

Jennie Baxter, Journalist

Robert Barr

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JENNIE BAXTER JOURNALIST

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BY

ROBERT BARR

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CHAPTER I.

JENNIE MAKES HER TOILETTE AND THE ACQUAINTANCE OF A PORTER.

Miss Jennie Baxter, with several final and dainty touches that put to rights her hat and dress--a little pull here and a pat there--regarded herself with some complacency in the large mirror that was set before her, as indeed she had every right to do, for she was an exceedingly pretty girl. It is natural that handsome young women should attire themselves with extra care, and although Jennie would have been beautiful under any conceivable condition of dress, she nevertheless did not neglect the arraying of herself becomingly on that account. All that was remarkable on this occasion consisted in the fact that she took more than usual pains to make herself presentable, and it must be admitted that the effect was as attractive as anyone could wish to have it. Her appearance was enough to send a friend into ecstasies, or drive an enemy to despair.

Jennie's voluminous hair, without being exactly golden, was--as the poets might term it--the colour of ripe corn, and was distractingly fluffy at the temples. Her eyes were liquidly, bewitchingly black, of melting tenderness, and yet, upon occasion, they would harden into piercing orbs that could look right through a man, and seem to fathom his innermost thoughts. A smooth, creamy complexion, with a touch of red in the cheeks, helped to give this combination of blonde and brunette an appearance so charmingly striking that it may be easily understood she was not a girl to be passed by with a single glance. Being so favoured by nature, Jennie did not neglect the aid of art, and it must be admitted that most of her income was expended in seeing that her wardrobe contained the best that Paris could supply; and the best in this instance was not necessarily the most expensive--at least not as expensive as such supplementing might have been to an ordinary woman, for Jennie wrote those very readable articles on the latest fashionable gowns which have appeared in some of the ladies' weeklies, and it was generally supposed that this fact did not cause her own replenishing from the *_modistes_* she so casually mentioned in her writings to be more expensive than her purse could afford. Be that as it may, Miss Baxter was always most becomingly attired, and her whole effect was so entrancing that men have been known to turn in the street as she passed, and murmur, "By Jove!" a phrase that, when you take into account the tone in which it is said, represents the furthestmost point of admiration which the limited vocabulary of a man about town permits him to utter; and it says something for the honesty of Jennie's black eyes, and the straightforwardness of her energetic walk, that none of these momentary admirers ever turned and followed her.

On this occasion Miss Jennie had paid more than usual attention to her toilette, for she was about to set out to capture a man, and the man was no other than Radnor Hardwick, the capable editor of the *_Daily Bugle_*, which was considered at that moment to be the most enterprising morning journal in the great metropolis. Miss Baxter had done work for some of the evening papers, several of the weeklies, and a number of the monthlies, and the income she made was reasonably good, but hazardously fitful. There was an uncertainty about her mode of life which was displeasing to her, and she resolved, if possible, to capture an editor on one of the morning papers, and get a salary that was fixed and secure. That it should be large was a matter of course, and pretty Miss Jennie had quite enough confidence in herself to believe she would earn every penny of it. Quite sensibly, she depended upon her skill and her industry as her ultimate recommendation to a large salary, but she was

woman enough to know that an attractive appearance might be of some assistance to her in getting a hearing from the editor, even though he should prove on acquaintance to be a man of iron, which was tolerably unlikely. She glanced at the dainty little watch attached to her wristlet, and saw that it lacked a few minutes of five. She knew the editor came to his office shortly after three, and remained there until six or half-past, when he went out to dine, returning at ten o'clock, or earlier, when the serious work of arranging next day's issue began. She had not sent a note to him, for she knew if she got a reply it would be merely a request for particulars as to the proposed interview, and she had a strong faith in the spoken word, as against that which is written. At five o'clock the editor would have read his letters, and would probably have seen most of those who were waiting for him, and Miss Baxter quite rightly conjectured that this hour would be more appropriate for a short conversation than when he was busy with his correspondence, or immersed in the hard work of the day, as he would be after ten o'clock at night. She had enough experience of the world to know that great matters often depend for their success on apparent trivialities, and the young woman had set her mind on becoming a member of the Daily Bugle staff.

She stepped lightly into the hansom that was waiting for her, and said to the cabman, "Office of the Daily Bugle, please; side entrance."

The careful toilette made its first impression upon the surly-looking Irish porter, who, like a gruff and faithful watch-dog, guarded the entrance to the editorial rooms of the Bugle. He was enclosed in a kind of glass-framed sentry-box, with a door at the side, and a small arched aperture that was on a level with his face as he sat on a high stool. He saw to it, not too politely, that no one went up those stairs unless he had undoubted right to do so. When he caught a glimpse of Miss Baxter, he slid off the stool and came out of the door to her, which was an extraordinary concession to a visitor, for Pat Ryan contented himself, as a usual thing, by saying curtly that the editor was busy, and could see no one.

"What did you wish, miss? To see the editor? That's Mr. Hardwick. Have ye an appointment with him? Ye haven't; then I very much doubt if ye'll see him this day, mum. It's far better to write to him, thin ye can state what ye want, an' if he makes an appointment there'll be no trouble at all, at all."

"But why should there be any trouble now?" asked Miss Baxter. "The editor is here to transact business, just as you are at the door to do the same. I have come on business, and I want to see him. Couldn't you send up my name to Mr. Hardwick, and tell him I will keep him but a few moments?"

"Ah, miss, that's what they all say; they ask for a few moments an' they shtay an hour. Not that there'd be any blame to an editor if he kept you as long as he could. An' it's willing I'd be to take up your name, but I'm afraid that it's little good it 'ud be after doin' ye. There's more than a dozen men in the waitin'-room now, an' they've been there for the last half-hour. Not a single one I've sent up has come down again."

"But surely," said Miss Jennie, in her most coaxing tone, "there must be some way to see even such a great man as the editor, and if there is, you know the way."

"Indeed, miss, an' I'm not so sure there is a way, unless you met him in the strate, which is unlikely. As I've told ye, there's twelve men now waitin' for him in the big room. Beyond that room there's another one, an' beyond that again is Mr. Hardwick's office. Now, it's as much as my place is worth, mum, to put ye in that room beyond the one where the men are waitin'; but, to tell you the truth, miss," said the Irishman, lowering his voice, as if he were divulging office secrets, "Mr. Hardwick, who is a difficult man to deal with, sometimes comes through the shmall room, and out into the passage whin he doesn't want to see anyone at all, at all, and goes out into the strate, leavin' everybody waitin' for him. Now I'll put ye into this room, and if the editor tries to slip out, then ye can speak with him; but if he asks ye how ye got there, for the sake of hiven don't tell him I sint ye, because that's not my duty at all, at all."

"Indeed, I won't tell him how I got there; or, rather, I'll say I came there by myself; so all you need to do is to show me the door, and there won't need to be any lies told.

"True for ye, an' a very good idea. Well, miss, then will ye just come up the stairs with me? It's the fourth door down the passage."

Miss Jennie beamed upon the susceptible Irishman a look of such melting gratitude that the man, whom bribery had often attempted to corrupt in vain, was her slave for ever after. They went up the stairs together, at the head of which the porter stood while Miss Baxter went down the long passage and stopped at the right door; Ryan nodded and disappeared.

Miss Baxter opened the door softly and entered. She found the room not too brilliantly lighted, containing a table and several chairs. The door to the right hand, which doubtless led into the waiting-room, where the dozen men were patiently sitting, was closed. The opposite door, which led into Mr. Hardwick's office, was partly open. Miss Baxter sat down near the third door, the one by which she had entered from the passage, ready to intercept the flying editor, should he attempt to escape.

In the editor's room someone was walking up and down with heavy footfall, and growling in a deep voice that was plainly audible where Miss Jennie sat. "You see, Alder, it's like this," said the voice. "Any paper may have a sensation every day, if it wishes; but what I want is accuracy, otherwise our sheet has no real influence. When an article appears in the Bugle, I want our readers to understand that that article is true from beginning to end. I want not only sensation, but definiteness and not only definiteness, but absolute truth."

"Well, Mr. Hardwick," interrupted another voice--the owner of which was either standing still or sitting in a chair, so far as Miss Baxter could judge by the tone, while the editor uneasily paced to and fro--"what Hazel is afraid of is that when this blows over he will lose his situation--"

"But," interjected the editor, "no one can be sure that he gave the information. No one knows anything about this but you and I, and we will certainly keep our mouths shut."

"What Hazel fears is that the moment we print the account, the Board of Public Construction will know he gave away the figures, because of their accuracy. He says that if we permit him to make one or two blunders, which will not matter in the least in so far as the general account

goes, it will turn suspicion from him. It will be supposed that someone had access to the books, and in the hurry of transcribing figures had made the blunders, which they know he would not do, for he has a reputation for accuracy."

"Quite so," said the editor; "and it is just that reputation--for accuracy--that I want to gain for the Daily Bugle. Don't you think the truth of it is that the man wants more money?"

"Who? Hazel?"

"Certainly. Does he imagine that he could get more than fifty pounds elsewhere?"

"Oh, no; I'm sure the money doesn't come into the matter at all. Of course he wants the fifty pounds, but he doesn't want to lose his situation on the Board of Public Construction in the getting of it."

"Where do you meet this man, at his own house, or in his office at the Board?"

"Oh, in his own house, of course."

"You haven't seen the books, then?"

"No; but he has the accounts all made out, tabulated beautifully, and has written a very clear statement of the whole transaction. You understand, of course, that there has been no defalcation, no embezzlement, or anything of that sort. The accounts as a whole balance perfectly, and there isn't a penny of the public funds wrongly appropriated. All the Board has done is to juggle with figures so that each department seems to have come out all right, whereas the truth is that some departments have been carried on at a great profit, while with others there has been a loss. The object obviously has been to deceive the public and make it think that all the departments are economically conducted."

"I am sorry money hasn't been stolen," said the editor generously, "then we would have had them on the hip; but, even as it is, the Bugle will make a great sensation. What I fear is that the opposition press will seize on those very inaccuracies, and thus try to throw doubt on the whole affair. Don't you think that you can persuade this person to let us have the information intact, without the inclusion of those blunders he seems to insist on? I wouldn't mind paying him a little more money, if that is what he is after."

"I don't think that is his object. The truth is, the man is frightened, and grows more and more so as the day for publication approaches. He is so anxious about his position that he insisted he was not to be paid by cheque, but that I should collect the money and hand it over to him in sovereigns."

"Well, I'll tell you what to do, Alder. We mustn't seem too eager. Let the matter rest where it is until Monday. I suppose he expects you to call upon him again to-day?"

"Yes; I told him I should be there at seven."

"Don't go, and don't write any explanation. Let him transfer a little of

his anxiety to the fear of losing his fifty pounds. I want, if possible, to publish this information with absolute accuracy."

"Is there any danger, Mr. Hardwick, that some of the other papers may get on the track of this?"

"No, I don't think so; not for three days, anyway. If we appear too eager, this man Hazel may refuse us altogether."

"Very good, sir."

Miss Baxter heard the editor stop in his walk, and she heard the rustling of paper, as if the subordinate were gathering up some documents on which he had been consulting his chief. She was panic-stricken to think that either of the men might come out and find her in the position of an eavesdropper, so with great quietness she opened the door and slipped out into the hall, going from there to the entrance of the ordinary waiting-room, in which she found, not the twelve men that the porter had expatiated upon, but five. Evidently the other seven had existed only in the porter's imagination, or had become tired of waiting and had withdrawn. The five looked up at her as she entered and sat down on a chair near the door. A moment later the door communicating with the room she had quitted opened, and a clerk came in. He held two or three slips of paper in his hand, and calling out a name, one of the men rose.

"Mr. Hardwick says," spoke up the clerk, "that this matter is in Mr. Alder's department; would you mind seeing him? Room number five."

So that man was thus got rid of. The clerk mentioned another name, and again a man rose.

"Mr. Hardwick," the clerk said, "has the matter under consideration. Call again to-morrow at this hour, then he will give you his decision."

That got rid of number two. The third man was asked to leave his name and address; the editor would write to him. Number four was told that if he would set down his proposition in writing, and send it in to Mr. Hardwick, it would have that gentleman's serious consideration. The fifth man was not so easily disposed of. He insisted upon seeing the editor, and presently disappeared inside with the clerk. Miss Baxter smiled at the rapid dispersion of the group, for it reminded her of the rhyme about the one little, two little, three little nigger-boys. But all the time there kept running through her mind the phrase, "Board of Public Construction," and the name, "Hazel."

After a few minutes, the persistent man who had insisted upon seeing the editor came through the general waiting-room, the secretary, or clerk, or whoever he was, following him.

"Has your name been sent in, madam?" the young man asked Miss Baxter, as she rose. "I think not," answered the girl. "Would you take my card to Mr. Hardwick, and tell him I will detain him but a few moments?"

In a short time the secretary reappeared, and held the door open for her.

CHAPTER II.

JENNIE HAS IMPORTANT CONFERENCES WITH TWO IMPORTANT EDITORS.

Mr. Hardwick was a determined-looking young man of about thirty-five, with a bullet head and closely-cropped black hair. He looked like a stubborn, strong-willed person, and Miss Baxter's summing up of him was that he had not the appearance of one who could be coaxed or driven into doing anything he did not wish to do. He held her card between his fingers, and glanced from it to her, then down to the card again.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Hardwick," began Miss Baxter. "I don't know that you have seen any of my work, but I have written a good deal for some of the evening papers and for several of the magazines."

"Yes," said Hardwick, who was standing up preparatory to leaving his office, and who had not asked the young woman to sit down; "your name is familiar to me. You wrote, some months since, an account of a personal visit to the German Emperor; I forget now where it appeared."

"Oh, yes," said Miss Baxter; "that was written for the Summer Magazine, and was illustrated by photographs."

"It struck me," continued Hardwick, without looking at her, "that it was an article written by a person who had never seen the German Emperor, but who had collected and assimilated material from whatever source presented itself."

The young woman, in nowise abashed, laughed; but still the editor did not look up.

"Yes," she admitted, "that is precisely how it was written. I never have had the pleasure of meeting William II. myself."

"What I have always insisted upon in work submitted to me," growled the editor in a deep voice, "is absolute accuracy. I take it that you have called to see me because you wish to do some work for this paper."

"You are quite right in that surmise also," answered Miss Jennie. "Still, if I may say so, there was nothing inaccurate in my article about the German Emperor. My compilation was from thoroughly authentic sources, so I maintain it was as truthfully exact as anything that has ever appeared in the Bugle."

"Perhaps our definitions of truth might not quite coincide. However, if you will write your address on this card I will wire you if I have any work--that is, any outside work--which I think a woman can do. The woman's column of the Bugle, as you are probably aware, is already in good hands."

Miss Jennie seemed annoyed that all her elaborate preparations were thrown away on this man, who never raised his eyes nor glanced at her, except once, during their conversation.

"I do not aspire," she said, rather shortly, "to the position of editor of a woman's column. I never read a woman's column myself, and, unlike Mr. Grant Allen, I never met a woman who did."

She succeeded in making the editor lift his eyes towards her for the second time.

"Neither do I intend to leave you my address so that you may send a wire to me if you have anything that you think I can do. What I wish is a salaried position on your staff."

"My good woman," said the editor brusquely, "that is utterly impossible. I may tell you frankly that I don't believe in women journalists. The articles we publish by women are sent to this office from their own homes. Anything that a woman can do for a newspaper I have men who will do quite as well, if not better; and there are many things that women can't do at all which men must do. I am perfectly satisfied with my staff as it stands, Miss Baxter."

"I think it is generally admitted," said the young woman, "that your staff is an exceptionally good one, and is most capably led. Still, I should imagine that there are many things happening in London, society functions, for instance, where a woman would describe more accurately what she saw than any man you could send. You have no idea how full of blunders a man's account of women's dress is as a general rule, and if you admire accuracy as much as you say, I should think you would not care to have your paper made a laughing-stock among society ladies, who never take the trouble to write you a letter and show you where you are wrong, as men usually do when some mistake regarding their affairs is made."

"There is probably something in what you say," replied the editor, with an air of bringing the discussion to a close. "I don't insist that I am right, but these are my ideas, and while I am editor of this paper I shall stand by them, so it is useless for us to discuss the matter any further, Miss Baxter. I will not have a woman as a member of the permanent staff of the _Bugle_."

For the third time he looked up at her, and there was dismissal in his glance.

Miss Baxter said indignantly to herself, "This brute of a man hasn't the slightest idea that I am one of the best dressed women he has ever met."

But there was no trace of indignation in her voice when she said to him sweetly, "We will take that as settled. But if upon some other paper, Mr. Hardwick, I should show evidence of being as good a newspaper reporter as any member of your staff, may I come up here, and, without being kept waiting too long, tell you of my triumph?"

"You would not shake my decision," he said.

"Oh, don't say that," she murmured, with a smile. "I am sure you wouldn't like it if anyone called you a fool."

"Called me a fool?" said the editor sharply, drawing down his dark brows. "I shouldn't mind it in the least."

"What, not if it were true? You know it would be true, if I could do something that all your clever men hadn't accomplished. An editor may be a very talented man, but, after all, his mission is to see that his paper is an interesting one, and that it contains, as often as possible,

something which no other sheet does."

"Oh, I'll see to that," Mr. Hardwick assured her with resolute confidence.

"I am certain you will," said Miss Baxter very sweetly; "but now you won't refuse to let me in whenever I send up my card? I promise you that I shall not send it until I have done something which will make the whole staff of the Daily Bugle feel very doleful indeed."

For the first time Mr. Hardwick gave utterance to a somewhat harsh and mirthless laugh.

"Oh, very well," he said, "I'll promise that."

"Thank you! And good afternoon, Mr. Hardwick. I am so much obliged to you for consenting to see me. I shall call upon you at this hour to-morrow afternoon."

There was something of triumph in her smiling bow to him, and as she left she heard a long whistle of astonishment in Mr. Hardwick's room. She hurried down the stairs, threw a bewitching glance at the Irish porter, who came out of his den and whispered to her,--

"It's all right, is it, mum?"

"More than all right," she answered. "Thank you very much indeed for your kindness."

The porter preceded her out to the waiting hansom and held his arm so that her skirt would not touch the wheel.

"Drive quickly to the Cafe Royal," she said to the cabman.

When the hansom drew up in front of the Cafe Royal, Miss Jennie Baxter did not step out of it, but waited until the stalwart servitor in gold lace, who ornamented the entrance, hurried from the door to the vehicle. "Do you know Mr. Stoneham?" she asked with suppressed excitement, "the editor of the Evening Graphite? He is usually here playing dominoes with somebody about this hour."

"Oh yes, I know him," was the reply. "I think he is inside at this moment, but I will make certain."

In a short time Mr. Stoneham himself appeared, looking perhaps a trifle disconcerted at having his whereabouts so accurately ascertained.

"What a blessing it is," said Miss Jennie, with a laugh, "that we poor reporters know where to find our editors in a case of emergency."

"This is no case of emergency, Miss Baxter," grumbled Stoneham. "If it's news, you ought to know that it is too late to be of any use for us to-day."

"Ah, yes," was the quick reply, "but what excellent time I am in with news for to-morrow!"

"If a man is to live a long life," growled the disturbed editor, "he must allow to-morrow's news to look after itself. Sufficient for the day

are the worries thereof."

"As a general rule that is true," assented the girl, "but I have a most important piece of information for you that wouldn't wait, and in half an hour from now you will be writing your to-morrow's leader, showing forth in terse and forcible language the many iniquities of the Board of Public Construction."

"Oh," cried the editor, brightening, "if it is anything to the discredit of the Board of Public Construction, I am glad you came."

"Well, that's not a bit complimentary to me. You should be glad in any case; but I'll forgive your bad manners, as I wish you to help me. Please step into this hansom, because I have most startling intelligence to impart--news that must not be overheard; and there is no place so safe for a confidential conference as in a hansom driving through the streets of London. Drive slowly towards the _Evening Graphite_ office," she said to the cabman, pushing up the trap-door in the roof of the vehicle. Mr. Stoneham took his place beside her, and the cabman turned his horse in the direction indicated.

"There is little use in going to the office of the paper," said Stoneham; "there won't be anybody there but the watchman."

"I know, but we must go in some direction. We can't talk in front of the Cafe Royal, you know. Now, Mr. Stoneham, in the first place, I want fifty golden sovereigns. How am I to get them within half an hour?"

"Good gracious! I don't know; the banks are all closed, but there is a man at Charing Cross who would perhaps change a cheque for me; there is a cheque-book at the office."

"Then that's all right and settled. Mr. Stoneham, there's been some juggling with the accounts in the office of the Board of Public Construction."

"What! a defalcation?" cried Stoneham eagerly.

"No; merely a shifting round."

"Ah," said the editor, in a disappointed tone.

"Oh, you needn't say 'Ah.' It's very serious; it is indeed. The accounts are calculated to deceive the dear and confiding public, to whose interests all the daily papers, morning and evening, pretend to be devoted. The very fact of such deception being attempted, Mr. Stoneham, ought to call forth the anger of any virtuous editor."

"Oh, it does, it does; but then it would be a difficult matter to prove. If some money were gone, now----"

"My dear sir, the matter is already proved, and quite ripe for your energetic handling of it; that's what the fifty pounds are for. This sum will secure for you--to-night, mind, not to-morrow--a statement bristling with figures which the Board of Construction cannot deny. You will be able, in a stirring leading article, to express the horror you undoubtedly feel at the falsification of the figures, and your stern delight in doing so will probably not be mitigated by the fact that no other paper in London will have the news, while the matter will be

so important that next day all your beloved contemporaries will be compelled to allude to it in some shape or other."

"I see," said the editor, his eyes glistening as the magnitude of the idea began to appeal more strongly to his imagination. "Who makes this statement, and how are we to know that it is absolutely correct?"

"Well, there is a point on which I wish to inform you before going any further. The statement is not to be absolutely correct; two or three errors have been purposely put in, the object being to throw investigators off the track if they try to discover who gave the news to the Press; for the man who will sell me this document is a clerk in the office of the Board of Public Construction. So, you see, you are getting the facts from the inside."

"Is he so accustomed to falsifying accounts that he cannot get over the habit even when preparing an article for the truthful Press?"

"He wants to save his own situation, and quite rightly too, so he has put a number of errors in the figures of the department over which he has direct control. He has a reputation for such accuracy that he imagines the Board will never think he did it, if the figures pertaining to his department are wrong even in the slightest degree."

"Quite so. Then we cannot have the pleasure of mentioning his name, and saying that this honest man has been corrupted by his association with the scoundrels who form the Board of Public Construction?"

"Oh, dear, no; his name must not be mentioned in any circumstances, and that is why payment is to be made in sovereigns rather than by bank cheque or notes."

"Well, the traitor seems to be covering up his tracks rather effectually. How did you come to know him?"

"I don't know him. I've never met him in my life; but it came to my knowledge that one of the morning papers had already made all its plans for getting this information. The clerk was to receive fifty pounds for the document, but the editor and he are at present negotiating, because the editor insists upon absolute accuracy, while, as I said, the man wishes to protect himself, to cover his tracks, as you remarked."

"Good gracious!" cried Stoneham, "I didn't think the editor of any morning paper in London was so particular about the accuracy of what he printed. The pages of the morning sheets do not seem to reflect that anxiety."

"So, you see," continued Miss Jennie, unheeding his satirical comment, "there is no time to be lost; in fact, I should be on my way now to where this man lives."

"Here we are at the office, and I shall just run in and write a cheque for fifty pounds, which we can perhaps get cashed somewhere," cried the editor, calling the hansom to a halt and stepping out.

"Tell the watchman to bring me a London Directory," said the girl, and presently that useful guardian came out with the huge red volume, which Miss Baxter placed on her knees, and, with a celerity that comes of long practice, turned over the leaves rapidly, running her finger quickly

down the H column, in which the name "Hazel" was to be found. At last she came to one designated as being a clerk in the office of the Board of Public Construction, and his residence was 17, Rupert Square, Brixton. She put this address down in her notebook and handed back the volume to the waiting watchman, as the editor came out with the cheque in his hand.

The shrewd and energetic dealer in coins, whose little office stands at the exit from Charing Cross Station, proved quite willing to oblige the editor of the Evening Graphite with fifty sovereigns in exchange for the bit of paper, and the editor, handing to Miss Jennie the envelope containing the gold, saw her drive off for Brixton, while he turned, not to resume his game of dominoes at the cafe, but to his office, to write the leader which would express in good set terms the horror he felt at the action of the Board of Public Construction.

CHAPTER III.

JENNIE INTERVIEWS A FRIGHTENED OFFICIAL.

It was a little past seven o'clock when Miss Baxter's hansom drove up to the two-storeyed house in Rupert Square numbered 17. She knocked at the door, and it was speedily opened by a man with some trace of anxiety on his clouded face, who proved to be Hazel himself, the clerk at the Board of Public Construction. "You are Mr. Hazel?" she ventured, on entering.

"Yes," replied the man, quite evidently surprised at seeing a lady instead of the man he was expecting at that hour; "but I am afraid I shall have to ask you to excuse me; I am waiting for a visitor who is a few minutes late, and who may be here at any moment."

"You are waiting for Mr. Alder, are you not?"

"Yes," stammered the man, his expression of surprise giving place to one of consternation.

"Oh, well, that is all right," said Miss Jennie, reassuringly. "I have just driven from the office of the Daily Bugle. Mr. Alder cannot come to-night."

"Ah," said Hazel, closing the door. "Then are you here in his place?"

"I am here instead of him. Mr. Alder is on other business that he had to attend to at the editor's request. Now, Mr. Hardwick--that's the editor, you know----"

"Yes, I know," answered Hazel.

They were by this time seated in the front parlour.

"Well, Mr. Hardwick is very anxious that the figures should be given with absolute accuracy."

"Of course, that would be much better," cried the man; "but, you see, I have gone thoroughly into the question with Mr. Alder already. He said

he would mention what I told him to the editor--put my position before him, in fact."

"Oh, he has done so," said Miss Baxter, "and did it very effectively indeed; in fact, your reasons are quite unanswerable. You fear, of course, that you will lose your situation, and that is very important, and no one in the _Bugle_ office wishes you to suffer for what you have done. Of course, it is all in the public interest."

"Of course, of course," murmured Hazel, looking down on the table.

"Well, have you all the documents ready, so that they can be published at any time?"

"Quite ready," answered the man.

"Very well," said the girl, with decision; "here are your fifty pounds. Just count the money, and see that it is correct. I took the envelope as it was handed to me, and have not examined the amount myself."

She poured the sovereigns out on the table, and Hazel, with trembling fingers, counted them out two by two.

"That is quite right," he said, rising. He went to a drawer, unlocked it, and took out a long blue envelope.

"There," he said, with a sigh that was almost a gasp. "There are the figures, and a full explanation of them. You will be very careful that my name does not slip out in any way."

"Certainly," said Miss Jennie, coolly drawing forth the papers from their covering. "No one knows your name except Mr. Alder, Mr. Hardwick, and myself; and I can assure you that I shall not mention it to anyone."

She glanced rapidly over the documents.

"I shall just read what you have written," she said, looking up at him; "and if there is anything here I do not understand you will, perhaps, be good enough to explain it now,--and then I won't need to come here again."

"Very well," said Hazel. The man had no suspicion that his visitor was not a member of the staff of the paper he had been negotiating with. She was so thoroughly self-possessed, and showed herself so familiar with all details which had been discussed by Alder and himself that not the slightest doubt had entered the clerk's mind.

Jennie read the documents with great haste, for she knew she was running a risk in remaining there after seven o'clock. It might be that Alder would come to Brixton to let the man know the result of his talk with the editor, or Mr. Hardwick himself might have changed his mind, and instructed his subordinate to secure the papers. Nevertheless, there was no sign of hurry in Miss Jennie's demeanour as she placed the papers back in their blue envelope and bade the anxious Hazel good-bye.

Once more in the hansom, she ordered the man to drive her to Charing Cross, and when she was ten minutes away from Rupert Square she changed her direction and desired him to take her to the office of the _Evening Graphite_, where she knew Mr. Stoneham would be busy with his leading

article, and probably impatiently awaiting further details of the conspiracy he was to lay open before the public. A light was burning in the editorial rooms of the office of the Evening Graphite, always a suspicious thing in such an establishment, and well calculated to cause the editor of any rival evening paper to tremble, should he catch a glimpse of burning gas in a spot where the work of the day should be finished at latest by five o'clock. Light in the room of the evening journalist usually indicates that something important is on hand.

A glance at the papers Miss Baxter brought to him showed Mr. Stoneham that he had at least got the worth of his fifty pounds. There would be a fluttering in high places next day. He made arrangements before he left to have the paper issued a little earlier than was customary, calculating his time with exactitude, so that rival sheets could not have the news in their first edition, cribbed from the Graphite, and yet the paper would be on the street, with the newsboys shouting, "Orrible scandal," before any other evening journal was visible. And this was accomplished the following day with a precision truly admirable.

Mr. Stoneham, with a craft worthy of all commendation, kept back from the early issue a small fraction of the figures that were in his possession, so that he might print them in the so-called fourth edition, and thus put upon the second lot of contents--bills sent out, in huge, startling black type, "Further Revelations of the Board of Construction Scandal;" and his scathing leading article, in which he indignantly demanded a Parliamentary inquiry into the conduct of the Board, was recognized, even by the friends of that public body, as having seriously shaken confidence in it. The reception of the news by the other evening papers was most flattering. One or two ignored it altogether, others alluded to it as a rumour, that it "alleged" so and so, and threw doubt on its truth, which was precisely what Mr. Stoneham wished them to do, as he was in a position to prove the accuracy of his statement.

Promptly, at five o'clock that afternoon a hansom containing Miss Jennie Baxter drove up to the side entrance of the Daily Bugle office, and the young woman once more accosted the Irish porter, who again came out of his den to receive her.

"Miss Baxter?" said the Irishman, half by way of salutation, and half by way of inquiry. "Yes," said the girl.

"Well, Mr. Hardwick left strict orders with me that if ye came, or, rather, that whin ye came, I was to conduct ye right up to his room at once."

"Oh, that is very satisfactory," cried Miss Jennie, "and somewhat different from the state of things yesterday."

"Indeed, and that's very true," said the porter, his voice sinking. "To-day is not like yesterday at all, at all. There's been great ructions in this office, mum; although what it's about, fly away with me if I know. There's been ruinin' back and forrad, an' a plentiful deal of language used. The proprietor himself has been here, an' he's here now, an' Mr. Alder came out a minute ago with his face as white as a sheet of paper. They do be sayin'," added the porter, still further lowering his voice, and pausing on the stairway, "that Mr. Hardwick is not goin' to be the editor any more, but that Mr. Alder is to take his place. Anyway, as far as I can tell, Mr. Hardwick an' Mr. Alder have had a fine fall

out, an' one or other of them is likely to leave the paper."

"Oh, dear, oh, dear!" said Miss Jennie, also pausing on the stairs. "Is it so serious as all that?"

"Indeed it is, mum, an' we none of us know where we're standin', at all, at all."

The porter led the way to Mr. Hardwick's room, and announced the visitor.

"Ask her to come in," she heard the editor say, and the next instant the porter left them alone together.

"Won't you sit down, Miss Baxter?" said Mr. Hardwick, with no trace of that anger in his voice which she had expected. "I have been waiting for you. You said you would be here at five, and I like punctuality. Without beating round the bush, I suppose I may take it for granted that the Evening Graphite is indebted to you for what it is pleased to call the Board of Public Construction scandal?"

"Yes," said the young woman, seating herself; "I came up to tell you that I procured for the Graphite that interesting bit of information."

"So I supposed. My colleague, Henry Alder, saw Hazel this afternoon at the offices of the Board. The good man Hazel is panic-stricken at the explosion he has caused, and is in a very nervous state of mind, more especially when he learned that his documents had gone to an unexpected quarter. Fortunately for him, the offices of the Board are thronged with journalists who want to get statements from this man or the other regarding the exposure, and so the visit of Alder to Hazel was not likely to be noticed or commented upon. Hazel gave a graphic description of the handsome young woman who had so cleverly wheedled the documents from him, and who paid him the exact sum agreed upon in the exact way that it was to have been paid. Alder had not seen you, and has not the slightest idea how the important news slipped through his fingers; but when he told me what had happened, I knew at once you were the goddess of the machine, therefore I have been waiting for you. May I be permitted to express the opinion that you didn't play your cards at all well, Miss Baxter?"

"No? I think I played my cards very much better than you played yours, you know."

"Oh, I am not instituting any comparison, and am not at all setting myself up as a model of strategy. I admit that, having the right cards in my hands, I played them exceedingly badly; but then, you understand, I thought I was sure of an exclusive bit of news."

"No news is exclusive, Mr. Hardwick, until it is printed, and out in the streets, and the other papers haven't got it."

"That is very true, and has all the conciseness of an adage. I would like to ask, Miss Baxter, how much the Graphite paid you for that article over and above the fifty pounds you gave to Hazel?"

"Oh! it wasn't a question of money with me; the subject hasn't even been discussed. Mr. Stoneham is not a generous paymaster, and that is why I desire to get on a paper which does not count the cost too closely. What

I wished to do was to convince you that I would be a valuable addition to the _Bugle_ staff; for you seemed to be of opinion that the staff was already sufficient and complete."

"Oh, my staff is not to blame in this matter; I alone am to blame in being too sure of my ground, and not realizing the danger of delay in such a case. But if you had brought the document to me, you would have found me by far your best customer. You would have convinced me quite as effectually as you have done now that you are a very alert young woman, and I certainly would have been willing to give you four or five times as much as the _Graphite_ will be able to pay."

"To tell the truth, I thought of that as I stood here yesterday, but I saw you were a very difficult man to deal with or to convince, and I dared not take the risk of letting you know I had the news. You might very easily have called in Mr. Alder, told him that Hazel had given up the documents, and sent him flying to Brixton, where very likely the clerk has a duplicate set. It would have been too late to get the sensation into any other morning paper, and, even if it were not too late, you would have had something about the sensation in the _Bugle_, and so the victory would not have been as complete as it is now. No, I could not take such a risk. I thought it all out very carefully."

"You credit us with more energy, Miss Baxter, than we possess. I can assure you that if you had come here at ten or eleven o'clock with the documents, I should have been compelled to purchase them from you. However, that is all past and done with, and there is no use in our saying anything more about it. I am willing to take all the blame for our defeat on my shoulders, but there are some other things I am not willing to do, and perhaps you are in a position to clear up a little misunderstanding that has arisen in this office. I suppose I may take it for granted that you overheard the conversation which took place between Mr. Alder and myself in this room yesterday afternoon?"

"Well," said Miss Baxter, for the first time in some confusion, "I can assure you that I did not come here with the intention of listening to anything. I came into the next room by myself for the purpose of getting to see you as soon as possible. While not exactly a member of the staff of the _Evening Graphite_, that paper nevertheless takes about all the work I am able to do, and so I consider myself bound to keep my eyes and ears open on its behalf wherever I am."

"Oh, I don't want to censure you at all," said Hardwick; "I merely wish to be certain how the thing was done. As I said, I am willing to take the blame entirely on my own shoulders. I don't think I should have made use of information obtained in that way myself; still, I am not venturing to find fault with you for doing so."

"To find fault with me!" cried Miss Jennie somewhat warmly, "that would be the pot calling the kettle black indeed. Why, what better were you? You were bribing a poor man to furnish you with statistics, which he was very reluctant to let you have; yet you overcame his scruples with money, quite willing that he should risk his livelihood, so long as you got the news. If you ask me, I don't see very much difference in our positions, and I must say that if two men take the risk of talking aloud about a secret, with a door open leading to another room, which may be empty or may be not, then they are two very foolish persons."

"Oh, quite so, quite so," answered Hardwick soothingly. "I have already

disclaimed the critical attitude. The point I wish to be sure of is this--you overheard the conversation between Alder and myself?"

"Yes, I did."

"Would you be able to repeat it?"

"I don't know that I could repeat it word for word, but I could certainly give the gist of it."

"Would you have any objection to telling a gentleman whom I shall call in a moment, as nearly as possible what Alder said and what I said? I may add that the gentleman I speak of is Mr. Hempstead, and he is practically the proprietor of this paper. There has arisen between Mr. Alder and myself a slight divergence of memory, if I may call it so, and it seems that you are the only person who can settle the dispute."

"I am perfectly willing to tell what I heard to anybody."

"Thank you."

Mr. Hardwick pressed an electric button, and his secretary came in from another room.

"Would you ask Mr. Hempstead to step this way, if he is in his room?"

In a few minutes Mr. Hempstead entered, bowed somewhat stiffly towards the lady, but froze up instantly when he heard that she was the person who had given the Board of Public Construction scandal to the Evening Graphite.

"I have just this moment learned, Mr. Hempstead, that Miss Baxter was in the adjoining room when Alder and I were talking over this matter. She heard the conversation. I have not asked her to repeat it, but sent for you at once, and she says she is willing to answer any questions you may ask."

"In that case, Mr. Hardwick, wouldn't it be well to have Henry Alder here?"

"Certainly, if he is on the premises." Then, turning to his secretary, he said, "Would you find out if Mr. Alder is in his room? Tell him Mr. Hempstead wishes to see him here."

When Henry Alder came in, and the secretary had disappeared, Miss Baxter saw at once that she was in an unenviable situation, for it was quite evident the three men were scarcely on speaking terms with each other. Nothing causes such a state of tension in a newspaper office as the missing of a piece of news that is important.

"Perhaps it would be better," suggested Hardwick, "if Miss Baxter would repeat the conversation as she heard it."

"I don't see the use of that," said Mr. Hempstead. "There is only one point at issue. Did Mr. Alder warn Mr. Hardwick that by delay he would lose the publication of this report?"

"Hardly that," answered the girl. "As I remember it, he said, 'Isn't there a danger that some other paper may get this?' Mr. Hardwick

replied, 'I don't think so. Not for three days, at least'; and then Mr. Alder said, 'Very good,' or 'Very well,' or something like that."

"That quite tallies with my own remembrance," assented Hardwick. "I admit I am to blame, but I decidedly say that I was not definitely warned by Mr. Alder that the matter would be lost to us."

"I told you it would be lost if you delayed," cried Alder, with the emphasis of an angry man, "and it has been lost. I have been on the track of this for two weeks, and it is very galling to have missed it at the last moment through no fault of my own."

"Still," said Mr. Hempstead coldly, "your version of the conversation does not quite agree with what Miss Baxter says."

"Oh, well," said Alder, "I never pretended to give the exact words. I warned him, and he did not heed the warning."

"You admit, then, that Miss Baxter's remembrance of the conversation is correct?"

"It is practically correct. I do not 'stickle' about words."

"But you did stickle about words an hour ago," said Mr. Hempstead, with some severity. "There is a difference in positively stating that the item would be lost and in merely suggesting that it might be lost."

"Oh, have it as you wish," said Alder truculently. "It doesn't matter in the least to me. It is very provoking to work hard for two weeks, and then have everything nullified by a foolish decision from the editor. However, as I have said, it doesn't matter to me. I have taken service on the Daily Trumpet, and you may consider my place on the Bugle vacant"--saying which, the irate Mr. Alder put his hat on his head and left the room.

Mr. Hempstead seemed distressed by the discussion, but, for the first time, Mr. Hardwick smiled grimly.

"I always insist on accuracy," he said, "and lack of it is one of Alder's failings."

"Nevertheless, Mr. Hardwick, you have lost one of your best men. How are you going to replace him?" inquired the proprietor anxiously.

"There is little difficulty in replacing even the best man on any staff in London," replied Hardwick, with a glance at Miss Baxter. "As this young lady seems to keep her wits about her when the welfare of her paper is concerned, I shall, if you have no objection, fill Henry Alder's place with Miss Baxter?"

Mr. Hempstead arched his eyebrows a trifle, and looked at the girl in some doubt.

"I thought you didn't believe in women journalists, Mr. Hardwick," he murmured at last.

"I didn't up till to-day, but since the evening papers came out I have had reason to change my mind. I should much rather have Miss Baxter for me than against me."

"Do you think you can fill the position, Miss Baxter?" asked the proprietor, doubtfully.

"Oh, I, am sure of it," answered the girl. "I have long wanted a place on a well-edited paper like the Bugle." Again Mr. Hardwick smiled grimly. The proprietor turned to him, and said, "I don't quite see, Mr. Hardwick, what a lady can do on this paper outside of the regular departments."

"I hardly think there will be any trouble about that, Mr. Hempstead. For example, who could be better equipped to attempt the solution of that knotty question about the Princess von Steinheimer's diamonds?"

"By Jove!" cried Hempstead, his eyes glittering with excitement. "That is an inspiration. I imagine that if anyone can unravel the mystery, it is Miss Baxter."

CHAPTER IV.

JENNIE LEARNS ABOUT THE DIAMONDS OF THE PRINCESS.

"What about the diamonds of the Princess?" asked Miss Baxter, her curiosity piqued by the remark of the editor.

"That is rather a long story," replied Mr. Hardwick, "and before I begin it, I would like to ask you one or two questions. Can you manipulate a typewriter?"

"That depends on what make it is. The ordinary typewriter I understand very thoroughly."

"Good. Have you any knowledge of shorthand?"

"A workable knowledge; I can write about one hundred words a minute."

"Admirable! admirable! Your coming to this office was indeed an inspiration, as Mr. Hempstead remarked. You are just the person I have been looking for."

"You didn't seem to think so yesterday, Mr. Hardwick," said the girl with a sly glance at him.

"Well, many things have happened since yesterday. We are now dealing with to-day, and with the Princess von Steinheimer."

"She is a German princess, of course?"

"An Austrian princess, but an American woman. She was a Miss Briggs of Chicago; a daughter of Briggs, the railway millionaire, worth somewhere between twenty and twenty-five millions--dollars, of course. A year or two ago she married Prince Konrad von Steinheimer; you may remember having read about it in the papers?"

"Oh, yes; the usual international match--the girl after the title, he

after the money."

"I suppose so; but be that as it may, she is the only daughter of old Briggs, and had spent a good deal of her time in Europe, but she spent more than time; she spent the old man's money as well, so during her stay in Europe she accumulated a vast stock of diamonds, some of them very notable stones. I don't know what the whole collection is worth, some say a million dollars, while others say double that amount. However that may be, Miss Briggs became the Princess von Steinheimer, and brought to Austria with her a million dollars in gold and the diamonds, which her father gave as dowry; but, of course, being an only child, she will come in for the rest of his money when the railway magnate dies."

"Is he likely to die soon? I don't suppose the Prince gave himself away for a mere million."

"Oh, you forget the diamonds. As to the likelihood of old Briggs's death, it didn't strike me as imminent when I had a conversation with him yesterday."

"Yesterday? Is he here in London, then?"

"Yes; he has come over to disentangle the mystery about the diamonds."

"And what is the mystery? You take a dreadful long time to tell a story, Mr. Hardwick."

"The story is important, and it must be told in detail, otherwise you may go on a long journey for nothing. Are you taking down what I say in shorthand? That is right, and if you are wise you will not transcribe your notes so that anyone can read them; they are safer in that form. The von Steinheimer family have two residences, a house in Vienna and an ancient castle in the Tyrol, situated on the heights above Meran, a most picturesque place, I understand; but very shortly you will know more about it than I do, because the *Bugle* expects you to go there as its special correspondent. Here the diamond robbery took place something like two months ago, and the affair is still as great a mystery as ever. The Princess was to open the season at Meran, which is a fashionable resort, by giving a fancy dress ball in Schloss Steinheimer, to which all the Austrian and foreign notables were invited. It was just before the ball began that the diamonds were first missed--in fact, the Princess was about to put them on, she representing some gorgeously decorated character from the Arabian Nights, when the discovery was made that the diamonds were gone. She was naturally very much upset over her loss, and sent at once for the Prince, her husband, insisting that the police should be notified immediately and detectives called in, as was perfectly natural. Now here comes a strange feature of the affair, and this is that the Prince positively forbade any publicity, refusing his sanction when she demanded that the police should be informed, and yet the Prince knew better than anyone else the very considerable value of the stones."

"What reason did he give for his refusal?" asked Miss Baxter, looking up from her notes.

"I am not quite certain about that; but I think he said it was *infra dig.* for the Steinheimers to call in the police. Anyhow, it was an excuse which did not satisfy the Princess; but as guests were arriving, and as it was desirable that there should be no commotion to mar the

occasion, the Princess temporarily yielded to the wish of her husband, and nothing was said publicly about the robbery. The great ball was the talk of Meran for several days, and no one suspected the private trouble that was going on underneath this notable event. During these several days the Princess insisted that the aid of the police should be invoked, and the Prince was equally strenuous that nothing should be said or done about the matter. Then, quite unexpectedly, the Prince veered completely round, and proclaimed that he would engage the best detectives in Europe. Strange to say, when he announced this decision to his wife, she had veered round also, and opposed the calling in of the detectives as strenuously as he had done heretofore."

"What reason did she give for her change of front?" asked Miss Jennie.

"She said, I believe, that it was now too late; that the thieves, whoever they were, had had time to make away with their plunder, and there would merely be a fuss and worry for nothing."

"Do you know, I am inclined to agree with her," asserted the girl.

"Are you? Then tell me what you think of the case as far as you have got."

"What do you think?"

"I sha'n't tell you at this stage, because I know of further particulars which I will give you later on. I merely want your opinion now, so that I may see whether what I have to tell you afterwards modifies it in any way."

"Well, to me the case looks decidedly dark against the Prince."

"That is what Mr. Briggs thinks. He imagines his Highness has the jewels."

"Where did you get all these particulars?"

"From Mr. Briggs, who, of course, got them by letter from his daughter."

"Then we have, as it were, a one-sided statement."

"Oh, quite so; but still you must remember the Princess does not in the least suspect her husband of the theft."

"Well, please go on. What are the further particulars?"

"The further particulars are that the Prince made some quiet investigations among the servants, and he found that there was a man who, although he was a friend of his own, was much more the friend of the Princess, and this man had, on the day the ball was given, the entire freedom of the castle. He is a young officer and nobleman. Lieutenant von Schaumberg, and the Prince knew that this young man was being hard pressed for some debts of honour which he did not appear to be in a position to liquidate. The young man went unexpectedly to Vienna the day after the ball, and on his return settled his obligations. The Princess, from one of her women, got word of her husband's suspicion. She went to the Prince at once, and told him she had come to his own opinion with regard to the lost diamonds. She would, in no circumstances, have detectives about the place. Then he told her that he had also changed his mind, and resolved to engage detectives. So here

they were at a deadlock again. She wrote to her father with great indignation about the Prince's unjust suspicions, saying von Schaumberg was a gentleman in every sense of the word. I gather that relations between herself and her husband are somewhat strained, so I imagine there is much more in this matter than the lost diamonds."

"You imagine, then, that she is shielding the Lieutenant?"

"Candidly, I do."

"And you are of opinion he stole the diamonds?"

"Yes, I am."

"I don't agree with you. I still think it was the Prince, and I think besides this, that he dexterously managed to throw suspicion on the Lieutenant. Have they called in the detectives yet?"

"No, they are at a deadlock, as I remarked before."

"Well, what am I expected to do?"

"Mr. Briggs cabled to his daughter--he never writes a letter--that he would come over and straighten out the tangle in fifteen minutes. He is certain the Prince stole the diamonds, but he did not tell his daughter so. He informed her he was bringing her a present of a new typewriting machine, and also a young woman from Chicago who could write shorthand and would look after the Princess's correspondence--act as secretary, in fact; for it seems the Princess has a larger correspondence than she can reasonably attend to, and she appears therefore to yearn for a typewriter. The old man tells me she is very careless about her letters, never being able to find anything she wants, and leaving them about a good deal, so he thinks she needs someone to look after her affairs; and I have a suspicion that her father fears she may leave some compromising letter about, so he wishes to ward off a divorce case."

"No, I fancy you are mistaken there. The father hasn't the slightest idea that there can be anything wrong with his daughter. It is probable the Princess has written some libellous statements about her husband, and it is quite likely the Prince is a brute and that young von Schaumberg is a most charming person."

"Well, as I was saying," continued Hardwick, "the old man cabled his daughter that he is bringing her a secretary and a typewriter. He engaged a female Pinkerton detective to enter the castle as secretary to the Princess and, if possible, to solve the diamond mystery. She is a young woman who, when she left Chicago, was very anti-English, but she became acquainted on the steamer with a young Englishman who was tremendously taken with her, and so at Liverpool she quite calmly broke her engagement with the old man and fulfilled a new engagement she had made with the young man by promptly marrying him--special license, I am told. Old Briggs has therefore a new typewriting machine on his hands, and so I was going to propose to you that you take the place of the Chicago Pinkerton person. Briggs has become so disgusted with all these detective women that he abandoned the idea of sending a female detective with the machine, and doesn't imagine that whoever is sent will be either a detective or a newspaper woman. I was introduced to him the other day by one of those lucky chances which sometimes put interesting

items of news in our way, and he told me the whole story, requesting me to recommend someone who wrote shorthand and understood the typewriter. I am to dine with him this evening, and I shall cordially recommend you. I may say that Briggs has gone to that celebrated London detective Mr. Cadbury Taylor, and has engaged him to solve the diamond mystery. So you see you will have a clear field. If you can leave for the castle to-morrow night, you may have the pleasure of Mr. Cadbury Taylor's company. He isn't visiting the castle, but goes straight to Vienna; so if you work your cards rightly, you can be in the same carriage with him as far as Munich, and during that time you may find out perhaps what he thinks about the case. I know only this much about his theory, and that is he thinks the right place to begin is in Vienna, where some, at least, of the stones are supposed to have been pawned."

"Oh, this is a delightful case, and I shall enjoy it. Has there been anything published yet with reference to the robbery?"

"Not a word; nobody knows anything about it, except the Prince and Princess, Briggs, myself and yourself, and perhaps one or two of the servants in the castle--oh, yes, and Cadbury Taylor."

CHAPTER V.

JENNIE MEETS A GREAT DETECTIVE.

Miss Baxter was early at the station before the Continental train left. She walked up and down the platform, hoping to see Mr. Cadbury Taylor, with whose face and form she was familiar. She secured a porter who spoke French, and pretended to him that she knew no English.

"I desire," she said, "to get into a first-class compartment with a gentleman whom I shall point out to you. I shall give you five shillings, so you must let me have your whole attention. My luggage has been labelled and registered, therefore you will not need to bother about it, but keep your eye on me and follow me into whatever carriage I enter, bringing with you the hand-bag and this heavy package."

The heavy package was a typewriter in its case. Shortly before the train departed, there sauntered into the station the tall, thin, well-known form of the celebrated detective. He wore a light ulster that reached almost to his heels, and his keen, alert face was entirely without beard or moustache. As he came up the platform, a short, stout man accosted him.

"I was afraid you were going to be late," said the detective's friend, "but I see you are just in time as usual."

"A railway station," said Mr. Cadbury Taylor, "is not the most inspiring place in London for the spending of a spare half hour; besides, I had some facts to get together, which are now tabulated in my note-book, and I'm quite ready to go, if the train is."

"I have secured a smoking compartment here where we shall be alone."

"That's right, Smith," said Cadbury Taylor. "You are always so

thoughtful," and the two men entered the compartment together.

Just as the guards were shouting, "Take your seats, please," Miss Baxter made a bolt for the compartment in which the detective and his friend sat together in opposite corners.

"I beg your pardon," said Smith, "this is a smoking compartment." The lady replied to him volubly in French, and next instant the porter heaved the typewriter and hand-bag on the seat beside her. Smith seemed to resent the intrusion, and appeared about to blame the porter, but the man answered rapidly as he banged the door shut, "The lady doesn't speak any English," and the next moment the train moved out of the station.

"There was no need," said the detective, "my dear Smith, to depend upon the porter for the information that the lady could not speak English. She is the secretary to a very rich employer in Chicago, and came from that city to New York, where she sailed on the Servia alone, coming to England to transact some special business, of which I could here give you full particulars, if it were worth while. She came from Liverpool to London over the Great Western Railway, and is now on her way to Paris. All this, of course, is obvious to the most casual observer, and so, my dear Smith, we may discuss our case with as much security as though we were entirely alone."

"But, good heavens, Cadbury!" cried Smith in amazement, "how can you tell all that?"

"My dear fellow," said the detective wearily, "no one travels with a typewriting machine unless that person is a typewriter. The girl, if you will notice, is now engaged in filling the leaves of her book with shorthand, therefore that proves her occupation. That she is secretary to a rich man is evidenced by the fact that she crossed in the Servia first cabin, as you may see by glancing at the label on the case; that she came alone, which is to say her employer was not with her, is indicated by the typewriter being marked 'Not Wanted,' so it was put down into the hold. If a Chicago business man had been travelling with his secretary, the typewriter case would have been labelled instead, 'Cabin, wanted,' for a Chicago man of business would have to write some hundreds of letters, even on the ocean, to be ready for posting the moment he came ashore. The typewriter case is evidently new, and is stamped with the name and address of its sellers in Chicago. That she came by the Great Western is shown by the fact that 'Chester' appears on still another label. That she has special business in England we may well believe, otherwise she would have crossed on the French line direct from New York to Havre. So you see, my dear boy, these are all matters of observation, and quite patent to anyone who cares to use his eyes."

"Yes, it all seems very simple now that you have explained it," growled Smith.

"I should be a much more mysterious person than I am," remarked the detective complacently, "if I did not explain so much. This explanation habit is becoming a vice with me, and I fear I must abandon it."

"I hope for my sake you won't," said Smith more good-naturedly, "for if left to myself I never could find out how you arrive at your wonderful conclusions. Do you expect the Austrian diamond mystery to prove difficult?"

"Difficult? Oh, dear no! To tell the truth, I have solved it already, but in order to give the American a run for his money--and surely he ought not to object to that, because he is a millionaire who has made his fortune by giving other people runs for their money, being a railway man--I am now on my way to Vienna. If I solved the problem off-hand for him in London, he would have no more appreciation of my talent than you had a moment ago when I explained why I knew this French girl came from Chicago."

"You mustn't mind that, Cadbury," said Smith contritely. "I confess I was irritated for a moment because it all seemed so simple."

"My dear fellow, every puzzle in this world is simple except one, and that is to find any problem which is difficult."

"Then who stole the diamonds? The lieutenant?"

The detective smiled and gazed upwards for a few tantalizing moments at the roof of the carriage.

"Here we have," he said at last, "an impecunious prince who marries an American heiress, as so many of them do. The girl begins life in Austria on one million dollars, say two hundred thousand pounds, and a case of diamonds said to be worth another two hundred thousand at least--probably more. Not much danger of running through that very speedily, is there, Smith?"

"No, I should think not."

"So the average man would think," continued the detective. "However, I have long since got out of the habit of thinking; therefore I make sure. The first problem I set to myself is this: How much money have the Prince and Princess spent since they were married? I find that the repairs on the Schloss Steinheimer, situated in the Tyrol, cost something like forty thousand pounds. It is a huge place, and the Steinheimers have not had an heiress in the family for many centuries. The Prince owed a good deal of money when he was married, and it took something like sixty thousand pounds to settle those debts; rather expensive as Continental princes go, but if one must have luxuries, one cannot save money. Not to weary you with details, I found that the two hundred thousand pounds were exhausted somewhat more than two months ago; in fact, just before the alleged robbery. The Prince is, of course, without money, otherwise he would not have married a Chicago heiress, and the Princess being without money, what does she naturally do?"

"Pawns her own diamonds!" cried Smith enthusiastically.

The detective smiled.

"I thought it much more probable she would apply to her father for money. I asked him if this was the case, giving him the date, roughly speaking, when such a letter had been sent. The old man opened his eyes at this, and told me he had received such a letter. 'But you did not send the money?' I ventured, 'No,' he said, 'I did not. The fact is, money is very tight in Chicago just now, and so I cabled her to run on her debts for a while.' This exactly bore out the conclusion at which I had already arrived. So now, having failed to get money from her father, the lady turns to her diamonds, the only security she possesses. The chances are that she did so before her father's cable message came, and

that was the reason she so confidently wished information to be given to the police. She expected to have money to redeem her jewels, and being a bright woman, she knew the traditional stupidity of the official police, and so thought there was no danger of her little ruse being discovered. But when the cable message came saying no money would be sent her, a different complexion was put upon the whole affair, for she did not know but if the police were given plenty of time they might stumble on the diamonds."

"But, my dear Cadbury, why should she not have taken the diamonds openly and raised money on them?"

"My dear fellow, there are a dozen reasons, any one of which will suffice where a woman is in the case. In the first place, she might fear to offend the family pride of the von Steinheimers; in the second place, we cannot tell what her relations with her husband were. She may not have wished him to know that she was short of money. But that she has stolen her own diamonds there is not the slightest question in my mind. All that is necessary for me to do now is to find out how many persons there are in Vienna who would lend large sums of money on valuable jewels. The second is to find with which one of those the Princess pawned her diamonds."

"But, my dear Cadbury, the lady is in Meran, and Vienna is some hundreds of miles away. How could a lady in the Tyrol pawn diamonds in Vienna without her absence being commented on? or do you think she had an agent to do it for her?" Again the detective smiled indulgently.

"No, she had no agent. The diamonds never left Vienna. You see, the ball had been announced, and immediate money was urgently needed. She pawned the diamonds before she left the capital of Austria, and the chances are she did not intend anyone to know they were missing; but on the eve of the ball her husband insisted that she should wear her diamonds, and therefore, being a quick-witted woman, she announced they had been stolen. After having made such a statement, she, of course, had to stick to it; and now, failing to get the money from America, she is exceedingly anxious that no real detective shall be employed in investigation."

At Dover Miss Baxter, having notes of this interesting conversation in shorthand, witnessed the detective bid good-bye to his friend Smith, who returned to London by a later train. After that she saw no more of Mr. Cadbury Taylor, and reached the Schloss Steinheimer at Meran without further adventure.

CHAPTER VI.

JENNIE SOLVES THE DIAMOND MYSTERY.

Miss Baxter found life at the Schloss much different from what she had expected. The Princess was a young and charming lady, very handsome, but in a state of constant depression. Once or twice Miss Baxter came upon her with apparent traces of weeping on her face. The Prince was not an old man, as she had imagined, but young and of a manly, stalwart appearance. He evidently possessed a fiendish temper, and moped about

the castle with a constant frown upon his brow.

The correspondence of the Princess was in the utmost disorder. There were hundreds upon hundreds of letters, and Miss Baxter set to work tabulating and arranging them. Meanwhile the young newspaper woman kept her eyes open. She wandered about the castle unmolested, poked into odd corners, talked with the servants, and, in fact, with everyone, but never did she come upon a clue which promised to lead to a solution of the diamond difficulty. Once she penetrated into a turret room, and came unexpectedly upon the Prince, who was sitting on the window-ledge, looking absently out on the broad and smiling valley that lay for miles below the castle. He sprang to his feet and stared so fiercely at the intruder that the girl's heart failed her, and she had not even the presence of mind to turn and run.

"What do you want?" he said to her shortly, for he spoke English perfectly. "You are the young woman from Chicago, I suppose?"

"No," answered Miss Baxter, forgetting for the moment the role she was playing; "I am from London."

"Well, it doesn't matter; you are the young woman who is arranging my wife's correspondence?"

"Yes." The Prince strode rapidly forward and grasped her by the wrist, his brow dark with a forbidding frown. He spoke in a hoarse whisper:

"Listen, my good girl! Do you want to get more money from me than you will get from the Princess in ten years' service? Hearken, then, to what I tell you. If there are any letters from--from--men, will you bring them to me?"

Miss Baxter was thoroughly frightened, but she said to the Prince sharply,--

"If you do not let go my wrist, I'll scream. How dare you lay your hand on me?"

The Prince released her wrist and stepped back.

"Forgive me," he said; "I'm a very miserable man. Forget what I have said."

"How can I forget it?" cried the girl, gathering courage as she saw him quail before her blazing eyes. "What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to bring to me any letters written by--by----"

"Written by von Schaumberg," cried the girl, noticing his hesitation and filling in the blank.

A red wave of anger surged up in the Prince's face.

"Yes," he cried; "bring me a letter to her from von Schaumberg, and I'll pay you what you ask."

The girl laughed.

"Prince," she said, "you will excuse me if I call you a fool. There are

no letters from von Schaumberg, and I have gone through the whole of the correspondence."

"What, then, suggested the name von Schaumberg to you? Where did you ever hear it before?"

"I heard that you suspected him of stealing the diamonds."

"And so he did, the cowardly thief. If it were not for mixing the Princess's name with such carrion as he, I would--"

But the Prince in his rage stamped up and down the room without saying what he would do. Miss Baxter quickly brought him to a standstill.

"It is contrary to my duty to the Princess," she began, hesitatingly, when he stopped and turned fiercely upon her.

"What is contrary to your duty?"

"There are letters, tied very daintily with a blue ribbon, and they are from a man. The Princess did not allow me to read them, but locked them away in a secret drawer in her dressing-room, but she is so careless with her keys and everything else, that I am sure I can get them for you, if you want them."

"Yes, yes, I want them," said the Prince, "and will pay you handsomely for them."

"Very well," replied Miss Baxter, "you shall have them. If you will wait here ten minutes, I shall return with them."

"But," hesitated the Prince, "say nothing to the Princess."

"Oh, no, I shall not need to; the keys are sure to be on her dressing-table."

Miss Baxter ran down to the room of the Princess, and had little difficulty in obtaining the keys. She unlocked the secret drawer into which she had seen the Princess place the packet of letters, and taking them out, she drew another sheet of paper along with them, which she read with wide-opening eyes, then with her pretty lips pursed, she actually whistled, which unmaidenly performance merely gave sibilant expression to her astonishment. Taking both the packet of letters and the sheet of paper with her, she ran swiftly up the stair and along the corridor to the room where the Prince was impatiently awaiting her.

"Give them to me," he snapped, rudely snatching the bundle of documents from her hand. She still clung to the separate piece of paper and said nothing. The Prince stood by the window and undid the packet with trembling hands. He examined one and then another of the letters, turning at last towards the girl with renewed anger in his face.

"You are trifling with me, my girl," he cried.

"No, I am not," she said stoutly.

"These are my own letters, written by me to my wife before we were married!"

"Of course they are. What others did you expect? These are the only letters, so far as I have learned, that any man has written to her, and the only letters she cares for of all the thousands she has ever received. Why, you foolish, blind man, I had not been in this castle a day before I saw how matters stood. The Princess is breaking her poor heart because you are unkind to her, and she cares for nobody on earth but you, great stupid dunce that you are."

"Is it true? Will you swear it's true?" cried the Prince, dropping the packet and going hastily toward the girl. Miss Jennie stood with her back to the wall, and putting her hands behind her, she said,--

"No, no; you are not going to touch me again. Of course it's true, and if you had the sense of a six-year-old child, you would have seen it long ago; and she paid sixty thousand pounds of your gambling debts, too."

"What are you talking about? The Princess has never given me a penny of her money; I don't need it. Goodness knows, I have money enough of my own."

"Well, Cadbury Taylor said that you--Oh, I'll warrant you, it is like all the rest of his statements, pure moonshine."

"Of whom are you speaking? And why did my wife protect that wretch whom she knows has stolen her diamonds?"

"You mean von Schaumberg?"

"Yes."

"I believe the Princess does think he stole them, and the reason the Princess protects him is to prevent you from challenging him, for she fears that he, being a military man, will kill you, although I fancy she would be well rid of you."

"But he stole the diamonds--there was nobody else."

"He did nothing of the kind. Read that!"

The Prince, bewildered, took the sheet that she handed to him and read it, a wrinkle of bewilderment corrugating his brow.

"I don't understand what this has to do with the case," he said at last. "It seems to be an order on the bank at Vienna for the diamonds, written by the Princess herself."

"Of course it is. Well, if the diamonds had been delivered, that paper would now be in the possession of the bank instead of in your hands."

"Perhaps she mislaid this order and wrote another."

"Perhaps. Still it might be worth while finding out."

"Take this, then, to the Princess and ask her."

"It is not likely she would remember. The better plan is to telegraph at once to the Vienna bank, asking them to send the diamonds to Meran by special messenger. No one there knows that the diamonds are missing."

"I will do so at once," cried the Prince, with more animation in his voice than Miss Baxter had previously noticed. His Highness was becoming interested in the game.

After luncheon the Princess came to Miss Baxter, who was seated at her desk, and handed her a letter.

"There is an invitation from the Duchess of Chiselhurst for a grand ball she is shortly to give in her London house. It is to be a very swell affair, but I don't care enough for such things to go all the way to England to enjoy them. Would you therefore send her Grace my regrets?"

"I will do so at once."

At that moment there came a messenger from the Prince asking Miss Baxter to meet him in the library. The girl glanced up at the Princess.

"Have I your permission to go?" she said.

The Princess looked at her steadily for a moment, just the faintest suspicion of a frown on her fair brow.

"I do not suppose you need my permission." Her Highness spoke with slow deliberation. "My husband condescends to take considerable interest in you. Passing along the corridor this morning, I heard your voices in most animated conversation."

"Had you sufficient interest in our discussion to stop and listen to what we said, Princess von Steinheimer?"

"Ah, now you are becoming insolent, and I must ask you to consider your engagement with me at an end."

"Surely you will not dismiss me in this heartless way, Princess. I think I am entitled to a month's notice, or is it only a week's?"

"I will pay you a year's salary, or two years' if that will content you. I have no wish to deal harshly with you, but I desire you to leave at once," said the Princess, who had little sense of humour, and thus thought the girl was in earnest when she asked for notice.

Miss Baxter laughed merrily, and replied when she was able to control her mirth, "I do hate to leave the castle just when things are becoming interesting. Still, I don't suppose I shall really need to go away in spite of your dismissal, for the Prince this morning offered me ten times the amount of money you are paying."

"Did he?"

"Be assured he did; if you don't believe me, ask him. I told him he was a fool, but, alas, we live in a cynical age, and few men believe all they hear, so I fear my expression of opinion made little impression on him."

"I shall not keep you longer from his Highness," said the Princess with freezing dignity.

"Thank you so much. I am just dying to meet him, for I know he has

something most interesting to tell me. Don't you think yourself, Princess, that a man acts rather like a fool when he is deeply in love?"

To this there was no reply, and the Princess left the room.

Miss Jennie jumped to her feet and almost ran to the library. She found the Prince walking up and down the long room with a telegraph message in his hand. "You are a most wonderful young woman," he said; "read that."

"I have been told so by more observing men than you, Prince von Steinheimer," said the girl, taking the telegram. It was from the manager of the bank in Vienna, and it ran: "Special messenger leaves with package by the Meran express to-night."

"Just as I thought," said Miss Jennie; "the diamonds never left the bank. I suppose those idiots of servants which the Princess has round her didn't know what they took away from Vienna and what they left. Then, when the diamonds were missing, they completely lost their heads--not that anyone in the castle has much wit to spare. I never saw such an incompetent lot."

The Prince laughed.

"You think, perhaps, I have not wit enough to see that my wife cares for me, is that it? Is that why you gave me my own letters?"

"Oh, you are well mated! The Princess now does me the honour of being jealous. Think of that! As if it were possible that I should take any interest in you, for I have seen real men in my time."

The Prince regarded her with his most severe expression.

"Are you not flattering yourself somewhat, young lady?"

"Oh, dear no! I take it as the reverse of flattering to be supposed that I have any liking for such a ninny as you are. Flattering, indeed! And she has haughtily dismissed me, if you please."

"The Princess has? What have you been saying to her?"

"Oh, I made the most innocent remark, and it was the truth too, which shows that honesty is not always the best policy. I merely told her that you had offered me ten times the amount of money she is paying me. You needn't jump as if somebody had shot off a gun at your ear. You know you did make such an offer."

"You confounded little mischief-maker," cried the Prince in anger. "Did you tell her what it was for?"

"No. She did not ask."

"I will thank you to apply the cleverness you seem to possess to the undoing of the harm you have so light-heartedly caused."

"How can I? I am ordered to leave to-night, when I did _so_ wish to stay and see the diamond _denouement_."

"You are not going to-night. I shall speak to the Princess about it if that should be necessary. Your mention of the diamonds reminds me that

my respected father-in-law, Mr. Briggs, informs me that a celebrated detective, whom it seems he has engaged--Taylor, I think the name is--will be here to-morrow to explain the diamond mystery, so you see you have a competitor."

"Oh, is Cadbury coming? That is too jolly for anything. I simply _must_ stay and hear his explanation, for he is a very famous detective, and the conclusions he has arrived at must be most interesting."

"I think some explanations are due to me as well. My worthy father-in-law seems to have commissioned this person without thinking it necessary to consult me in the least; in fact, Mr. Briggs goes about the castle looking so dark and lowering when he meets me, that I sometimes doubt whether this is my own house or not."

"And is it?"

"Is it what?"

"Is it your own house? I was told it was mortgaged up to the tallest turret. Still, you can't blame Mr. Briggs for being anxious about the diamonds; they belong to his daughter."

"They belong to my wife."

"True. That complicates matters a bit, and gives both Chicago and Vienna a right to look black. And now, your Highness, I must take my leave of you; and if the diamonds come safely in the morning, remember I intend to claim salvage on them. Meanwhile, I am going to write a nice little story about them."

In the morning the diamonds arrived by special messenger, who first took a formal receipt for them, and then most obsequiously took his departure. By the same train came Mr. Cadbury Taylor, as modest as ever, but giving some indication in his bearing of the importance of the discovery his wonderful system had aided him in making. He blandly evaded the curiosity of Mr. Briggs, and said it would perhaps be better to reveal the secret in the presence of the Prince and Princess, as his investigations had led him to conclusions that might be unpleasant for one of them to hear, yet were not to be divulged in their absence.

"Just what I suspected," muttered Mr. Briggs, who had long been convinced that the Prince was the actual culprit.

The important gathering took place in the library, the Prince, with the diamonds in his coat pocket, seated at the head of the long table, while the Princess sat at the foot, as far from her husband as she could conveniently get without attracting notice. Miss Baxter stood near a window, reading an important letter from London which had reached her that morning. The tall, thin detective and the portly Mr. Briggs came in together, the London man bowing gravely to the Prince and Princess. Mr. Briggs took a seat at the side of the table, but the detective remained standing, looking questioningly at Miss Baxter, but evidently not recognizing her as the lady who had come in upon him and his friend when they had entered the train.

"I beg the pardon of your Highness, but what I have to say had better be said with as few hearers as possible. I should be much obliged if this young person would read her correspondence in another room."

"The young woman," said the Prince coldly, "is secretary to her Highness, and is entirely in her confidence."

The Princess said nothing, but sat with her eyes upon the table, apparently taking no note of what was going on. Rich colour came into her face, and, as the keen detective cast a swift glance at her, he saw before him a woman conscious of her guilt, fearing exposure, yet not knowing how to avert it.

"If your Highness will excuse my persistence," began Mr. Taylor blandly.

"But I will not," interrupted the Prince gruffly. "Go on with your story without so much circumlocution."

The detective, apparently unruffled by the discourtesy he met, bowed profoundly towards the Prince, cleared his throat, and began.

"May I ask your Highness," he said, addressing himself to the Princess, "how much money you possessed just before you left Vienna?"

The lady looked up at him in surprise, but did not answer.

"In Heaven's name, what has that to do with the loss of the diamonds?" rapped out the Prince, his hot temper getting once more the better of him. Cadbury Taylor spread out his hands and shrugged his shoulders in protest at the interruption. He spoke with deference, but nevertheless there was a touch of reproach in his tone.

"I am accustomed to being listened to with patience, and am generally allowed to tell my story my own way, your Highness."

"What I complain of is that you are not telling any story at all, but are asking instead a very impertinent question."

"Questions which seem to you irrelevant may be to a trained mind most--"

"Bosh! Trained donkeys! Do you know where the diamonds are?"

"Yes, I do," answered Cadbury Taylor, still imperturbable, in spite of the provocation he was receiving.

"Well, where are they?"

"They are in the vaults of your bank in Vienna."

"I don't believe it. Who stole them then?"

"They were put there by her Highness the Princess von Steinheimer, doubtless in security for money--"

"What!" roared the Prince, springing to his feet, his stentorian voice ringing to the ceiling. "Do you mean to insinuate, you villain, that my wife stole her own diamonds?"

"If your Highness would allow me to proceed in my own--"

"Enough of this fooling. There are the diamonds," cried the Prince, jerking the box from his pocket and flinging it on the table.

"There!" shouted old man Briggs, bringing his clenched fist down on the oak. "What did I tell you? I knew it all along. The Prince stole the diamonds, and in his excitement yanks them out of his pocket and proves it. That was my opinion all along!"

"Oh, father, father!" moaned the Princess, speaking for the first time. "How can you say such a thing? My husband couldn't do a mean action if he tried. The idea of him stealing the diamonds! Not if they were worth a thousand millions and detection impossible."

The Prince, who had been glaring at Mr. Briggs, and who seemed on the point of giving that red-faced gentleman a bit of his mind, turned a softened gaze upon his wife, who rested her arms on the table and buried her face in them.

"Come, come," cried Miss Jennie Baxter, stepping energetically forward; "I imagine everybody has had enough of this. Clear out, Mr. Briggs, and take Mr. Taylor with you; I am sure he has not had any breakfast yet, and he certainly looks hungry. If you hire detectives, Mr. Briggs, you must take care of them. Out you go. The dining-room is ever so much more inviting just now than the library; and if you don't see what you want, ring for it."

She drove the two speechless men out before her, and, closing the door, said to the Prince, who was still standing bewildered at having his hand forced in this manner,--

"There! Two fools from four leaves two. Now, my dears--I'm not going to Highness either of you--you are simply two lone people who like each other immensely, yet who are drifting apart through foolish misunderstandings that a few words would put right if either of you had sense enough to speak them, which you haven't, and that's why I'm here to speak them for you. Now, madame, I am ready to swear that the Prince has never said anything to me that did not show his deep love for you, and if you had overheard us, you would not need me to tell you so. He thinks that you have a fancy for that idiot von Schaumberg--not that I ever saw the poor man; but he is bound to be an idiot, or the Prince wouldn't be jealous of him. As nobody has stolen the diamonds after all this fuss, so no one has stolen the affection of either of you from the other. I can see by the way you look at each other that I won't need to apologize for leaving you alone together while I run upstairs to pack."

"Oh, but you are not going to leave us?" cried the Princess.

"I should be delighted to stay; but there is no rest for the wicked, and I must get back to London."

With that the girl ran to her room and there re-read the letter she had received.

"Dear Miss Baxter (it ran),--We are in a very considerable dilemma here, so I write asking you to see me in London without delay, going back to the Tyrol later on if the investigation of the diamond mystery renders your return necessary. The Duchess of Chiselmhurst is giving a great ball on the 29th. It is to be a very swagger affair, with notables from every part of Europe, and they seem determined that no one connected with a newspaper shall be admitted. We have set at work every influence to obtain an invitation for a reporter, but without success, the reply

invariably given being that an official account will be sent to the press. Now, I want you to set your ingenuity at work, and gain admittance if possible, for I am determined to have an account of this ball written in such a way that everyone who reads it will know that the writer was present. If you can manage this, I can hardly tell you how grateful the proprietor and myself will be.--Yours very truly,

"RADNOR HARDWICK."

Miss Jennie Baxter sat for some moments musing, with the letter in her hand. She coned over in her mind the names of those who might be able to assist her in this task, but she dismissed them one by one, well knowing that if Mr. Hardwick and the proprietor of the Bugle had petitioned all their influential friends without avail, she could not hope to succeed with the help of the very few important personages she was acquainted with. She wondered if the Princess could get her an invitation; then suddenly her eyes lit up, and she sprang eagerly to her feet.

"What a fortunate thing it is," she cried aloud, "that I did not send on the refusal of the Princess to the Duchess of Chiselhurst. I had forgotten all about it until this moment."

CHAPTER VII.

JENNIE ARRANGES A CINDERELLA VISIT.

The room which had been allotted to Jennie Baxter in the Schloss Steinheimer enjoyed a most extended outlook. A door-window gave access to a stone balcony, which hung against the castle wall like a swallow's nest at the eaves of a house. This balcony was just wide enough to give ample space for one of the easy rocking-chairs which the Princess had imported from America, and which Jennie thought were the only really comfortable pieces of furniture the old stronghold possessed, much as she admired the artistic excellence of the mediaeval chairs, tables, and cabinets which for centuries had served the needs of the ancient line that had lived in the Schloss. The rocking-chair was as modern as this morning's daily paper; its woodwork painted a bright scarlet, its arms like broad shelves, its rockers as sensitively balanced as a marine compass; in fact, just such a chair as one would find dotted round the vast verandah of an American summer hotel. In this chair sat Miss Jennie, two open letters on her lap, and perplexity in the dainty little frown that faintly ruffled the smoothness of her fair brow. The scene from the high balcony was one to be remembered; but, although this was her last day at the Castle, the girl saw nothing of the pretty town of Meran so far below; the distant chalk-line down the slope beyond which marked the turbulent course of the foaming Adegge; the lofty mountains all around, or the further snow-peaks, dazzling white against the deep blue of the sky.

One of the epistles which lay on her lap was the letter she had received from the editor recounting the difficulties he had met with while endeavouring to make arrangements for reporting adequately the Duchess of Chiselhurst's ball; the other was the still unanswered invitation from the Duchess to the Princess. Jennie was flattered to know that

already the editor, who had engaged her with unconcealed reluctance, expected her to accomplish what the entire staff were powerless to effect. She knew that, had she but the courage, it was only necessary to accept the invitation in the name of her present hostess, and attend the great society function as Princess von Steinheimer. Yet she hesitated, not so much on account of the manifest danger of discovery, but because she had grown to like the Princess, and this impersonation, if it came to the knowledge of the one most intimately concerned, as it was almost sure to do, would doubtless be regarded as an unpardonable liberty. As she swayed gently back and forth in the gaudy rocking-chair, she thought of confessing everything to the Princess and asking her assistance; but pondering on this, she saw that it was staking everything on one throw of the dice. If the Princess refused, then the scheme became impossible, as that lady herself would answer the letter of the Duchess and decline the invitation. Jennie soothed her accusing conscience by telling herself that this impersonation would do no harm to Princess von Steinheimer, or to anyone else for that matter, while it would be of inestimable assistance to her own journalistic career. From that she drifted to meditation on the inequalities of this life--the superabundance which some possess, while others, no less deserving, have difficulty in obtaining the scant necessities. And this consoling train of thought having fixed her resolve to take the goods the gods scattered at her feet, or rather threw into her lap, she drew a long sigh of determination as there came a gentle tap at the door of her room, and the voice of the Princess herself said, "May I come in?"

Jennie, a rapid blush flaming her cheeks, sprang to her feet, flung the letters on a table, and opened the door.

The visitor entered, looking attractive enough to be a princess of fairyland, and greeted Miss Baxter most cordially.

"I am so sorry you are leaving," she said. "Cannot you be persuaded to change your mind and stay with me? Where could you find a more lovely view than this from your balcony here?"

"Or a more lovely hostess?" said the girl, looking at her visitor with undisguised admiration and quite ignoring the landscape.

The Princess laughed, and as they now stood together on the balcony she put out her hands, pushed Jennie gently into the rocking-chair again, seating herself jauntily on its broad arm, and thus the two looked like a pair of mischievous schoolgirls, home at vacation time, thoroughly enjoying their liberty.

"There! You are now my prisoner, about to be punished for flattery," cried the Princess. "I saw by the motion of the chair that you had just jumped up from it when I disturbed you, so there you are, back in it again. What were you thinking about? A rocking-chair lends itself deliciously to meditation, and we always dream of someone very particular as we rock."

"I am no exception to the rule," sighed Jennie; "I was thinking of you, Princess."

"How nice of you to say that; and as one good turn deserves another, here is proof that a certain young lady has been in my thoughts."

As she spoke, the Princess took from her pocket an embossed case of

Russian leather, opened it and displayed a string of diamonds, lustrous as drops of liquid light.

"I want you to wear these stones in remembrance of our diamond mystery--that is why I chose diamonds--and also, I confess, because I want you to think of me every time you put them on. See how conceited I am! One does not like to be forgotten."

Jennie took the string, her own eyes for a moment rivalling in brilliancy the sparkle of the gems; then the moisture obscured her vision and she automatically poured the stones from one hand to the other, as if their scintillating glitter hypnotized her. She tried once or twice to speak, but could not be sure of her voice, so remained silent. The Princess, noticing her agitation, gently lifted the necklace and clasped it round the girl's white throat, chattering all the while with nervous haste.

"There! you can wear diamonds, and there are so many to whom they are unbecoming. I also look well in diamonds--at least, so I've been told over and over again, and I've come to believe it at last. I suppose the young men have not concealed from you the fact that you are a strikingly good-looking girl, Jennie. Indeed, and this is brag if you like, we two resemble one another enough to be sisters, nearly the same height, the same colour of eyes and hair. Come to the mirror, Miss Handsomeness, and admire yourself."

She dragged Jennie to her feet and drew her into the room, placing her triumphantly before the great looking-glass that reflected back a full-length portrait.

"Now confess that you never saw a prettier girl," cried the Princess gleefully.

"I don't think I ever did," admitted Jennie, but she was looking at the image of the Princess and not at her own. The Princess laughed, but Miss Baxter seemed too much affected by the unexpected present to join in the merriment. She regarded herself solemnly in the glass for a few moments, then slowly undid the clasp, and, slipping the string of brilliants from her neck, handed them back to the Princess. "You are very, very kind, but I cannot accept so costly a present."

"Cannot? Why? Have I offended you by anything I have said since you came?"

"Oh, no, no. It isn't that."

"What, then? Don't you like me, after all?"

"Like you? I love you, Princess!" cried the girl impulsively, throwing her arms round the other's neck.

The Princess tried to laugh as she pressed Jennie closely to her, but there was a tremour of tears in the laughter.

"You must take this little gift as a souvenir of your visit with me. I was really--very unhappy when you came, and now--well, you smoothed away some misunderstandings--I'm more than grateful. And it isn't natural for a woman to refuse diamonds, Jennie."

"I know it isn't; and I won't quite refuse them. I'll postpone. It is possible that something I shall do before long may seriously offend you. If it does--then good-bye to the necklace! If it doesn't, when I have told you all about my misdeed--I shall confess courageously--you will give me the diamonds."

"Dear me, Jennie, what terrible crime are you about to commit? Why not tell me now? You have no idea how you have aroused my curiosity."

"I dare not tell you, Princess; not until my project proves a success or a failure. We women--some have our way made for us--others have our own way to make. I am among the others, and I hope you will remember that, if you are ever angry with me."

"Is it a new kind of speculation? A fortune made in a day? Gambling?"

"Something of that sort. I am going to stake a good deal on the turn of a card; so please pray that luck will not be against me."

"If pluck will make you win, I am sure you will carry it through, but if at first you don't succeed, try, try again; and if you haven't the money, I'll supply the capital. I know I should like to gamble. Anyhow, you have my best wishes for your success."

"Thank you, Princess. I can hardly fail after that."

The time had come when the two friends must part. The carriage was waiting to take Miss Baxter to the station, and the girl bade good-bye to her hostess with an uneasy feeling that she was acting disloyally to one who had befriended her. In her handbag was the invitation to the ball, and also the letter she had written in the Princess's name accepting it, which latter she posted in Meran. In due course she reached London, and presented herself to the editor of the Daily Bugle.

"Well, Miss Baxter," he said, "you have been extraordinarily successful in solving the diamond mystery, and I congratulate you. My letter reached you, I suppose. Have you given any thought to the problem that now confronts us? Can you get us a full report of the Duchess of Chiselhurst's ball, written so convincingly that all the guests who read it will know that the writer was present?"

"It is entirely a question of money, Mr. Hardwick."

"Most things are. Well, we are prepared to spend money to get just what we want."

"How much?"

"Whatever is necessary."

"That's vague. Put it into figures."

"Five hundred pounds; seven hundred; a thousand if need be."

"It will not cost you a thousand, and it may come to more than five hundred. Place the thousand to my credit, and I shall return what is left. I must go at once to Paris and carry out my plans from that city."

"Then you have thought out a scheme. What is it?"

"I have not only thought it out, but most of the arrangements are already made. I cannot say more about it. You will have to trust wholly to me."

"There is a good deal of money at stake, Miss Baxter, and our reputation as a newspaper as well. I think I should know what you propose to do."

"Certainly. I propose to obtain for you an accurate description of the ball, written by one who was present."

The editor gave utterance to a sort of interjection that always served him in place of a laugh.

"In other words, you want neither interference nor advice."

"Exactly, Mr. Hardwick. You know from experience that little good comes of talking too much of a secret project not yet completed."

The editor drummed with his fingers on the table for a few moments thoughtfully.

"Very well, then, it shall be as you say. I should have been very glad to share the responsibility of failure with you; but if you prefer to take the whole risk yourself, there is nothing more to be said. The thousand pounds shall be placed to your credit at once. What next?"

"On the night of the ball I should like you to have three or four expert shorthand writers here; I don't know how many will be necessary--you understand more about that than I do; but it is my intention to dictate the report right along as fast as I can talk until it is finished, and I don't wish to be stopped or interrupted, so I want the best stenographers you have; they are to relieve one another just as if they were taking down a parliamentary speech. The men had better be in readiness at midnight; I shall be here as soon after that as possible. If you will kindly run over their type-written MS. before it goes to the compositors, I will glance at the proofs when I have finished dictating."

"Then you hope to attend the ball yourself."

"Perhaps."

"You have just returned from the Tyrol, and I fear you don't quite appreciate the difficulties that are in the way. This is no ordinary society function, and if you think even a thousand pounds will gain admittance to an uninvited guest, you will find yourself mistaken."

"So I understood from your letter."

Again the editorial interjection did duty for a laugh.

"You are very sanguine, Miss Baxter. I wish I felt as confident; however, we will hope for the best, and if we cannot command success, we will at least endeavour to deserve it."

Jennie, with the thousand pounds at her disposal, went to Paris, took rooms at the most aristocratic hotel, engaged a maid, and set about the

construction of a ball dress that would be a dream of beauty. Luckily, she knew exactly the gown-making resources of Paris, and the craftsmen to whom she gave her orders were not the less anxious to please her when they knew that the question of cost was not to be considered. From Paris she telegraphed in the name of the Princess von Steinheimer to Claridge's Hotel for an apartment on the night of the ball, and asked that a suitable equipage be provided to convey her to and from that festival.

Arriving at Claridge's, she was well aware her first danger was that someone who knew the Princess von Steinheimer would call upon her; but on the valid plea of fatigue from her journey she proclaimed that in no circumstances could she see any visitor, and thus shipwreck was avoided at the outset. It was unlikely that the Princess von Steinheimer was personally known to many who would attend the ball; in fact, the Princess had given to Jennie as her main reason for refusing the invitation the excuse that she knew no one in London. She had been invited merely because of the social position of the Prince in Vienna, and was unknown by sight even to her hostess, the Duchess of Chiselhurst. Critically, she compared the chances of success with the chances of failure, and often it seemed that disaster was inevitable, unversed as she knew herself to be in the customs of grand society at one of its high functions, but nevertheless she was undaunted by the odds against her, and resolved to stake a career on the fortunes of a night.

CHAPTER VIII.

JENNIE MIXES WITH THE ELITE OF EARTH.

It is said that a woman magnificently robed is superior to all earthly tribulations. Such was the case with Jennie as she left her carriage, walked along the strip of carpet which lay across the pavement under a canopy, and entered the great hall of the Duke of Chiselhurst's town house, one of the huge palaces of Western London. Nothing so resplendent had she ever witnessed, or even imagined, as the scene which met her eye when she found herself about to ascend the broad stairway at the top of which the hostess stood to receive her distinguished guests. Early as she was, the stairway and the rooms beyond seemed already thronged. Splendid menials in gorgeous livery, crimson the predominant colour, stood on each step at either side of the stair. Uniforms of every pattern, from the dazzling oriental raiment of Indian princes and eastern potentates, to the more sober, but scarcely less rich apparel of the diplomatic corps, ministers of the Empire, and officers, naval and military, gave the final note of magnificence and picturesque decoration. Like tropical flowers in this garden of colour were the ladies, who, with easy grace, moved to and fro, bestowing a smile here and a whisper there; and yet, despite her agitation, a hurried, furtive glance around brought to Jennie the conviction that she was, perhaps, the best-gowned woman in that assemblage of well-dressed people, which recognition somewhat calmed her palpitating heart. The whole environment seemed unreal to her, and she walked forward as if in a dream. She heard someone cry, "The Princess von Steinheimer," and at first had a difficulty in realizing that the title, for the moment, pertained to herself. The next instant her hand was in that of the Duchess of

Chiselhurst, and Jennie heard the lady murmur that it was good of her to come so far to grace the occasion. The girl made some sort of reply which she found herself unable afterwards to recall, but the rapid incoming of other guests led her to hope that, if she had used any unsuitable phrase, it was either unheard or forgotten in the tension of the time. She stood aside and formed one of the brilliant group at the head of the stairs, thankful that this first ordeal was well done with. Her rapidly beating heart had now opportunity to lessen its pulsations, and as she soon realized that she was practically unnoticed, her natural calmness began to return to her. She remembered why she was there, and her discerning eye enabled her to stamp on a retentive memory the various particulars of so unaccustomed a spectacle whose very unfamiliarity made the greater impression upon the girl's mind. She moved away from the group, determined to saunter through the numerous rooms thrown open for the occasion, and thus, as it were, get her bearings. In a short time all fear of discovery left her, and she began to feel very much at home in the lofty, crowded salons, pausing even to enjoy a selection which a military band, partly concealed in the foliage, was rendering in masterly manner, led by the most famous _impresario_ of the day. The remote probability of meeting anyone here who knew the Princess reassured her, and there speedily came over her a sense of delight in all the kaleidoscopic bewilderment of this great entertainment. She saw that each one there had interest in someone else, and, to her great relief, found herself left entirely alone with reasonable assurance that this remoteness would continue to befriend her until the final gauntlet of leave-taking had to be run; a trial still to be encountered, the thought of which she resolutely put away from her, trusting to the luck that had hitherto not deserted her.

Jennie was in this complaisant frame of mind when she was suddenly startled by a voice at her side.

"Ah, Princess, I have been searching everywhere for you, catching glimpses of you now and then, only to lose you, as, alas, has been my fate on more serious occasion. May I flatter myself with the belief that you also remember?"

There was no recognition in the large frightened eyes that were turned upon him. They saw a young man bowing low over the unresisting hand he had taken. His face was clear-cut and unmistakably English. Jennie saw his closely-cropped auburn head, and, as it raised until it overtopped her own, the girl, terrified as she was, could not but admire the sweeping blonde moustache that overshadowed a smile, half-wistful, half-humorous, which lighted up his handsome face. The ribbon of some order was worn athwart his breast; otherwise he wore court dress, which well became his stalwart frame.

"I am disconsolate to see that I am indeed forgotten, Princess, and so another cherished delusion fades away from me."

Her fan concealed the lower part of the girl's face, and she looked at him over its fleecy semicircle.

"Put not your trust in princesses," she murmured, a sparkle of latent mischief lighting up her eyes.

The young man laughed. "Indeed," he said, "had I served my country as faithfully as I have been true to my remembrance of you, Princess, I would have been an ambassador long ere this, covered with decorations.

Have you then lost all recollection of that winter in Washington five years ago; that whirlwind of gaiety which ended by wafting you away to a foreign country, and thus the eventful season clings to my memory as if it were a disastrous western cyclone? Is it possible that I must re-introduce myself as Donal Stirling?"

"Not Lord Donal Stirling?" asked Jennie, dimly remembering that she had heard this name in connection with something diplomatic, and her guess that he was in that service was strengthened by his previous remark about being an ambassador.

"Yes, Lord Donal, if you will cruelly insist on calling me so; but this cannot take from me the consolation that once, in the conservatory of the White House, under the very shadow of the President, you condescended to call me Don."

"You cannot expect one to remember what happened in Washington five years ago. You know the administration itself changes every four years, and memories seldom carry back even so far as that."

"I had hoped that my most outspoken adoration would have left reminiscence which might outlast an administration. I have not found forgetting so easy."

"Are you quite sure of that, Lord Donal?" asked the girl archly, closing her fan and giving him for the first time a full view of her face.

The young man seemed for a moment perplexed, but she went on, giving him little time for reflection. "Have your diplomatic duties taken you away from Washington?"

"Yes, to the other end of the earth. I am now in St. Petersburg, with ultimate hopes of Vienna, Princess. I happened to be in London this week, and hearing you were to be here, I moved heaven and earth for an invitation."

"Which you obtained, only to find yourself forgotten. How hollow this world is, isn't it?"

"Alas, yes. A man in my profession sees a good deal of the seamy side of life, and I fully believe that my rapidly lessening dependence on human veracity will be shattered by my superiors sending me to Constantinople. But let me find you a seat out of this crowd where we may talk of old times."

"I don't care so much about the past as I do about the present. Let us go up into that gallery, where you shall point out to me the celebrities. I suppose you know them all, while I am an entire stranger to London Society."

"That is a capital idea," cried the young man enthusiastically. "Yes, I think I know most of the people here, at least by name. Ah, here comes the Royal party; we shall just be in time to have a good look at them."

The band played the National Anthem, and Lord Donal got two chairs, which he placed at the edge of the gallery, well hidden from the promenaders by spreading tropical plants.

"Oh, this is jolly," cried Jennie, quite forgetting the dignity of a

Princess. "You told me why you came to the ball. Do you know why I am here?"

"On the remote chance of meeting me whom you pretended to have forgotten," replied the young man audaciously.

"Of course," laughed Jennie; "but aside from that, I came to see the costumes. You know, we women are libellously said to dress for each other. Away from the world, in the Tyrol, I have little opportunity of seeing anything fine in the way of dress, and so I accepted the invitation of the Duchess."

"Have you the invitation of the Duchess with you?"

"Yes, I am going to make some notes on the back of it. Would you like to see it?" She handed him the letter and then leaned back in her chair, regarding him closely. The puzzled expression on his face deepened as he glanced over the invitation, and saw that it was exactly what it purported to be. He gave the letter back to her, saying,--

"So you are here to see the fashions. It is a subject I know little about; but, judging by effect, I should say that the Princess von Steinheimer has nothing to learn from anyone present. If I may touch on a topic so personal, your costume is what they call a creation, is it not, Princess?"

"It isn't bad," said the girl, looking down at her gown and then glancing up at him with merriment dancing in her eyes. The diplomat had his elbow resting on the balustrade, his head leaning on his hand, and, quite oblivious to everything else, was gazing at her with such absorbed intentness that the girl blushed and cast down her eyes. The intense admiration in his look was undisguised. "Still," she rattled on somewhat breathlessly, "one gets many hints from others, and the creation of to-day is merely the old clothes of to-morrow. Invention has no vacation so far as ladies' apparel is concerned. 'Take no thought of the morrow, wherewithal ye shall be clothed,' may have been a good motto for the court of Solomon, but it has little relation with that of Victoria."

"Solomon--if the saying is his--was hedging. He had many wives, you know."

"Well, as I was about to say, you must now turn your attention to the other guests, and tell me who's who. I have already confessed my ignorance, and you promised to enlighten me."

The young man, with visible reluctance, directed his thoughts from the one to the many, and named this person and that, while Jennie, with the pencil attached to her card, made cabalistic notes in shorthand, economizing thus both space and time. When at last she had all the information that could be desired, she leaned back in her chair with a little sigh of supreme content. Whatever might now betide, her mission was fulfilled, if she once got quietly away. The complete details of the most important society event of the season were at her fingers' ends. She closed her eyes for a moment to enjoy the satisfaction which success leaves in its train, and when she opened them again found Lord Donal in his old posture, absorbed in the contemplation of her undeniable beauty.

"I see you are determined I shall have no difficulty in remembering you next time we meet," she said with a smile, at the same time flushing

slightly under his ardent gaze.

"I was just thinking," he replied, shifting his position a little, "that the five years which have dealt so hardly with me, have left you five years younger."

"Age has many privileges, Lord Donal," she said to him, laughing outright; "but I don't think you can yet lay claim to any of them. The pose of the prematurely old is not in the least borne out by your appearance, however hardly the girl you met in Washington dealt with you."

"Ah, Princess, it is very easy for you to treat these serious matters lightly. He laughs at scars who never felt a wound. Time, being above all things treacherous, often leaves the face untouched the more effectually to scar the heart. The hurt concealed is ever the more dangerous."

"I fancy it has been concealed so effectually that it is not as deep as you imagined."

"Princess, I will confess to you that the wound at Washington was as nothing to the one received at London."

"Yes; you told me you had been here for a week."

"The week has nothing to do with it. I have been here for a night--for two hours--or three; I have lost count of time since I met you."

What reply the girl might have made to this speech, delivered with all the fervency of a man in thorough earnest, will never be known, for at that moment their tete-a-tete was interrupted by a messenger, who said,--

"His Excellency the Austrian Ambassador begs to be permitted to pay his regards to the Princess von Steinheimer."

Lord Donal Stirling never took his eyes from the face of his companion, and he saw a quick pallor overspread it. He leaned forward and whispered,--

"I know the Ambassador; if you do not wish to meet him, I will intercept him."

Jennie rose slowly to her feet, and, looking at the young man with a calmness she was far from feeling, said coldly,--

"Why should I not wish to meet the Ambassador of my adopted country?"

"I know of no reason. Quite the contrary, for he must be an old friend of yours, having been your guest at the Schloss Steinheimer a year ago."

He stepped back as he said this, and Jennie had difficulty in suppressing the gasp of dismay with which she received his disquieting disclosure, but she stood her ground without wincing. She was face to face with the crisis she had foreseen--the coming of one who knew the Princess. Next instant the aged diplomat was bending over her outstretched hand, which in courtly fashion the old man raised to his lips.

"I am delighted to have the privilege of welcoming you to this gloomy old city, Princess von Steinheimer, which you illumine with your presence. Do you stay long in London?"

"The period of illumination is short, your Excellency. I leave for Paris to-morrow."

"So soon? Without even visiting the Embassy? I am distressed to hear of so speedy a desertion, and yet, knowing the charms of the Schloss Steinheimer, I can hardly wonder at your wish to return there. The Prince, I suppose, is as devoted as ever to the chase. I must censure his Highness, next time we meet, for not coming with you to London; then I am sure you would have stayed longer with us."

"The Prince is a model husband, your Excellency," said Jennie, with a sly glance at Lord Donal, whose expression of uncertainty increased as this colloquy went on, "and he would have come to London without a murmur had his wife been selfish enough to tear him away from his beloved Meran."

"A model husband!" said the ancient count, with an unctuous chuckle. "So few of us excel in that respect; but there is this to be said in our exculpation, few have been matrimonially so fortunate as the Prince von Steinheimer. I have never ceased to long for a repetition of the charming visit I paid to your delightful home."

"If your Excellency but knew how welcome you are, your visits would not have such long intervals between."

"It is most kind of you, Princess, to cheer an old man's heart by such gracious words. It is our misfortune that affairs of State chain us to our pillar, and, indeed, diplomacy seems to become more difficult as the years go on, because we have to contend with the genius of rising young men like Lord Donal Stirling here, who are more than a match for old dogs that find it impossible to learn new tricks."

"Indeed, your Excellency," said his lordship, speaking for the first time since the Ambassador began, "the very reverse of that is the case. We sit humbly at your feet, ambitious to emulate, but without hope of excelling."

The old man chuckled again, and, turning to the girl, began to make his adieux.

"Then my former rooms are waiting for me at the Castle?" he concluded.

"Yes, your Excellency, with the addition of two red rocking-chairs imported from America, which you will find most comfortable resting-places when you are free from the cares of State."

"Ah! The rocking-chairs! I remember now that you were expecting them when I was there. So they have arrived, safely, I hope; but I think you had ordered an incredible number, to be certain of having at least one or two serviceable."

"No; only a dozen, and they all came through without damage."

"You young people, you young people!" murmured the Ambassador, bending

again over the hand presented to him, "what unheard-of things you do."

And so the old man shuffled away, leaving many compliments behind him, evidently not having the slightest suspicion that he had met anyone but the person he supposed himself addressing, for his eyesight was not of the best, and an Ambassador meets many fair and distinguished women.

The girl sat down with calm dignity, while Lord Donal dropped into his chair, an expression of complete mystification on his clear-cut, honest face. Jennie slowly fanned herself, for the heat made itself felt at that elevated situation, and for a few moments nothing was said by either. The young man was the first to break silence.

"Should I be so fortunate as to get an invitation to the Schloss Steinheimer, may I hope that a red rocking-chair will be allotted to me? I have not sat in one since I was in the States."

"Yes, one for you; two for the Ambassador," said Jennie, with a laugh.

"I should like further to flatter myself that your double generosity to the Ambassador arises solely from the dignity of his office, and is not in any way personal."

"I am very fond of ambassadors; they are courteous gentlemen who seem to have less distrust than is exhibited by some not so exalted."

"Distrust! You surely cannot mean that I have distrusted you, Princess?"

"Oh, I was speaking generally," replied Jennie airily. "You seem to seek a personal application in what I say."

"I admit, Princess, that several times this evening I have been completely at sea."

"And what is worse, Lord Donal, you have shown it, which is the one unforgivable fault in diplomacy."

"You are quite right. If I had you to teach me, I would be an ambassador within the next five years, or at least a minister."

The girl looked at him over the top of her fan, covert merriment lurking in her eyes.

"When you visit Schloss Steinheimer you might ask the Prince if he objects to my giving you lessons."

Here there was another interruption, and the announcement was made that the United States Ambassador desired to renew his acquaintance with the Princess von Steinheimer. Lord Donal made use of an impatient exclamation more emphatic than he intended to give utterance to, but on looking at his companion in alarm, he saw in her glance a quick flash of gratitude as unmistakable as if she had spoken her thanks. It was quite evident that the girl had no desire to meet his Excellency, which is not to be wondered at, as she had already encountered him three times in her capacity of journalist. He not only knew the Princess von Steinheimer, but he knew Jennie Baxter as well.

She leaned back in her chair and said wearily,--

"I seem to be having rather an abundance of diplomatic society this evening. Are you acquainted with the American Ambassador also, Lord Donal?"

"Yes," cried the young man, eagerly springing to his feet. "He was a prominent politician in Washington while I was there. He is an excellent man, and I shall have no difficulty in making your excuses to him if you don't wish to meet him."

"Thank you so much. You have now an opportunity of retrieving your diplomatic reputation, if you can postpone the interview without offending him."

Lord Donal departed with alacrity, and the moment he was gone all appearance of languor vanished from Miss Jennie Baxter.

"Now is my chance," she whispered to herself. "I must be in my carriage before he returns."

Eager as she was to be gone, she knew that she should betray no haste. Expecting to find a stair at the other end of the gallery, she sought for it, but there was none. Filled with apprehension that she would meet Lord Donal coming up, she had difficulty in timing her footsteps to the slow measure that was necessary. She reached the bottom of the stair in safety and unimpeded, but once on the main floor a new problem presented itself. Nothing would attract more attention than a young and beautiful lady walking the long distance between the gallery end of the room and the entrance stairway entirely alone and unattended. She stood there hesitating, wondering whether she could venture on finding a quiet side-exit, which she was sure must exist in this large house, when, to her dismay, she found Lord Donal again at her side, rather breathless, as if he had been hurrying in search of her. His brows were knit and there was an anxious expression on his face.

"I must have a word with you alone," he whispered. "Let me conduct you to this alcove under the gallery."

"No; I am tired. I am going home."

"I quite understand that, but you must come with me for a moment."

"Must?" she said, with a suggestion of defiance in her tone.

"Yes," he answered gravely. "I wish to be of assistance to you. I think you will need it."

For a moment she met his unflinching gaze steadily, then her glance fell, and she said in a low voice, "Very well."

When they reached the alcove, she inquired rather quaveringly--for she saw something had happened which had finally settled all the young man's doubts--"Is it the American Ambassador?"

"No; there was little trouble there. He expects to meet you later in the evening. But a telegraphic message has come from Meran, signed by the Princess von Steinheimer, which expresses a hope that the ball will be a success, and reiterates the regret of her Highness that she could not be present. Luckily this communication has not been shown to the Duchess. I told the Duke, who read it to me, knowing I had been with you all the

evening, that it was likely a practical joke on the part of the Prince; but the Duke, who is rather a serious person, does not take kindly to that theory, and if he knew the Prince he would dismiss it as absurd--which it is. I have asked him not to show the telegram to anyone, so there is a little time for considering what had best be done."

"There is nothing for me to do but to take my leave as quickly and as quietly as possible," said the girl, with a nervous little laugh bordering closely on the hysterical. "I was about to make my way out by some private exit if I could find one."

"That would be impossible, and the attempt might lead to unexpected complications. I suggest that you take my arm, and that you bid farewell to her Grace, pleading fatigue as the reason for your early departure. Then I will see you to your carriage, and when I return I shall endeavour to get that unlucky telegram from the Duke by telling him I should like to find out whether it is a hoax or not. He will have forgotten about it most likely in the morning. Therefore, all you have to do is to keep up your courage for a few moments longer until you are safe in your carriage."

"You are very kind," she murmured, with downcast eyes.

"You are very clever, my Princess, but the odds against you were tremendous. Some time you must tell me why you risked it."

She made no reply, but took his arm, and together they sauntered through the rooms until they found the Duchess, when Jennie took her leave of the hostess with a demure dignity that left nothing to be desired. All went well until they reached the head of the stair, when the Duke, an ominous frown on his brow, hurried after them and said,--

"My lord, excuse me."

Lord Donal turned with an ill-concealed expression of impatience, but he was helpless, for he feared his host might not have the good sense to avoid a scene even in his own hall. Had it been the Duchess, all would have been well, for she was a lady of infinite tact, but the Duke, as he had said, was a stupid man, who needed the constant eye of his wife upon him to restrain him from blundering. The young man whispered, "Keep right on until you are in your carriage. I shall ask my man here to call it for you, but please don't drive away until I come."

A sign brought a serving man up the stairs.

"Call the carriage of the Princess von Steinheimer," said his master; then, as the lady descended the stair, Lord Donal turned, with no very thankful feeling in his heart, to hear what his host had to say.

"Lord Donal, the American Ambassador says that woman is not the Princess von Steinheimer, but is someone of no importance whom he has met several times in London. He cannot remember her name. Now, who is she, and how did you come to meet her?"

"My Lord Duke, it never occurred to me to question the identity of guests I met under your hospitable roof. I knew the Princess five years ago in Washington, before she was married. I have not seen her in the interval, but until you showed me the telegraphic message there was no

question in my mind regarding her."

"But the American Ambassador is positive."

"Then he has more confidence in his eyesight than I have. If such a question, like international difficulties, is to be settled by the Embassies, let us refer it to Austria, who held a long conversation with the lady in my presence. Your Excellency," he continued to the Austrian Ambassador, who was hovering near, waiting to speak to his host, "The Duke of Chiselhurst has some doubt that the lady who has just departed is the Princess von Steinheimer. You spoke with her, and can therefore decide with authority, for his Grace seems disinclined to accept my testimony."

"Not the Princess? Nonsense. I know her very well indeed, and a most charming lady she is. I hope to be her guest again before many months are past."

"There, my Lord Duke, you see everything is as it should be. If you will give me that stupid telegram, I will make some quiet inquiries about it. Meanwhile, the less said the better. I will see the American Ambassador and convince him of his error. And now I must make what excuses I can to the Princess for my desertion of her."

Placing the telegram in his pocket, he hurried down the stair and out to the street. There had been some delay about the coming of the carriage, and he saw the lady he sought, at that moment entering it.

"Home at once as fast as you can," he heard her say to the coachman. She had evidently no intention of waiting for him. He sprang forward, thrust his arm through the carriage window, and grasped her hand.

"Princess," he cried, "you will not leave me like this. I must see you to-morrow."

"No, no," she gasped, shrinking into the corner of the carriage.

"You cannot be so cruel. Tell me at least where a letter will reach you. I shall not release your hand until you promise."

With a quick movement the girl turned back the gauntlet of her long glove; the next instant the carriage was rattling down the street, while a chagrined young man stood alone on the kerb with a long, slender white glove in his hand.

"By Jove!" he said at last, as he folded it carefully and placed it in the pocket of his coat. "It is the glove this time, instead of the slipper!"

CHAPTER IX.

JENNIE REALIZES THAT GREAT EVENTS CAST THEIR SHADOWS BEHIND.

Jennie Baxter reached her hotel as quickly as a fast pair of horses could take her. She had succeeded; yet a few rebellious tears of

disappointment trickled down her cheeks now that she was alone in the semi-darkness of the carriage. She thought of the eager young man left standing disconsolately on the kerb, with her glove dangling in his hand, and she bitterly regretted that unkind fortune had made it possible for her to meet him only under false pretences. One consolation was that he had no clue to her identity, and she was resolved never, never to see him again; yet, such is the contrariness of human nature, no sooner was she refreshed by this determination than her tears flowed more freely than ever.

She knew that she was as capable of enjoying scenes like the function she had just left as any who were there; as fitted for them by education, by personal appearance, or by natural gifts of the mind, as the most welcome of the Duchess's guests; yet she was barred out from them as effectually as was the lost Peri at the closed gate. Why had capricious fate selected two girls of probably equal merit, and made one a princess, while the other had to work hard night and day for the mere right to live? Nothing is so ineffectual as the little word "why"; it asks, but never answers.

With a deep sigh Jennie dried her tears as the carriage pulled up at the portal of the hotel. The sigh dismissed all frivolities, all futile "whys"; the girl was now face to face with the realities of life, and the events she had so recently taken part in would soon blend themselves into a dream.

Dismissing the carriage, and walking briskly through the hall, she said to the night porter,--

"Have a hansom at the door for me in fifteen minutes."

"A hansom, my lady?" gasped the astonished man.

"Yes." She slipped a sovereign into his hand and ran lightly up the stairs. The porter was well accustomed to the vagaries of great ladies, although a hansom at midnight was rather beyond his experience. But if all womankind tipped so generously, they might order an omnibus, and welcome; so the hansom was speedily at the door.

Jennie roused the drowsy maid who was sitting up for her.

"Come," she said, "you must get everything packed at once. Lay out my ordinary dress and help me off with this."

"Where is your other glove, my lady?" asked the maid, busily unhooking, and untying.

"Lost. Don't trouble about it. When everything is packed, get some sleep, and leave word to be called in time for the eight o'clock express for Paris. Here is money to pay the bill and your fare. It is likely I shall join you at the station; but if I do not, go to our hotel in Paris and wait for me there. Say nothing of our destination to anyone, and answer no questions regarding me, should inquiries be made. Are you sure you understand?"

"Yes, my lady." A few moments later Jennie was in the cab, driving through the nearly deserted streets. She dismissed her vehicle at Charing Cross, walked down the Strand until she got another, then proceeded direct to the office of the Daily Bugle, whose upper windows

formed a row of lights, all the more brilliant because of the intense darkness below.

She found the shorthand writers waiting for her. The editor met her at the door of the room reserved for her, and said, with visible anxiety on his brow, "Well, what success?"

"Complete success," she answered shortly.

"Good!" he replied emphatically. "Now I propose to read the typewritten sheets as they come from the machine, correct them for obvious clerical errors, and send them right away to the compositors. You can, perhaps, glance over the final proofs, which will be ready almost as soon as you have finished."

"Very well. Look closely to the spelling of proper names and verify titles. There won't be much time for me to go carefully over the last proofs."

"All right. You furnish the material, and I'll see that it's used to the best advantage."

Jennie entered the room, and there at a desk sat the waiting stenographer; over his head hung the bulb of an electric light, its green circular shade throwing the white rays directly down on his open notebook. The girl was once more in the working world, and its bracing air acted as a tonic to her overwrought nerves. All longings and regrets had been put off with the Paris-made gown which the maid at that moment was carefully packing away. The order of nature seemed reversed; the butterfly had abandoned its gorgeous wings of gauze, and was habited in the sombre working garb of the grub. With her hands clasped behind her, the girl paced up and down the room, pouring forth words, two hundred to the minute, and sometimes more. Silently one stenographer, tiptoeing in, replaced another, who as silently departed; and from the adjoining room, the subdued, nervous, rapid click, click, click of the typewriting machine invaded, without disturbing, her consciousness. Towards three o'clock the low drone of the rotaries in the cellar made itself felt rather than heard; the early edition for the country was being run off. Time was flying--danced away by nimble feet in the West End, worked away by nimble fingers in Fleet Street (well-named thoroughfare); play and work, work and play, each supplementing the other; the acts of the frivolous recorded by the industrious.

When a little more than three hours' dictating was finished, the voice of the girl, now as hoarse as formerly it had been musical, ceased; she dropped into a chair and rested her tired head on the deserted desk, closing her wearied eyes. She knew she had spoken between 15,000 and 20,000 words, a number almost equal in quantity to that contained in many a book which had made an author's fame and fortune. And all for the ephemeral reading of a day--of a forenoon, more likely--to be forgotten when the evening journals came out!

Shortly after the typewriter gave its final click the editor came in.

"I didn't like to disturb you while you were at work, and so I kept at my own task, which was no light one, and thus I appreciate the enormous strain that has rested on you. Your account is magnificent, Miss Baxter; just what I wanted, and never hoped to get."

"I am glad you liked it," said the girl, laughing somewhat dismally at the croaking sound of her own voice.

"I need not ask you if you were there, for no person but one who was present, and one who knew how to describe, could have produced such a vivid account of it all. How did you get in?"

"In where?" murmured Jennie drowsily. She found difficulty in keeping her mind on what he was saying.

"To the Duchess of Chiselhurst's ball."

"Oh, getting in was easy enough; it was the getting out that was the trouble."

"Like prison, eh?" suggested the editor. "Now, will you have a little wine, or something stronger?"

"No, no. All I need is rest."

"Then let me call a cab; I will see you home, if you will permit me."

"I am too tired to go home; I shall remain here until morning."

"Nonsense. You must go home and sleep for a week if you want to. Rouse up; I believe you are talking in your sleep now."

"I understand perfectly what you are saying and what I am doing. I have work that must be attended to at eight. Please leave orders that someone is to call me at seven and bring a cup of coffee and biscuits, or rolls, or anything that is to be had at that hour. And please don't trouble further. I am very thankful to you, but will express myself better later on."

With this the editor had to be content, and was shortly on his way to his own well-earned rest. To Jennie it seemed but a moment after he had gone, that the porter placed coffee and rolls on the desk beside her saying, "Seven o'clock, miss!"

The coffee refreshed the girl, and as she passed through the editorial rooms she noted their forlorn, dishevelled appearance, which all places show when seen at an unaccustomed hour, their time of activity and bustle past. The rooms were littered with torn papers; waste-baskets overflowing; looking silent, scrappy, and abandoned in the grey morning light which seemed intrusive, usurping the place of the usual artificial illumination, and betraying a bareness which the other concealed. Jennie recognized a relationship between her own up-all-night feeling and the spirit of the deserted rooms.

At the railway station she found her maid waiting for her, surrounded by luggage.

"Have you got your ticket?"

"Yes, my lady."

"I have changed my mind, and will not go to Paris just now. Ask a porter to put those trunks in the left-luggage office, and bring me the keys and the receipt."

When this was done and money matters had been adjusted between them, Jennie gave the girl five pounds more than was due to her, and saw her into the railway carriage, well pleased with the reward. A hansom brought Jennie to her flat, and so ended the exhausting episode of the Duchess of Chiselhurst's ball.

Yet an event, like a malady, leaves numerous consequences in its train, extending, who shall say, how far into the future? The first symptom of these consequences was a correspondence, and, as there is no reading more dreary than a series of letters, merely their substance is given here. When Jennie was herself again, she wrote a long letter to the Princess von Steinheimer, detailing the particulars of her impersonation, and begging pardon for what she had done, while giving her reasons for doing it; but, perhaps because it did not occur to her, she made not the slightest reference to Lord Donal Stirling. Two answers came to this--one a registered packet containing the diamonds which the Princess had previously offered to her; the other a letter from the Princess's own hand. The glitter of the diamonds showed Jennie that she had been speedily forgiven, and the letter corroborated this. In fact, the Princess upbraided her for not letting her into the secret earlier. "It is just the jolly kind of thing I should have delighted in," wrote her Highness. "And then, if I had known, I should not have sent that unlucky telegram. It serves you right for not taking me into your confidence, and I am glad you had a fright. Think of it coming in at that inopportune moment, just as telegrams do at a play! But, Jennie, are you sure you told me everything? A letter came from London the day before yours arrived, and it bewildered me dreadfully at first. Don Stirling, whom I used to know at Washington (a conceited young fellow he was then--I hope he has improved since), wrote to say that he had met a girl at the Duchess of Chiselhurst's ball who had a letter inviting the Princess von Steinheimer to the festivity. He thought at first she was the Princess (which is very complimentary to each of us), but found later that she wasn't. Now he wants to know, you know, and thinks, quite reasonably, that I must have some inkling who that girl was, and he begs me, by our old friendship, etc., etc., etc. He is a nice young man, if a trifle confident (these young diplomatists think they hold the reins of the universe in their hands), and I should like to oblige him, but I thought first I would hear what you had to say about it. I am to address him care of the Embassy at St. Petersburg; so I suppose he's stationed there now. By the way, how did he get your glove, or is that merely brag on his part? He says that it is the only clue he has, and he is going to trace you from that, it seems, if I do not tell him who you are and send him your address. Now, what am I to say when I write to St. Petersburg?"

In reply to this, Jennie sent a somewhat incoherent letter, very different from her usual style of writing. She had not mentioned the young man in her former communication, she said, because she had been trying to forget the incident in which he was the central figure. In no circumstances could she meet him again, and she implored the Princess not to disclose her identity to him even by a hint. She explained the glove episode exactly as it happened; she was compelled to sacrifice the glove to release her hand. He had been very kind in helping her to escape from a false position, but it would be too humiliating for her ever to see him or speak with him again.

When this letter reached the Schloss at Meran, the Princess telegraphed to London, "Send me the other glove," and Jennie sent it. A few days

later came a further communication from the Princess.

"I have puzzled our young man quite effectually, I think, clever as he imagines himself to be. I wrote him a semi-indignant letter to St. Petersburg, and said I thought all along he had not really recognized me at the ball, in spite of his protestations at first. Then I saw how easily he was deluded into the belief that I was some other woman, and so the temptation to cozen him further was irresistible. Am I not a good actress? I asked him. I went on to say, with some show of anger, that a quiet flirtation in the gallery was all very well in its way, but when it came to a young man rushing in a frenzy bare-headed into the street after a respectable married woman who had just got into her carriage and was about to drive away, it was too much altogether, and thus he came into possession of the glove. As the remaining glove was of no use to me, I had great pleasure in sending it to him, but warned him that if the story of the gloves ever came to the ears of my husband, I should deny having either owned or worn them. I should like to see Don's amazed look when the other glove drops out of my letter, which was a bulky package and cost ever so much in postage. I think the sending of the glove was an inspiration. I fancy his lordship will be now completely deluded, and that you need have no further fear of his finding you."

Jennie read this letter over once or twice, and in spite of her friendly feeling for the Princess, there was something in the epistle that jarred on her. Nevertheless she wrote and thanked the Princess for what she had done, and then she tried to forget all about everything pertaining to the ball. However, she was not allowed to erase all thought of Lord Donal from her mind, even if she could have accomplished this task unimpeded. There shortly arrived a brief note from the Princess enclosing a letter the young diplomatist at St. Petersburg had written.

"DEAR PRINCESS" (it ran),--"I am very much obliged to you for the companion glove, as I am thus enabled to keep one and use the other as a clue. I see you not only know who the mysterious young lady is, but that you have since met her, or at least have been in correspondence with her. If the glove does not lead me to the hand, I shall pay a visit to you in the hope that you will atone for your present cruelty by telling me where to find the owner of both glove and hand."

With regard to this note the Princess had written, "Don is not such a fool as I took him to be. He must have improved during the last few years. I wish you would write and tell me exactly what he said to you that evening."

But with this wish Jennie did not comply. She merely again urged the Princess never to divulge the secret.

For many days Jennie heard nothing more from any of the actors in the little comedy, and the episode began to take on in her thoughts that air of unreality which remote events seem to gather round them. She went on with her daily work to the satisfaction of her employers and the augmentation of her own banking account, although no experience worthy of record occurred in her routine for several weeks. But a lull in a newspaper office is seldom of long duration.

One afternoon Mr. Hardwick came to the desk at which Jennie was at work, and said to her,--

"Cadbury Taylor called here yesterday, and was very anxious to see you.

Has he been in again this afternoon?"

"You mean the detective? No, I haven't seen him since that day at the Schloss Steinheimer. What did he want with me?"

"As far as I was able to understand, he has a very important case on hand--a sort of romance in high life; and I think he wants your assistance to unravel it; it seems to be baffling him."

"It is not very difficult to baffle Mr. Cadbury Taylor," said the girl, looking up at her employer with a merry twinkle in her eye.

"Well, he appears to be in a fog now, and he expressed himself to me as being very much taken with the neat way in which you unravelled the diamond mystery at Meran, so he thinks you may be of great assistance to him in his present difficulty, and is willing to pay in cash or in kind."

"Cash payment I understand," said the girl, "but what does he mean by payment in kind?"

"Oh, he is willing that you should make a sensational article out of the episode. It deals entirely, he says, with persons in high life--titled persons--and so it might make an interesting column or two for the paper."

"I see--providing, of course, that the tangled skein was unravelled by the transcendent genius of Mr. Cadbury Taylor," said the girl cynically.

"I don't think he wants his name mentioned," continued the editor; "in fact, he said that it wouldn't do to refer to him at all, for if people discovered that he made public any of the cases intrusted to him, he would lose his business. He has been working on this problem for several weeks, and I believe has made little progress towards its solution. His client is growing impatient, so it occurred to the detective that you might consent to help him. He said, with a good deal of complacency, that he did not know you were connected with the Daily Bugle, but he put his wits at work and has traced you to this office."

"How clever he is!" said Jennie, laughing; "I am sure I made no secret of the fact that I work for the Daily Bugle."

"I think Mr. Taylor will have no hesitation in agreeing with you that he is clever; nevertheless, it might be worth while to see him and to assist him if you can, because nothing so takes the public as a romance in high life. Here is his address; would you mind calling on him?"

"Not at all," replied the young woman, copying the street and number in her note-book.

CHAPTER X.

JENNIE ASSISTS IN SEARCHING FOR HERSELF.

Next day Jennie Baxter drove to the address the editor had given her,

and she found Mr. Cadbury Taylor at home, in somewhat sumptuous offices on the first floor. Fastened to his door was a brass plate, which exposed to public view the carven words--

CADBURY TAYLOR,
Private Enquiry Agent.

The detective was quite evidently very glad to see her.

"I intended calling to-day at the office of the Bugle on the chance of finding you," he said; "but I am delighted to meet you here, because we can talk without fear of interruption. Has the editor told you anything of this case?"

"Very little; he didn't seem to know much about it himself."

"It was impossible for me to go into full particulars with him. I could only give him a hint or two in order to convey to him some idea of the interest which the mystery, when solved, might have from a newspaper standpoint. Of course I wished to gain his assistance so that he might, perhaps, persuade you to help me in this matter."

"He seems to be quite willing that I should lend what aid I can," said Jennie; "but I must have full details before I promise. I have a good deal of work on hand, and, unless this case is interesting from a newspaper point of view, as you have just said, I don't think that I should care to touch it."

"Oh, you will find it of great interest," the detective assured her with much eagerness. "It relates to the sudden and hitherto unexplained disappearance of a woman. That of itself is absorbing, for I may tell you, as one having a large experience, that there is nothing more difficult in this world than for any person, and more especially for a woman, to disappear entirely and leave no trace behind."

"I should have thought it quite easy," said Jennie, "especially in a large city like London."

"You have given expression to the universal opinion, but I pledge you my word that a completely successful disappearance is one of the most rare events that we detectives have to meet with in our line of investigation."

"Please tell me the story," said the girl; "then we can speak more understandingly about it."

The detective selected a packet of papers, one of many which occupied the end of his table. He slipped from it a rubber band which held the documents together.

"The first act of the drama, if we may call it so, began at the Duchess of Chiselhurst's ball."

"The Duchess of Chiselhurst's ball!" echoed Jennie, with a shudder. "Oh, dear!"

The detective looked up at her.

"Why do you say 'Oh, dear'?" he asked.

"Because," said the girl wearily, "I am tired hearing of the Duchess of Chiselhurst's ball; there seems to have been nothing else in the papers for weeks past."

"It has excited a great deal of comment," assented the detective; "and, by the way, the Daily Bugle had one of the best accounts of it that was printed in any newspaper."

"So I have heard," said Jennie carelessly, "but I most confess that I didn't read that copy of the Bugle."

"You amaze me! I should have thought that would have been the first part of the paper to which any lady would turn. However, the report of the ball has nothing to do with what we have in hand. Now, you remember the Princess von Steinheimer, at whose castle I first had the pleasure of meeting you?"

"You had the pleasure of meeting me before that," said Jennie, speaking without giving thought to what she said.

"Really!" cried the detective, dropping his papers on the table; "and where was that?"

"Oh, well, as you have just said--it has nothing to do with this case. Perhaps I was wrong in saying you saw me; it would be more correct to say that I saw you. You must remember that you are a public character, Mr. Taylor."

"Ah, quite so," said the detective complacently, turning to his documents again. "Now, the Princess von Steinheimer was invited to the Duchess of Chiselhurst's ball, but she did not attend it."

"Are you sure of that?" said the girl. "I thought her name was among the list of those present."

"It was in the list, and that is just where our mystery begins. Someone else attended the ball as the Princess von Steinheimer; it is this person that I wish to find."

"Ah, then you are employed by the Duke of Chiselhurst?"

"No, I am not, for, strangely enough, I believe the Duke thinks it was actually the Princess who attended the ball. Only one man knows that the Princess was not present, one man and two women. Of the latter, one is the Princess von Steinheimer, and the other, the lady who impersonated her. The one man is Lord Donal Stirling, of the Diplomatic Service, whose name is no doubt familiar to you. Lord Donal has done me the honour to place the case in my hands."

"Why does his lordship wish to find this--this--fraudulent person?" asked Jennie, speaking slowly and with difficulty.

"Because," said the detective, with the air of a man who knows whereof he speaks, "he is in love with her."

"What makes you think that?"

"I don't think it, I know it. Listen to his description of her."

The detective chose a paper from among his pile of documents, folded, labelled, and docketed for reference.

"The girl is of average height, or perhaps a trifle taller than the average; carries herself superbly, like a born duchess. Her eyes are of a deep, velvety black--"

"Dear me!" cried the girl, "he describes her as if she were a cat!"

"Wait a moment," said the detective.

"I don't see much trace of love in that," continued Jennie breathlessly.

"Wait a moment," repeated the detective. "They light up and sparkle with merriment, and they melt into the most entrancing tenderness."

"Good gracious!" cried Jennie, rising, "the conceit of the man is illimitable. Does he mean to intimate that he saw tenderness for himself in the eyes of a woman he had met for an hour or two?"

"That's just it," said the detective, laughing. "You see the man is head over ears in love. Please sit down again, Miss Baxter, and listen. I know this sentimental kind of writing must be irksome to a practical woman like yourself, but in our business we cannot neglect even the slightest detail. Let's see, where was I?--'tenderness,' oh, yes. 'Her hair is of midnight darkness, inclined to ripple, with little whiffs of curls imperiously defying restraint about her temples. Her complexion is as pure as the dawn, touched now and then with a blush as delicate as the petal of a rose.'"

"Absurd!" cried Jennie impatiently. "The complexion of a woman at a ball! Of course, she put it on for the occasion."

"Of course," agreed the detective. "But that merely shows you how deeply in love he is. Lord Donal is quite a young man. He came up to this room to consult with me, and certainly he doesn't know the difference between a complexion developed in a Surrey lane and one purchased in New Bond Street."

"Still, the blushing would seem to indicate that the complexion was genuine," retorted Jennie, apparently quite unflattered by Mr. Taylor's agreement with the theory she herself had put forward.

"Oh, I don't know about that. I believe modern science enables an enamelled woman to blush at will; I wouldn't be sure of it, because it is outside of my own line of investigation, but I have understood such is the case."

"Very likely," assented Jennie. "What is that you have at the bottom of your packet?"

"That," said the detective, drawing it forth and handing it to the girl, "is her glove."

Jennie picked up the glove--which, alas! she had paid for and only worn on one occasion--and smoothed it out between her fingers. It was docketed "G; made by Gaunt et Cie, Boulevard Hausmann; purchased in Paris by one alleging herself to be the Princess von Steinheimer."

"You have found out all about it," said Jennie, as she finished reading the label.

"Yes, it is our business to do so; but the glove has not been of much assistance to us."

"How did he say he became possessed of the glove?" asked the girl innocently. "Did she give it to him?"

"No; he tore it from her hand as she was leaving him in the carriage. It seemed to me a most ungentlemanly thing to do, but of course it was not my business to tell Lord Donal that."

"So the glove has not been of much assistance to you. Tell me, then, what you have done, and perhaps I shall be the better able to advise you."

"We have done everything that suggested itself. We traced the alleged Princess from the Hotel Bristol in Paris to Claridge's in London. I have a very clever woman in Paris who assisted me, and she found where the gloves were bought and where the dress was made. Did I read you Lord Donal's description of the lady's costume?"

"No, never mind that; go on with your story."

"Well, Claridge's provided carriage, coachman and footman to take her to the ball, and this returned with her sometime about midnight. Now, here a curious thing happened. The lady ordered a hansom as she passed the night-porter and shortly after packed off her maid in the cab."

"Her maid!" echoed Jennie.

"Yes. The maid came down in ordinary street dress shortly after, deeply veiled, and drove away in the hansom; the lady paid her bill next morning and went to the eight o'clock Paris express, with carriage and pair, coachman and footman. Of course it struck me that it might be the lady herself who had gone off in the cab, but a moment's reflection showed me that she was not likely to leave the hotel in a cab at midnight, and allow her maid to take the carriage in state next morning."

"That doesn't appear reasonable," murmured Jennie. "You made no attempt, then, to trace the maid?"

"Oh yes, we did. We found the cabman who took her from Claridge's, and he left her at Charing Cross Station, but there all trace of her vanishes. She probably left on one of the late trains--there are only a few after midnight--to some place out in the country. The lady took a first-class ticket to Paris, and departed alone next morning by the eight o'clock Continental express. My assistant discovered her and took a snapshot of her as she was walking down the boulevard; here is the picture."

The detective handed Miss Baxter an instantaneous view of one of the boulevards taken in bright sunshine. The principal figure in the foreground Jennie had no difficulty in recognizing as her own maid, dressed in that chic fashion which Parisian women affect.

"She seems to answer the description," said Jennie.

"So I thought," admitted the detective, "and I sent the portrait to Lord Donal. See what he has written on the back."

Jennie turned the picture over, and there under the inscription, "H. Supposed photo of the missing woman," was written in a bold hand, "Bosh! Read my description of the girl; this is evidently some Paris lady's maid."

"Well, what did you do when you got this picture back?" asked Jennie.

"I remembered you, and went to the office of the Daily Bugle. This brings us to the present moment. You have now the whole story, and I shall be very pleased to listen to any suggestions you are good enough to offer."

The girl sat where she was for a few moments and pondered over the situation. The detective, resting his elbow on the table and his chin in his hand, regarded her with eager anticipation. The more Jennie thought over the matter, the more she was amazed at the man before her, who seemed unable to place two and two together. He had already spoken of the account of the ball which had appeared in the Daily Bugle; of its accuracy and its excellence; he knew that she was a member of the Bugle staff, yet it had never occurred to him to inquire who wrote that description; he knew also that she had been a guest at the Schloss Steinheimer when the invitation to the ball must have reached the Princess. These facts were so plainly in evidence that the girl was afraid to speak lest some chance word would form the connecting link between the detective's mind and the seemingly palpable facts. At last she looked up, the colour coming and going in her cheeks, as Lord Donal had so accurately described it.

"I don't think I can be of any assistance to you in this crisis, Mr. Taylor. You have already done everything that human ingenuity can suggest."

"Yes, I have--everything that my human ingenuity can suggest. But does nothing occur to you? have you no theory to put forward?"

"None that would be of any practical advantage. Is Lord Donal certain that it was not the Princess herself whom he met? Are you thoroughly convinced that there was really an impersonation?"

"What do you mean, Miss Baxter?"

"Well, you met Prince von Steinheimer; what do you think of him?"

"I thought him an overbearing bully, if you ask me. I can't imagine what English or American girls see in those foreigners to cause them to marry. It is the titles, I suppose. The Prince was very violent--practically ordered me out of the Castle, spoke to his father-in-law in the most peremptory manner, and I could easily see the Princess was frightened out of her wits."

"A very accurate characterization of his Highness, Mr. Taylor. Now, of course, the Princess being a woman--and a young woman--would naturally be very anxious to attend the Duchess of Chiselhurst's ball, wouldn't she?"

"One would think so."

"And, as you have just said, she has a bear of a husband, a good deal older than herself, who does not in the least care for such functions as that to which the Princess was invited. Is it not quite possible that the Princess actually attended the ball, but, for reasons of her own, desired to keep the fact of her presence there a secret; and you must remember that Lord Donal Stirling had not seen the Princess for five years."

"For five years?" said the detective sharply. "How did you learn that, Miss Baxter?"

"Well, you know," murmured the girl, with a gasp, "he met her last in Washington, and the Princess has not been in America for five years; so you see--"

"Oh, I was not aware that he had met her in America at all; in fact, Lord Donal said nothing much about the Princess--all his talk had reference to this lady who impersonated her."

Jennie leaned back in her chair, closed her eyes for a moment, and breathed quickly.

"I am afraid," she said at last, "that I do not remember with sufficient minuteness the details you have given me, to be able to advise. I can only suggest that Lord Donal met the Princess herself at the Duchess of Chiselhurst's ball. The Princess, naturally, would wish to mislead him regarding her identity; and so, if he had not met her for some time--say two years, or three years, or five years, or whatever the period may be--it is quite possible that the Princess has changed greatly in the interval, and perhaps she was not reluctant to carry on a flirtation with the young man--your client. Of course, she could not allow it to go further than the outside of the door of the Duke of Chiselhurst's town house, for you must remember there was her husband in the background--a violent man, as you have said; and Lord Donal must have thoroughly angered the Princess by what you term his rudeness in tearing off her glove; and now the Princess will never admit that she was at the ball, so it seems to me that you are wasting your time in a wild goose chase. Why, it is absurd to think, if there had been a real disappearing woman, that you, with all your experience and all your facilities, should not have unearthed her long ago. You said at the beginning that nothing was more difficult than to disappear. Very well, then--why have you been baffled? Simply because the Princess herself attended the ball, and there has been no disappearing lady at all."

The detective, with great vehemence, brought down his fist on the table.

"By Jove!" he cried, "I believe you are right. I have been completely blinded, the more so that I have the clue to the mystery right here under my own eyes."

He fumbled for a moment and brought forth a letter from his pile of documents.

"Here is a note from St. Petersburg, written by Lord Donal himself, saying the Princess had sent him the companion glove to the one you now have in your hand. He says he is sure the Princess knows who her

impersonator was, but that she won't tell; and, although I had read this note, it never struck me that the Princess herself was the woman. Miss Baxter, you have solved the puzzle!"

"I should be glad to think so," replied the girl, rising, "and I am very happy if I have enabled you to give up a futile chase."

"It is as plain as daylight," replied the detective. "Lord Donal's description fits the Princess exactly, and yet I never thought of her before."

Jennie hurried away from the detective's office, happy in the belief that she had not betrayed herself, although she was not blind to the fact that her escape was due more to good luck than to any presence of mind of her own, which had nearly deserted her at one or two points in the conversation. When Mr. Hardwick saw her, he asked how much space he should have to reserve for the romance in high life; but she told him there was nothing in the case, so far as she could see, to interest any sane reader.

Here matters rested for a fortnight; then the girl received an urgent note from Cadbury Taylor, asking her to call at his office next day promptly at four o'clock. It was very important, he said, and he hoped she would on no account disappoint him. Jennie's first impulse was not to go, but she was so anxious to learn what progress the detective had made in the case, fearing that at last he might have got on the right track, that she felt it would be unwise to take the risk of not seeing him. If his suspicions were really aroused, her absence might possibly serve to confirm them. Exactly at four o'clock next afternoon she entered his office and found him, to her relief, alone. He sprang up from his table on seeing her, and said in a whisper, "I am so glad you have come. I am in rather a quandary. Lord Donal Stirling is in London on a flying visit. He called here yesterday."

The girl caught her breath, but said nothing.

"I explained to him the reasons I have for believing that it was actually the Princess von Steinheimer whom he met at the Duchess of Chiselhurst's ball. He laughed at me; there was no convincing him. He said that theory was more absurd than the sending him a picture of a housemaid as that of the lady he met at the ball. I used all the arguments which you had used, but he brushed them aside as of no consequence, and somehow the case did not appear to be as clear as when you propounded your theory."

"Well, what then?" asked the girl.

"Why, then I asked him to come up here at four o'clock and hear what an assistant of mine would say about the case."

"At four o'clock!" cried the girl in terror; "then he may be here at any moment."

"He is here now; he is in the next room. Come in, and I will introduce you, and then I want you to tell him all the circumstances which lead you to believe that it was the Princess herself whom he met. I am sure you can place all the points before him so tersely that you will succeed in bringing him round to your own way of thinking. You will try, won't you, Miss Baxter? It will be a very great obligation to me."

"Oh, no, no, no!" cried the girl; "I am not going to admit to anyone that I have been acting as a detective's assistant. You had no right to bring me here. I must go at once. If I had known this I would not have come."

"It won't take you five minutes," pleaded Cadbury Taylor. "He is at this moment waiting for you; I told him you would be here at four."

"I can't help that; you had no right to make an appointment for me without my knowledge and consent."

Taylor was about to speak when the door-handle of the inner room turned.

"I say, detective," remarked Lord Donal, in a voice of some irritation, "you should have assistants who are more punctual. I am a very busy man, and must leave for St. Petersburg to-night, so I can't spend all my time in your office, you know."

"I am sure I beg your pardon, my lord," said the detective with great obsequiousness. "This young lady has some objections to giving her views, but I am sure you will be able to persuade her--"

He turned, but the place at his side was vacant. The door to the hall was open, and the girl had escaped as she saw the handle of the inner door turn. Taylor looked blankly at his client with dropped jaw. Lord Donal laughed.

"Your assistant seems to have disappeared as completely as did the lady at the ball. Why not set your detectives on her track? Perhaps she will prove to be the person I am in search of."

"I am very sorry, my lord," stammered the detective.

"Oh, don't mention it. I am sure you have done all that could be done with the very ineffective clues which unfortunately are our only possession, but you are quite wrong in thinking it was the Princess herself who attended the ball, and I don't blame your assistant for refusing to bolster up an impossible case. We will consider the search ended, and if you will kindly let me have your bill at the Diplomatic Club before six o'clock to-night, I will send you a cheque. Good afternoon, Mr. Taylor."

CHAPTER XI.

JENNIE ELUDES AN OFFER OF MARRIAGE.

As Jennie rapidly hurried away from the office of Mr. Cadbury Taylor, there arose in her mind some agitation as to what the detective would think of her sudden flight. She was convinced that, up to the moment of leaving him so abruptly, he had not the slightest suspicion she herself, to whom he was then talking, was the person he had been searching for up and down Europe. What must he think of one who, while speaking with him, suddenly, without a word of leave-taking, disappeared as if the earth had opened and swallowed her, and all because the handle of the door to

the inner room had turned? Then the excuse she had given for not wishing to meet Lord Donal must have struck him as ridiculously inadequate. When she reached her desk and reflected with more calmness over the situation, she found no cause to censure herself for her hasty departure; although she had acted on impulse, she saw there had been nothing else to do; another moment and she would have been face to face with Lord Donal himself.

Next day brought a note from the detective which went far to reassure her. He apologized for having made the appointment without her permission, and explained that Lord Donal's unexpected arrival in London, and his stubborn unbelief that it had been the Princess herself whom he met at the ball, seemingly left the detective no alternative out to call on the person who had so persistently advanced the theory, to explain it to the one most intimately concerned. It had not occurred to him at the time to think that Miss Baxter might object to meet Lord Donal, who was an entire stranger to her; but now he saw that he was wrong, etc., etc., etc. This note did much to convince Jennie that, after all, the detective had not seen the clues which appeared to be spread so plainly before his eyes. Cadbury Taylor, however, said nothing about the search being ended, and a few days later Jennie received a disquieting letter from the Princess von Steinheimer.

"My dear Jennie," her Highness wrote, "I am sure the detectives are after you, and so I thought it best to send you a word of warning. Of course it is only surmise on my part, but for days there has been a woman hovering about the castle, trying to get information from my servants. My maid came directly to me and told me what she knew. The woman detective had spoken to her. This inquisitive person, who had come from Paris, wished particularly to know whether I had been seen about the castle during the week in which the Duchess of Chiselhurst's ball took place; and so this leads me to suppose that some one is making inquiries for you. It must be either Lord Donal Stirling or the Duke of Chiselhurst, but I rather think it is the former. I have written an indignant letter to Lord Donal, accusing him of having caused detectives to haunt the castle. I have not yet received a reply, but Lord Donal is a truthful person, and in a day or two I expect to find out whether or not he has a hand in this business. Meanwhile, Jennie, be on your guard, and I will write you again as soon as I have something further to tell."

The reading of this letter greatly increased Jennie's fears, for she felt assured that, stupid as the men undoubtedly were, they verged so closely on the brink of discovery, they were almost certain to stumble upon the truth if the investigation was continued. She wrote a hurried note to the Princess, imploring her to be cautious, and not inadvertently give any clue that would lead to her discovery. Her letter evidently crossed one from the Princess herself. Lord Donal had confessed, said the letter, and promised never, never to do it again. "He says that before my letter was received he had stopped the detectives, who were doing no good and apparently only annoying innocent people. He says the search is ended, as far as the detective is concerned, and that I need fear no more intrusions from inquiry agents, male or female. He apologized very handsomely, but says he has not given up hopes of finding the lady who disappeared. And now, Jennie, I trust that you will admit my cleverness. You see that I had only a word or two from my maid as a clue, but I unravelled the whole plot and at once discovered who was the instigator of it, so I think I wouldn't make a bad detective myself. I am tremendously interested in episodes like this. I believe if I had known nothing of the impersonation, and if the

case had been put in my hands, I should have discovered you long ago. Can't you think of some way in which my undoubted talent for research may be made use of? You don't know how much I envy you in your newspaper office, always with an absorbing mystery on hand to solve. It must be like being the editor of a puzzle department. I wish you would let me help you next time you have anything important to do. Will you promise?

"When you write again, please send your letter to Vienna, as we are going into residence there, my husband having been unexpectedly called to the capital. He holds an important position in the Government, as perhaps you remember."

Jennie was delighted to know that all inquiry had ceased, and she wrote a long letter of gratitude to the Princess. She concluded her epistle by saying: "It is perfectly absurd of you to envy one who has to work as hard as I. You are the person to be envied. It is not all beer and skittles in a newspaper office, which is a good thing, for I don't like beer, and I don't know what skittles is or are. But I promise you that the next time I have an interesting case on hand I shall write and give you full particulars, and I am sure that together we shall be invincible."

But one trouble leaves merely to give place to another in this life. Jennie was disturbed to notice that Mr. Hardwick was becoming more and more confidential with her. He sat down by her desk whenever there was a reasonable excuse for doing so, and he consulted her on matters important and on matters trivial. An advance of salary came to her, and she knew it was through his influence with the board of directors. Although Mr. Hardwick was sharp and decisive in business matters, he proved an awkward man where his affections were concerned, and he often came and sat by the girl's desk, evidently wishing to say something, and yet quite as evidently having nothing to say; and thus the situation became embarrassing. Jennie was a practical girl and had no desire to complicate the situation by allowing her employer to fall in love with her, yet it was impossible to go to him and ask that his attentions might be limited strictly to a business basis. The crisis, however, was brought on by Mr. Hardwick himself. One day, when they were alone together, he said abruptly,--

"That romance in high life which you were investigating with Mr. Cadbury Taylor did not come to anything?"

"No, Mr. Hardwick."

"Then don't you think we might enact a romance in high life in this very room; it is high enough from the street to entitle it to be called a romance in high life," and the editor grinned uneasily, like an unready man who hopes to relieve a dilemma by a poor joke.

Jennie, however, did not laugh and did not look up at him, but continued to scribble shorthand notes on the paper before her.

"Ah, Mr. Hardwick!" she said with a sigh, "I see you have discovered my secret, although I had hoped to conceal it even from your alert eyes. I am, indeed, in the situation of Ralph Rackstraw in 'Pinafore,' 'I love, and love, alas! above my station,' and now that you know half, you may as well know all. It arose out of that unfortunate ball given by the Duchess of Chiselhurst which will haunt me all the rest of my life, I fear," said Jennie, still without looking up. Mr. Hardwick smothered an

ejaculation and was glad that the girl's eyes were not upon him. There was a pause of a few moments' duration between them. He took the path which was left open to him, fondly flattering himself that, while he had stumbled inadvertently upon her romance, he had kept his own secret safe.

"I--I have no right to intrude on your confidences, Miss Baxter," he said finally with an effort, "and I hope you will excuse me for--for-----"

"Oh! I have been sure for some days you knew it," interrupted the girl, looking up, but not at him. "I have been neglecting my work, I fear, and so you were quite right in speaking."

"No, your work is all right; it wasn't that exactly--but never mind, we won't speak of this any more, for I see it embarrasses you."

"Thank you, Mr. Hardwick," said Jennie, again bending her eyes on the desk before her.

The man saw the colour come and go in her cheeks, and thought he had never beheld anyone so entrancing. He rose quickly, without making further attempt at explanation, and left the room. One or two tear drops stained the paper on which the girl was scribbling. She didn't like giving pain to anyone, but could not hold herself to blame for what had happened. She made up her mind to leave the Daily Bugle and seek employment elsewhere, but next day Mr. Hardwick showed no trace of disappointment, and spoke to her with that curt imperiousness which had heretofore been his custom.

"Miss Baxter," he said, "have you been reading the newspapers with any degree of attention lately?"

"Yes, Mr. Hardwick."

"Have you been watching the drift of foreign politics?"

"Do you refer to that speech by the Prime Minister of Austria a week or two ago?"

"Yes, that is what I have in my mind. As you know, then, it amounted almost to a declaration of war against England--almost, but not quite. It was a case of saying too much or of not saying enough; however, it was not followed up, and the Premier has been as dumb as a graven image ever since. England has many enemies in different parts of the world, but I must confess that this speech by the Austrian Premier came as a surprise. There must have been something hidden, which is not visible from the outside. The Premier is too astute a man not to know exactly what his words meant, and he was under no delusion as to the manner in which England would take them. It is a case, then, of, 'When I was so quickly done for, I wonder what I was begun for'--that is what all Europe is asking."

"Is it not generally supposed, Mr. Hardwick, that his object was to consolidate Austria and Hungary? I understood that local politics were at the bottom of his fiery speech."

"Quite so, but the rousing of the war spirit in Austria and Hungary was useless unless that spirit is given something to do. It needs a war, not

a threat of war, to consolidate Austria and Hungary. If the speech had been followed up by hostile action, or by another outburst that would make war inevitable, I could understand it. The tone of the speech indicates that the Prime Minister meant business at the time he gave utterance to it. Something has occurred meanwhile to change the situation, and what that something is, all the newspapers in Europe have been trying to find out. We have had our regular Vienna representative at work ever since the words were uttered, and for the past two weeks he has been assisted by one of the cleverest men I could send him from London; but up to date, both have failed. Now I propose that you go quietly to Vienna; I shall not let either of the men know you are investigating the affair at which they have laboured with such little success; for both are good men, and I do not want to discourage either of them; still, above all things, I wish to have the solution of this mystery. So it occurred to me last night that you might succeed where others had failed. What do you think of it?"

"I am willing to try," said Miss Baxter, as there flashed across her mind an idea that here was a case in which the Princess von Steinheimer could be of the greatest assistance to her.

"It has been thought," went on the editor, "that the Emperor is extremely adverse to having trouble with England or any other country. Still, if that were the case, a new Cabinet would undoubtedly have been formed after this intemperate address of the Premier; but this man still holds his office, and there has been neither explanation nor apology from Court or Cabinet. I am convinced that there is something behind all this, a wheel within a wheel of some sort, because, the day after the speech, there came a rumour from Vienna that an attempt had been made on the life of the Emperor or of the Premier; it was exceedingly vague, but it was alleged that a dynamite explosion had taken place in the palace. This was promptly contradicted, but we all know what official contradictions amount to. There is internal trouble of some kind at the Court of Vienna, and if we could publish the full details, such an article would give us a European reputation. When could you be ready to begin your journey, Miss Baxter?"

"I am ready now."

"Well, in an affair like this it is best to lose no time; you can go to-morrow morning, then?"

"Oh, certainly, but I must leave the office at once, and you should get someone to finish the work I am on."

"I will attend to that," said the editor.

Thus relieved, Jennie betook herself to a telegraph office. She knew that if she wrote a letter to the Princess, who was now in Vienna, she would probably herself reach that city as soon as her note, so she telegraphed that something important was on hand which would take her to Vienna by next day's Orient express, and intimated that it was a matter in which she might need the assistance of the Princess. Then she hastened to her rooms to pack up. That evening there came an answering telegram from Vienna. The Princess asked her to bring her ball dress and all the rest of her finery. The lady added that she herself would be at the railway station, and asked Jennie to telegraph to her, *en route*, the time of her arrival. It was evident that her Highness was quite prepared to engage in whatever scheme there was on hand, and this fact

encouraged Jennie to hope that success perhaps awaited her.

CHAPTER XII.

JENNIE TOUCHES THE EDGE OF A GOVERNMENT SECRET.

True to her promise, the Princess von Steinheimer was waiting at the immense railway station of Vienna, and she received her friend with gushing effusion. Jennie left the train as neat as when she had entered it, for many women have the faculty of taking long journeys without showing the dishevelled effect which protracted railway travelling seems to have upon the masculine, and probably more careless, portion of humanity.

"Oh, you dear girl!" cried the Princess; "you cannot tell how glad I am to see you. I was just yearning for someone to talk English to. I am so tired of French and German, although they flatter me by saying that I speak those two languages extremely well; yet English is my own tongue, and it is so delightful to talk with one who can understand every blessed word you say, which you can easily see those who pretend to speak English in Vienna do not. What long chats we shall have! And now come this way to the carriage. There is a man here to look after your luggage. You are coming right home with me and are going to stay with me as long as you are in Vienna. Don't say, 'No,' nor make any excuse, nor talk of going to an hotel, for a suite of rooms is all ready for you, and your luggage will be there before we are. Now let us enter the carriage, for I am just pining to hear what it is you have on hand. Some delicious scandal, I hope."

"No," answered Jennie; "it pertains to Government matters."

"Oh, dear!" cried the Princess; "how tiresome! Politics are so dull."

"I don't think this case is dull," said Jennie; "because it has brought Austria and England to the verge of war."

"What a dreadful idea! I hadn't heard anything of it. When did this happen?"

"Less than a month ago," and Jennie related the whole circumstance, giving a synopsis of the Premier's speech.

"But I see nothing in that speech to cause war," protested the Princess. "It is as mild as new milk."

"I don't pretend to understand diplomacy," continued Jennie, blushing slightly as she remembered Lord Donal; and it seemed that the same thought struck the Princess at the same moment, for she looked quizzically at Jennie and burst out into a laugh.

"You may laugh," cried the girl; "but I tell you that this is a serious business. They say it only needed a second 'new milk' speech from the Premier to have England answer most politely in words of honey, and next instant the two countries would have been at each other's throats."

"Suppose we write to Lord Donal in St. Petersburg," suggested the Princess, still laughing, "and ask him to come to Vienna and help us? He understands all about diplomacy. By the way, Jennie, did Lord Donal ever find out whom he met at the ball that night?"

"No, he didn't," answered Miss Baxter shortly.

"Don't you ever intend to let him know? Are you going to leave the romance unfinished, like one of Henry James's novels?"

"It isn't a romance; it is simply a very distressing incident which I have been trying to forget ever since. It is all very well for you to laugh, but if you ever mention the subject again I'll leave you and go to an hotel."

"Oh, no, you won't," chirruped the Princess brightly; "you daren't. You know I hold all the trump cards; at any time I can send a letter to Lord Donal and set the poor young man's mind at rest. So you see, Miss Jennie, you will have to talk very sweetly and politely to me and not make any threats, because I am like those dreadful persons in the sensational plays who possess the guilty secrets of other people and blackmail them. But you are a nice girl, and I won't say anything you don't want to hear said. Now, what is it you wish to find out about this political crisis?"

"I want to discover why the Premier did not follow up his speech with another. He must have known when he spoke how his words would be taken in England; therefore it is thought that he had some plans which unforeseen circumstances intervening have nullified. I want to know what those unforeseen circumstances were, and what these plans were. For the past fortnight the Daily Bugle has had two men here in Vienna trying to throw some light on the dark recesses of diplomacy. Up to date they have failed, but at any moment they may succeed; it was because they failed that I am sent here. Now, have you anything to suggest, Madame la Princesse?"

"I suggest, Jennie, that we put our heads together and learn all that those diplomatists wish to hide. Have you no plans yourself?"

"I have no very definite plan, but I have a general scheme. These men I spoke of are trying to discover what other men are endeavouring to conceal. All the officials are on their guard; they are highly placed, and are not likely to be got at by bribery. They are clever, alert men of the world, so hoodwinking them is out of the question; therefore I think my two fellow journalists have a difficult task before them."

"But it is the same task that you have before you; why is it not as difficult for you, Jennie, as for them?"

"Because I propose to work with people who are not on their guard, and there is where you can help me, if you are not shocked at my proposal. Each official has a wife, or at least most of them have. Some of these wives, in all probability, possess the information that we would like to get. Women will talk more freely with women than men will with men. Now, I propose to leave the officials severely alone and to interview their wives."

The Princess clapped her hands.

"Excellent!" she cried. "The women of Vienna are the greatest gossips you ever heard chattering together. I have never taken any interest in politics, otherwise I suppose I might have become possessed of some important Government secrets. Now, Jennie, I'll tell you what I propose doing. I shall give a formal tea next Thursday afternoon. I shall invite to that tea a dozen, or two dozen, or three dozen wives of influential officials about the Court. My husband will like that, because he is always complaining that I do not pay enough attention to the ladies of the political circle of Vienna. He takes a great interest in politics, you know. If we discover nothing at the first tea-meeting, we will have another, and another, and another, until we do. We are sure to invite the right woman on one of those occasions, and when we find her I'll warrant the secret will soon belong to us. Ah, here we are at home, and we will postpone the discussion of our delightful conspiracy until you have had something to eat and are rested a bit."

The carriage drew up at the magnificent palace, well known in Vienna, which belongs to the Prince von Steinheimer; and shortly afterwards Jennie Baxter found herself in possession of the finest suite of rooms she had ever beheld in her life. Jennie laughed as she looked round her apartment and noted its luxuriant appointments.

"These are not exactly what we should call 'diggings' in London, are they?" she said to the Princess, who stood by her side, delighted at the pleasure of her friend. "We often read of poor penny-a-liners in their garrets; but I don't think any penny-a-liner ever had such a garret as this placed at his disposal."

"I knew you would like the rooms," cried the Princess gaily. "I like them myself, and I hope they will help to induce you to stay in Vienna as long as you can. I have given you my own maid Gretlich, and I assure you it isn't every friend I would lend her to; she is a model servant."

"Oh, but you mustn't do that," said Jennie. "I cannot rob you of your maid and also be selfish enough to monopolize these rooms."

"You are not robbing me; in fact, I am, perhaps, a little artful in giving you Gretlich, for she is down in the dumps this last week or two, and I don't know what in the world is the matter with her. I suspect it is some love affair; but she will say nothing, although I have asked her time and again what is the trouble. Now, you are such a cheery, consoling young woman that I thought if Gretlich were in your service for a time she might brighten up and be her own self again. So you see, instead of robbing me, I am really taking advantage of your good nature."

"I am afraid you are just saying that to make it easier for me to be selfish; still, you are so generous, Princess, that I am not going to object to anything you do, but just give myself up to luxury while I stay in Vienna."

"That is right. Ah, here is Gretlich. Now, Gretlich, I want you to help make Miss Baxter's stay here so pleasant that she will never want to leave us."

"I shall do my best, your Highness," said the girl, with quiet deference.

The Princess left the two alone together, and Jennie saw that Gretlich

was not the least ornamental appendage to the handsome suite of rooms. Gretlich was an excellent example of that type of fair women for which Vienna is noted; but she was, as the Princess had said, extremely downcast, and Jennie, who had a deep sympathy for all who worked, spoke kindly to the girl and endeavoured to cheer her. There was something of unaccustomed tenderness in the compassionate tones of Jennie's voice that touched the girl, for, after a brief and ineffectual effort at self-control, she broke down and wept. To her pitying listener she told her story. She had been betrothed to a soldier whose regiment was stationed in the Burg. When last the girl saw her lover he was to be that night on guard in the Treasury. Before morning a catastrophe of some kind occurred. The girl did not know quite what had happened. Some said there had been a dreadful explosion and her lover had lost his life. Neither the soldier's relatives nor his betrothed were allowed to see him after the disaster. He had been buried secretly, and it appeared to be the intention of the authorities to avoid all publicity. The relatives and the betrothed of the dead soldier had been warned to keep silence and seek no further information. It was not till several days after her lover's death that Gretlich, anxious because he did not keep his appointment with her, and not hearing from him, fearing that he was ill, began to make inquiries; then she received together the information and the caution.

In the presence of death all consolers are futile, and Jennie realized this as she endeavoured as well as she could to comfort the girl. Her heart was so much enlisted in this that perhaps her intellect was the less active; but here she stood on the very threshold of the secret she had come to Vienna to discover, and yet had not the slightest suspicion that the girl's tragedy and her own mission were interwoven. Jennie had wondered at the stupidity of Cadbury Taylor, who failed to see what seemed so plainly before him, yet here was Jennie herself come a thousand miles, more or less, to obtain certain information, and here a sobbing girl was narrating the very item of news that she had come so far to learn--all of which would seem to show that none of us are so bright and clever as we imagine ourselves to be.

In the afternoon the Princess entered Jennie's sitting-room carrying in her hand a bunch of letters.

"There!" she cried, "while you have been resting I have been working, and we are not going to allow any time to be lost. I have written with my own hand invitations to about two dozen people to our tea on Thursday; among others, the wife of the Premier, Countess Stron. I expect you to devote yourself to that lady and tell me the result of the conversation after it is over. Have you been talking consolation to Gretlich? I came up here half an hour ago, and it seemed to me I heard the sound of crying in this room."

"Oh, yes," said Jennie, "she has been telling me all her trouble. It seems she had a lover in the army, and he has been killed in some accident in the Treasury."

"What kind of an accident?"

"Gretlich said there had been an explosion there."

"Dear me! I never heard of it. It is a curious thing that one must come from London to tell us our own news. An explosion in the Treasury! and so serious that a soldier was killed! That arouses my curiosity, so I

shall just sit down and write another invitation to the wife of the Master of the Treasury."

"I wish you would, because I should like to know something further about this myself. Gretlich seems to have had but scant information regarding the occurrence, and I should like to know more about it so that I might tell her."

"We shall learn all about it from madame, and I must write that note at once for fear I forget it."

CHAPTER XIII.

JENNIE INDULGES IN TEA AND GOSSIP.

On Thursday afternoon there was a brilliant assemblage in the spacious salon of the Princess von Steinheimer. The rich attire of the ladies formed a series of kinetographic pictures that were dazzling, for Viennese women are adepts in the art of dress, as are their Parisian sisters. Tea was served, not in cups and saucers, as Jennie had been accustomed to seeing it handed round, but in goblets of clear, thin Venetian glass, each set in a holder of encrusted filigree gold. There were all manner of delicious cakes, for which the city is celebrated. The tea itself had come overland through Russia from China and had not suffered the deterioration which an ocean voyage produces. The decoction was served clear, with sugar if desired, and a slice of lemon, and Jennie thought it the most delicious brew she had ever tasted.

"I am so sorry," whispered the Princess to Jennie when an opportunity occurred, "but the Countess Stron has sent a messenger to say that she cannot be present this afternoon. It seems her husband, the Premier, is ill, and she, like a good wife, remains at home to nurse him. This rather upsets our plans, doesn't it?"

"Oh, I don't know," replied Jennie. "It is more than likely that the wife of the Premier would be exceedingly careful not to discuss any political question in this company. I have counted more upon the wife of a lesser official than upon the Countess Stron."

"You are right," said the Princess. "and now come with me. I want to introduce you to the wife of the Master of the Treasury, and from her, perhaps, you can learn something of the accident that befell the lover of poor Gretlich."

The wife of the Master of the Treasury proved to be a garrulous old lady who evidently prided herself on knowing everything that was taking place about her. Jennie and she became quite confidential over their goblets of tea, a beverage of which the old lady seemed inordinately fond. As the conversation between them drifted on, Jennie saw that here was a person who would take a delight in telling everything she knew, and the only question which now arose was whether she knew anything Jennie wished to learn. But before she tried her on high politics the girl determined to find out more about the disaster that had made such an abrupt ending to Gretlich's young dream.

"I have been very much interested," she said, "in one of the maids here who lost her lover some weeks ago in an accident that occurred in the Treasury. The maid doesn't seem to know very much about what happened, and was merely told that her lover, a soldier who had been on guard there that night, was dead."

"Oh, dear, yes!" whispered the old lady, lowering her voice, "what a dreadful thing that was, four men killed and eight or nine now in the hospital. My poor husband has had hardly a wink of sleep since the event, and the Premier is ill in bed through the worry."

"Because of the loss of life?" asked Jennie innocently.

"Oh, no, no! the loss of life wouldn't matter; it is the loss of the money that is the serious thing, and how they are going to replace it or account for its disappearance I am sure I don't know. The deficiency is something over two hundred million florins. Was it not awful?"

"Was the building shattered to such an extent?" inquired Jennie, who did not stop to think that such a sum would replace any edifice in Vienna, even if it had been wiped off the face of the earth.

"The Treasury was damaged, of course, but the cost of repairs will not be great. No, my child, it is a much more disturbing affair than the destruction of any state house in the Empire. What has made the Premier ill, and what is worrying my poor husband into an untimely grave, is nothing less than the loss of the war chest."

"The war chest!" echoed Jennie, "what is that?"

"My dear, every great nation has a war chest. England has one, so has France, Germany, Russia--no matter how poor a nation may be, or how difficult it is to collect the taxes, that nation must have a war chest. If war were to break out suddenly, even with the most prosperous country, there would be instant financial panic; ready money would be difficult to obtain; a loan would be practically impossible; and what war calls for the very instant it is declared is money--not promises of money, not paper money, not silver money even, but gold; therefore, every nation which is in danger of war has a store of gold coin. This store is not composed mainly, or even largely, of the coins of the nation which owns the store; it consists of the sovereigns of England, the louis of France, the Willems d'or of Holland, the eight-florin pieces of Austria, the double-crown of Germany, the half-imperials of Russia, the double-Frederics of Denmark, and so on. All gold, gold, gold! I believe that in the war chest of Austria there were deposited coins of different nations to the value of something like two hundred million florins. My husband never told me exactly how much was there, but sometimes when things looked peaceable there was less money in the war chest than when there was imminent danger of the European outbreak which we all fear. The war chest of Austria was in a stone-vaulted room, one of the strongest dungeons in the Treasury. The public are admitted into several rooms of the Treasury, but no stranger is ever allowed into that portion of the building which houses the war chest. This room is kept under guard night and day. For what happened, my husband feels that he is in no way to blame, and I don't think his superiors are inclined to charge him with neglect of duty. It is a singular thing that the day before the disaster took place he of his own accord doubled the guard that watched over the room and also the approaches to it. The war chest was at its fullest. Never, so he tells me, was there so much money in

the war chest as at that particular time. Something had occurred that in his opinion called for extra watchfulness, and so he doubled the guard. But about midnight there was a tremendous explosion. The strong door communicating with the passage was wrenched from its hinges and flung outwards into the hallway. It is said that dynamite must have been used, and that in a very large quantity. Not a vestige of the chest remained but a few splintered pieces of iron. The four soldiers in the room were blown literally to pieces, and those in the passage-way were stunned by the shock. The fact that they were unconscious for some minutes seems to have given the criminal, whoever he was, his chance of escape. For, although an instant alarm was sent out, and none but those who had a right to be on the premises were allowed out of or in the Treasury, yet no one was caught, nor has anyone been caught up to this day."

"But the gold, the gold?" cried Jennie eagerly.

"There was not a florin of it left. Every piece has disappeared. It is at once the most clever and the most gigantic robbery of money that has taken place within our knowledge."

"But such a quantity of gold," said Jennie, "must have been of enormous weight. Two hundred million florins! Why, that is twenty million pounds, isn't it? It would take a regiment of thieves to carry so much away. How has that been done? And where is the gold concealed?"

"Ah, my child, if you can answer your own questions the Austrian Government will pay you almost any sum you like to name. The police are completely baffled. Of course, nothing has been said of this gigantic robbery; but every exit from Vienna is watched, and not only that, but each frontier is guarded. What the Government wants, of course, is to get back its gold, the result of years of taxation, which cannot very easily be re-levied."

"And when did this robbery take place?" asked Jennie.

"On the night of the 17th."

"On the night of the 17th," repeated the girl, more to herself than to the voluble old woman; "and it was on the 16th that the Premier made his war speech."

"Exactly," said the old lady, who overheard the remark not intended for her ears; "and don't you think there was something striking in the coincidence?"

"I don't quite understand. What coincidence?"

"Well, you know the speech of the Premier was against England. It was not a speech made on the spur of the moment, but was doubtless the result of many consultations, perhaps with Russia, perhaps with Germany, or with France--who knows? We have been growing very friendly with Russia of late; and as England has spies all over the world, doubtless her Government knew before the speech was made that it was coming; so the police appear to think that the whole resources of the British Government were set at the task of crippling Austria at a critical moment."

"Surely you don't mean, madame, that the Government of England would descend to burglary, robbery--yes, and murder, even, for the poor

soldiers who guarded the treasure were as effectually murdered as if they had been assassinated in the street? You don't imagine that the British Government would stoop to such deeds as these?"

The old lady shook her head wisely.

"By the time you are my age, my dear, and have seen as much of politics as I have, you will know that Governments stop at nothing to accomplish their ends. No private association of thieves could have laid such plans as would have done away with two hundred millions of florins in gold, unless they had not only ample resources, but also a master brain to direct them. Nations hesitate at nothing where their interests are concerned. It was to the interest of no other Empire but England to deplete Austria at this moment, and see how complete her machinations are. No nation trusts another, and if Austria had proof that England is at the bottom of this robbery, she dare not say anything, because her war chest is empty. Then, again, she cannot allow either Germany or Russia to know how effectually she has been robbed, for no one could tell what either of these nations might do under the circumstances. The Government fears to let even its own people know what has happened. It is a stroke of vengeance marvellous in its finality. Austria is crippled for years to come, unless she finds the stolen gold on her own territory."

The old lady had worked herself up into such a state of excitement during her recital that she did not notice that most of her companion visitors had taken their leave, and when the Princess approached the two, she arose with some trepidation.

"My dear Princess," she said, "your tea has been so good, and the company of your young compatriot has been so charming, that I have done nothing but chatter, chatter, chatter away about things which should only be spoken of under one's breath, and now I must hurry away. May I venture to hope that you will honour me with your presence at one of my receptions if I send you a card?"

"I shall be delighted to do so," replied the Princess, with that gracious condescension which became her so well.

The garrulous old lady was the last to take her leave, and when the Princess was left alone with her guest, she cried,--

"Jennie, I have found out absolutely nothing, what have you discovered?"

"Everything!" replied the girl, walking up and down the floor in excitement over the unearthing of such a bonanza of news.

"You don't tell me so! Now do sit down and let me know the full particulars at once."

When Jennie's exciting story was finished she said,--

"You see, this robbery explains why the Premier did not follow up his warlike speech. The police seem to think that England has had a hand in this robbery, but of course that is absurd."

"I am not so sure of that," replied the Princess, taking as she spoke, the Chicago point of view, and forgetting for the moment her position among the aristocracy of Europe. "England takes most things it can get

its hands on, and she is not too slow to pick up a gold mine here and there, so why should she hesitate when the gold is already minted for her?"

"It is too absurd for argument," continued Jennie calmly, "so we won't talk of that phase of the subject. I must get away to England instantly. Let us find out when the first train leaves."

"Nonsense!" protested the Princess; "what do you need to go to England for? You have seen nothing of Vienna."

"Oh, I can see Vienna another time; I must get to England with this account of the robbery."

"Won't your paper pay for telegraphing such an important piece of news?"

"Oh, yes; there would be no difficulty about that, but I dare not trust either the post or the telegraph in a case like this. The police are on the watch."

"But couldn't you send it through by a code? My father always used to do his cabling by code; it saved a lot of money and also kept other people from knowing what his business was."

"I have a code, but I hesitate about trusting even to that."

"I'll tell you what we'll do," said the Princess. "I want you to stay in Vienna."

"Oh, I shall return," said Jennie. "I've only just had a taste of this delightful city. I'll come right back."

"I can't trust you to do anything of the kind. When you get to London you will stay there. Now here is what I propose, and it will have the additional advantage of saving your paper a day. We will run down together into Italy--to Venice; then you can take along your code and telegraph from there in perfect safety. When that is done you will return here to Vienna with me. And another thing, you may be sure your editor will want you to stay right here on the spot to let him know of any outcome of this sensational _denouement_."

"That isn't a bad idea," murmured Jennie. "How long will it take us to get to Venice?"

"I don't know, but I am sure it will save you hours compared with going to London. I shall get the exact time for you in a moment."

Jennie followed the suggestion of the Princess, and together the two went to the ever-entrancing city of Venice. By the time they reached there, Jennie had her account written and coded. The long message was handed in at the telegraph office as soon as the two arrived in Venice. Jennie also sent the editor a private despatch giving her address in Venice, and also telling him the reason for sending the telegram from Italy rather than from Austria or Germany. In the evening she received a reply from Mr. Hardwick. "This is magnificent," the telegram said. "I doubt if anything like it has ever been done before. We will startle the world to-morrow morning. Please return to Vienna, for, as you have discovered this much, I am perfectly certain that you will be able to capture the robbers. Of course all the police and all the papers of

Europe will be on the same scent, but I am sure that you will prove a match for the whole combination."

"Oh, dear!" cried Jennie, as she handed the message to her friend. "What a bothersome world this is; there is no finality about anything. One piece of work simply leads to another. Here I thought I had earned at least a good month's rest, but, instead of that, a further demand is made upon me. I am like the genii in fairy tales: no sooner is one apparently impossible task accomplished than another is set."

"But what a magnificent thing it would be if you could discover the robber or robbers."

"Magnificent enough, yes; but that isn't to be done by inviting a lot of old women to tea, is it?"

"True, so we shall have to set our wits together in another direction. I tell you, Jennie, I know I have influence enough to have you made a member of the special police. Shall I introduce you as from America, and say that you have made a speciality of solving mysteries? An appointment to the special police would allow you to have unrestricted entrance to the secret portion of the Treasury building. You would see the rooms damaged by the explosion, and you would learn what the police have discovered. With that knowledge to begin with, we might then do something towards solving the problem."

"Madame la Princesse," cried Jennie enthusiastically, "you are inspired! The very thing. Let us get back to Vienna." And accordingly the two conspirators left Italy by the night train for Austria.

CHAPTER XIV.

JENNIE BECOMES A SPECIAL POLICE OFFICER.

When Jennie returned to Vienna, and was once more installed in her luxurious rooms at the Palace Steinheimer, she received in due time a copy of the Daily Bugle, sent to her under cover as a registered letter. The girl could not complain that the editor had failed to make the most of the news she had sent him. As she opened out the paper she saw the great black headlines that extended across two columns, and the news itself dated not from Venice, but from Vienna, was in type much larger than that ordinarily used in the paper, and was double-led. The headings were startling enough:--

PHANTOM GOLD.

THE MOST GIGANTIC ROBBERY OF MODERN TIMES.

THE AUSTRIAN WAR CHEST DYNAMITED.

TWENTY MILLION POUNDS IN COIN LOOTED.

APPALLING DISASTER AT THE TREASURY IN VIENNA.

FOUR MEN KILLED, AND SIXTEEN OTHERS MORE OR LESS SERIOUSLY

INJURED.

"Dear me!" the Princess cried, peering over Jennie's shoulder at these amazing headings, "how like home that looks. The Bugle doesn't at all resemble a London journal; it reminds me of a Chicago paper's account of a baseball match; a baseball match when Chicago was winning, of course, and when Anson had lined out the ball from the plate to the lake front, and brought three men in on a home run at a critical point in the game."

"Good gracious!" cried Jennie, "what language are you speaking? Is it slang, or some foreign tongue?"

"It is pure Chicagoese, Jennie, into which I occasionally lapse even here in prim Vienna. I would like to see a good baseball match, with the Chicago nine going strong. Let us abandon this effete monarchy, Jennie, and pay a visit to America."

"I'll go with pleasure if you will tell me first who robbed the war chest. If you can place your dainty forefinger on the spot that conceals two hundred million florins in gold, I'll go anywhere with you."

"Oh, yes, that reminds me. I spoke to my husband this morning, and asked him if he could get you enrolled as a special detective, and he said there would be some difficulty in obtaining such an appointment for a woman. Would you have any objection to dressing up as a nice young man, Jennie?"

"I would very much rather not; I hope you didn't suggest that to the Prince."

The Princess laughed merrily and shook her head.

"No, I told him that I believed that you would solve the mystery if anyone could, and, remembering what you had done in that affair of my diamonds, my husband has the greatest faith in your powers as an investigator; but he fears the authorities here will be reluctant to allow a woman to have any part in the search. They have very old-fashioned ideas about women in Austria, and think her proper place is presiding over a tea-table."

"Well, if they only knew it," said Jennie archly, "some things have been discovered over a teacup within our own memories."

"That is quite true," replied the Princess, "but we can hardly give the incident as a recommendation to the Austrian authorities. By the way, have you noticed that no paper in Vienna has said a single word about the robbery of the war chest?"

"It must have been telegraphed here very promptly from London, and yet they do not even deny it, which is the usual way of meeting the truth."

While they were talking, a message came from his Highness, asking if he might take the liberty of breaking in upon their conference. A few moments after, the Prince himself entered the apartment and bowed with courtly deference to the two ladies.

"I have succeeded," he said, "beyond my expectations. It seems that a newspaper in London has published an account of the whole affair, and the police, who were at their wits end before, are even more flustered

now that the account of the robbery has been made public. By the way, how did you learn anything about this robbery? It did not strike me at the time you spoke about Miss Baxter's commission this morning, but I have been wondering ever since."

"Jennie received a paper from London," said the Princess hurriedly, "which said the war chest of Austria had been robbed of two hundred million florins, but there is nothing about it in the Vienna Press."

"No," replied the Prince; "nor is there likely to be. The robbery is now known to all the world except Austria, and I imagine nothing will be said about it here."

"Is there, then, any truth in the report?" asked the Princess innocently.

"Truth! It's all truth; that is just where the trouble is. There is little use of our denying it, because this London paper is evidently well informed, and to deny it we should have to publish something about the robbery itself, which we are not inclined to do. It is known, however, who the two correspondents of this London paper are, and I believe the police are going to make it so interesting for those two gentlemen that they will be glad to leave Vienna, for a time at least. Of course, nothing can be done openly, because Englishmen make such a fuss when their liberties are encroached upon. One of the young men has been lured across the frontier by a bogus telegram, and I think the authorities will see that he does not get back in a hurry; the other we expect to be rid of before long. Of course, we could expel him, but if we did, it would be thought that we had done so because he had found out the truth about the explosion."

"How did you learn of the explosion?" asked the Princess.

"Oh, I have known all about the affair ever since it happened."

The Princess gave Jennie a quick look, which said as plainly as words, "Here was the news that we wanted in our household, and we never suspected it." "Why didn't you tell me?" cried the Princess indignantly.

"Well, you see, my dear, you never took much interest in politics, and I did not think the news would have any attraction for you; besides," he added, with a smile, "we were all cautioned to keep the matter as secret as possible."

"And wonderfully well you have managed it!" exclaimed the Princess. "That shows what comes of trusting a secret to a lot of men; here it is, published to all the world."

"Not quite all the world my dear. As I have said, Austria will know nothing regarding it."

"The Princess tells me," said Jennie, "that you were kind enough to endeavour to get me permission to make some investigation into this mystery. Have you succeeded?"

"Yes, Miss Baxter, as I said, I have succeeded quite beyond my expectations, for the lady detective is comparatively an innovation in Vienna. However, the truth is, the police are completely in a fog, and they are ready to welcome help from whatever quarter it comes. Here is a

written permit from the very highest authority, which you do not need to use except in a case of emergency. Here is also an order from the Chief of Police, which will open for you every door in Vienna; and finally, here is a badge which you can pin on some not too conspicuous portion of your clothing. This badge, I understand, is rarely given out. It is partly civil and partly military. You can show it to any guard, who will, on seeing it, give you the right-of-way. In case he does not, appeal to his superior officer, and allow him to read your police permit. Should that fail, then play your trump card, which is this highly important document. The Director of the Police, who is a very shrewd man, seemed anxious to make your acquaintance before you began your investigation. He asked me if you would call upon him, but seemed taken aback when I told him you were my wife's friend and a guest at our house, so he suggested that you would in all probability wish first to see the scene of the explosion, and proposed that he should call here with his carriage and accompany you to the Treasury. He wished to know if four o'clock in the afternoon would suit your convenience!"

"Oh, yes!" replied Jennie. "I am eager to begin at once, and, of course, I shall be much obliged to him if he will act as my guide in the vaults of the Treasury, and tell me how much they have already discovered."

"You must not expect much information from the police--in fact, I doubt if they have discovered anything. Still, if they have, they are more than likely to keep it to themselves; and I imagine they will hold a pretty close watch on you, being more anxious to learn what you discover, and thus take the credit if they can, than to furnish you with any knowledge of the affair they may happen to possess."

"That is quite natural, and only what one has a right to expect. I don't wish to rob the police of whatever repute there is to be gained from this investigation, and I am quite willing to turn over to them any clues I may happen to chance upon."

"Well, if you can convince the Director of that, you will have all the assistance he can give you. It wouldn't be bad tactics to let him know that you are acting merely in an amateur way, and that you have no desire to rob the police of their glory when it comes to the solving of the problem." Promptly at four o'clock the Director of the Police put in an appearance at the Palace Steinheimer. He appeared to be a most obsequious, highly decorated old gentleman, in a very resplendent uniform, and he could hardly conceal his surprise at learning that the lady detective was a woman so young and so pretty. Charmed as he was to find himself in the company of one so engaging, it was nevertheless evident to Jennie that he placed no very high estimate on the assistance she might be able to give in solving the mystery of the Treasury. This trend of mind, she thought, had its advantages, for the Director would be less loth to give her full particulars of what had already been accomplished by the police.

Jennie accompanied the Director to that extensive mass of buildings of which the Treasury forms a part. The carriage drew up at a doorway, and here the Director and his companion got out. He led the way into the edifice, then, descending a stair, entered an arched corridor, at the door of which two soldiers stood on guard, who saluted as the Chief passed them.

"Does this lead to the room where the explosion took place?" asked Jennie. "Yes." "And is this the only entrance?" "The only entrance,

madame." "Were the men on guard in this doorway injured by the explosion?" "Yes. They were not seriously injured, but were rendered incapable for a time of attending to their duties." "Then a person could have escaped without their seeing him?" "A whole regiment of persons might have escaped. You will understand the situation exactly if I compare this corridor to a long cannon, the room at the end being the breech-loading chamber. Two guards were inside the room, and two others stood outside the door that communicated with this corridor. These four men were killed instantly. Of the guards inside the room not a vestige has been found. The door, one of the strongest that can be made, somewhat similar to the door of a safe, was flung outward and crushed to the floor the two guards who stood outside it in the corridor. Between the chamber in which the chest lay and the outside entrance were sixteen men on guard. Every one of these was flung down, for the blast, if I may call it so, travelled through this straight corridor like the charge along the inside of the muzzle of a gun. The guards nearest the treasure chamber were, of course, the more seriously injured, but those further out did not escape the shock, and the door by which we entered this corridor, while not blown from its hinges, was nevertheless forced open, its strong bolts snapping like matches. So when you see the great distance that intervened between the chamber and that door, you will have some idea of the force of the explosion."

"There is no exit, then, from the treasure chamber except along this corridor?"

"No, madame. The walls at the outside of the chamber are of enormous strength, because, of course, it was expected that if an attempt at robbery were ever made, it would be made from the outside, and it is scarcely possible that even the most expert of thieves could succeed in passing two guards at the door, sixteen officers and soldiers along the corridor, two outside the Treasury door, and two in the chamber itself. Such a large number of soldiers were kept here so that any attempt at bribery would be impossible. Among such a number one or two were sure to be incorruptible, and the guards were constantly changed. Seldom was either officer or man twice on duty here during the month. With such a large amount at stake every precaution was taken."

"Are there any rooms at the right or left of this corridor in which the thieves could have concealed themselves while they fired the mine?"

"No, the corridor leads to the treasure chamber alone."

"Then," said Jennie, "I can't see how it was possible for a number of men to have made away with the treasure in such circumstances as exist here."

"Nevertheless, my dear young lady, the treasure is gone. We think that the mine was laid with the connivance of one or more officers on duty here. You see the amount at stake was so large that a share of it would tempt any nine human beings out of any ten. Our theory is that the train was laid, possibly electric wires being used, which would be unnoticed along the edge of the corridor, and that the bribed officer exploded the dynamite by bringing the ends of the wires into contact. We think the explosion was a great deal more severe than was anticipated. Probably, it was expected that the shock would break a hole from the treasure chamber to the street, but so strong were the walls that no impression was made upon them, and a cabman who was driving past at the time heard nothing of the sound of the explosion, though he felt a trembling of the

ground, and thought for a moment there had been a shock of earthquake."

"You think, then, that the thieves were outside?"

"That seems the only possible opinion to hold."

"The outside doors were locked and bolted, of course?"

"Oh, certainly; but if they had a confederate or two in the large hallway upstairs, these traitors would see to it that there was no trouble about getting in. Once inside the large hallway, with guards stunned by the shock, the way to the treasure chamber was absolutely clear."

"There were sentries outside the building, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Did they see any vehicle driving near the Treasury?"

"No, except the cab I spoke of, and the driver has accounted satisfactorily for his time that night. The absence of any conveyance is the strange part of it; and, moreover, the sentries, although pacing outside the walls of this building, heard nothing of the concussion beyond a low rumble, and those who thought of the matter at all imagined an explosion had occurred in some distant part of the city."

"Then the outside doors in the large hall above were not blown open?"

"No; the officer reports that they were locked and bolted when he examined them, which was some minutes, of course, after the disaster had taken place; for he, the officer in charge, had been thrown down and stunned, seemingly by the concussion of air which took place."

As Jennie walked down the corridor, she saw more and more of the evidences of the convulsion. The thick iron-bound door lay where it had fallen, and it had not been moved since it was lifted to get the two men from under it. Its ponderous hinges were twisted as if they had been made of glue, and its massive bolts were snapped across like bits of glass. All along the corridor on the floor was a thick coating of dust and _debris_, finely powdered, growing deeper and deeper until they came to the entrance of the room. There was no window either in corridor or chamber, and the way was lit by candles held by soldiers who accompanied them. The scoria crunched under foot as they walked, and in the chamber itself great heaps of dust, sand and plaster, all pulverized into minute particles, lay in the corners of the room, piled up on one side higher than a man's head. There seemed to be tons of this _debris_, and, as Jennie looked up at the arched ceiling, resembling the roof of a vaulted dungeon, she saw that the stone itself had been ground to fine dust with the tremendous force of the blast.

"Where are the remnants of the treasure chest?" she asked.

The Director shook his head. "There are no remnants; not a vestige of it is to be found."

"Of what was it made?"

"We used to have an old treasure chest here made of oak, bound with

iron; but some years ago, a new receptacle being needed, one was especially built of hardened steel, constructed on the modern principles of those burglar-proof and fire-proof safes."

"And do you mean to say that there is nothing left of this?"

"Nothing that we have been able to discover."

"Well, I have seen places where dynamite explosions have occurred, but I know of nothing to compare with this. I am sure that if dynamite has been used, or any explosive now generally obtainable, there would have been left, at least, some remnant of the safe. Hasn't this pile of rubbish been disturbed since the explosion?"

"Yes, it has been turned over; we made a search for the two men, but we found no trace of them."

"And you found no particles of iron or steel?"

"The heap throughout is just as you see it on the surface--a fine, almost impalpable dust. We had to exercise the greatest care in searching through it, for the moment it was disturbed with a shovel it filled the air with suffocating clouds. Of course we shall have it removed by-and-by, and carted away, but I considered it better to allow it to remain here until we had penetrated somewhat further into the mystery than we have already done."

Jennie stooped and picked up a handful from the heap, her action caused a mist to rise in the air that made them both choke and cough, and yet she was instantly struck by the fact that her handful seemed inordinately heavy for its bulk.

"May I take some of this with me?" she asked.

"Of course," replied the Director. "I will have a packet of it put up for you."

"I would like to take it with me now," said Jennie. "I have curiosity to know exactly of what it is composed. Who is the Government analyst? or have you such an official?"

"Herr Feltz, in the Graubenstrasse, is a famous analytical chemist; you cannot do better than go to him."

"Do you think he knows anything about explosives?"

"I should suppose so, but if not, he will certainly be able to tell you who the best man is in that line."

The Director ordered one of the soldiers who accompanied him to find a small paper bag, and fill it with some dust from the treasure chamber. When this was done, he handed the package to Jennie, who said, "I shall go at once and see Herr Feltz."

"My carriage is at your disposal, madame."

"Oh, no, thank you, I do not wish to trouble you further. I am very much obliged to you for devoting so much time to me already. I shall take a fiacre."

"My carriage is at the door," persisted the Director, "and I will instruct the driver to take you directly to the shop of Herr Feltz; then no time will be lost, and I think if I am with you, you will be more sure of attention from the chemist, who is a very busy man."

Jennie saw the Director did not wish to let her out of his sight, and although she smiled at his suspicion, she answered politely,--

"It is very kind of you to take so much trouble and devote so much of your time to me. I shall be glad of your company if you are quite certain I am not keeping you from something more important."

"There is nothing more important than the investigation we have on hand," replied the Chief grimly.

CHAPTER XV.

JENNIE BESTOWS INFORMATION UPON THE CHIEF OF POLICE.

A few minutes after leaving the Treasury building the carriage of the Chief stopped in front of the shop of Herr Feltz in the wide Graubenstrasse. The great chemist himself waited upon them and conducted them to an inner and private room.

"I should be obliged to you if you would tell me the component parts of the mixture in this package," said Jennie, as she handed the filled paper bag to the chemist.

"How soon do you wish to know the result?" asked the man of chemicals.

"As soon as possible," replied Jennie.

"Could you give me until this hour to-morrow?"

"That will do very nicely," replied Jennie, looking up at the Director of Police, who nodded his head.

With that the two took their leave, and once more the Director of Police politely handed the girl into his carriage, and they drove to the Palace Steinheimer. Here she again thanked him cordially for his attentions during the day. The Director answered, with equal suavity, that his duty had on this occasion been a pleasure, and asked her permission to call at the same hour the next afternoon and take her to the chemist. To this Jennie assented, and cheerily bade him good-evening. The Princess was waiting for her, wild with curiosity to know what had happened.

"Oh, Jennie!" she cried, "who fired the mine, and who robbed the Government?"

Jennie laughed merrily as she replied,--

"Dear Princess, what a compliment you are paying me! Do you think that in one afternoon I am able to solve a mystery that has defied the combined talents of all the best detectives in Austria? I wish the

Director of Police had such faith in me as you have."

"And hasn't he, Jennie?"

"Indeed he has not. He watched me every moment he was with me, as if he feared I would disappear into thin air, as the treasure had done."

"The horrid man. I shall have my husband speak to him, and rid you of this annoyance."

"Oh, no, Princess, you mustn't do anything of the kind. I don't mind it in the least; in fact, it rather amuses me. One would think he had some suspicion that I stole the money myself."

"A single word from the Prince will stop all that, you know."

"Yes, I know. But I really want to help the Director; he is so utterly stupid."

"Now, Jennie, take off your hat and sit down here, and tell me every incident of the afternoon. Don't you see I am just consumed with curiosity? I know you have discovered something. What is it?"

"I will not take off my hat, because I am going out again directly; but, if you love me, get me a cup of that delicious tea of yours."

"I shall order it at once, but dinner will be served shortly. You are surely not going out alone to-night?"

"I really must. Do not forget that I have been used to taking care of myself in a bigger city than Vienna is, and I shall be quite safe. You will please excuse my absence from the dinner-table to-night."

"Nonsense, Jennie! You cannot be allowed to roam round Vienna in that Bohemian way."

"Then, Princess, I must go to an hotel, for this roaming round is strictly necessary, and I don't want to bring the Palace Steinheimer into disrepute."

"Jennie, I'll tell you what we will do; we'll both bring it into disrepute. The Prince is dining at his club to-night with some friends, so I shall order the carriage, and you and I will roam round together. You will let me come, won't you? Where are you going?"

"I am going to the Graubenstrasse to see Herr Feltz."

"Oh, I know Herr Feltz, and a dear old man he is; he will do anything for me. If you want a favour from Herr Feltz, you had better take me with you."

"I shall be delighted. Ah, here comes the tea! But what is the use of ordering the carriage? we can walk there in a very few minutes."

"I think we had better have the carriage. The Prince would be wild if he heard that we two went walking about the streets of Vienna at night. So, Jennie, we must pay some respect to conventionality, and we will take the carriage. Now, tell me where you have been, and what you have seen, and all about it." Over their belated decoction of tea Jennie related

everything that had happened.

"And what do you expect to learn from the analysis at the chemist's, Jennie?"

"I expect to learn something that will startle the Director of Police."

"And what is that? Jennie, don't keep me on tenterhooks in this provoking way. How can you act so? I shall write to Lord Donal and tell him that you are here in Vienna, if you don't mind."

"Well, under such a terrible threat as that, I suppose I must divulge all my suspicions. But I really don't know anything yet; I merely suspect. The weight of that dust, when I picked up a handful of it, seemed to indicate that the gold is still there in the rubbish heap."

"You don't mean to say so! Then there has been no robbery at all?"

"There may have been a robbery planned, but I do not think any thief got a portion of the gold. The chances are that they entirely underestimated the force of the explosive they were using, for, unless I am very much mistaken, they were dealing with something a hundred times more powerful than dynamite."

"And will the chemical analysis show what explosive was used?"

"No; it will only show of what the _debris_ is composed. It will settle the question whether or not the gold is in that dust-heap. If it is, then I think the Government will owe me some thanks, because the Director of Police talked of carting the rubbish away and dumping it out of sight somewhere. If the Government gets back its gold, I suppose the question of who fired the mine is merely of academic interest."

"The carriage is waiting, your Highness," was the announcement made to the Princess, who at once jumped up, and said,--

"I'll be ready in five minutes. I'm as anxious now as you are to hear what the chemist has to say; but I thought you told me he wouldn't have the analysis ready until four o'clock to-morrow. What is the use of going there to-night?"

"Because I am reasonably certain that the Director of Police will see him early to-morrow morning, and I want to get the first copy of the analysis myself."

With that the Princess ran away and presently reappeared with her wraps on. The two drove to the shop of Herr Feltz in the Graubenstrasse, and were told that the chemist could not be seen in any circumstances. He had left orders that he was not to be disturbed.

"Disobey those orders and take in my card," said the Princess.

A glance at the card dissolved the man's doubts, and he departed to seek his master.

"He is working at the analysis now, I'll warrant," whispered the Princess to her companion. In a short time Herr Feltz himself appeared. He greeted the Princess with most deferential respect, but seemed astonished to find in her company the young woman who had called on him

a few hours previously with the Director of the Police.

"I wanted to ask you," said Jennie, "to finish your analysis somewhat earlier than four o'clock to-morrow. I suppose it can be done?"

The man of science smiled and looked at her for a moment, but did not reply. "You will oblige my friend, I hope," said the Princess.

"I should be delighted to oblige any friend of your Highness," answered the chemist slowly, "but, unfortunately, in this instance I have orders from an authority not to be disputed."

"What orders?" demanded the Princess.

"I promised the analysis at four o'clock to-morrow, and at that hour it will be ready for the young lady. I am ordered not to show the analysis to anyone before that time."

"Those orders came from the Director of Police, I suppose?" The chemist bowed low, but did not speak.

"I understand how it is, Jennie; he came here immediately after seeing you home. I suppose he visited you again within the hour after he left with this young lady--is that the case, Herr Feltz?"

"Your Highness distresses me by asking questions that I am under pledge not to answer."

"Is the analysis completed?"

"That is another question which I sincerely hope your Highness will not press."

"Very well, Herr Feltz, I shall ask you a question or two of which you will not be so frightened. I have told my friend here that you would do anything for me, but I see I have been mistaken."

The chemist made a deprecatory motion of his hands, spreading them out and bowing. It was plainly apparent that his seeming discourtesy caused him deep regret. He was about to speak, but the Princess went impetuously on.

"Is the Director of Police a friend of yours, Herr Feltz? I don't mean merely an official friend, but a personal friend?"

"I am under many obligations to him, your Highness, and besides that, like any other citizen of Vienna, I am compelled to obey him when he commands."

"What I want to learn," continued the Princess, her anger visibly rising at this unexpected opposition, "is whether you wish the man well or not?"

"I certainly wish him well, your Highness."

"In that case know that if my friend leaves this shop without seeing the analysis of the material she brought to you, the Director of Police will be dismissed from his office to-morrow. If you doubt my influence with my husband to have that done, just try the experiment of sending us away

unsatisfied."

The old man bowed his white head.

"Your Highness," he said, "I shall take the responsibility of refusing to obey the orders of the Director of Police. Excuse me for a moment."

He retired into his den, and presently emerged with a sheet of paper in his hand.

"It must be understood," he said, addressing Jennie, "that the analysis is but roughly made. I intended to devote the night to a more minute scrutiny."

"All I want at the present moment," said Jennie, "is a rough analysis."

"There it is," said the chemist, handing her the paper. She read,----

Calcium	29
Iron	4
Quartz]	
Feldspar]	27
Mica]	
Gold	36-1/2
Traces of other substances	3-1/2

Total	100

Jennie's eyes sparkled as she looked at the figures before her. She handed the paper to the Princess saying,--

"You see, I was right in my surmise. More than one-third of that heap is pure gold."

"I should explain," said the chemist, "that I have grouped the quartz, feldspar, and mica together, without giving the respective portions of each, because it is evident that the combination represents granite."

"I understand," said Jennie; "the walls and the roof are of granite."

"I would further add," continued the chemist, "that I have never met gold so finely divided as this is."

"Have you the gold and other ingredients separated?"

"Yes, madame."

"I shall take them with me, if you please."

The chemist shortly after brought her the components, in little glass vials, labelled.

"Have you any idea, Herr Feltz, what explosive would reduce gold to such fine powder as this?"

"I have only a theoretical knowledge of explosives, and I know of nothing that would produce such results as we have here. Perhaps Professor Carl Seigfried could give you some information on that point. The science of detonation has been his life study, and he stands head

and shoulders above his fellows in that department."

"Can you give me his address?"

The chemist wrote the address on a sheet of paper and handed it to the young woman.

"Do you happen to know whether Professor Seigfried or his assistants have been called in during this investigation?"

"What investigation, madame?"

"The investigation of the recent terrible explosion."

"I have heard of no explosion," replied the chemist, evidently bewildered.

Then Jennie remembered that, while the particulars of the disaster in the Treasury were known to the world at large outside of Austria, no knowledge of the catastrophe had got abroad in Vienna.

"The Professor," continued the chemist, noticing Jennie's hesitation, "is not a very practical man. He is deeply learned, and has made some great discoveries in pure science, but he has done little towards applying his knowledge to any everyday useful purpose. If you meet him, you will find him a dreamer and a theorist. But if you once succeed in interesting him in any matter, he will prosecute it to the very end, quite regardless of the time he spends or the calls of duty elsewhere."

"Then he is just the man I wish to see," said Jennie decisively, and with that they took leave of the chemist and once more entered the carriage.

"I want to drive to another place," said Jennie, "before it gets too late."

"Good gracious!" cried the Princess, "you surely do not intend to call on Professor Seigfried to-night?"

"No; but I want to drive to the office of the Director of Police."

"Oh, that won't take us long," said the Princess, giving the necessary order. The coachman took them to the night entrance of the central police station by the Hohenstaufengasse, and, leaving the Princess in the carriage, Jennie went in alone to speak with the officer in charge.

"I wish to see the Director of Police," she said.

"He will not be here until to-morrow morning. He is at home. Is it anything important?"

"Yes. Where is his residence?"

"If you will have the kindness to inform me what your business is, madame, we will have pleasure in attending to it without disturbing Herr Director."

"I must communicate with the Director in person. The Princess von Steinheimer is in her carriage outside, and I do not wish to keep her

waiting." At mention of the Princess the officer bestirred himself and became tremendously polite.

"I shall call the Director at once, and he will be only too happy to wait upon you."

"Oh, have you a telephone here? and can I speak with him myself without being overheard?"

"Certainly, madame. If you will step into this room with me, I will call him up and leave you to speak with him."

This was done, and when the Chief had answered, Jennie introduced herself to him.

"I am Miss Baxter, whom you were kind enough to escort through the Treasury building this afternoon."

"Oh, yes," replied the Chief. "I thought we were to postpone further inquiry until to-morrow."

"Yes, that was the arrangement; but I wanted to say that if my plans are interfered with; if I am kept under surveillance, I shall be compelled to withdraw from the search."

A few moments elapsed before the Chief replied, and then it was with some hesitation.

"I should be distressed to have you withdraw; but, if you wish to do so, that must be a matter entirely for your own consideration. I have my own duty to perform, and I must carry it out to the best of my poor ability."

"Quite so. I am obliged to you for speaking so plainly. I rather surmised this afternoon that you looked upon my help in the light of an interference."

"I should not have used the word interference," continued the Chief; "but I must confess that I never knew good results to follow amateur efforts, which could not have been obtained much more speedily and effectually by the regular force under my command."

"Well, the regular force under your command has been at work several weeks and has apparently not accomplished very much. I have devoted part of an afternoon and evening to the matter, so before I withdraw I should like to give you some interesting information which you may impart to the Government, and I am quite willing that you should take all the credit for the discovery, as I have no wish to appear in any way as your competitor. Can you hear me distinctly?"

"Perfectly, madame," replied the Chief.

"Then, in the first place, inform the Government that there has been no robbery."

"No robbery? What an absurd statement, if you will excuse me speaking so abruptly! Where is the gold if there was no robbery?"

"I am coming to that. Next inform the Government that their loss will

be but trifling. That heap of _debris_ which you propose to cart away contains practically the whole of the missing two hundred million florins. More than one-third of the heap is pure gold. If you want to do a favour to a good friend of yours, and at the same time confer a benefit upon the Government itself, you will advise the Government to secure the services of Herr Feltz, so that the gold may be extracted from the rubbish completely and effectually. I put in a word for Herr Feltz, because I am convinced that he is a most competent man. To-night his action saved you from dismissal to-morrow, therefore you should be grateful to him. And now I have the honour to wish you good-night."

"Wait--wait a moment!" came in beseeching tones through the telephone. "My dear young lady, pray pardon any fault you have to find with me, and remain for a moment or two longer. Who, then, caused the explosion, and why was it accomplished?"

"That I must leave for you to find out, Herr Director. You see, I am giving you the results of merely a few hours' inquiry, and you cannot expect me to discover everything in that time. I don't know how the explosion was caused, neither do I know who the criminals are or were. It would probably take me all day to-morrow to find that out; but as I am leaving the discovery in such competent hands as yours, I must curb my impatience until you send me full particulars. So, once again, good-night, Herr Director."

"No, no, don't go yet. I shall come at once to the station, if you will be kind enough to stop there until I arrive."

"The Princess von Steinheimer is waiting for me in her carriage outside, and I do not wish to delay her any longer."

"Then let me implore you not to give up your researches."

"Why? Amateur efforts are so futile, you know, when compared with the labours of the regular force."

"Oh, my dear young lady, you must pardon an old man for what he said in a thoughtless moment. If you knew how many useless amateurs meddle in our very difficult business you would excuse me. Are you quite convinced of what you have told me, that the gold is in the rubbish heap?"

"Perfectly. I will leave for you at the office here the analysis made by Herr Feltz, and if I can assist you further, it must be on the distinct understanding that you are not to interfere again with whatever I may do. Your conduct in going to Herr Feltz to-night after you had left me, and commanding him not to give me any information, I should hesitate to characterize by its right name. When I have anything further to communicate, I will send for you."

"Thank you; I shall hold myself always at your command." This telephonic interview being happily concluded, Jennie hurried to the Princess, stopping on her way to give the paper containing the analysis to the official in charge, and telling him to hand it to the Director when he returned to his desk. This done, she passed out into the night, with the comfortable consciousness that the worries of a busy day had not been without their compensation.

CHAPTER XVI.

JENNIE VISITS A MODERN WIZARD IN HIS MAGIC ATTIC.

When Jennie entered the carriage in which her friend was waiting, the other cried, "Well, have you seen him?" apparently meaning the Director of Police.

"No, I did not see him, but I talked with him over the telephone. I wish you could have heard our conversation; it was the funniest interview I ever took part in. Two or three times I had to shut off the instrument, fearing the Director would hear me laugh. I am afraid that before this business is ended you will be very sorry I am a guest at your house. I know I shall end by getting myself into an Austrian prison. Just think of it! Here have I been 'holding up' the Chief of Police in this Imperial city as if I were a wild western brigand. I have been terrorizing the man, brow-beating him, threatening him, and he the person who has the liberty of all Vienna in his hands; who can have me dragged off to a dungeon-cell any time he likes to give the order."

"Not from the Palace Steinheimer," said the Princess, with decision.

"Well, he might hesitate about that; yet, nevertheless, it is too funny to think that a mere newspaper woman, coming into a city which contains only one or two of her friends, should dare to talk to the Chief of Police as I have done to-night, and force him actually to beg that I shall remain in the city and continue to assist him."

"Tell me what you said," asked the Princess eagerly; and Jennie related all that had passed between them over the telephone.

"And do you mean to say calmly that you are going to give that man the right to use the astounding information you have acquired, and allow him to accept complacently all the _kudos_ that such a discovery entitles you to?"

"Why, certainly," replied Jennie. "What good is the _kudos_ to me? All the credit I desire I get in the office of the _Daily Bugle_ in London."

"But, you silly girl, holding such a secret as you held, you could have made your fortune," insisted the practical Princess, for the principles which had been instilled into her during a youth spent in Chicago had not been entirely eradicated by residence in Vienna. "If you had gone to the Government and said, 'How much will you give me if I restore to you the missing gold?' just imagine what their answer would be."

"Yes, I suppose there was money in the scheme if it had really been a secret. But you forget that to-morrow morning the Chief of Police would have known as much as he knows to-night. Of course, if I had gone alone to the Treasury vault and kept my discovery to myself, I might, perhaps, have 'held up' the Government of Austria-Hungary as successfully as I 'held up' the Chief of Police to-night. But with the Director watching everything I did, and going with me to the chemist, there was no possibility of keeping the matter a secret."

"Well, Jennie, all I can say is that you are a very foolish girl. Here you are, working hard, as you said in one of your letters, merely to

make a living, and now, with the greatest nonchalance, you allow a fortune to slip through your fingers. I am simply not going to allow this. I shall tell my husband all that has happened, and he will make the Government treat you honestly; if not generously. I assure you, Jennie, that Lord Donal--no, I won't mention his name, since you protest so strenuously--but the future young man, whoever he is, will not think the less of you because you come to him with a handsome dowry. But here we are at home; and I won't say another word on the subject if it annoys you."

When Jennie reached her delightful apartments--which looked even more luxuriantly comfortable bathed in the soft radiance that now flooded them from quiet-toned shaded lamps than they did in the more garish light of day--she walked up and down her sitting-room in deep meditation. She was in a quandary--whether or not to risk sending a coded telegram to her paper was the question that presented itself to her. If she were sure that no one else would learn the news, she would prefer to wait until she had further particulars of the Treasury catastrophe. A good deal would depend on whether or not the Director of Police took anyone into his confidence that night. If he did not, he would be aware that only he and the girl possessed this important piece of news. If a full account of the discovery appeared in the next morning's *_Daily Bugle_*, then, when that paper arrived in Vienna, or even before, if a synopsis were telegraphed to the Government, as it was morally certain to be, the Director would know at once that she was the correspondent of the newspaper whom he was so anxious to frighten out of Vienna. On the other hand, her friendship with the Princess von Steinheimer gave her such influence with the Chief's superiors, that, after the lesson she had taught him, he might hesitate to make any move against her. Then, again, the news that to-night belonged to two persons might on the morrow come to the knowledge of all the correspondents in Vienna, and her efforts, so far as the *_Bugle_* was concerned, would have been in vain. This consideration decided the girl, and, casting off all sign of hesitation, she sat down at her writing table and began the first chapter of the solution of the Vienna mystery. Her opening sentence was exceedingly diplomatic: "The Chief of Police of Vienna has made a most startling discovery." Beginning thus, she went on to details of the discovery she had that day made. When her account was finished and codified, she went down to her hostess and said,--

"Princess, I want a trustworthy man, who will take a long telegram to the central telegraph office, pay for it, and come away quickly before anyone can ask him inconvenient questions."

"Would it not be better to call a *Dienstmanner*?"

"A *Dienstmanner*? That is your commissioner, or telegraph messenger? No, I think not. They are all numbered and can be traced."

"Oh, I know!" cried the Princess; "I will send our coachman. He will be out of his livery now, and he is a most reliable man; he will not answer inconvenient questions, or any others, even if they are asked."

To her telegram for publication Jennie had added a private despatch to the editor, stating that it would be rather inconvenient for her if he published the account next morning, but she left the decision entirely with him. Here was the news, and if he thought it worth the risk, he might hold it over; if not, he was to print it regardless of consequences.

As a matter of fact, the editor, with fear and trembling, held the news for a day, so that he might not embarrass his fair representative, but so anxious was he, that he sat up all night until the other papers were out, and he heaved a sigh of relief when, on glancing over them, he found that not one of them contained an inkling of the information locked up in his desk. And so he dropped off to sleep when the day was breaking. Next night he had nearly as much anxiety, for although the _Bugle_ would contain the news, other papers might have it as well, and thus for the second time he waited in his office until the other sheets, wet from the press, were brought to him. Again fortune favoured him, and the triumph belonged to the _Bugle_ alone.

The morning after her interview with the Director of Police, Jennie, taking a small hand-satchel, in which she placed the various bottles containing the different dusts which the chemist had separated, went abroad alone, and hailing a fiacre, gave the driver the address of Professor Carl Seigfried. The carriage of the Princess was always at the disposal of the girl, but on this occasion she did not wish to be embarrassed with so pretentious an equipage. The cab took her into a street lined with tall edifices and left her at the number she had given the driver. The building seemed to be one let out in flats and tenements; she mounted stair after stair, and only at the very top did she see the Professor's name painted on a door. Here she rapped several times without any attention being paid to her summons, but at last the door was opened partially by a man whom she took, quite accurately, to be the Professor himself. His head was white; and his face deeply wrinkled. He glared at her through his glasses, and said sharply, "Young lady, you have made a mistake; these are the rooms of Professor Carl Seigfried."

"It is Professor Carl Seigfried that I wish to see," replied the girl hurriedly, as the old man was preparing to shut the door.

"What do you want with him?"

"I want some information from him about explosives. I have been told that he knows more about explosives than any other man living."

"Quite right--he does. What then?"

"An explosion has taken place producing the most remarkable results. They say that neither dynamite nor any other known force could have had such an effect on metals and minerals as this power has had."

"Ah, dynamite is a toy for children!" cried the old man, opening the door a little further and exhibiting an interest which had, up to that moment, been absent from his manner. "Well, where did this explosion take place? Do you wish me to go and see it?"

"Perhaps so, later on. At present I wish to show you some of its effects, but I don't propose to do this standing here in the passageway."

"Quite right--quite right," hastily ejaculated the old scientist, throwing the door wide open. "Of course, I am not accustomed to visits from fashionable young ladies, and I thought at first there had been a mistake; but if you have any real scientific problem, I shall be delighted to give my attention to it. What may appear very extraordinary

to the lay mind will doubtless prove fully explainable by scientists. Come in, come in."

The old man shut the door behind her, and led her along a dark passage, into a large apartment, whose ceiling was the roof of the building. At first sight it seemed in amazing disorder. Huge as it was, it was cluttered with curious shaped machines and instruments. A twisted conglomeration of glass tubing, bent into fantastic tangles, stood on a central table, and had evidently been occupying the Professor's attention at the time he was interrupted. The place was lined with shelving, where the walls were not occupied by cupboards, and every shelf was burdened with bottles and apparatus of different kinds. Whatever care Professor Seigfried took of his apparatus, he seemed to have little for his furniture. There was hardly a decent chair in the room, except one deep arm-chair, covered with a tiger's skin, in which the Professor evidently took his ease while meditating or watching the progress of an experiment. This chair he did not offer to the young lady; in fact, he did not offer her a seat at all, but sank down on the tiger's skin himself, placed the tips of his fingers together, and glared at her through his glittering glasses.

"Now, young woman," he said abruptly, "what have you brought for me? Don't begin to chatter, for my time is valuable. Show me what you have brought, and I will tell you all about it; and most likely a very simple thing it is."

Jennie, interested in so rude a man, smiled, drew up the least decrepit bench she could find, and sat down, in spite of the angry mutterings of her irritated host. Then she opened her satchel, took out the small bottle of gold, and handed it to him without a word. The old man received it somewhat contemptuously, shook it backward and forward without extracting the cork, adjusted his glasses, then suddenly seemed to take a nervous interest in the material presented to him. He rose and went nearer the light. Drawing out the cork with trembling hands, he poured some of the contents into his open palm. The result was startling enough. The old man flung up his hands, letting the vial crash into a thousand pieces on the floor. He staggered forward, shrieking, "Ah, mein Gott--mein Gott!"

Then, to the consternation of Jennie, who had already risen in terror from her chair, the scientist plunged forward on his face. The girl had difficulty in repressing a shriek. She looked round hurriedly for a bell to ring, but apparently there was none. She tried to open the door and cry for help, but in her excitement could neither find handle nor latch. It seemed to be locked, and the key, doubtless, was in the Professor's pocket. She thought at first that he had dropped dead, but the continued moaning as he lay on the floor convinced her of her error. She bent over him anxiously and cried, "What can I do to help you?"

With a struggle he muttered, "The bottle, the bottle, in the cupboard behind you."

She hurriedly flung open the doors of the cupboard indicated, and found a bottle of brandy, and a glass, which she partly filled. The old man had with an effort struggled into a sitting posture, and she held the glass of fiery liquid to his pallid lips. He gulped down the brandy, and gasped, "I feel better now. Help me to my chair."

Assisting him to his feet, she supported him to his arm-chair, when he

shook himself free, crying angrily, "Let me alone! Don't you see I am all right again?"

The girl stood aside, and the Professor dropped into his chair, his nervous hands vibrating on his knees. For a long interval nothing was said by either, and the girl at last seated herself on the bench she had formerly occupied. The next words the old man spoke were, "Who sent you here?"

"No one, I came of my own accord. I wished to meet someone who had a large knowledge of explosives, and Herr Feltz, the chemist, gave me your address."

"Herr Feltz! Herr Feltz!" he repeated. "So he sent you here?"

"No one sent me here," insisted the girl. "It is as I tell you. Herr Feltz merely gave me your address."

"Where did you get that powdered gold?"

"It came from the _debris_ of an explosion."

"I know, you said that before. Where was the explosion? Who caused it?"

"That I don't know."

"Don't you know where the explosion was?"

"Yes, I know where the explosion was, but I don't know who caused it."

"Who sent you here?"

"I tell you no one sent me here."

"That is not true, the man who caused the explosion sent you here. You are his minion. What do you expect to find out from me?"

"I expect to learn what explosive was used to produce the result that seemed to have such a remarkable effect on you."

"Why do you say that? It had no effect on me. My heart is weak. I am subject to such attacks, and I ward them off with brandy. Some day they will kill me. Then you won't learn any secrets from a dead man, will you?"

"I hope, Professor Seigfried, that you have many years yet to live, and I must further add that I did not expect such a reception as I have received from a man of science, as I was told you were. If you have no information to give to me, very well, that ends it; all you have to do is to say so."

"Who sent you here?"

"No one, as I have repeated once or twice. If anyone had, I would give him my opinion of the errand when I got back. You refuse, then, to tell me anything about the explosive that powdered the gold?"

"Refuse? Of course I refuse! What did you expect? I suppose the man who sent you here thought, because you were an engaging young woman and I

an old dotard, I would gabble to you the results of a life's work. Oh, no, no, no; but I am not an old dotard. I have many years to live yet."

"I hope so. Well, I must bid you good morning. I shall go to someone else."

The old man showed his teeth in a forbidding grin.

"It is useless. Your bottle is broken, and the material it contained is dissipated. Not a trace of it is left."

He waved his thin, emaciated hand in the air as he spoke.

"Oh, that doesn't matter in the least," said Jennie. "I have several other bottles here in my satchel."

The Professor placed his hands on the arms of his chair, and slowly raised himself to his feet.

"You have others," he cried, "other bottles? Let me see them--let me see them!"

"No," replied Jennie, "I won't."

With a speed which, after his recent collapse, Jennie had not expected, the Professor ambled round to the door and placed his back against it. The glasses over his eyes seemed to sparkle as if with fire. His talon-like fingers crooked rigidly. He breathed rapidly, and was evidently labouring under intense excitement.

"Who knows you came up to see me?" he whispered hoarsely, glaring at her.

Jennie, having arisen, stood there, smoothing down her perfectly fitting glove, and answered with a calmness she was far from feeling,--

"Who knows I am here? No one but the Director of Police."

"Oh, the Director of Police!" echoed the Professor, quite palpably abashed by the unexpected answer. The rigidity of his attitude relaxed, and he became once more the old man he had appeared as he sat in a heap in his chair. "You will excuse me," he muttered, edging round towards the chair again; "I was excited."

"I noticed that you were, Professor. But before you sit down again, please unlock that door."

"Why?" he asked, pausing on his way to the chair.

"Because I wish it open."

"And I," he said in a higher tone, "wish it to remain locked until we have come to some understanding. I can't let you go out now; but I shall permit you to go unmolested as soon as you have made some explanation to me."

"If you do not unlock the door immediately I shall take this machine and fling it through the front window out on the street. The crashing glass on the pavement will soon bring someone to my rescue, Professor, and, as

I have a voice of my own and small hesitation about shouting, I shall have little difficulty in directing the strangers where to come."

As Jennie spoke she moved swiftly towards the table on which stood the strange aggregation of reflectors and bent glass tubing.

"No, no, no!" screamed the Professor, springing between her and the table. "Touch anything but that--anything but that. Do not disturb it an inch--there is danger--death not only to you and me, but perhaps to the whole city. Keep away from it!"

"Very well, then," said Jennie, stepping back in spite of her endeavour to maintain her self-control; "open the door. Open both doors and leave them so. After that, if you remain seated in your chair, I shall not touch the machine, nor shall I leave until I make the explanations you require, and you have answered some questions that I shall ask. But I must have a clear way to the stair, in case you should become excited again."

"I'll unlock the doors; I'll unlock both doors," replied the old man tremulously, fumbling about in his pockets for his keys. "But keep away from that machine, unless you want to bring swift destruction on us all."

With an eagerness that retarded his speed, the Professor, constantly looking over his shoulder at his visitor, unlocked the first door, then hastily he flung open the second, and tottered back to his chair, where he collapsed on the tiger skin, trembling and exhausted.

"We may be overheard," he whined. "One can never tell who may sneak quietly up the stair. I am surrounded by spies trying to find out what I am doing."

"Wait a moment," said Jennie.

She went quickly to the outer door, found that it closed with a spring latch, opened and shut it two or three times until she was perfectly familiar with its workings, then she closed it, drew the inner door nearly shut, and sat down.

"There," she said, "we are quite safe from interruption, Professor Seigfried; but I must request you not to move from your chair."

"I have no intention of doing so," murmured the old man. "Who sent you? You said you would tell me. I think you owe me an explanation."

"I think you owe me one," replied the girl. "As I told you before, no one sent me. I came here entirely of my own accord, and I shall endeavour to make clear to you exactly why I came. Some time ago there occurred in this city a terrific explosion--"

"Where? When?" exclaimed the old man, placing his hands on the arms of his chair, as if he would rise to his feet.

"Sit where you are," commanded Jennie firmly, "and I shall tell you all I can about it. The Government, for reasons of its own, desires to keep the fact of this explosion a secret, and thus very few people outside of official circles know anything about it. I am trying to discover the cause of that disaster."

"Are you--are you working on behalf of the Government?" asked the old man eagerly, a tremor of fear in his quavering voice.

"No. I am conducting my investigations quite independently of the Government."

"But why? But why? That is what I don't understand."

"I would very much rather not answer that question."

"But that question--everything is involved in that question. I must know why you are here. If you are not in the employ of the Government, in whose employ are you?"

"If I tell you," said Jennie with some hesitation, "will you keep what I say a secret?"

"Yes, yes, yes!" cried the scientist impatiently.

"Well, I am in the service of a London daily newspaper."

"I see, I see; and they have sent you here to publish broadcast over the world all you can find out of my doings. I knew you were a spy the moment I saw you. I should never have let you in."

"My dear sir, the London paper is not even aware of your existence. They have not sent me to you at all. They have sent me to learn, if possible, the cause of the explosion I spoke of. I took some of the _debris_ to Herr Feltz to analyze it, and he said he had never seen gold, iron, feldspar, and all that, reduced to such fine, impalpable grains as was the case with the sample I left with him. I then asked him who in Vienna knew most about explosives, and he gave me your address. That is why I am here."

"But the explosion--you have not told me when and where it occurred!"

"That, as I have said, is a Government secret."

"But you stated you are not in the Government employ, therefore it can be no breach of confidence if you let me have full particulars."

"I suppose not. Very well, then, the explosion occurred after midnight on the seventeenth in the vault of the Treasury."

The old man, in spite of the prohibition, rose uncertainly to his feet.

Jennie sprang up and said menacingly, "Stay where you are!"

"I am not going to touch you. If you are so suspicious of every move I make, then go yourself and bring me what I want. There is a map of Vienna pinned against the wall yonder. Bring it to me."

Jennie proceeded in the direction indicated. It was an ordinary map of the city of Vienna, and as Jennie took it down she noticed that across the southern part of the city a semi-circular line in pencil had been drawn. Examining it more closely, she saw that the stationary part of the compass had been placed on the spot where stood the building which contained the Professor's studio. She paid closer attention to the

pencil mark and observed that it passed through the Treasury building.

"Don't look at that map!" shrieked the Professor, beating the air with his hands. "I asked you to bring it to me. Can't you do a simple action like that without spying about?"

Jennie rapidly unfastened the paper from the wall and brought it to him. The scientist scrutinized it closely, adjusting his glasses the better to see, then deliberately tore the map into fragments, numerous and minute. He rose--and this time Jennie made no protest--went to the window, opened it, and flung the fluttering bits of paper out into the air, the strong wind carrying them far over the roofs of Vienna. Closing the casement, he came back to his chair.

"Was--was anyone hurt at this explosion?" he asked presently.

"Yes, four men were killed instantly, a dozen were seriously injured and are now in hospital."

"Oh, my God--my God!" cried the old man, covering his face with his hands, swaying from side to side in his chair like a man tortured with agony and remorse. At last he lifted a face that had grown more pinched and yellow within the last few minutes.

"I can tell you nothing," he said, moistening his parched lips.

"You mean that you _will_ tell me nothing, for I see plainly that you know everything."

"I knew nothing of any explosion until you spoke of it. What have I to do with the Treasury or the Government?"

"That is just what I want to know."

"It is absurd. I am no conspirator, but a man of learning."

"Then you have nothing to fear, Herr Seigfried. If you are innocent, why are you so loth to give me any assistance in this matter?"

"It has nothing to do with me. I am a scientist--I am a scientist. All I wish is to be left alone with my studies. I have nothing to do with governments or newspapers, or anything belonging to them."

Jennie sat tracing a pattern on the dusty floor with the point of her parasol. She spoke very quietly:--

"The pencilled line which you drew on the map of Vienna passed through the Treasury building; the centre of the circle was this garret. Why did you draw that pencilled semi-circle? Why were you anxious that I should not see you had done so? Why did you destroy the map?"

Professor Seigfried sat there looking at her with dropped jaw, but he made no reply.

"If you will excuse my saying so," the girl went on, "you are acting very childishly. It is evident to me that you are no criminal, yet if the Director of Police had been in my place he would have arrested you long ago, and that merely because of your own foolish actions."

"The map proved nothing," he said at last, haltingly, "and besides, both you and the Director will now have some difficulty in finding it."

"That is further proof of your folly. The Director doesn't need to find it. I am here to testify that I saw the map, saw the curved line passing through the Treasury, and saw you destroy what you thought was an incriminating piece of evidence. It would be much better if you would deal as frankly with me as I have done with you. Then I shall give you the best advice I can--if my advice will be of any assistance to you."

"Yes, and publish it to all the world."

"It will have to be published to all the world in any case, for, if I leave here without full knowledge, I will simply go to the police office and there tell what I have learned in this room."

"And if I do speak, you will still go to the Director of the Police and tell him what you have discovered."

"No, I give you my word that I will not."

"What guarantee have I of that?" asked the old man suspiciously.

"No guarantee at all except my word!"

"Will you promise not to print in your paper what I tell you?"

"No, I cannot promise that!"

"Still, the newspaper doesn't matter," continued the scientist. "The story would be valueless to you, because no one would believe it. There is little use in printing a story in a newspaper that will be laughed at, is there? However, I think you are honest, otherwise you would have promised not to print a line of what I tell you, and then I should have known you were lying. It was as easy to promise that as to say you would not tell the Director of Police. I thought at first some scientific rival had sent you here to play the spy on me, and learn what I was doing. I assure you I heard nothing about the explosion you speak of, yet I was certain it had occurred somewhere along that line which I drew on the map. I had hoped it was not serious, and begun to believe it was not. The anxiety of the last month has nearly driven me insane, and, as you say quite truly, my actions have been childish." The old man in his excitement had risen from his chair and was now pacing up and down the room, running his fingers distractedly through his long white hair, and talking more to himself than to his auditor.

Jennie had edged her chair nearer to the door, and had made no protest against his rising, fearing to interrupt his flow of talk and again arouse his suspicions.

"I have no wish to protect my inventions. I have never taken out a patent in my life. What I discover I give freely to the world, but I will not be robbed of my reputation as a scientist. I want my name to go down to posterity among those of the great discoverers. You talked just now of going to the police and telling them what you knew. Foolish creature! You could no more have gone to the central police office without my permission, or against my will, than you could go to the window and whistle back those bits of paper I scattered to the winds. Before you reached the bottom of the stairs I could have laid Vienna

in a mass of ruins. Yes, I could in all probability have blown up the entire Empire of Austria. The truth is, that I do not know the limit of my power, nor dare I test it."

"Oh, this is a madman!" thought Jennie, as she edged still nearer to the door. The old man paused in his walk and turned fiercely upon her.

"You don't believe me?" he said.

"No, I do not," she answered, the colour leaving her cheeks.

The aged wizard gave utterance to a hideous chuckle. He took from one of his numerous shelves a hammer-head without the handle, and for a moment Jennie thought he was going to attack her; but he merely handed the metal to her and said,--

"Break that in two. Place it between your palms and grind it to powder."

"You know that is absurd; I cannot do it."

"Why can't you do it?"

"Because it is of steel."

"That is no reason. Why can't you do it?"

He glared at her fiercely over his glasses, and she saw in his wild eye all the enthusiasm of an instructor enlightening a pupil.

"I'll tell you why you can't do it; because every minute particle of it is held together by an enormous force. It may be heated red-hot and beaten into this shape and that, but still the force hangs on as tenaciously as the grip of a giant. Now suppose I had some substance, a drop of which, placed on that piece of iron, would release the force which holds the particles together--what would happen?"

"I don't know," replied Jennie.

"Oh, yes you do!" cried the Professor impatiently; "but you are like every other woman--you won't take the trouble to think. What would happen is this. The force that held the particles together would be released, and the hammer would fall to powder like that gold you showed me. The explosion that followed, caused by the sudden release of the power, would probably wreck this room and extinguish both our lives. You understand that, do you not?"

"Yes, I think I do."

"Well, here is something you won't understand, and probably won't believe when you hear it. There is but one force in this world and but one particle of matter. There is only one element, which is the basis of everything. All the different shapes and conditions of things that we see are caused by a mere variation of that force in conjunction with numbers of that particle. Am I getting beyond your depth?"

"I am afraid you are, Professor."

"Of course; I know what feeble brains the average woman is possessed of; still, try and keep that in your mind. Now listen to this. I have

discovered how to disunite that force and that particle. I can, with a touch, fling loose upon this earth a giant whose strength is irresistible and immeasurable."

"Then why object to making your discovery public?"

"In the first place, because there are still a thousand things and more to be learned along such a line of investigation. The moment a man announces his discoveries, he is first ridiculed, then, when the truth of what he affirms is proven, there rise in every part of the world other men who say that they knew all about it ten years ago, and will prove it too--at least, far enough to delude a gullible world; in the second because I am a humane man, I hesitate to spread broadcast a knowledge that would enable any fool to destroy the universe. Then there is a third reason. There is another who, I believe, has discovered how to make this force loosen its grip on the particle--that is Keely, of Philadelphia, in the United States--"

"What! You don't mean the Keely motor man?" cried Jennie, laughing. "That arrant humbug! Why, all the papers in the world have exposed his ridiculous pretensions; he has done nothing but spend other people's money."

"Yes, the newspapers have ridiculed him. Human beings have, since the beginning of the world, stoned their prophets. Nevertheless, he has liberated a force that no gauge made by man can measure. He has been boastful, if you like, and has said that with a teacupful of water he would drive a steamship across the Atlantic. I have been silent, working away with my eye on him, and he has been working away with his eye on me, for each knows what the other is doing. If either of us discovers how to control this force, then that man's name will go down to posterity for ever. He has not yet been able to do it; neither have I. There is still another difference between us. He appears to be able to loosen that force in his own presence; I can only do it at a distance. All my experiments lately have been in the direction of making modifications with this machine, so as to liberate the force within the compass, say, of this room; but the problem has baffled me. The invisible rays which this machine sends out, and which will penetrate stone, iron, wood, or any other substance, must unite at a focus, and I have not been able to bring that focus nearer me than something over half a mile. Last summer I went to an uninhabited part of Switzerland and there continued my experiments. I blew up at will rocks and boulders on the mountain sides, the distances varying from a mile to half a mile. I examined the results of the disintegration, and when you came in and showed me that gold, I recognized at once that someone had discovered the secret I have been trying to fathom for the last ten years. I thought that perhaps you had come from Keely. I am now convinced that the explosion you speak of in the Treasury was caused by myself. This machine, which you so recklessly threatened to throw out of the window, accidentally slipped from its support when I was working here some time after midnight on the seventeenth. I placed it immediately as you see it now, where it throws its rays into mid-air, and is consequently harmless; but I knew an explosion must have taken place in Vienna somewhere within the radius of half a mile. I drew the pencilled semi-circle that you saw on the map of Vienna, for in my excitement in placing the machine upright I had not noticed exactly where it had pointed, but I knew that, along the line I had drawn, an explosion must have occurred, and could only hope that it had not been a serious one, which it seems it was. I waited and waited, hardly daring to leave my

attic, but hearing no news of any disaster, I was torn between the anxiety that would naturally come to any humane man in my position who did not wish to destroy life, and the fear that, if nothing had occurred, I had not actually made the discovery I thought I had made. You spoke of my actions being childish; but when I realized that I had myself been the cause of the explosion, a fear of criminal prosecution came over me. Not that I should object to imprisonment if they would allow me to continue my experiments; but that, doubtless, they would not do, for the authorities know nothing of science, and care less."

In spite of her initial scepticism, Jennie found herself gradually coming to believe in the efficiency of the harmless-looking mechanism of glass and iron which she saw on the table before her, and a sensation of horror held her spellbound as she gazed at it. Its awful possibilities began slowly to develop in her mind, and she asked breathlessly,--"What would happen if you were to turn that machine and point it towards the centre of the earth?"

"I told you what would happen. Vienna would lie in ruins, and possibly the whole Austrian Empire, and perhaps some adjoining countries would become a mass of impalpable dust. It may be that the world itself would dissolve. I cannot tell what the magnitude of the result might be, for I have not dared to risk the experiment."

"Oh, this is too frightful to think about," she cried. "You must destroy the machine, Professor, and you must never make another."

"What! And give up the hope that my name will descend to posterity?"

"Professor Seigfried, when once this machine becomes known to the world, there will be no posterity for your name to descend to. With the present hatred of nation against nation, with different countries full of those unimprisoned maniacs whom we call Jingo--men preaching the hatred of one people against another--how long do you think the world will last when once such knowledge is abroad in it?"

The Professor looked longingly at the machine he had so slowly and painfully constructed.

"It would be of much use to humanity if it were but benevolently employed. With the coal fields everywhere diminishing, it would supply a motive force for the universe that would last through the ages."

"Professor Seigfried," exclaimed Jennie earnestly, "when the Lord permits a knowledge of that machine to become common property, it is His will that the end of the world shall come."

The Professor said nothing, but stood with deeply wrinkled brow, gazing earnestly at the mechanism. In his hand was the hammer-head which he had previously given to the girl; his arm went up and down as if he were estimating its weight; then suddenly, without a word of warning, he raised it and sent it crashing through the machine, whose splintering glass fell with a musical tinkle on the floor.

Jennie gave a startled cry, and with a low moan the Professor struggled to his chair and fell, rather than sat down, in it. A ghastly pallor overspread his face, and the girl in alarm ran again to the cupboard, poured out some brandy and offered it to him, then tried to pour it down his throat, but his tightly set teeth resisted her efforts. She chafed

his rigid hands, and once he opened his eyes, slowly shaking his head.

"Try to sip this brandy," she said, seeing his jaws relax.

"It is useless," he murmured with difficulty. "My life was in the instrument, as brittle as the glass. I have--"

He could say no more. Jennie went swiftly downstairs to the office of a physician, on the first floor, which she had noticed as she came up.

The medical man, who knew of the philosopher, but was not personally acquainted with him, for the Professor had few friends, went up the steps three at a time, and Jennie followed him more slowly. He met the girl at the door of the attic.

"It is useless," he said. "Professor Seigfried is dead; and it is my belief that in his taking away Austria has lost her greatest scientist."

"I am sure of it," answered the girl, with trembling voice; "but perhaps after all it is for the best."

"I doubt that," said the doctor. "I never feel so like quarrelling with Providence as when some noted man is removed right in the midst of his usefulness."

"I am afraid," replied Jennie solemnly, "that we have hardly reached a state of development that would justify us in criticizing the wisdom of Providence. In my own short life I have seen several instances where it seemed that Providence intervened for the protection of His creatures; and even the sudden death of Professor Seigfried does not shake my belief that Providence knows best."

She turned quickly away and went down the stairs in some haste. At the outer door she heard the doctor call down, "I must have your name and address, please."

But Jennie did not pause to answer. She had no wish to undergo cross-examination at an inquest, knowing that if she told the truth she would not be believed, while if she attempted to hide it, unexpected personal inconvenience might arise from such a course. She ran rapidly to the street corner, hailed a fiacre and drove to a distant part of the city; then she dismissed the cab, went to a main thoroughfare, took a tramcar to the centre of the town, and another cab to the Palace.

CHAPTER XVII.

JENNIE ENGAGES A ROOM IN A SLEEPING CAR.

Jennie had promised Professor Seigfried not to communicate with the Director of Police, and she now wondered whether it would be breaking her word, or not, if she let that official know the result of her investigation, when it would make no difference, one way or the other, to the Professor. If Professor Seigfried could have foreseen his own sudden death, would he not, she asked herself, have preferred her to make public all she knew of him? for had he not constantly reiterated

that fame, and the consequent transmission of his name to posterity, was what he worked for? Then there was this consideration: if the Chief of Police was not told how the explosion had been caused, his fruitless search would go futilely on, and, doubtless, in the course of police inquiry, many innocent persons would be arrested, put to inconvenience and expense, and there was even a chance that one or more, who had absolutely nothing to do with the affair, might be imprisoned for life. She resolved, therefore, to tell the Director of the Police all she knew, which she would not have done had Professor Seigfried been alive. She accordingly sent a messenger for the great official, and just as she had begun to relate to the impatient Princess what had happened, he was announced. The three of them held convention in Jennie's drawing-room with locked doors.

"I am in a position," began Jennie, "to tell you how the explosion in the Treasury was caused and who caused it; but before doing so you must promise to grant me two favours, each of which is in your power to bestow without inconvenience."

"What are they?" asked the Director of Police cautiously.

"To tell what they are is to tell part of my story. You must first promise blindly, and afterwards keep your promise faithfully."

"Those are rather unusual terms, Miss Baxter," said the Chief; "but I accede to them, the more willingly as we have found that all the gold is still in the Treasury, as you said it was."

"Very well, then, the first favour is that I shall not be called to give testimony when an inquest is held on the body of Professor Carl Seigfried."

"You amaze me!" cried the Director; "how did you know he was dead? I had news of it only a moment before I left my office."

"I was with him when he died," said Jennie simply, which statement drew forth an exclamation of surprise from both the Princess and the Director. "My next request is that you destroy utterly a machine which stands on a table near the centre of the Professor's room. Perhaps the instrument is already disabled--I believe it is--but, nevertheless, I shall not rest content until you have seen that every vestige of it is made away with, because the study of what is left of it may enable some other scientist to put it in working order again. I entreat you to attend to this matter yourself. I will go with you, if you wish me to, and point out the instrument in case it has been moved from its position."

"The room is sealed," said the Director, "and nothing will be touched until I arrive there. What is the nature of this instrument?"

"It is of a nature so deadly and destructive that, if it got into the hands of an anarchist, he could, alone, lay the city of Vienna in ruins."

"Good heavens!" cried the horrified official, whose bane was the anarchist, and Jennie, in mentioning this particular type of criminal, had builded better than she knew. If she had told him that the Professor's invention might enable Austria to conquer all the surrounding nations, there is every chance that the machine would have

been carefully preserved.

"The explosion in the Treasury vaults," continued Jennie, "was accidentally caused by this instrument, although the machine at the moment was in a garret half a mile away. You saw the terrible effect of that explosion; imagine, then, the destruction it would cause in the hands of one of those anarchists who are so reckless of consequences."

"I shall destroy the instrument with my own hands," asserted the Director fervently, mopping his pallid brow.

Jennie then went on, to the increasing astonishment of the Princess and the Director, and related every detail of her interview with the late professor Carl Seigfried.

"I shall go at once and annihilate that machine," said the Director, rising when the recital was finished. "I shall see to that myself. Then, after the inquest, I shall give an order that everything in the attic is to be destroyed. I wish that every scientific man on the face of the earth could be safely placed behind prison bars."

"I am afraid that wouldn't do much good," replied Jennie, "unless you could prevent chemicals being smuggled in. The scientists would probably reduce your prison to powder, and walk calmly out through the dust."

Mr. Hardwick had told Jennie that if she solved the Vienna mystery she would make a European reputation for the Daily Bugle. Jennie did more than was expected of her, yet the European reputation which the Bugle established was not one to be envied. It is true that the account printed of the cause of the explosion, dramatically completed with the Professor's tragically sudden death, caused a great sensation in London. The comic papers of the week were full of illustrations showing the uses to which the Professor's instrument might be put. To say that any sane man in England believed a word of the article would be to cast an undeserved slight upon the intelligence of the British public. No one paused to think that if a newspaper had published an account of what could be done by the Roentgen rays, without being able to demonstrate practically the truth of the assertions made, the contribution would have been laughed at. If some years ago a newspaper had stated that a man in York listened to the voice of a friend at that moment standing in London, and was not only able to hear what his friend said, but could actually recognize the voice speaking in an ordinary tone, and then if the paper had added that, unfortunately, the instrument which accomplished this had been destroyed, people would have denounced the sensational nature of modern journalism.

Letters poured in upon the editor, saying that while, as a general rule, the writers were willing to stand the ordinary lie of commerce daily printed in the sheet, there was a limit to their credulity and they objected to be taken for drivelling imbeciles. To complete the discomfiture of the Daily Bugle, the Government of Austria published an official statement, which Reuter and the special correspondents scattered broadcast over the earth. The statement was written in that calm, serious, and consistent tone which diplomatists use when uttering a falsehood of more than ordinary dimensions.

Irresponsible rumours had been floating about (the official proclamation began) to the effect that there had been an explosion in the Treasury at Vienna. It had been stated that a large quantity of gold had been

stolen, and that a disaster of some kind had occurred in the Treasury vaults. Then a ridiculous story had been printed which asserted that Professor Seigfried, one of Austria's honoured dead, had in some manner that savoured of the Black Art, encompassed this wholesale destruction. The Government now begged to make the following declarations: First, not a penny had been stolen out of the Treasury; second, the so-called war-chest was intact; third, the two hundred million florins reposed securely within the bolted doors of the Treasury vaults; fourth, the coins were not, as had been alleged, those belonging to various countries, which was a covert intimation that Austria had hostile intent against one or the other of those friendly nations. The whole coinage in this falsely named war-chest, which was not a war-chest at all, but merely the receptacle of a reserve fund which Austria possessed, was entirely in Austrian coinage; fifth, in order that these sensational and disquieting scandals should be set at rest, the Government announced that it intended to weigh this gold upon a certain date, and it invited representatives of the Press, from Russia, Germany, France, and England to witness this weighing.

The day after this troy-weight function had taken place in Vienna, long telegraphic accounts of it appeared in the English press, and several solemn leading articles were put forward in the editorial columns, which, without mentioning the name of the *Daily Bugle*, deplored the voracity of the sensational editor, who respected neither the amity which should exist between friendly nations, nor the good name of the honoured and respected dead, in his wolfish hunt for the daily scandal. Nothing was too high-spiced or improbable for him to print. He traded on the supposed gullibility of a fickle public. But, fortunately, in the long run, these staid sheets asserted, such actions recoiled upon the head of him who promulgated them. Sensational journals merited and received the scathing contempt of all honest men. Later on, one of the reviews had an article entitled "Some Aspects of Modern Journalism," which battered in the head of the *Daily Bugle* as with a sledge hammer, and in one of the quarterlies a professor at Cambridge showed the absurdity of the alleged invention from a scientific point of view.

"I swear," cried Mr. Hardwick, as he paced up and down his room, "that I shall be more careful after this in the handling of truth; it is a most dangerous thing to meddle with. If you tell the truth about a man, you are mulcted in a libel suit, and if you tell the truth about a nation, the united Press of the country are down upon you. Ah, well, it makes the battle of life all the more interesting, and we are baffled to fight better, as Browning says."

The editor had sent for Miss Baxter, and she now sat by his desk while he paced nervously to and fro. The doors were closed and locked so that they might not be interrupted, and she knew by the editor's manner that something important was on hand. Jennie had returned to London after a month's stay in Vienna, and had been occupied for a week at her old routine work in the office.

"Now, Miss Baxter," said the editor, when he had proclaimed his distrust of the truth as a workable material in journalism, "I have a plan to set before you, and when you know what it is, I am quite prepared to hear you refuse to have anything to do with it. And, remember, if you do undertake it, there is but one chance in a million of your succeeding. It is on this one chance that I propose now to send you to St. Petersburg--"

"To St. Petersburg!" echoed the girl in dismay.

"Yes," said the editor, mistaking the purport of her ejaculation, "it is a very long trip, but you can travel there in great comfort, and I want you to spare no expense in obtaining for yourself every luxury that the various railway lines afford during your journey to St. Petersburg and back."

"And what am I to go to St. Petersburg for?" murmured Jennie faintly.

"Merely for a letter. Here is what has happened, and what is happening. I shall mention no names, but at present a high and mighty personage in Russia, who is friendly to Great Britain, has written a private letter, making some proposals to a certain high and mighty personage in England, who is friendly to Russia. This communication is entirely unofficial; neither Government is supposed to know anything at all about it. As a matter of fact, the Russian Government have a suspicion, and the British Government have a certainty, that such a document will shortly be in transit. Nothing may come of it, or great things may come of it. Now on the night of the 21st, in one of the sleeping cars leaving St. Petersburg by the Nord Express for Berlin, there will travel a special messenger having this letter in his possession. I want you to take passage by that same train and secure a compartment near the messenger, if possible. This messenger will be a man in whom the respective parties to the negotiation have implicit confidence. I wish I knew his name, but I don't; still, the chances are that he is leaving London for St. Petersburg about this time, and so you might keep your eyes open on your journey there, for, if you discovered him to be your fellow-passenger, it might perhaps make the business that comes after easier. You see this letter," continued the editor, taking from a drawer in his desk a large envelope, the flap of which was secured by a great piece of stamped sealing-wax. "This merely contains a humble ordinary copy of to-day's issue of the Bugle, but in outside appearance it might be taken for a duplicate of the letter which is to leave St. Petersburg on the 21st. Now, what I would like you to do is to take this envelope in your hand-bag, and if, on the journey back to London, you have an opportunity of securing the real letter, and leaving this in its place, you will have accomplished the greatest service you have yet done for the paper."

"Oh!" cried Jennie, rising, "I couldn't think of that, Mr. Hardwick--I couldn't think of doing it. It is nothing short of highway robbery!"

"I know it looks like that," pleaded Hardwick; "but listen to me. If I were going to open the letter and use its contents, then you might charge me with instigating theft. The fact is, the letter will not be delayed; it will reach the hands of the high and mighty personage in England quite intact. The only difference is that you will be its bearer instead of the messenger they send for it."

"You expect to open the letter, then, in some surreptitious way--some way that will not be noticed afterwards? Oh, I couldn't do it, Mr. Hardwick."

"My dear girl, you are jumping at conclusions. I shall amaze you when I tell you that I know already practically what the contents of that letter are."

"Then what is the use of going to all this expense and trouble trying to steal it?"

"Don't say 'steal it,' Miss Baxter. I'll tell you what my motive is. There is an official in England who has gone out of his way to throw obstacles in mine. This is needless and irritating, for generally I manage to get the news I am in quest of; but in several instances, owing to his opposition, I have not only not got the news, but other papers have. Now, since the general raking we have had over this Austrian business, quite aside from the fact that we published the exact truth, this stupid old official duffer has taken it upon himself to be exceedingly sneering and obnoxious to me, and I confess I want to take him down a peg. He hasn't any idea that I know as much about this business as I do--in fact, he thinks it is an absolute secret; yet, if I liked, I could to-morrow nullify all the arrangements by simply publishing what is already in my possession, which action on my part would create a furor in this country, and no less of a furor in Russia. For the sake of amity between nations, which I am accused of disregarding, I hold my hand.

"Now, if you get possession of that communication, I want you to telegraph to me while you are en route for London, and I will meet you at the terminus; then I shall take the document direct to this official, even before the regular messenger has time to reach him. I shall say to the official, 'There is the message from the high personage in Russia to the high personage in England. If you want the document, I will give it to you, but it must be understood that you are to be a little less friendly to certain other newspapers, and a little more friendly to mine, in future.'"

"And suppose he refuses your terms?"

"He won't refuse them; but if he does I shall hand him the envelope just the same."

"Well, honestly, Mr. Hardwick, I don't think your scheme worth the amount of money it will cost, and, besides, the chance of my getting hold of the packet, which will doubtless be locked safely within a despatch box, and constantly under the eye of the messenger, is most remote."

"I am more than willing to risk all that if you will undertake the journey. You speak lightly of my scheme, but that is merely because you do not understand the situation. Everything you have heretofore done has been of temporary advantage to the paper; but if you carry this off, I expect the benefit to the Bugle will be lasting. It will give me a standing with certain officials that I have never before succeeded in getting. In the first place, it will make them afraid of me, and that of itself is a powerful lever when we are trying to get information which they are anxious to give to some other paper."

"Very well, Mr. Hardwick, I will try; though I warn you to expect nothing but failure. In everything else I have endeavoured to do, I have felt confident of success from the beginning. In this instance I am as sure I shall fail."

"As I told you, Miss Baxter, the project is so difficult that your failure, if you do fail, will merely prove it to have been impossible, because I am sure that if anyone on earth could carry the project to success, you are that person; and, furthermore, I am very much obliged to you for consenting to attempt such a mission."

And thus it was that Jennie Baxter found herself in due time in the great capital of the north, with a room in the Hotel de l'Europe overlooking the Nevski Prospect. In ordinary circumstances she would have enjoyed a visit to St. Petersburg; but now she was afraid to venture out, being under the apprehension that at any moment she might meet Lord Donal Stirling face to face, and that he would recognize her; therefore she remained discreetly in her room, watching the strange street scenes from her window. She found herself scrutinizing everyone who had the appearance of being an Englishman, and she had to confess to a little qualm of disappointment when the person in question proved to be some other than Lord Donal; in fact, during her short stay at St. Petersburg she saw nothing of the young man.

Jennie went, on the evening of her arrival, to the offices of the Sleeping Car Company, to secure a place in one of the carriages that left at six o'clock on the evening of the 21st. Her initial difficulty met her when she learned there were several sleeping cars on that train, and she was puzzled to know which to select. She stood there, hesitating, with the plans of the carriages on the table before her.

"You have ample choice," said the clerk; "seats are not usually booked so long in advance, and only two places have been taken in the train, so far."

"I should like to be in a carriage containing some English people," said the girl, not knowing what excuse to give for her hesitation.

"Then let me recommend this car, for one compartment has been taken by the British Embassy--Room C, near the centre, marked with a cross."

"Ah, well, I will take the compartment next to it--Room D, isn't it?" said Jennie.

"Oh, I am sorry to say that also has been taken. Those are the two which are bespoke. I will see under what name Room D has been booked. Probably its occupant is English also. But I can give you Room B, on the other side of the one reserved by the Embassy. It is a two-berth room, Nos. 5 and 6."

"That will do quite as well," said Jennie.

The clerk looked up the order book, and then said,--

"It is not recorded here by whom Room D was reserved. As a usual thing," he continued, lowering his voice almost to a whisper and looking furtively over his shoulder, "when no name is marked down, that means the Russian police. So, you see, by taking the third room you will not only be under the shadow of the British Embassy, but also under the protection of Russia. Do you wish one berth only, or the whole room? It is a two-berth compartment."

"I desire the whole room, if you please."

She paid the price and departed, wondering if the other room had really been taken by the police, and whether the authorities were so anxious for the safety of the special messenger that they considered it necessary to protect him to the frontier. If, in addition to the natural precautions of the messenger, there was added the watchfulness of one or

two suspicious Russian policemen, then would her difficult enterprise become indeed impossible. On the other hand, the ill-paid policemen might be amenable to the influence of money, and as she was well supplied with the coin of the realm, their presence might be a help rather than a hindrance. All in all, she had little liking for the task she had undertaken, and the more she thought of it, the less it commended itself to her. Nevertheless, having pledged her word to the editor, if failure came it would be through no fault of hers.

CHAPTER XVIII.

JENNIE ENDURES A TERRIBLE NIGHT JOURNEY.

Jennie went early to the station on the night of the 21st and entered the sleeping car as soon as she was allowed to do so. The conductor seemed unaccountably flustered at her anxiety to get to her room, and he examined her ticket with great care; then, telling her to follow him, brought her to Room B, in which were situated berths 5 and 6, upper and lower. The berths were not made up, and the room showed one seat, made to accommodate two persons. The conductor went out on the platform again, and Jennie, finding herself alone in the carriage, walked up and down the narrow passage-way at the side, to get a better idea of her surroundings.

[Illustration: PLAN OF SLEEPING CAR.]

Room C, next to her own, was the one taken by the British Embassy. Room D, still further on, was the one that appeared to have been retained by the police. She stood for a few moments by the broad plate-glass window that lined the passage and looked out at the crowded platform. For a time she watched the conductor, who appeared to be gazing anxiously towards the direction from which passengers streamed, as if looking for someone in particular. Presently a big man, a huge overcoat belted round him, with a stern bearded face--looking, the girl thought, typically Russian--strode up to the conductor and spoke earnestly with him. Then the two turned to the steps of the car, and Jennie fled to her narrow little room, closing the door all but about an inch. An instant later the two men came in, speaking together in French. The larger man had a gruff voice and spoke the language in a way that showed it was not native to him.

"When did you learn that he had changed his room?" asked the man with the gruff voice.

"Only this afternoon," replied the conductor.

"Did you bore holes between that and the adjoining compartment?"

"Yes, Excellency; but Azof did not tell me whether you wanted the holes at the top or the bottom."

"At the bottom, of course," replied the Russian. "Any fool might have known that. The gas must rise, not fall; then when he feels its effect and tumbles down, he will be in a denser layer of it, whereas, if we put it in the top, and he fell down, he would come into pure air, and so

might make his escape. You did not bore the hole over the top berth, I hope?"

"Yes, Excellency, but I bored one at the bottom also."

"Oh, very well, we can easily stop the one at the top. Have you fastened the window? for the first thing these English do is to open a window."

"The window is securely fastened, your Excellency, unless he breaks the glass."

"Oh, he will not think of doing that until it is too late. The English are a law-abiding people. How many other passengers are there in the car?"

"Oh, I forgot to tell you, Excellency, the Room B has been taken by an English lady, who is there now."

"Ten thousand devils!" cried the Russian in a hoarse whisper. "Why did you not say that before?"

The voices now fell to so low a murmur that Jennie could not distinguish the words spoken. A moment later there was a rap at her door, and she had presence of mind enough to get in the further corner, and say in a sleepy voice,--

"Come in!"

The conductor opened the door.

"_Votre billet, s'il vous plait, madame." _

"Can't you speak English?" asked Jennie.

The conductor merely repeated his question, and as Jennie was shaking her head the big Russian looked over the conductor's shoulder and said in passable English,--

"He is asking for your ticket, madam. Do you not speak French?" In answer to this direct question Jennie, fumbling in her purse for her ticket, replied,--

"I speak English, and I have already shown him my ticket." She handed her broad-sheet sleeping-car ticket to the Russian, who had pushed the conductor aside and now stood within the compartment.

"There has been a mistake," he said. "Room C is the one that has been reserved for you."

"I am sure there isn't any mistake," said Jennie. "I booked berths 5 and 6. See, there are the numbers," pointing to the metallic plates by the door, "and here are the same numbers on the ticket."

The Russian shook his head.

"The mistake has been made at the office of the Sleeping Car Company. I am a director of the Company."

"Oh, are you?" asked Jennie innocently. "Is Room C as comfortable as

this one?"

"It is a duplicate of this one, madam, and is more comfortable, because it is nearer the centre of the car."

"Well, there is no mistake about my reserving the two berths, is there?"

"Oh, no, madam, the room is entirely at your disposal."

"Well, then, in that case," said Jennie, "I have no objection to making a change."

She knew that she would be compelled to change, no matter what her ticket recorded, so she thought it best to play the simple maiden abroad, and make as little fuss as possible about the transfer. She had to rearrange the car in her mind. She was now in Room C, which had been first reserved by the British Embassy. It was evident that at the last moment the messenger had decided to take Room A, a four-berth compartment at the end of the car. The police then would occupy Room B, which she had first engaged, and, from the bit of conversation she had overheard, Jennie was convinced that they intended to kill or render insensible the messenger who bore the important letter. The police were there not to protect, but to attack. This amazing complication in the plot concentrated all the girl's sympathies on the unfortunate man who was messenger between two great personages, even though he travelled apparently under the protection of the British Embassy at St. Petersburg. The fact, to put it baldly, that she had intended to rob him herself, if opportunity occurred, rose before her like an accusing ghost. "I shall never undertake anything like this again," she cried to herself, "never, never," and now she resolved to make reparation to the man she had intended to injure. She would watch for him until he came down the passage, and then warn him by relating what she had heard. She had taken off her hat on entering the room; now she put it on hurriedly, thrusting a long pin through it. As she stood up, there was a jolt of the train that caused her to sit down again somewhat hurriedly. Passing her window she saw the lights of the station; the train was in motion. "Thank Heaven!" she cried fervently, "he is too late. Those plotting villains will have all their trouble for nothing."

She glanced upwards towards the ceiling and noticed a hole about an inch in diameter bored in the thin wooden partition between her compartment and the next. Turning to the wall behind her she saw that another hole had been bored in a similar position through to Room B. The car had been pretty thoroughly prepared for the work in hand, and Jennie laughed softly to herself as she pictured the discomfiture of the conspirators. The train was now rushing through the suburbs of St. Petersburg, when Jennie was startled by hearing a stranger's voice say in French,--

"Conductor, I have Room A; which end of the car is that?"

"This way, Excellency," replied the conductor. Everyone seemed to be "Excellency" with him. A moment later, Jennie, who had again risen to her feet, horrified to learn that, after all, the messenger had come, heard the door of his room click. Everything was silent save the purring murmur of the swiftly moving train. She stood there for a few moments tense with excitement, then bethought herself of the hole between her present compartment and the one she had recently left. She sprang up on the seat, and placing her eye with some caution at the hole, peered through. First she thought the compartment was empty, then noticed there

had been placed at the end by the window a huge cylinder that reached nearly to the ceiling of the room. The lamp above was burning brightly, and she could see every detail of the compartment, except towards the floor. As she gazed a man's back slowly rose; he appeared to have been kneeling on the floor, and he held in his hand the loop of a rubber tube. Peering downwards, she saw that it was connected with the cylinder, and that it was undoubtedly pouring whatever gas the cylinder contained through the hole into Room A. For a moment she had difficulty in repressing a shriek; but realizing how perfectly helpless she was, even if an alarm were raised, she fought down all exclamation. She saw that the man who was regulating the escape of gas was not the one who had spoken to the conductor. Then, fearing that he might turn his head and see her eye at the small aperture, she reached up and covered the lamp, leaving her own room in complete darkness. The double covering, which closed over the semi-globular lamp like an eyelid, kept every ray of light from penetrating into the compartment she occupied.

As Jennie turned to her espionage again, she heard a blow given to the door in Room A that made it chatter, then there was a sound of a heavy fall on the floor. The door of Room B was flung open, the head of the first Russian was thrust in, and he spoke in his own language a single gruff word. His assistant then turned the cock and shut off the gas from the cylinder. The door of Room B was instantly shut again, and Jennie heard the rattle of the key as Room A was being unlocked.

Jennie jumped down from her perch, threw off her hat, and, with as little noise as possible, slid her door back an inch or two. The conductor had unlocked the door of Room A, the tall Russian standing beside him saying in a whisper,--

"Never mind the man, he'll recover the moment you open the door and window; get the box. Hold your nose with your fingers and keep your mouth shut. There it is, that black box in the corner."

The conductor made a dive into the room, and came out with an ordinary black despatch-box.

The policeman seemed well provided with the materials for his burglarious purpose. He selected a key from a jingling bunch, tried it; selected another; then a third, and the lid of the despatch-box was thrown back. He took out a letter so exactly the duplicate of the one Jennie possessed that she clutched her own document to see if it were still in her pocket. The Russian put the envelope between his knees and proceeded to lock the box. His imagination had not gone to any such refinement as the placing of a dummy copy where the original had been. Quick as thought Jennie acted. She slid open the door quietly and stepped out into the passage. So intent were the two men on their work that neither saw her. The tall man gave the box back to the conductor, then took the letter from between his knees, holding it in his right hand, when Jennie, as if swayed by the motion of the car, lurched against him, and, with a sleight of hand that would have made her reputation on a necromantic stage, she jerked the letter from the amazed and frightened man; at the same moment allowing the bogus document to drop on the floor of the car from her other hand. The conductor had just emerged from Room A, holding his nose and looking comical enough as he stood there in that position, amazed at the sudden apparition of the lady. The Russian struck down the conductor's fingers with his right hand, and by a swift motion of the left closed the door of Compartment A, all of which happened in a tenth of the time taken to tell it.

"Oh, pardon me!" cried Jennie in English, "I'm afraid a lurch of the car threw me against you."

The Russian, before answering, cast a look at the floor and saw the large envelope lying there with its seal uppermost. He quietly placed his huge foot upon it, and then said, with an effort at politeness,--

"It is no matter, madam. I fear I am so bulky that I have taken up most of the passage."

"It is very good of you to excuse me," said Jennie; "I merely came out to ask the conductor if he would make up my berth. Would you be good enough to translate that to him?"

The Russian surlily told the conductor to attend to the wants of the lady. The conductor muttered a reply, and that reply the Russian translated.

"He will be at your service in a few moments, madam. He must first make up the berth of the gentleman in Room A."

"Oh, thank you very much," returned Jennie. "I am in no hurry; any time within the hour will do."

With that she retired again into her compartment, the real letter concealed in the folds of her dress, the bogus one on the floor under the Russian's foot. She closed the door tightly, then, taking care that she was not observed through either of the holes the conductor had bored in the partition, she swiftly placed the important document in a deep inside pocket of her jacket. As a general rule, women have inside pockets in their capes, and outside pockets in their jackets; but Jennie, dealing as she did with many documents in the course of her profession, had had this jacket especially made, with its deep and roomy inside pocket. She sat on a corner of the sofa, wondering what was to be the fate of the unfortunate messenger, for, in spite of the sudden shutting of the door by the Russian, she caught a glimpse of the man lying face downwards on the floor of his stifling room. She also had received a whiff of the sweet, heavy gas which had been used, that seemed now to be tincturing the whole atmosphere of the car, especially in the long narrow passage. It was not likely they intended to kill the man, for his death would cause an awkward investigation, while his statement that he had been rendered insensible might easily be denied. As she sat there, the silence disturbed only by the low, soothing rumble of the train, she heard the ring of the metal cylinder against the woodwork of the next compartment. The men were evidently removing their apparatus. A little later the train slowed, finally coming to a standstill, and looking out of the window into the darkness, she found they were stopping at an ill-lighted country station. Covering the light in the ceiling again, the better to see outside, herself, unobserved, she noted the conductor and another man place the bulky cylinder on the platform, without the slightest effort at concealment. The tall Russian stood by and gave curt orders. An instant later the train moved on again, and when well under way there was a rap at her door. When she opened it, the conductor said that he would make up her berth now, if it so pleased her. She stood out in the corridor while this was deftly and swiftly done. She could not restrain her curiosity regarding the mysterious occupant of Room A, and to satisfy it she walked slowly up and down the corridor, her hands behind her, passing and repassing the

open door of her room, and noticing that ever and anon the conductor cast a suspicious eye in her direction.

The door of Room A was partly open, but the shaded lamp in the ceiling left the interior in darkness. There was now no trace of the intoxicating gas in the corridor, and as she passed Room A she noticed that a fresh breeze was blowing through the half open doorway, therefore the window must be up. Once as she passed her own door she saw the conductor engaged in a task which would keep him from looking into the corridor for at least a minute, and in that interval she set her doubts at rest by putting her head swiftly into Room A, and as swiftly withdrawing it. The man had been lifted on to his sofa, and lay with his face towards the wall, his head on a pillow. The despatch-box rested on a corner of the sofa, where, doubtless, he had left it. He was breathing heavily like a man in a drunken sleep; but the air of the room was sweet and fresh, and he would doubtless recover.

Jennie still paced up and down, pondering deeply over what had happened. At first, when she had secured the important document, she had made up her mind to return it to the messenger; but further meditation induced her to change her mind. The messenger had been robbed by the Russian police; he would tell his superiors exactly what had happened, and yet the letter would reach its destination as speedily as if he had brought it himself--as if he had never been touched. Knowing the purpose which Mr. Hardwick had in his mind, Jennie saw that the letter now was of tenfold more value to him than it would have been had she taken it from the messenger. It was evident that the British Embassy, or the messenger himself, had suspicions that an attempt was to be made to obtain the document, otherwise Room C of the sleeping car would not have been changed for Room A at the very last moment. If, then, the editor could say to the official, "The Russian police robbed your messenger in spite of all the precautions that could be taken, and my emissary cozened the Russians; so, you see, I have accomplished what the whole power of the British Government was powerless to effect; therefore it will be wisdom on your part to come to terms with me."

Jennie resolved to relate to Hardwick exactly how she came into possession of the document, and she knew his alert nature well enough to be sure he would make the most of the trump card dealt to him.

"Your room is ready for you," said the conductor in French.

She had the presence of mind enough not to comprehend his phrase until, with a motion of his hand, he explained his meaning. She entered her compartment and closed the door.

Having decided what disposal to make of the important document, there now arose in her mind the disquieting problem whether or not it would be allowed to remain with her. She cogitated over the situation and tried to work out the mental arithmetic of it. Trains were infrequent on the Russian railways, and she had no means of estimating when the burly ruffian who had planned and executed the robbery would get back to St. Petersburg. There was no doubt that he had not the right to open the letter and read its contents; that privilege rested with some higher official in St. Petersburg. The two men had got off at the first stopping place. It was quite possible that they would not reach the capital until next morning, when the Berlin express would be well on its way to the frontier. Once over the frontier she would be safe; but the moment it was found that the purloined envelope merely contained a

copy of an English newspaper, what might not happen? Would the Russian authorities dare telegraph to the frontier to have her searched, or would the big official who had planned the robbery suspect that she, by legerdemain, had become possessed of the letter so much sought for? Even if he did suspect her, he would certainly have craft enough not to admit it. His game would rather be to maintain that this was the veritable document found in the Englishman's despatch-box; and it was more than likely, taking into consideration the change of room at the last moment, which would show the officials the existence of suspicion in the messenger's mind, or in the minds of those who sent him, the natural surmise would be that another messenger had gone with the real document, and that the robbed man was merely a blind to delude the Russian police. In any case, Jennie concluded, there was absolutely nothing to do but to remain awake all night and guard the treasure which good luck had bestowed upon her. She stood up on her bed, about to stuff her handkerchief into the hole bored in the partition, but suddenly paused and came down to the floor again. No, discomfiting as it was to remain in a room under possible espionage, she dared not stop the openings, as that would show she had cognisance of them, and arouse the conductor's suspicion that, after all, she had understood what had been said; whereas, if she left them as they were, the fact of her doing so would be strong confirmation of her ignorance. She took from her bag a scarf, tied one end round her wrist and the other to the door, so that it could not be opened, should she fall asleep, without awakening her. Before entrenching herself thus, she drew the eyelids down over the lamp, and left her room in darkness. Then, if anyone did spy upon her they would not see the dark scarf which united her wrist with the door.

In spite of the danger of her situation she had the utmost difficulty in keeping awake. The rumble of the train had a very somnolent effect, and once or twice she started up, fearing that she had been slumbering. Once she experienced a tightening sensation in her throat, and sprang to the floor, seeing the rising gas somehow made visible, the colour of blood. The scarf drew her to her knees, and for a moment she thought someone clutched her wrist. Panting, she undid the scarf and flooded the room with light. Her heart was beating wildly, but all was still, save the ever-present rumble of the train rushing through the darkness over the boundless plains of Russia. She looked at her tiny watch, it was two o'clock in the morning. She knew then that she must have fallen asleep in spite of her strong resolutions. The letter was still in the inside pocket of her jacket, and all was well at two in the morning. No eye appeared at either of the apertures, so she covered up the light once more and lay down again, sighing to think how rumpled her dainty costume would look in the morning. Now she was resolved not to go to sleep, if force of will could keep her awake. A moment later she was startled by someone beating down the partition with an axe. She sprang up, and again the scarf pulled her back. She untied it from her wrist and noticed that daylight flooded the compartment. This amazed her; how could it be daylight so soon? Had she been asleep again, and was the fancied battering at the door with an axe merely the conclusion of a dream caused by the conductor's knock? After a breathless pause there came a gentle rap on her door, and the voice of the conductor said,--

"Breakfast at Luga, madame, in three-quarters of an hour."

"Very good," she replied in English, her voice trembling with fear. Slowly she untied the scarf from the door and placed it in her handbag. She shivered notwithstanding her effort at self-control, for she knew she had slept through the night, and far into the morning. In agitation

she unbuttoned her jacket. Yes; there was the letter, just where she had placed it. She dare not take it out and examine it, fearing still that she might be watched from some unseen quarter, but "Thank God," she said to herself fervently, "this horrible night is ended. Once over the frontier I am safe." She smoothed and brushed down her dress as well as she was able, and was greatly refreshed by her wash in cold water, which is one of the luxuries, not the least acceptable, on a sleeping car.

CHAPTER XIX.

JENNIE EXPERIENCES THE SURPRISE OF HER LIFE.

At nine o'clock the long train came to a standstill, seventeen minutes late at Luga, and ample time was allowed for a leisurely breakfast in the buffet of the station. The restaurant was thronged with numerous passengers, most of whom seemed hardly yet awake, while many were unkempt and dishevelled, as if they had had little sleep during the night.

Jennie found a small table and sat down beside it, ordering her coffee and rolls from the waiter who came to serve her. Looking round at the cosmopolitan company, and listening to the many languages, whose clash gave a Babel air to the restaurant, Jennie fell to musing on the strange experiences she had encountered since leaving London. It seemed to her she had been taking part in some ghastly nightmare, and she shuddered as she thought of the lawlessness, under cover of law, of this great and despotic empire, where even the ruler was under the surveillance of his subordinates, and could not get a letter out of his own dominion in safety, were he so minded. In her day-dream she became conscious, without noting its application to herself, that a man was standing before her table; then a voice which made her heart stop said,--

"Ah, lost Princess!"

She placed her hand suddenly to her throat, for the catch in her breath seemed to be suffocating her, then looked up and saw Lord Donal Stirling, in the ordinary everyday dress of an English gentleman, as well groomed as if he had come, not from a train, but from his own house. There was a kindly smile on his lips and a sparkle in his eyes, but his face was of ghastly pallor.

"Oh, Lord Donal!" she cried, regarding him with eyes of wonder and fear, "what is wrong with you?"

"Nothing," the young man replied, with an attempt at a laugh; "nothing, now that I have found you, Princess. I have been making a night of it, that's all, and am suffering the consequences in the morning. May I sit down?"

He dropped into a chair on the other side of the table, like a man thoroughly exhausted, unable to stand longer, and went on,--

"Like all dissipated men, I am going to break my fast on stimulants. Waiter," he said, "bring me a large glass of your best brandy."

"And, waiter," interjected Jennie in French, "bring two breakfasts. I suppose it was not a meal that you ordered just now, Lord Donal?"

"I have ordered my breakfast," he said; "still, it pleads in my favour that I do not carry brandy with me, as I ought to do, and so must drink the vile stuff they call their best here."

"You should eat as well," she insisted, taking charge of him as if she had every right to do so.

"All shall be as you say, now that I have the happiness of seeing you sitting opposite me, but don't be surprised if I show a most unappreciative appetite."

"What is the matter?" she asked breathlessly. "You certainly look very ill."

"I have been drugged and robbed," he replied, lowering his voice. "I imagine I came to close quarters with death itself. I have spent a night in Hades, and this morning am barely able to stagger; but the sight of you, Princess--Ah, well, I feel once more that I belong to the land of the living!"

"Please do not call me Princess," said the girl, looking down at the tablecloth.

"Then what am I to call you, Princess?"

"My name is Jennie Baxter," she said in a low voice.

"_Miss_ Jennie Baxter?" he asked eagerly, with emphasis on the first word.

"Miss Jennie Baxter," she answered, still not looking up at him.

He leaned back in his chair and said,--

"Well, this is not such a bad world, after all. To think of meeting you here in Russia! Have you been in St. Petersburg, then?"

"Yes. I am a newspaper woman," explained Jennie hurriedly. "When you met me before, I was there surreptitiously--fraudulently, if you like; I was there to--to write a report of it for my paper. I can never thank you enough, Lord Donal, for your kindness to me that evening."

"Your thanks are belated," said the young man, with a visible attempt at gaiety. "You should have written and acknowledged the kindness you are good enough to say I rendered to you. You knew my address, and etiquette demanded that you should make your acknowledgments."

"I was reluctant to write," said Jennie, a smile hovering round her lips, "fearing my letter might act as a clue. I had no wish to interfere with the legitimate business of Mr. Cadbury Taylor."

"Great heavens!" cried the young man, "how came you to know about that? But of course the Princess von Steinheimer told you of it. She wrote to me charging me with all sorts of wickedness for endeavouring to find you."

"No, Lord Donal, I did not learn it from her. In fact, if you had opened the door of the inner room at Mr. Cadbury Taylor's a little quicker, you would have come upon me, for I was the assistant who tried to persuade him that you really met the Princess von Steinheimer."

Lord Donal, for the first time, laughed heartily.

"Well, if that doesn't beat all! And I suppose Cadbury Taylor hasn't the slightest suspicion that you are the person he was looking for?"

"No, not the slightest."

"I say! that is the best joke I have heard in ten years," said Lord Donal; and here, breakfast arriving, Jennie gave him his directions.

"You are to drink a small portion of that brandy," she said, "and then put the rest in your coffee. You must eat a good breakfast, and that will help you to forget your troubles,—that is, if you have any real troubles."

"Oh, my troubles are real enough," said the young man. "When I met you before, Princess, I was reasonably successful. We even talked about ambassadorships, didn't we, in spite of the fact that ambassadors were making themselves unnecessarily obtrusive that night? Now you see before you a ruined man. No, I am not joking; it is true. I was given a commission, or, rather, knowing the danger there was in it, I begged that the commission might be given me. It was merely to take a letter from St. Petersburg to London. I have failed, and when that is said, all is said."

"But surely," cried the girl, blushing guiltily as she realized that this was the man she had been sent to rob, "you could not be expected to ward off such a lawless attempt at murder as you have been the victim of?"

"That is just what I expected, and what I supposed I could ward off. In my profession—which, after all has a great similarity to yours, except that I think we have to do more lying in ours—there must be no such word as fail. The very best excuses are listened to with tolerance, perhaps, and a shrug of the shoulders; but failure, no matter from what cause, is fell doom. I have failed. I shall not make any excuses. I will go to London and say merely, 'The Russian police have robbed me.' Oh, I know perfectly well who did the trick, and how it was done. Then I shall send in my resignation. They will accept it with polite words of regret, and will say to each other, 'Poor fellow, he had a brilliant career before him, but he got drunk, or something, and fell into the ditch.' Ah, well, we won't talk any more about it."

"Then you don't despise the newspaper profession, Lord Donal?"

"Despise it! Bless you, no: I look up to it. Belonging myself to a profession very much lower down in the scale of morality, as I have said. But, Princess," he added, leaning towards her, "will you resign from the newspaper if I resign from diplomacy?"

The girl slowly shook her head, her eyes on the tablecloth before her.

"I will telegraph my resignation," he said impetuously, "if you will

telegraph yours to your paper."

"You are feeling ill and worried this morning, Lord Donal, and so you take a pessimistic view of life. You must not resign."

"Oh, but I must. I have failed, and that is enough."

"It isn't enough. You must do nothing until you reach London."

"I like your word _must_, Jennie," said the young man audaciously. "It implies something, you know."

"What does it imply, Lord Donal?" she asked, glancing up at him.

"It implies that you are going to leave the 'Lord' off my name."

"That wouldn't be very difficult," replied Jennie.

"I am delighted to hear you say so," exclaimed his lordship; "and now, that I may know how it sounds from your dear lips, call me Don."

"No; if I ever consented to omit the title, I should call you Donal. I like the name in its entirety."

He reached his hand across the table. "Are you willing then, to accept a man at the very lowest ebb of his fortunes? I know that if I were of the mould that heroes are made of, I would hesitate to proffer you a blighted life. But I loved you the moment I saw you; and, remembering my fruitless search for you, I cannot run the risk of losing you again; I have not the courage."

She placed her hand in his and looked him, for the first time, squarely in the eyes.

"Are you sure, Donal," she said, "that I am not a mere effigy on which you are hanging the worn-out garments of a past affection? You thought I was the Princess at first."

"No, I didn't," he protested. "As soon as I heard you speak, I knew you were the one I was destined to meet."

"Ah, Donal, Donal, at lovers' perjuries they say Jove laughs. I don't think you were quite so certain as all that. But I, too, am a coward, and I dare not refuse you."

Lord Donal glanced quickly about him; the room was still crowded. Even the Berlin Express gave them a long time for breakfast, and was in no hurry to move westward. His hurried gaze returned to her and he sighed.

"What an unholy spot for a proposal!" he whispered; "and yet they call Russia the Great Lone Land. Oh, that we had a portion of it entirely to ourselves!"

The girl sat there, a smile on her pretty lips that Lord Donal thought most tantalizing. A railway official announced in a loud voice that the train was about to resume its journey. There was a general shuffling of feet as the passengers rose to take their places.

"Brothers and sisters kiss each other, you know, on the eve of a railway

journey," said Lord Donal, taking advantage of the confusion.

Jennie Baxter made no protest.

"There is plenty of time," he whispered. "I know the leisurely nature of Russian trains. Now I am going to the telegraph office, to send in my resignation, and I want you to come with me and send in yours."

"No, Lord Donal," said the girl.

"Aren't you going to resign?" he asked, in surprise.

"Yes, all in good time; but you are not."

"Oh, I say," he cried, "it is really imperative. I'll tell you all about it when we get on the train."

"It is really imperative that you should not send in your resignation. Indeed, Donal, you need not look at me with that surprised air. You may as well get accustomed to dictation at once. You did it yourself, you know. You can't say that I encouraged you. I eluded the vigilant Cadbury Taylor as long as I could. But, if there is time, go to the telegraph office and send a message to the real Princess, Palace Steinheimer, Vienna. Say you are engaged to be married to Jennie Baxter, and ask her to telegraph you her congratulations at Berlin."

"I'll do it," replied the young man with gratifying alacrity.

When Lord Donal came out of the telegraph office, Jennie said to him, "Wait a moment while I go into the sleeping car and get my rugs and handbag."

"I'll go for them," he cried impetuously.

"Oh, no," she said. "I'll tell you why, later. The conductor is a villain and was in collusion with the police."

"Oh, I know that," said Lord Donal. "Poor devil, he can't help himself; he must do what the police order him to do, while he is in Russia."

"I'll get my things and go into an ordinary first class carriage. When I pass this door, you must get your belongings and come and find me. There is still time, and I don't want the conductor to see us together."

"Very well," said the young man with exemplary obedience.

CHAPTER XX.

JENNIE CONVERSES WITH A YOUNG MAN SHE THINKS MUCH OF.

When the train started, they were seated together in a carriage far forward.

"One of my failings," said the girl, "is to act first, and think afterwards. I am sorry now that I asked you to send that telegram to the

Princess."

"Why?"

"Because I have a great deal to tell you, and perhaps you may wish to withdraw from the rash engagement you have undertaken."

"A likely thing!" cried the ardent lover. "Indeed, Miss Princess, if you think you can get rid of me as easily as all that, you are very much mistaken."

"Well, I want to tell you why I did not allow you to resign."

Slowly she undid the large buttons of her jacket, then, taking it by the lapel and holding it so that no one else could see, she drew partly forth from the inside pocket the large envelope, until the stamp of the Embassy was plainly visible. Lord Donal's eyes opened to their widest capacity, and his breath seemed to stop.

"Great heavens!" he gasped at last, "do you mean to say you have it?"

"Yes," she said, buttoning up her jacket again. "I robbed the robbers. Listen, and I will tell you all that happened. But, first, are you armed?"

"Yes," he replied, "I have a trumpery revolver in my pocket; little good it did me last night."

"Very well, we shall be across the frontier by noon to-day. If the Russian authorities find before that time how they have been checkmated, and if they have any suspicion that I am the cause of it, is it not likely that they will have me stopped and searched on some pretence or other?" Lord Donal pondered for a moment. "They are quite capable of it," he said; "but, Jennie, I will fight for you against the whole Russian Empire, and somebody will get hurt if you are meddled with. The police will hesitate, however, before interfering with a messenger from the Embassy, or anyone in his charge in broad daylight on a crowded train. We will not go back into that car, but stay here, where some of our fellow-countrymen are."

"That is what I was going to propose," said Jennie. "And now listen to the story I have to tell you, and then you will know exactly why I came to Russia."

"Don't tell me anything you would rather not," said the young man hurriedly.

"I would rather not, but it must be told," answered the girl.

The story lasted a long time, and when it was ended the young man cried enthusiastically in answer to her question,--

"Blame you? Why, of course I don't blame you in the slightest. It wasn't Hardwick who sent you here at all, but Providence. Providence brought us together, Jennie, and my belief in it hereafter will be unshaken."

Jennie laughed a contented little laugh, and said she was flattered at being considered an envoy of Providence.

"It is only another way of saying you are an angel, Jennie," remarked the bold young man.

They crossed the frontier without interference, and, once in Germany, Jennie took the object of so much contention and placed it in the hands of her lover.

"There," she whispered, with a tiny sigh, for she was giving up the fruits of her greatest achievement, "put that in your despatch box, and see that it doesn't leave that receptacle until you reach London. I hope the Russians will like the copy of the Daily Bugle they find in their envelope."

The two chatted together throughout the long ride to Berlin, and when 11 p.m. and the Schleischer station came at last, they still seemed only to have begun their conversation, so much more remained to be told.

The telegram from the Princess was handed to Lord Donal at Berlin.

"I congratulate you most sincerely," she wired; "and tell Jennie the next time you see her"--Lord Donal laughed as he read this aloud--"that the Austrian Government has awarded her thirty thousand pounds for her share in enabling them to recover their gold, and little enough I think it is, considering what she has done."

"Now, I call that downright handsome of the Austrian Government," cried Lord Donal. "I thought they were going to fight us when I read the speech of their Prime Minister, but, instead of that, they are making wedding presents to our nice girls."

"Ah, that comes through the good-heartedness of the Princess, and the kindness of the Prince," said Jennie. "He has managed it."

"But what in the world did you do for the Austrian Government, Jennie?"

"That is a long story, Donal, and I think a most interesting one."

"Well, let us thank heaven that we have a long journey for you to tell it and me to listen."

And saying this, the unabashed, forward young man took the liberty of kissing his fair companion good-night, right there amidst all the turmoil and bustle of the Schleischer Bahnhof in Berlin.

It was early in the morning when the two met again in the restaurant car. The train had passed Cologne and was now rushing up that picturesque valley through which runs the brawling little river Vesdre. Lord Donal and Jennie had the car to themselves, and they chose a table near the centre of it and there ordered their breakfast. The situation was a most picturesque one. The broad, clear plate glass windows on each side displayed, in rapid succession, a series of landscapes well worth viewing; the densely wooded hills, the cheerful country houses, the swift roaring stream lashing itself into fleecy foam; now and then a glimpse of an old ruined castle on the heights, and, in the deep valley, here and there a water mill.

It was quite evident that Jennie had slept well, and, youth being on her side, her rest had compensated for the nightmare of the Russian journey. She was simply but very effectively dressed, and looked as fresh and

pretty and cool and sweet as a snowdrop. The enchanted young man found it impossible to lure his eyes away from her, and when, with a little laugh, Jennie protested that he was missing all the fine scenery, he answered that he had something much more beautiful to look upon; whereat Jennie blushed most enticingly, smiled at him, but made no further protest. Whether it was his joy in meeting Jennie, or the result of his night's sleep, or his relief at finding that his career was not wrecked, as he had imagined, or all three together, Lord Donal seemed his old self again, and was as bright, witty, and cheerful as a boy home for the holidays. They enjoyed their breakfast with the relish that youth and a healthy appetite gives to a dainty meal well served. The rolls were brown and toothsome, the butter, in thick corrugated spirals, was of a delicious golden colour, cold and crisp. The coffee was all that coffee should be, and the waiter was silent and attentive. Russia, like an evil vision, was far behind, and the train sped through splendid scenery swiftly towards England and home.

The young man leaned back in his chair, interlaced his fingers behind his head, and gazed across at Jennie, drawing a sigh of deep satisfaction.

"Well, this _is_ jolly," he said.

"Yes," murmured Jennie, "it's very nice. I always did enjoy foreign travel, especially when it can be done in luxury; but, alas! luxury costs money, doesn't it?"

"Oh, you don't need to mind, you are rich."

"That is true; I had forgotten all about it."

"I hope, Jennie, that the fact of my travelling on a _train de luxe_ has not deluded you regarding my wealth. I should have told you that I usually travel third class when I am transporting myself in my private capacity. I am wringing this pampered elegance from the reluctant pockets of the British taxpayer. When I travel for the British Government I say, as _Pooh Bah_ said to _Koko_ in the 'Mikado,' 'Do it well, my boy,' or words to that effect."

"Indeed," laughed Jennie, "I am in a somewhat similar situation; the newspaper is paying all the expenses of this trip, but I shall insist on returning the money to the _Bugle_ now that I have failed in my mission."

"Dear me, how much more honest the newspaper business is than diplomacy! The idea of returning any money never even occurred to me. The mere suggestion freezes my young blood and makes each particular hair to stand on end like quills upon the fretful porcupine. Our motto in the service is, Get all you can, and keep all you get."

"But then, you see, your case differs from mine; you did your best to succeed, and I failed through my own choice; and thus I sit here a traitor to my paper."

"Well, Jennie," said the young man, picking up the despatch-box, which he never allowed to leave his sight, and placing it on the table, "you've only to say the word, and this contentious letter is in your possession again. Do you regret your generosity?"

"Oh, no, no, no, no, I would not have it back on any account. Even looking at the matter in the most materialistic way, success means far more to you than it does to me. As you say, I am rich, therefore I am going to give up my newspaper career. I suppose that is why women very rarely make great successes of their lives. A woman's career so often is merely of incidental interest to her; a man's career is his whole life."

"What a pity it is," mused the young man, "that one person's success usually means another person's failure. If I were the generous, whole-souled person I sometimes imagine myself to be, I should refuse to accept success at the price of your failure. You have actually succeeded, while I have actually failed. With a generosity that makes me feel small and mean, you hand over your success to me, and I selfishly accept it. But I compound with my conscience in this way. You and I are to be married; then we will be one. That one shall be heir to all the successes of each of us and shall disclaim all the failures of each. Isn't that a good idea?"

"Excellent," replied Jennie; "nevertheless, I cannot help feeling just a little sorry for poor Mr. Hardwick."

"Who is he--the editor?"

"Yes. He did have such faith in me that it seems almost a pity to disappoint him."

"You mustn't trouble your mind about Hardwick. Don't think of him at all; think of me instead."

"I am afraid I do, and have done so for some time past; nevertheless, I shall get off at Liege and telegraph to him that I am not bringing the document to London."

"I will send the telegram for you when we reach there; but, if I remember rightly what you told me of his purpose, he can't be very deeply disappointed. I understood you to say that he did not intend to publish the document, even if he got it."

"That is quite true. He wished to act as the final messenger himself, and was to meet me at Charing Cross Station, secure the envelope, and take it at once to its destination."

"I must confess," said the young man, with a bewildered expression, "that I don't see the object of that. Are you sure he told you the truth?"

"Oh, yes. The object was this. It seems that there is in the Foreign Office some crusty old curmudgeon who delights in baffling Mr. Hardwick. This official--I forget his name; in fact, I don't think Mr. Hardwick told me who he was--seems to forget the Daily Bugle when important items of news are to be given out, and Mr. Hardwick says that he favours one of the rival papers, and the Bugle has been unable, so far, to receive anything like fair treatment from him; so Mr. Hardwick wanted to take the document to him, and thus convince him there was danger in making an enemy of the Daily Bugle. As I understood his project, which didn't commend itself very much to me, Hardwick had no intention of making a bargain, but simply proposed to hand over the document, and ask the Foreign Office man to give the Bugle its fair share in what was going."

"Do you mean to say that the official in question is the man to whom I am to give this letter?"

"Yes."

"Oh, my prophetic soul, my uncle! Why, that is Sir James Cardiff, the elder brother of my mother; he is a dear old chap, but I can well understand an outsider thinking him gruff and uncivil. If the editor really means what he says, then there will be no difficulty and no disappointment. If all that is needed is the winning over of old Jimmy to be civil to Hardwick, I can guarantee that. I am the especial protege of my uncle. Everything I know I have learned from him. He cannot understand why the British Government does not appoint me immediately Ambassador to France; Jimmy would do it to-morrow if he had the power. It was through him that I heard of this letter, and I believe his influence had a good deal to do with my getting the commission of special messenger. It was the chagrin that my uncle Jimmy would have felt, had I failed, that put the final drop of bitterness in my cup of sorrow when I came to my senses after my encounter with the Russian police. That would have been a stunning blow to Sir James Cardiff. We shall reach Charing Cross about 7.30 to-night, and Sir James will be there with his brougham to take charge of me when I arrive. Now, what do you say to our settling all this under the canopy of Charing Cross Station? If you telegraph Mr. Hardwick to meet us there, I will introduce him to Sir James, and he will never have any more trouble in that quarter."

"I think," said the girl, looking down at the tablecloth, "that I'd rather not have Mr. Hardwick meet us."

"Of course not," answered the young man quickly. "What was I thinking about? It will be a family gathering, and we don't want any outsiders about, do we?"

Jennie laughed, but made no reply.

CHAPTER XXI.

JENNIE KEEPS STEP WITH THE WEDDING MARCH.

They had a smooth and speedy passage across from Calais to Dover, and the train drew in at Charing Cross Station exactly on time. Lord Donal recognized his uncle's brougham waiting for him, and on handing the young lady out of the railway carriage he espied the old man himself closely scrutinizing the passengers. Sir James, catching sight of him, came eagerly forward and clasped both his nephew's hands.

"Donal," he cried, "I am very glad indeed to see you. Is everything right?"

"As right as can be, uncle."

"Then I am glad of that, too, for we have had some very disquieting hints from the East."

"They were quite justified, as I shall tell you later on; but meanwhile, uncle, allow me to introduce to you Miss Baxter, who has done me the honour of promising to be my wife."

Jennie blushed in the searching rays of the electric light as the old man turned quickly towards her. Sir James held her hand in his for some moments before he spoke, gazing intently at her. Then he said slowly, "Ah, Donal, Donal, you always had a keen eye for the beautiful."

"Oh, I say," cried the young man, abashed at his uncle's frankness, "I don't call that a diplomatic remark at all, you know."

"Indeed, Sir James," said the girl, laughing merrily, "it is better than diplomatic, it is complimentary, and I assure you I appreciate it. The first time he met me he took me for quite another person."

"Then, whoever that person is, my dear," replied the old man, "I'll guarantee she is a lovely woman. And you mustn't mind what I say; nobody else does, otherwise my boy Donal here would be much higher in the service than the present moment finds him; but I am pleased to tell you that the journey he has now finished will prove greatly to his advantage."

"Indeed, uncle, that is true," said the young man, looking at his betrothed, "for on this journey I met again Miss Baxter, whom, to my great grief, I had lost for some time. And now, uncle, I want you to do me a great favour. Do you know Mr. Hardwick, editor of the Daily Bugle?"

"Yes, I know him; but I don't like him, nor his paper either."

"Well, neither do the Russians, for that matter, by this time, and I merely wish to tell you that if it hadn't been for his action, and for the promptness of a member of his staff, I should have failed in this mission. I was drugged by the Russian police and robbed. Miss Baxter, who was on the train, saw something of what was going forward, and succeeded, most deftly, in despoiling the robbers. I was lying insensible at the time and helpless. She secured the document and handed it back to me when we had crossed the frontier, leaving in the hands of the Russians a similar envelope containing a copy of the Daily Bugle; therefore, uncle, if in future you can do anything to oblige Mr. Hardwick, you will help in a measure to cancel the obligation which our family owes to him."

"My dear boy, I shall be delighted to do so. I am afraid I have been rather uncivil to him. If you wish it, I will go at once and apologize to him."

"Oh, no," cried Jennie, "you must not do that; but if you can help him without jeopardizing the service, I, for one, will be very glad."

"So shall I," said Donal.

The old man took out his card-case, and on the back of his card scribbled a most cordial invitation to Hardwick, asking him to call on him. He handed this to Jennie, and said,--

"Tell Mr. Hardwick that I shall be pleased to see him at any time."

"And now," said Lord Donal, "you must let us both escort you home in the carriage."

"No, no. I shall take a hansom, and will go directly to the office of the _Bugle_, for Mr. Hardwick will be there by this time."

"But we can drive you there."

"No, please."

She held out her hand to Sir James and said, with the least bit of hesitation before uttering the last word, "Good night--uncle."

"Good night, my dear," said the old man, "and God bless you," he added with a tenderness which his appearance, so solemn and stately, left one unprepared for.

Lord Donal saw his betrothed into a hansom, protesting all the while at thus having to allow her to go off unprotected.

"What an old darling he is," murmured Jennie, ignoring his protests. "I think if Mr. Hardwick had allowed me to look after the interests of the paper at the Foreign Office, Sir James would not have snubbed me."

"If the Foreign Office dared to do such a thing, it would hear of something not to its advantage from the Diplomatic Service; and so, goodnight, my dear." And, with additions, the nephew repeated the benediction of the uncle.

Jennie drove directly to the office of the _Daily Bugle_, and, for the last time, mounting the stairs, entered the editorial rooms. She found Mr. Hardwick at his desk, and he sprang up quickly on seeing who his visitor was. "Ah, you have returned," he cried. "You didn't telegraph to me, so I suppose that means failure."

"I don't know, Mr. Hardwick. It all depends on whether or not your object was exactly what you told me it was."

"And what was that? I think I told you that my desire was to get possession of the document which was being transmitted from St. Petersburg to London."

"No; you said the object was the mollifying of old Sir James Cardiff, of the Foreign Office."

"Exactly; that was the ultimate object, of course."

"Very well. Read this card. Sir James gave it to me at Charing Cross Station less than half an hour ago."

The editor took the card, turned it over in his hands once or twice, and read the cordial message which the old man had scribbled on the back of it.

"Then you have succeeded," cried Hardwick. "You got the document; but why did you give it to Sir James yourself, instead of letting me hand it to him?"

"That is a long story. To put it briefly, it was because the messenger carrying the document was Lord Donal Stirling, who is--who is--an old friend of mine. Sir James is his uncle, and Lord Donal promised that he would persuade the old man to let other newspapers have no advantages which he refused to the Daily Bugle. I did not give the document to Sir James, I gave it back to Lord Donal."

"Lord Donal Stirling--Lord Donal Stirling," mused the editor. "Where have I heard that name before?"

"He is a member of the British Embassy at St. Petersburg, so you may have seen his name in the despatches."

"No. He is not so celebrated as all that comes to. Ah, I remember now. I met the detective the other night and asked him if anything had come of that romance in high life, to solve which he had asked your assistance. He said the search for the missing lady had been abandoned, and mentioned the name of Lord Donal Stirling as the foolish young man who had been engaged in the pursuit of the unknown."

Jennie coloured at this and drew herself up indignantly.

"Before you say anything further against Lord Donal," she cried hotly, "I wish to inform you that he and I are to be married."

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said the editor icily. "Then, having failed to find the other girl, he has speedily consoled himself by--"

"There was no other girl. I was the person of whom Mr. Cadbury Taylor was in search. I willingly gave him valuable assistance in the task of failing to find myself. Having only a stupid man to deal with, I had little difficulty in accomplishing my purpose. Neither Mr. Taylor nor Mr. Hardwick ever suspected that the missing person was in their own employ."

"Well, I'm blessed!" ejaculated Hardwick. "So you baffled Cadbury Taylor in searching for yourself, as you baffled me in getting hold of the Russian letter. It seems to me, Miss Baxter, that where your own inclinations do not coincide with the wishes of your employers, the interests of those who pay you fall to the ground."

"Mr. Cadbury Taylor didn't pay me anything for my services as amateur detective, and he has, therefore, no right to grumble. As for the St. Petersburg trip, I shall send you a cheque for all expenses incurred as soon as I reach home."

"Oh, you mistake me," asserted Mr. Hardwick earnestly. "I had no thought of even hinting that you have not earned over and over again all the money the Daily Bugle has paid you; besides, I was longing for your return, for I want your assistance in solving a mystery that has rather puzzled us all. Paris is in a turmoil just now over the--"

Jennie's clear laugh rang out.

"I am going over to Paris in a day or two, Mr. Hardwick, to solve the mystery of dressmaking, and I think, from what I know of it already, it will require my whole attention. I must insist on returning to you the cost of the St. Petersburg journey, for, after all, it proved to be rather a personal excursion, and I couldn't think of allowing the paper

to pay for it. I merely came in to-night to hand you this card from Sir James Cardiff, and I also desired to tender to you personally my resignation. And so I must bid you good-bye, Mr. Hardwick," said the girl holding out her hand; "and I thank you very much indeed for having given me a chance to work on your paper."

Before the editor could reply, she was gone, and that good man sat down in his chair bewildered by the suddenness of it all, the room looking empty and dismal, lacking her presence.

"Confound Lord Donal Stirling!" he muttered under his breath, and then, as an editor should he went on impassively with his night's work.

* * * * *

It was intended that the wedding should be rather a quiet affair, but circumstances proved too strong for the young people. Lord Donal was very popular and the bride was very beautiful. Sir James thought it necessary to invite a great many people, and he intimated to Lord Donal that a highly placed personage desired to honour the function with his presence. And thus the event created quite a little flutter in the smart set. The society papers affirmed that this elevated personage had been particularly pleased by some diplomatic service which Lord Donal had recently rendered him; but then, of course, one can never believe what one reads in the society press. However, the man of exalted rank was there, and so people said that perhaps there might be something in the rumour. Naturally there was a great turn-out of ambassadors and ministers, and their presence gave colour and dignity to the crush at St. George's, Hanover Square. The Princess von Steinheimer made a special journey from Vienna to attend, and on this occasion she brought the Prince with her. The general opinion was that the bridegroom was a very noble-looking fellow, and that the bride, in her sumptuous wedding apparel, was quite too lovely for anything.

The Princess was exceedingly bright and gay, and she chatted with her old friends the Ambassadors from Austria and America.

"I'm _so_ sorry," she said to the Ambassador from America, "that I did not have time to speak with you at the Duchess of Chiselhurst's ball, but I was compelled to leave early. You should have come to me sooner. The Count here was much more gallant. We had a most delightful conversation, hadn't we, Count? I was with Lord Donal, you remember."

"Oh, yes," replied the aged Austrian, bowing low; "I shall not soon forget the charming conversation I had with your Highness, and I hope you, on your part, have not forgotten the cordial invitation you gave me to visit again your castle at Meran."

"Indeed, Count, you know very well how glad I am to see you at any time, either in Vienna or at Meran."

The American Ambassador remained silent, and glanced alternately from the bride to the Princess with a puzzled expression on his face.

The mystery of the Duchess of Chiselhurst's Ball proved too much for him, as the search for the missing lady had proved too much for Mr. Cadbury Taylor.

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