

Long Live The King

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Karl saw the king that evening, a short visit marked by extreme formality, and, on the king's part, by the keen and frank scrutiny of one who is near the end and fears nothing but the final moment. Karl found the meeting depressing and the king's eyes disconcerting.

"It will not be easy going for Otto," said the king, at the end of the short interview. "I should like to feel that his interests will be looked after, not only here, but by you and yours. We have a certain element here that is troublesome."

And Karl, with Hedwig in his mind, had promised.

"His interests shall be mine, sir," he had said.

He had bent over the bed then, and raised the thin hand to his lips. The interview was over. In the anteroom the king's master of the horse, the chamberlain, and a few other gentlemen stood waiting, talking together in low tones. But the chancellor, who had gone in with Karl and then retired, stood by a window, with his arms folded over his chest, and waited. He put resolutely out of his mind the face of the dying man on his pillows, and thought only of this thing which he—Mettlich—had brought about. There was no yielding in his face or in his heart, no doubt of his course. He saw, instead of the lovers loitering in the place, a new and greater kingdom, anarchy held down by an iron-shod heel, peace and the fruits thereof, until out of very prosperity the people grew fat and content.

He saw a boy king, carefully taught, growing into his responsibilities until, big with the vision of the country's welfare, he should finally ascend the throne. He saw the river filled with ships, carrying merchandise over the world and returning with the wealth of the world. Great buildings, too, lifted their heads on his horizon, a dreamy city, with order for disorder, and citizens instead of inhabitants.

When at last he stirred and sighed, it was because his old friend, in his bed in the next room, would see nothing of all this, and that he himself could not hope for more than the beginning, before his time came also.

The first large dinner for months was given that night at the palace, to do King Karl all possible honor. The gold service which had been presented to the king by the czar of Russia was used. The anticipatory gloom of the court was laid aside, and jewels brought from vaults were worn for the first time in months. Uniforms of various sorts, but all gorgeous, touched the shoulders, and came away, bearing white, powdery traces of the meeting. The greenhouses at the summer palace had been sacked for flowers and plants. The corridor from the great salon to the dining hall, always a dreary passage, had suddenly become a jolly path of early spring bloom. Even Annuncata, lung now with ropes of pearls, her hair dressed high for a tiara of diamonds, her cameos exchanged for pearls, looked royal. Proving conclusively that clutter, as to dress, is entirely a matter of value.

Miss Brathwaite, who had begun recently to think a palace the dreariest place in the world, and the most commonplace, found the preparations rather exciting. Being British she dearly loved the aristocracy, and shrugged her shoulders at any family which took up less than a page in the peerage. She resented deeply the intrusion of the commoner into British politics, and considered Lloyd George an upstart and an interloper.

That evening she took the crown place to see the preparations for the festivities. The flowers appealed to him, and he asked for and secured a rose, which he held carefully. But the magnificence of the table only faintly impressed him, and when he heard that Nikky would not be present, he lost interest entirely. "Will they wheel my grandfather in in a chair?" he inquired.

"He is too ill," Miss Brathwaite said.

"He'll be rather lonely, when they're all at the party. You don't suppose I could go and sit with him, do you?"

"It will be long after your bedtime."

Best time being the one rule which was never under and circumstances broken, he did not persist. To have insisted might have meant five marks off in Miss Brathwaite's book, and his record was very good that week. To get the elderly English woman and the boy went back to the school room.

The Countess Loschek, who had dressed with a heavy heart, was easily the most beautiful of the women that night. A little court paid tribute to her beauty, and bowed the deeper and flattered the more as she openly scorned and flouted them. She caught a flicker of admiration in Karl's eye, and although her head went high, her heart beat stormily under

Hedwig was like a flower that revealed the sun. Only her sun was

happiness, she was in soft white chiffons, her hair and frock alike girlish and unpretentious. Her mother, coming into her dressing room, had eyed her with disfavor.

"You look like a schoolgirl," she said, and had sent for rouge, and with her own royal hands applied it. Hedwig stood silent, and allowed her to have her way without protest. Had she submitted, too, to a diamond pin in her hair, and a string of her mother's pearls.

"There," said Annuncata, standing off and surveying her, "you look less like a baby."

She did, indeed! It took Hedwig quite five minutes to wash the rouge



"There," said Annuncata, "You Look Less Like a Baby."

off her face, and there was, one might as well confess, a moment when a part of the crown jewels of the kingdom lay in a corner of the room, whence a trembling maid salvaged them, and examined them for damage.

The Princess Hedwig appeared that evening without rouge, and was the only woman in the room thus unadorned. Also she wore her coming out string of modest pearls and a slightly defiant, somewhat frightened, expression.

The dinner was endless, which was necessary, since nothing was to follow but conversation. There could, under the circumstances, be no dancing. And the talk at the table, through course after course, was somewhat hectic, even under the constraining presence of King Karl. There were two reasons for this: Karl's presence and his purpose—as yet unannounced, but surmised, and even known—and the situation in the city.

That was bad. The papers had been ordered to make no mention of the occurrence of the afternoon, but it was well known. There were many at the table who felt the whole attempt foolhardy, the setting of a match to inflammable material. There were others who resented Karl's presence in Livonia, and all that it implied. And perhaps there were, too, among the guests, one or more who had but recently sat in less august and more awful company.

Beneath all the brilliance and chatter, the sparkle and gaiety, there was, then, uneasiness, wretchedness, and even treachery. And outside the palace, held back by the guards, there still stood a part of the sullen crowd which had watched the arrival of the carriages and automobiles, had craned forward to catch a glimpse of uniform or brilliantly shrouded figure entering the palace, and muttered as it looked

Dinner was over at last. The party moved back to the salon, a vast and empty place, hung with tapestries and waxy lighted. Here the semblance of gaiety persisted, and Karl, affably itself, spoke a few words to each of the guests. Then it was over. The guests left, the members of the council, each with a wife on his arm, frowsy, overdressed women most of them. The council was chosen for ability and not for birth. At last only the suite remained, and constraint vanished.

The family withdrew shortly after to a small salon off the large one. And there, at last, Karl cornered Hedwig and demanded speech.

"Where?" she asked, glancing around the crowded room.

"I shall have to leave that to you," he said. "Unless—there is a balcony."

"But do you think it is necessary?" "Why not?" "Because what I have to say does not matter."

"It matters very much to me," he replied gravely.

Hedwig went first, slipping away quietly and unnoted. Karl asked the archbishop's permission to follow her and found her waiting there alone, rather desperately calm now, and with a trace of excited color in her cheeks. Because he cared a great deal, and because, as kings go, he was neither hopelessly bad nor hard, his first words were kind and genuine, and almost brought her to tears.

"Poor little girl!" he said.

He had dropped the curtain behind him, and they stood alone.

"Don't," said Hedwig; "I want to be very calm, and I am sorry for myself already."

"Then you think it is all very terrible?"

She did not reply, and he drew a chair for her to the rail. When she was seated, he took up his position beside her, one arm against a pillar.

"I wonder, Hedwig," he said, "if it is not terrible because it is new to you, and because you do not know me very well. Not," he added hastily, "that I think your knowing me well would be an advantage! I am not so idiotic. But you do not know me at all, and for a good many years I must have stood in the light of an enemy. It is not easy to readjust such things—witness the reception I had today!"

"Why must we talk about it?" Hedwig demanded, looking up at him suddenly with a flash of her old spirit. "It will not change anything."

"Perhaps not. Perhaps—yes. You see, I am not quite satisfied. I do not want you, unless you are willing. It would be a poor bargain for me, and not quite fair."

A new turn, this, with a vengeance! Hedwig stared up with startled eyes. It was not enough to be sacrificed. And as she realized all that hung on the situation, the very life of the kingdom, perhaps the safety of her family, everything, she closed her eyes for fear he might see the fright in them.

Karl bent over and took one of her cold hands between his two warm ones. "Little Hedwig," he said, "I want you to come willingly because—I care a great deal. I would like you to care, too. Don't you think you would, after a time?"

"After a time?" said Hedwig drearily. "That's what they all say. After a time it doesn't matter. Marriage is always the same—after a time."

"Why should marriage be always the same, after a time?" he inquired. "This sort of marriage, without love."

"It is hardly that, is it? I love you." "I wonder how much you love me."

Karl smiled. He was on his own ground here. The girlish question put him at ease. "Enough for us both, at first," he said. "After that—"

"But," said Hedwig desperately, "suppose I know I shall never care for you, the way you will want me to. You talk of being fair. I want to be fair to you. You have a right—"

She checked herself abruptly. After all, he might have a right to know about Nikky Larisch. But there were others who had rights, too—Otto to his throne, her mother and Hilda and all the others, to safety, her grandfather to die in peace, the only gift she could give him.

"What I think you want to tell me, is something I already know," Karl said gravely. "Suppose I am willing to take that chance? Suppose I am vain enough, or fool enough, to think that I can make you forget certain things, certain people. What then?"

"I do not forget easily." "But you would try?" "I would try," said Hedwig, almost in a whisper.

Karl bent over and taking her hands, raised her to her feet.

"Darling," he said, and suddenly drew her to him. He covered her with hot kisses, her neck, her face, the soft angle below her ear. Then he held her



"Now," He Said, "Have You Forgotten?"

away from him triumphantly. "Now," he said, "have you forgotten?"

But Hedwig, scarlet with shame, faced him steadily. "No," she said.

Later in the evening the old king received a present, a rather wilted rose, to which was pinned a card, with "Best wishes from Ferdinand William Otto," printed on it in careful letters. It was the only flower the king had

received during his illness.

When, that night, he fell asleep, it was still clasped in his old hand, and there was a look of girlish tenderness on the face on the pillow, turned toward his dead son's picture.

Troubled times now, with the carnival only a day or two off, and the shop windows gay with banners; with the committee of ten in almost constant session, and Olga Loschek summoned before it, to be told of the passage, and the thing she was to do; with the old king very close to the open door, and Hedwig being fitted for her bridal robe and for somber black at one sitting.

Troubled times, indeed. The city was smoldering, and from some strange source had come a new rumor. Nothing less than that the royalists, headed by the chancellor, despairing of crowning the boy prince, would, on the king's death, make away with him, thus putting Hedwig on the throne—Hedwig, queen of Karnia perhaps already by secret marriage.

The city, which adored the boy, was seething. The rumor had originated with Olga Loschek, who had given it to the committee as a useful weapon. This would she have her revenge on (those of the palace, and at the same time secure her own safety. Revenge, indeed, for she knew the way of such rumors, how they fly from house to house, street to street. How the innocent, proclaiming their innocence, look even the more guilty.

When she had placed the scheme before the committee of ten, had seen the eagerness with which they grasped it—"in this way," she had said, in her scornful, incisive tones, "the onus of the boy is not on you, but on them. Even those who have no sympathy with your movement will burn at such a rumor. The better the citizen, the more outraged he will be. Every man in the city with a child of his own will rise against the palace."

"Madame," the leader had said, "you should be of the committee."

But she had ignored the speech contemptuously, and gone on to other things.

Now everything was arranged. Black Humbert had had his niece to work on a carnival dress for a small boy, and had stayed her curiosity by a hint that it was for the American lad.

"They are comfortable tenants," he had said. "Not lavish, perhaps, as rich Americans should be, but orderly, and pleasant. The boy has good manners. It would be well to please him."

So the niece, sewing in the back room, watched Bobby in and out, with pleasant mysteries in her eyes.

Now and then, in the evenings, when the Americans were away, and Bobby was snug in bed, with Tucker on the tiny feather comfort at his feet, the Fraulein would come downstairs and sit in Black Humbert's room. At such times the niece would be sent on an errand, and the two would talk. The niece, who, although she had no lover, was on the lookout for love, suspected a romance of the middle-aged, and smiled in the half darkness of the street; smiled with a touch of malice, as one who has pierced the armor of the fortress, and knows its weakness.

But it was not love that Humbert and the Fraulein talked.

Herman Spler was busy in those days and making plans. Thus, day by day, he dined in the restaurant where the little Marie, now weary of her husband, sat in idle intervals behind the cashier's desk, and watched the grass in the place emerge from its winter hiding place. When she turned her eyes to the room, frequently she encountered those of Herman Spler, pale yet burning, fixed on her. And at last, one day when her husband lay lame with sciatica, she left the desk and paused by Herman's table.

"You come frequently now," she observed. "It is that you like us here, or that you have risen in the shop?"

"I have left the shop," said Herman, staring at her. Flesh, in a moderate amount, suited her well. He liked plump women. They were, if you please, an artful. "And I come to see you."

"Left the shop?" Marie exclaimed. "And Peter Niburg—he has left also? I never see him."

"No," said Herman noncommittally. "He is ill, perhaps?" "He is dead," said Herman, devouring her with his eyes.

"Dead?" She put a hand to her plump side.

"Aye. Shot as a spy." He took another piece of the excellent pigeon pie. Marie, meantime, lost all her looks, grew puffy white.

"Of the—terrorists?" she demanded, in a whisper.

"Terrorists! No, Of Karnia. He was no patriot."

So the little Marie went back to her desk, and to her staring out over the place in intervals of business. And what she thought of no one can know. But that night, and thereafter, she was very tender to her spouse, and put cloths soaked in hot turpentine water on his aching thigh.

On the surface things went on as usual at the palace. Karl's visit had been but for a day or two. He had met the council in session, and had had, because of their growing alarm, rather his own way with them.

But although he had pointed to the king's condition and theirs—as an argument for immediate marriage—he failed. The thing would be done, but properly and in good time. Karl left them in a bad temper, well concealed, and had the pleasure of being hissed through the streets.

(To be continued)

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