BLASCO IBÁÑEZ VICENTE

THE ENEMIES OF WOMEN (LOS ENEMIGOS DE LA MUJER)

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I

THE Prince repeated his statement:

"Man's greatest wisdom consists in getting along without women."

He intended to go on but was interrupted. There was a slight stir of the heavy window curtains. Through their parting was seen below, as in a frame, the intense azure of the Mediterranean. A dull roar reached the dining-room. It seemed to come from the side of the house facing the Alps. It was a faint vibration, deadened by the walls, the curtains, and the carpets, distant, like the working of some underground monster; but there rose above the sound of revolving steel and the puffing of steam a clamor of human beings, a sudden burst of shouts and whistling.

"A train full of soldiers!" exclaimed Don Marcos Toledo, leaving his chair.

"The Colonel is at it again, always the hero, always enthusiastic about everything that has to do with his profession," said Atilio Castro, with a smile of amusement.

In spite of his years, the man whom they called the Colonel sprang to the nearest window. Above the foliage of the sloping garden, he could see a small section of the Corniche railroad, swallowed up in the smoky entrance of a tunnel, and reappearing farther on, beyond the hill, among the groves and rose colored villas of Cap-Martin. Under the mid-day sun the rails quivered like rills of molten steel. Although the train had not yet reached this side of the tunnel, the whole country-side was filled with the ever-increasing roar. The windows, terraces, and gardens of the villas were dotted black with people who were leaving their luncheon tables to see the train pass. From the mountain slope to the seashore, from walls and buildings on both sides of the track, flags of all colors began to wave.

Don Marcos ran to the opposite window overlooking the city. All he could see was an expanse of roofs with no trace of Nature's touch save here and there the feathery green of the gardens against the red of the tiles. It was like a stage setting broken into a succession of wings: in the foreground, amid trees, isolated villas with green balustrades and flower-strewn walls; next, the mass of Monte Carlo, its huge hotels bristling with pointed turrets and cupolas; and hazy in the background, as though floating in golden dust, the rocky cliffs of Monaco, with its promenades; the enormous pile of the Oceanographic Museum; the New Cathedral, a glaring white; and the square crested tower of the palace of the Prince. Buildings stretched from the edge of the sea halfway up the mountains. It was a country without fields, with

no open land, covered completely with houses, from one frontier to the other.

But Don Marcos had known the view for years, and at once detected the unfamiliar detail. A long, interminable train was moving slowly along the hillside. He counted aloud more than forty cars, without coming to the rear coaches still hidden in a hollow.

"It must be a battalion … a whole battalion on a war footing. More than a thousand soldiers," he said in an authoritative manner, pleased at showing off his keen professional judgment before his fellow guests, who, for that matter, were not listening.

The train was filled with men, tiny yellowish gray figures, that gathered at the car windows, doors, and on the running-boards with their feet hanging over the track. Others were crowded in cattle pens or stood on the open flat-cars, among the tanks and crated machine guns. A great many had climbed to the roofs and were greeting the crowds with arms and legs extended in the shape of a letter X. Almost all of them had their shirt sleeves rolled up to the elbows, like sailors preparing to maneuver.

"They are English!" exclaimed Don Marcos. "English soldiers on their way to Italy!"

But this information seemed to irritate the Prince, who always spoke to him in familiar language, in spite of the difference in their ages. "Don't be absurd, Colonel. Anybody would know that. They are the only ones who whistle."

The men still seated at the table nodded. Military trains passed

every day, and from a distance it was possible to guess the nationality of the passengers. "The French," said Castro, "go past silently. They have had a little over three years of fighting on their own soil. They are as silent and gloomy as their duty is monotonous and endless. The Italians coming from the French front sing, and decorate their trains with green branches. The English shout like a lot of boys, just out of school, and in their enthusiasm, whistle all the time. They are the real children in this war; they go with a sort of boyish glee to their death."

The whistling sound drew nearer, shrill as the howling of a witches' Sabbath. It passed between the mountains and the gardens of Villa Sirena; and then went on in the other direction, toward Italy, gradually growing fainter as it disappeared in the tunnel. Toledo, who was the only one in the room to watch the train pass, noticed how the houses, gardens, and *potagers* on both sides of the track were alive with people, waving handkerchiefs and flags in reply to the whistling of the English. Even along the seashore the fishermen stood up on the seats of their boats and waved their caps at a distant train. The quick ear of Don Marcos distinguished a sound of footsteps on the floor above. The servants doubtless were opening the windows to join with silent enthusiasm in that farewell.

When only a few coaches were still visible at the mouth of the tunnel, the Colonel came back to his place at the table.

"More meat for the slaughter house!" exclaimed Atilio Castro, looking at the Prince. "The racket is over. Go on, Michael."

Under Toledo's watchful eye, two beardless Italian boys, unprepossessing in appearance, were serving the dessert at the luncheon.

The Colonel kept glancing over the table and at the faces of his three guests, as though he were afraid of suddenly noticing something that would show the lunch had been hastily arranged. It was the first that had been given at Villa Sirena for two years.

The master of the house, Prince Michael Fedor Lubimoff, who sat at the head of the table, had arrived from Paris the evening before.

The Prince was a man still in his youth, fresh with the well controlled vigor that is furnished by a life of physical exercise. He was tall, robust, and supple, of dark complexion, with large gray eyes, and a massive face, clean shaven. The scattered gray hairs at his temples seemed even more numerous in contrast with the blue-black of the rest. A number of premature wrinkles around the eyes, and two deep furrows running from his wide nostrils to the corners of his mouth, were the first indication of weariness in a powerful organism that seemed to have lived too intensely, in the mistaken confidence that its reserve of strength was endless.

The Colonel called him "Your Highness," as if Michael Fedor were a member of a ruling house, instead of a mere Russian prince. But this was when some one was present. It was a habit Don Marcos had adopted in the days of the late Princess Lubimoff, to maintain the prestige of the son, whom he had known since the latter was a child. In their intimate relations,

when they were alone, he preferred to call him "Marquis," Marquis de Villablanca, and the Prince was never successful in disturbing, by his witticisms on the subject, the precedence thus established by Don Marcos in his terms of respect. The title of Russian Prince was for those who are dazzled by the lofty sound of titles, without being able to appreciate their respective merits, and origins; as for himself, the Colonel preferred something nobler, the title of Spanish Marquis, in spite of the fact that that title for Lubimoff was quite unknown in Spain, and lacked official recognition.

Toledo was well acquainted with Prince Michael's three guests.

Atilio Castro was a fellow countryman, a Spaniard who had spent the greater part of his life outside his own country. He affected great intimacy with the Prince and, on the grounds of a distant blood relationship between them, even spoke to him with some familiarity. Don Marcos had a vague idea that the young Spaniard had been a consul somewhere for a short time. Atilio was continually poking fun at him without his being always immediately aware of it. But the Colonel, seeing that it pleased "His Highness" greatly, felt no ill-will on that account.

"A fine fellow, good hearted!" the Colonel often said, in speaking of Castro. "He hasn't led a model life, he's a terrible gambler – but a gentleman. Yes, sir, a real gentleman!"

Michael Fedor defined his relative in other terms.

"He has all the vices, and no defects."

Don Marcos could never quite understand what that meant, but nevertheless it increased his esteem for Castro.

The Prince was only two or three years older than Atilio, and yet their ages seemed much farther apart. Castro was over thirty-five, and some people thought him twenty-four. His face had an ingenuous, rather child-like expression, and it acquired a certain character of manliness, thanks solely to a dark red mustache, closely cropped. This tiny mustache, and his glossy hair parted squarely in the middle, were the most prominent details of his features, except when he became excited. If his humor changed – which happened very rarely – the luster in his eyes, the contraction of his mouth, and the premature wrinkles in his forehead gave him an almost ominous expression, and suddenly he seemed to age by ten years.

"A bad man to have for an enemy!" affirmed the Colonel. "It wouldn't do to get in his way."

And not out of fear, but rather out of sincere admiration did the Colonel speak admiringly of Castro's talents. He wrote poetry, painted in water color, improvised songs at the piano, gave advice in matters of furniture and clothes, and was well versed in antiquities, and matters of taste. Don Marcos knew no limits to that intelligence.

"He knows everything," he would say. "If he would only stick to one thing! If he would only work!"

Castro was always elegantly dressed, and lived in expensive hotels; but he had no regular income so far as was known. The

Colonel suspected a series of friendly little loans from the Prince. But the latter had remained away from Monte Carlo almost since the beginning of the war, and Don Marcos used to meet Castro every winter living at the Hôtel de Paris, playing at the Casino, and associating with people of wealth. From time to time, on encountering the Colonel in the gaming rooms, Castro had asked him for a loan of "ten louis," an absolute necessity for a gambler who had just lost his last stake and was anxious to recoup. But with more or less delay he had always returned the money. There was something mysterious about his life, according to Don Marcos.

The two other guests seemed to him to live much less complex lives. The one who had frequented the house for the longest period, was a dark young man, with a skin that was almost copper colored, a slight build, and long, straight hair. He was Teofilo Spadoni, a famous pianist. Spadoni's parents were Italian – this much was sure. No one could quite make out where he had been born. At times he mentioned his birthplace as Cairo, at other times, as Athens, or Constantinople, all the places where his father, a poor Neapolitan tailor, had lived. No one was astonished by such vagaries and absent-minded discrepancies on the part of the extraordinary virtuoso, who, the moment he left the piano, seemed to move in a world of dreams and to be quite incapable of adapting himself to any regular mode of life. After giving concerts in the large capitals of Europe and South America, he had settled down at Monte Carlo, explaining his residence there

by the war, while Don Marcos imputed it to his love of gambling. The Prince knew him through having engaged him as a member of the orchestra on board his large yacht, the Gaviota II, for a voyage around the world.

Sitting beside the host was the last guest, the latest to frequent the house, a pale young man, tall, thin, and nearsighted, who was always looking timidly around as though ill at ease. He was a professor from Spain, a Doctor of Science, Carlos Novoa, who received a subsidy from the Spanish government to make certain studies in ocean fauna at the Oceanographic Museum. The Colonel who had spent many years at Monte Carlo without running across any of his compatriots, other than those whom he saw around the roulette tables, had expressed a certain patriotic pride in meeting this professor two months previously.

"A man of learning! A famous scientist!" he exclaimed in speaking of his new friend. "They can say all they want now about us Spaniards being ignoramuses."

He had only the vaguest notion of the nature of his fellow countryman's learning. What is more: from his earliest conversations he had guessed that the professor's ideas were directly opposed to his own. "One of those heretics with no other God than matter," he said to himself. But he added by way of consolation: "All those learned men are like that: liberals and free-thinkers. What of it…" As for the professor's fame, in the opinion of Don Marcos it was unquestionable. Otherwise why would they have sent him to the Oceanographic Museum, large

and white as a temple, whose halls he had visited only once, with a feeling of awe that had prevented him from ever going back again.

On the occasional evenings when the professor would go to Monte Carlo and chance to meet Don Marcos, the latter would present him to his friends as a national celebrity. In this fashion Novoa had made the acquaintance of Castro and Spadoni, who never asked him more than how his luck was going.

When the coming of the Prince was announced, Toledo insisted that his illustrious friend the Professor should accompany him to the station in order to lose no time in introducing him to "His Highness."

"One of our country's prides… Your Highness is so fond of everything Spanish."

Michael Fedor had spent a considerable portion of his life on the sea, and felt a certain sympathy for the modest young man, on learning of the studies in which he specialized.

They talked for a long time about oceanography, and the following day Prince Michael, who was in the habit of entertaining elaborately at his table the most divergent kinds of guests, said to his "chamberlain":

"Your scholar is a very fine fellow. Invite him to luncheon."

The guests all spoke Spanish. Spadoni was able to follow the conversation, with the little he had picked up while giving piano recitals in Buenos Ayres, Santiago, and other South American capitals. He had been there with an impresario, who finally

got tired of backing him, and struggling with his childish irresponsibility.

As they were sitting down at the table, the Colonel noticed that the Prince seemed preoccupied with some absorbing meditation. He made a point of talking with Professor Novoa, expressing his surprise at the slight compensation the scientist received for his studies.

Castro and Spadoni gave their whole attention to their food. The days of the famous chef, to whom Prince Michael gave a salary worthy of a Prime Minister, were over. The "master" had been mobilized and at that moment was cooking for a general on the French front. However, Toledo had managed to discover a woman of some fifty years, whose combinations were less varied, perhaps, than those of the artist whom the war had snatched away, but more "classical," more solid and substantial – and the two men ate with the delight of people who, forever obliged to eat in restaurants and hotels, at last find themselves at a table where no economy or falsifications are practised.

About dessert time the conversation, becoming general, turned, as always happens when men are dining alone, to the subject of women. Toledo had a feeling that the Prince had gently steered the guests' talk in this direction. Suddenly Michael summed up his whole argument by declaring a second time:

"Man's greatest wisdom consists in getting along without women."

And then had followed the long interruption as the train of

English soldiers, in a whirl of shouts, whistling and hissing, had gone by.

Atilio Castro waited until the last car had disappeared in the tunnel, and said with a subtle and somewhat ironical smile:

"The shouting and whistling sound like a mixture of applause and scorn for your profound remark. However, please don't bother with such inexpert opinion. What you said interests me. You abominate women, you who have had thousands of them!.. Go on, Michael!"

But the Prince changed the conversation. He spoke of his impressions on returning to Villa Sirena after a long absence. Nothing remained to recall the former days, before the war, save the building and the gardens. All the men servants were mobilized: some in the French army, others in the Italian. The day after his arrival he had asked, as a matter of course, for an auto to go to Monte Carlo. There was no lack of machines. Three, of the best make, were lying as though forgotten, in the garage. But the chauffeurs too were at the front; and moreover there was no gasoline; and a permit was necessary to use the roads… In short, he had been obliged to stand at the iron gate of the garden and wait for the Manton electric. It was a novelty for him, an interesting means of locomotion. It seemed as if he had suddenly been transported into a world he had forgotten, as he found himself among the common people on the car. The general curiosity annoyed him. Everyone was whispering his name: and even the conductor showed a certain emotion on seeing the owner

of Villa Sirena among his passengers.

"And the worst of it all, my friends, is that I'm ruined!"

Spadoni stared with wide opened eyes as though hearing something extraordinary and absurd. Castro smiled incredulously.

"You ruined?.. I'd be satisfied with a tenth of the remains."

The Prince nodded. He reminded one of those great transatlantic liners which, when they are wrecked, make the fortune of a whole population of poverty stricken people along the shore. Wealth was of course a relative thing. He might still have more than many people; but ruin it was for him, nevertheless.

"In view of what I am going to say later, I must not conceal from you the situation I am in. A few weeks ago I sold my Paris residence which my mother built. It was bought by a 'newly rich.' With this war, I'm going to become a 'newly poor.' You know, Atilio, how things have gone with me, since this row among the nations started. From the time they fired the first cannon they sent me from Russia only an eighth of what I received in times of peace; later much less. The revolution came and cut down my income still more. And, now under Comrade Lenin and the red flag, there is nothing coming through at all, absolutely nothing. I have no idea whatsoever of the fate of my houses, my fields, my mines … I don't know even what has become of those who were looking after my fortune there. They have probably all been killed."

The Colonel raised his eyes to the ceiling: "The revolution!.. What they need is a master."

"But a rich man like you with reserve funds in the bank all the time, can always find some one to make him a loan until times are better."

"Perhaps; but it means practically poverty for me. My administrator told me when I was leaving Paris, that I ought to limit my expenses, live according to my present income. How much have I?.. I don't know. He doesn't even know himself. He is balancing my accounts, collecting from some people and paying others – I had a lot of debts, it seems. Millionaires are never asked to pay their bills promptly… In short, I shall have to live, like a ruined prince, on some sixty thousand dollars a year; perhaps more, perhaps less. I really don't know."

Castro and Spadoni seemed to be stirred with longing at the mention of such a sum. Novoa looked with an air of respect at this man who called himself his friend and thought himself poor with sixty thousand dollars a year.

"My administrator spoke to me of selling Villa Sirena as well as the Paris residence. It seems that the newly rich would like to get everything I have. A complete liquidation… But I wouldn't listen to it. This is my own little nook; I made it what it is myself. Besides, life is impossible out in the world. The war has filled it with bitterness. Living in Paris is very gloomy. There is no one there. The streets are dark. The 'Gothas' make the people of our class worried and nervous. It is much better to leave. I thought I

would settle down here and wait till this world madness is over."

"It is going to be a long wait," remarked Castro.

"I'm afraid so. However, this is an agreeable spot, a pleasant refuge, all the more delightful because of the selfish feeling that at this very moment millions of men are suffering every sort of hardship, and thousands are dying every day… But after all, it isn't the same as it used to be. Even the Mediterranean is different. The minute the sun goes down, my good Colonel has to mask with black curtains the windows and doors looking out on the sea, so that the German submarines cannot guide themselves by our lights… Dear me! Where are those wonderful days we spent here in time of peace, the festivals we used to have, those nights on the Gaviotta II when she anchored in the harbor of Monaco?"

A far away look came into Castro's eyes, as though he were in a dream. In his imaginings he saw the gardens of Villa Sirena, softly lighted, wrapped in a milky haze that settled on the invisible waves like rays of reflected moonlight.

The window curtains were crimson, and from them, drifting through the warm darkness of the night, came the sound of laughter, cries, the sighing of violins, amorous love songs, that told of women's throats, white and voluptuous, swelling with desire and the rapture of the music. The stars, specks of light lost in the infinite, twinkled in answer to the electric stars, hidden in the dark foliage. Walking slowly, couples arm in arm disappeared amid the deep shadows of the garden. All the women of the

day had turned up there sooner or later: famous actresses from Paris, London, and Vienna; beauties of the smart cliques of two hemispheres, women of high society, smiling the smile of slaves before the potentate who could banish their debts with the stroke of a pen. Oh, the Pompeian nights of Villa Sirena!..

Spadoni saw, rather, the Gaviotta II, a palace with propellers, which, when anchored in the small harbor of La Condamine, seemed to fill it completely and to make the yachts of the American millionaires and the Prince of Monaco look like tiny things indeed. It was an alcazar, a palace of the Arabian Nights, topped off with two smoke stacks, and parading over every sea of the planet, its private parlors adorned with fountains and statues, its enormous library, its ball room with a raised platform, from which fifty musicians, many of them celebrated, gave concerts for a single visible auditor, Prince Michael, who half reclined on a divan, while the tropical breeze came through the high windows, caressing the heads of the officers and chief functionaries of the steamer crowding about the openings. The pianist could see once more the lonely harbors of dead historic countries, with flights of seagulls wheeling against the quiet azure vault; the mighty bays, filled with the smoke and bustle of North America; the coasts of the Antilles with groves of cocoanut palms, black at sunset against the reddish sky; the islands of the Pacific, of hard coral, forming a ring about an inner lake… And that omnipotent magician confessed the loss of his wealth!..

The Prince, as though he guessed their thoughts, added:

"It's the end of all that: I don't know whether forever or for many years… And even if things should be the same some day as they were before the war, what a long time we shall have to wait!.. I may die before then… That is why I am going to make a proposal to you."

He paused a moment, to enjoy the curiosity he read in the eyes of his auditors.

Then he asked Castro:

"Are you satisfied with your present life?"

In spite of Castro's good natured, smiling placidity, he started in surprise as if indignant at such a question. His life was unbearable. The war had upset his habits and pleasures, scattering his friendships to the four winds. He did not know the fate of hundreds of persons of various nationalities, who had filled his life before the war, and without whom he would then have thought it impossible to live.

"Besides, I have less money than ever. I am staying at Monte Carlo just for the gambling; and even if I always lose in the end, like everyone else, I always keep a tight grip on a little something to live on!.. But what a life!"

He glanced at Novoa as though the recency of his acquaintance inspired a certain suspicion, but immediately he went on, with an air of assurance:

"There is no reason why I should not speak quite plainly. A little while ago the Professor told us how much he earned: some hundred dollars a month; less than any employee at the Casino. I

am going to be as frank as he. I live in the Hôtel de Paris: Atilio Castro cannot afford to live anywhere else; he must keep up his connections. But there are many weeks when I have the greatest difficulty in paying for my room, and I eat in cheap restaurants and Italian wine shops, when no one invites me out to dine. I pay three or four times as much for my bed as I do for my board. Evenings when luck is against me, and I lose everything to the last chip, I get along with a ham sandwich at the Casino bar. I belong to the same school as the Madrid gambler we nicknamed the 'Master,' and who used to say to us: 'Boys, money was made for gambling; and what's left, for eating.'"

"And in spite of that, you like good food," said the Prince.

Castro's laments took on a comical seriousness. With the war the good old customs had been forgotten. No one kept house; everyone lived in hotels, and the proprietors of the luxurious palaces took the scarcity of food as a pretext to serve the sort of meals one gets in third rate restaurants, scanty and poor. An invitation merely gave one a chance to fool one's hunger.

"It has been months, maybe years, since I've eaten as I have to-day, and I've sat at the tables of all the big hotels on the Riviera. I had ceased to believe that such chicken as you have just served existed in the world any longer. I imagined they were dream birds, mythological fowl."

The Colonel smiled, bowing as if that were a tribute to him.

"And you, Spadoni?" the Prince went on inquiringly. "How are you enjoying life?"

"Your Highness – I – I," stammered the musician, at the sudden question.

Castro intervened, coming to his rescue.

"Our friend Spadoni can always get a free meal at the villas of a number of invalid ladies, who live at Cap-Martin and who are mad about music. Besides some English people at Nice often invite him. He doesn't need to bother about paying hotel bills either. He has at his disposal a whole big villa, large and well-furnished: it goes with his job, as watchman over a corpse."

Novoa started with surprise at the news.

"Don't be astonished," continued Atilio. "He has the benefit of a magnificent house in exchange for looking after a tomb."

"Oh, Professor!.. Don't mind him," groaned the musician with the air of a martyr.

"But with all these advantages," Castro went on saying, "there is one terrible drawback: he is a worse gambler than I. He has a nickname in the Casino 'the number five gentleman.' He never plays any other number. Anything he can get hold of he puts on five, and loses it. I am the 'number seventeen gentleman' and it turns out as badly with me as with him… Besides, he has his English friends. Queer ducks! They come from Nice every day in a two horse landau, and just as if they didn't get enough gambling with the Casino, they set up a green table on their knees and take out a deck of cards. They play poker with the Corniche landscape, that people come from all over the world to see, right before their eyes. And our artist, when he takes a fourth hand

with the two Englishmen and an old maid, there within the sight of the Mediterranean, golden in the setting sun, loses everything he took in at some concert at Cannes or Monte Carlo."

Spadoni started to say something, but stopped, seeing that the Prince turned to Novoa:

"I shan't ask you," said the Prince; "I know your situation. You live in the old part of Monaco, in the house of an employee of the Museum; and his lodgings can't be much. Besides, as Atilio was saying, you receive much less than a croupier at the Casino."

And looking at his guests he added:

"What I want to propose to you is that you live with me. The invitation is a selfish one on my part; I'm not denying that. I intend to stay here until the world quiets down, and life is pleasant once more. If my Colonel and I were here alone we would end by hating each other. You will keep me company in my retreat."

All three remained dumbfounded at such an unexpected proposal. Novoa was the first to regain the use of his tongue.

"Prince, you scarcely know me. We saw each other for the first time three days ago… I don't know whether I ought…"

The Prince interrupted him with the sharp tone and imperious manner of a man who is not accustomed to considering objections.

"We have known each other for many years; we have known each other all our lives." Then he added soothingly:

"It isn't much that I'm offering you. Servants are scarce. There are no men except my old valet and those two Italian monkeys

that the Colonel managed to recruit somewhere. The rest of the service is done by women… But even so, our life will be pleasant. We shall isolate ourselves from a world gone crazy. We will not mention this war. We shall lead a comfortable existence, as the monks did in the monasteries of the Middle Ages, which were refreshing oases of tranquillity in the midst of violence and massacres. We shall eat well; the Colonel guarantees me that. The Library from the yacht is here. When I sold the boat, I had Don Marcos install all my books on the top floor. Our friend Novoa will find some volumes there which perhaps he does not know. Everyone will do what he pleases; free monks all of us, with no other obligation than to repair to the refectory at the proper hour. And if the 'number five gentleman' and the 'number seventeen gentleman' want to drop in at the Casino, they can do so, and someone will see to it that their pockets are kept filled. We must give something to vice, what the devil! Without vices, life wouldn't be worth living."

A silent approbation greeted these words of the master of Villa Sirena.

"The one thing I insist on," continued the Prince after a long pause, "is that we live alone, as men among men. No women! Women must be excluded from our life in common."

The pianist opened his eyes in astonishment; Castro stirred in his chair; Novoa removed his glasses with a mechanical gesture of surprise, immediately adjusting them once more to his nose.

There was another silence.

"What you propose," said Atilio, at last, with a smile, "reminds me of a comedy of Shakespeare. No women! And the hero in the end gets married."

"I know that play," replied the Prince, "but I am not in the habit of governing my life according to comedies, and I don't believe in their teachings. You can rest assured that I shan't marry, even if it gives the lie to Shakespeare and the French king from whose chronicle he got the material for his work."

"But what you're attempting is absurd," Castro went on: "I don't know what the rest think, but prevent me from…!"

With a gesture he ended his protest.

Then seeing that the Prince had remained thoughtful, he added:

"It is quite evident that you have had your fill!.. You have gotten all you wanted, and now you want to force on us…"

The Prince, although absorbed in his own train of thought, he had not heard him, interrupted.

"Seeing that you can't get along without it… All right! I have no fixed intention of making a martyr of you. Go on being a slave to a necessity that is a result more of the imagination than of desire. Now that I really know life, I am astonished that men do so many foolish things for the sake of a passing pleasure. While you are here you may satisfy your whims whenever you like … but no women."

The three listeners looked at one another in astonishment; and even the Colonel, who never betrayed his feeling when his "lord"

was speaking, showed a certain surprise on his countenance. What did the Prince mean?

"You are not ignorant, Atilio, of what a woman is. In the great majority of peoples on this earth there are only females. There are young females and old females; but there are no 'women.' Woman, as we understand the word, is the artificial product of civilizations which, somewhat like hot-house flowers, have reached their maturity with a complex perverse beauty. Only in the large cities that have come to be decadent because they have reached their limits, do you find 'women.' Not being mothers like the poor females, they give up all their time to love, prolong their youth marvelously, and scheme to inspire passions at an age when the others live like grandmothers. There you have the creatures that, personally, I am afraid of! If they come in here, it's the end of our society, our tranquil, even life."

The Prince arose from the table, and they all followed suit. Lunch being over they all passed into the great hall adjoining, where coffee was served. The Colonel looked about anxiously, examining the boxes of Havanas, and the large liquor chest with its varied cut glass and colored flasks, placed in a row.

While cutting the tip of his cigar, the Prince continued, speaking all the while to Castro:

"When you want … anything like that, all you need do is to choose in the vicinity of the Casino. A hundred or two francs; and then, good-by!.. But the other ones! The women! They work their way into our lives, and finally dominate us, and want to mold

our ways to suit their own. Their love for us after all is merely vanity, like that of the conqueror who loves the land that he has conquered with violence. They have all read books – nearly always stupidly and without understanding, to be sure, but they have read books – and such reading leaves them determined to satisfy all sorts of vague desires, and absurd whims, that succeed only in making slaves of us, and in moving us to act on impulses we have acquired in our own early romantic readings… I know them. I have met too many of them in my life. If women from our social sphere mingle with us here, it means an end to peace. They will seek me out through curiosity on remembering my past life, or greed in thinking of my wealth; as for you men, they will come between you, making you jealous of one another and the life that I desire here will be impossible… Besides, we are poor."

Atilio protested, smilingly: "Oh! poor!"

"Poor when it comes to the follies of the old days," continued the Prince, "and for love one needs money. All that talk about love being a disinterested thing was made up by poor people, who are satisfied with imitations. There is a glitter of gold at the bottom of every passion. At first we don't think of such things; desire blinds us. All we see is the immediate domination of the person so sweetly our adversary. But love invariably ends by giving or taking money."

"Take money from a woman!.. Never!" said Castro, losing his ironic smile.

"You will end by taking it, if you are poor, and frequent

the society of women. Those of our times think of nothing but money. When their love is a rich man, they ask him for it, even if they have a large fortune of their own. They feel less worthy if they don't ask. When they are fond of a poor man, they force him to receive gifts from them. They dominate him better by degrading him. Besides, in doing so they feel the selfish satisfaction of the person who gives alms. Woman, having always been forced to beg from man, has the greatest sensation of pride, and thinks she in turn can give money to some one of the sex that has always supported her."

Novoa, cup in hand, listened attentively to the Prince. Lubimoff was speaking of a world quite unknown to him. Spadoni, as he sipped his coffee, with a vague look in his eyes, was thinking of something far away.

"Now you know the worst, Atilio," the Prince went on. "No women!.. That way we will lead a great life. All the morning, free! We shan't see one another until lunch time. Down below is the cove, there are still a number of boats. We can fish, while it's sunny; we can go rowing. In the afternoon you will go to the Casino; occasionally I shall go, too, to hear some concert. Spring is drawing near. At night, sitting on the terrace, watching the stars, our friend Novoa, the man of learning of our monastery, will expound the music of the spheres; and Spadoni, our musician, will sit down at the piano, and delight us with terrestrial music."

"Splendid!" exclaimed Castro. "You are almost a poet in

describing our future life, and you have persuaded me. We are going to be happy. But don't forget your permission for the 'female,' and your prohibition of 'women.' No skirts in Villa Sirena! Nothing but men; monks in trousers, selfish and tolerant, coming together to live a pleasant life, while the world is aflame."

Atilio remained thoughtful a few moments, and continued:

"We need a name; our community must have a title. We shall call ourselves 'the enemies of women'."

The Prince smiled.

"The name mustn't go any farther than ourselves. If people outside learned of it, they might think it meant something else."

Novoa, feeling honored by his new intimacy with men so different from those with whom he had previously associated, accepted the name with enthusiasm.

"I confess, gentlemen, that according to the distinction made by the Prince, I have never known a 'woman'. Females … poor ones, to be sure, a very few perhaps! But I like the name, and agree to join the 'enemies of women' even though a woman is never to enter my life."

Spadoni, as though suddenly awakening, turned to Castro, and continued his thought aloud.

"It's a system of stakes invented by an English lord, now dead, who won millions by it. They explained it to me yesterday. First you place…"

"No, no, you satanic pianist!" exclaimed Atilio. "You can explain it to me in the Casino, providing I have the curiosity to

listen. You've made me lose a lot, with all your systems. I had better go on playing your 'number five.'"

The Colonel, who had listened in silence to the conversation in regard to women, seemed to recall something when Castro mentioned gambling.

"Last evening," he said to the Prince, in a mysterious voice, "I met the Duchess in the Casino"…

A look of silent questioning halted his words.

"What Duchess is that?"

"The question is quite in point, Michael," said Atilio. "Your 'chamberlain' is better acquainted in society than any man on the Riviera. He knows princesses and duchesses by the dozen. I have seen him dining in the Hôtel de Paris with all the ancient French nobility, who come here to console themselves for the long time it takes to bring back their former kings. In the private rooms in the Casino, he is always kissing wrinkled hands and bowing to some group of disgusting mummies loaded down with the oldest and most famous names. Some of them call him simply 'Colonel'; others introduce him with the title of 'aide de camp of Prince Lubimoff'."

Don Marcos stiffened, offended by the waggish tone in which his high estate was being mentioned, and said haughtily:

"Señor de Castro, I am a soldier grown old in defense of Legitimacy; I shed my blood for the sacred tradition, and there is nothing remarkable about my association with…"

The Prince knowing by experience that the Colonel did

not know what time was, when once he began to talk about "legitimacy" and the blood he had shed, hastened to interrupt him.

"All right; we know that very well already. But who was this Duchess you met?"

"The Duchess de Delille. She often asks about your Highness, and upon hearing that you had just arrived, she gave me to understand that she intended paying you a call."

The Prince replied with a simple exclamation, and then remained silent.

"We are starting well," said Castro, laughing. "'No women!' And immediately the Colonel announces a visit from one of them, one of the most dangerous… For you will admit that a Duchess like that is one of the 'women' you described to us."

"I won't receive her," said the Prince resolutely.

"I have an idea that this Duchess is a cousin of yours."

"There is no such relationship. Her father was the brother of my mother's second husband. But we have known each other since childhood, and we each have a most unpleasant memory of one another. When I was living in Russia she married a French Duke. She had the same desire as the majority of wealthy American girls: a great title of nobility in order to make her friends among the fair sex jealous and to shine in European circles. A few months later she left the Duke, assigning him a certain income, which is just what her noble husband wanted perhaps. This woman Alicia never appealed to me particularly…

Besides, she has lived life just as she pleased… She has seen almost as much of it as I have. She has as much of a reputation as I. They even accuse her, just as they do me, of love affairs with people she has never seen… They tell me that in recent years she has been parading around with a young lad, almost a child … dear me! We are getting old!"

"I saw her with him in Paris," said Castro. "It was before the war. Later in Monte Carlo I met her, all by herself, without being able to find a trace of her young chap anywhere. He must have been a passing fancy of hers… She has been here three years now. When summer comes she moves to Aix-les-Bains, or to Biarritz, but as soon as the Casino is gay and fashionable again, she is one of the first to return."

"Does she play?"

"Desperately. She plays high stakes and plays them badly, although we who think we play well always lose just the same, in the end. I mean, she puts her money on the table without thinking, in several places at a time, and then even forgets where she placed it. The 'leveurs des morts' are always hanging around to pick up the pieces that no one claims and when she wins, they always manage to get something of it. She gambled for two years with nothing less than chips of five hundred and a thousand francs. At present her chips are never for more than a hundred. It won't be long before she is using the red ones, the twenties, the favorites of your humble servant."

"I shall refuse to receive her," affirmed the Prince.

And doubtless in order not to talk any more about the Duchess de Delille, he suddenly left his friends, and walked out of the room.

Atilio, in a conversational mood, turned and asked a question of Don Marcos, who was speaking with Novoa, while Spadoni went on dreaming, with eyes wide open, of the English lord's system.

"Have you seen Doña Enriqueta lately?"

"Are you asking me about the Infanta?" replied the Colonel gravely. "Yes, I met her yesterday, in the courtyards of the Casino. Poor lady! If it isn't a shame! The daughter of a king… She told me that her sons haven't anything to wear. She owes two hundred francs for cigarettes, at the bar of the private play rooms. She can't find anyone who will lend her money. Besides, she has frightful bad luck; she loses everything. These are fatal days for people of royal blood. I almost wept when I heard all her poverty and troubles, and felt that I couldn't give her anything more. The daughter of a king?"

"But her father disowned her, when she eloped with some unknown artist," said Atilio. "And besides, Don Carlos wasn't a king anywhere."

"Señor de Castro," replied the Colonel, drawing himself up, like a rooster, "let's not spoil the party. You know my ideas: I have shed my blood in the cause of Legitimacy, and the respect that I have for you should not…"

Novoa, wishing to calm Don Marcos, intervened in the

conversation.

"Monte Carlo here is like a beach, where all sorts of wreckage, living and dead, is washed up sooner or later. In the Hôtel de Paris there is another member of the family, but of the successful branch, the one that is ruling and taking in the money."

"I know him," said Atilio, laughing. "He's a young man of calipigous exuberance and wherever he goes his handsome gentleman secretary goes with him. He always meets some venerable old lady who, dazzled by his royal kinship, takes it upon herself to keep up his extravagant mode of living… Don't know what the devil he can possibly give her in return! As for the secretary, he gives him a slap from time to time just to assert his ancient rights."

Don Marcos remained silent. He was not interested in the members of that branch, not he.

"Also," Castro continued mischievously, "in the Casino before the war, I met Don Jaime, your own king at present. A great fellow for gambling! He risked thousand franc chips by the handful. He had a lot of money coming from somewhere. In the Casino they all used to say that it was sent him from Madrid, on condition that he should have no children and allow his claims to the throne to die out with him."

"And just to think," murmured Novoa, without realizing that he was speaking aloud, "that for both of these families, back there, so many men have killed one another. To think, that for a question of inheritance among people like that we have gone

back a century in European life!"

"You too!" exclaimed the Colonel, provoked again. "A scholar, saying a thing like that! I can hardly believe my ears!"

CHAPTER II

AT the end of the second Carlist war a Spanish officer, Don Miguel Saldaña, had found himself, as a result of the defeat, banished forever from his own country and condemned to a life of poverty and obscurity. The Madrid papers, without prefixing his name with any slanderous adjectives, called him simply "the rebel chief Saldaña." This courtesy, doubtless, was intended to distinguish him from the other party chiefs who in Aragon, Catalonia, and Valencia, had waged a campaign of pillage and executions for five years. Among his own people he was known as General Miguel Saldaña, Marquis of Villablanca. The pretender, Don Carlos, had given him that title because Villablanca was the name of the town where Saldaña had practically annihilated a column of the Liberal army. The topographical information of Saldaña's Chief of Staff – a local priest who had spent his whole life in doing nothing except saying mass on Sundays and spending the rest of the week hunting in the mountains with his dog and gun – gave him an opportunity to take the enemy by surprise, and he won a notorious victory.

When he crossed the frontier as a fugitive, through refusing to recognize the Bourbons as the constitutional rulers, "the rebel chief Saldaña" was twenty-nine years of age. A second son in a proud and ruined family, he had been obliged to resist the traditions of his house which presented for him an ecclesiastical

career. When his studies at the Military School at Toledo were just finishing, the Revolution of 1868 caused him to renounce a commission to escape being under orders from certain generals who had participated in overthrowing royalty. When Don Carlos took up arms, Saldaña was one of the first to volunteer his services; and having gone through a military school, and received a good education, he at once became conspicuous among the guerrillas of the so-called Army of the Center, made up, for the most part, of country squires, village clerks, and mountain priests.

Besides, Saldaña distinguished himself for a reckless though rather unfortunate bravery. He always led the attack at the head of his men and consequently was wounded in the majority of his fights. But his wounds were "lucky wounds" as the soldiers say. They left marks of glory on his body without destroying his vigorous health.

Finding himself alone in Paris, where his only resource was the admiration of a few elderly "legitimist" ladies of the aristocratic Faubourg Saint Germain, he left for Vienna. There his king had friends and relatives. His youth and his exploits gained him admission as a hero of the old monarchy to the circle of archdukes. The war between Russia and Turkey tore him away from his pleasant life as an interesting hanger-on. Being a fighting man and a Catholic, he felt it his duty to wage war against the Turks; and with recommendations as a protégé of some influential Austrians, he went to the Court at Saint

Petersburg. General Saldaña became a mere Commander of a Squadron in the Russian Cavalry. The officers conversed with him in French. His horsemen understood him well enough when he placed himself in front of his division, and, unsheathing his sword, galloped ahead of them against the enemy.

Various successful charges and two more "lucky wounds" won him a certain celebrity. At the end of the war he had gained numerous friends among officers of the nobility, and was presented in the most aristocratic drawing rooms. One evening at a ball given by a Grand Duchess, he saw close at hand the most fashionable and most talked of young woman of the season: the Princess Lubimoff.

She was twenty-two, an orphan, with a fortune said to be one of the largest in Russia. The first to bear the title of Prince Lubimoff, a poor but handsome Cossack, unable to read or write, succeeded in winning the attention of the Great Catherine, who made him the favorite among her lovers of second rank. During the years that her imperial caprice lasted, the new Prince was forced to seek his fortune far from the Court, since the favorites before him had gained possession of all that was near at hand. The Czarina allowed him to make his selection on the map of her immense Empire; distant territories beyond the Urals, which the new proprietor was, like the majority of his successors, never to see. With the introduction of the railroad, enormous riches came to light in these lands chosen by the Cossack; in some, veins of platinum were discovered; in others, quarries of

malachite, deposits of lapis lazuli, and rich oil wells. Besides, tens of thousands of serfs, recently freed by the Czar, continued to work the land for the Lubimoff heirs, just as they had before the emancipation. And all this immense fortune, which nearly doubled each year with new discoveries, belonged entirely to one woman, the young Princess, who considered herself as one of the Imperial family owing to the relationship of her ancestor, and had more than once given the sovereign cause for worry through the eccentricities of her character.

She was an aggressive young woman, capricious and inconsistent in both words and deeds, a puzzle to everyone through the sharp contradictions in her conduct. She mingled with the officers of the Guard, treating them as comrades, smoking and drinking with them and taking a hand in their exercises in horsemanship; and then suddenly she would shut herself up in her palace for whole weeks, on her knees most of the time, before the holy ikons, absorbed in mystic fervor, and loudly imploring the forgiveness of her sins. She looked on the Emperor with veneration, as the representative of God. At the same time she was known to sympathize with the Nihilists.

The courtiers were scandalized whenever they told how she had accompanied a girl, whom the police were watching to a wretched house on the outskirts of the capital, and had there mingled with the revolutionary rabble composed of workmen and students. With them she had entered a narrow room, and joined the line passing before a coffin that was constantly in

danger of being upset by the pushing of the gloomy curious crowd. The dead man's name was Fedor Dostoiewsky. The princess had scattered a bouquet of the most costly roses on the protruding forehead and monkish beard of the novelist.

And in her moments of anger this same Nadina Lubimoff beat the servants in her Palace, as though they were still serfs, and forced her maids to grovel at her feet. Her irritability and fiery temper turned everything upside down, to such an extent that a certain elderly Prince, who by Imperial order had been chosen as her guardian, desired, in spite of the fact that it would mean to him loss of the management of an immense fortune, to see her married as soon as possible.

Nadina Lubimoff inspired a feeling of dread in her suitors. They were all afraid that she would answer their request for her hand with a cruel jest. Twice she had announced her engagement to gentlemen of the Court, and at the last moment she herself had begged the Czar to refuse his consent. By this time no one dared propose, for fear of laughter and comment. Yet in spite of the freedom and unconventionality of her conduct, no one doubted the uprightness of her character.

On seeing her, Saldaña thought of a naiad of the North, rising from an emerald river, in which cakes of ice were floating. She was tall and majestic, with a somewhat massive figure, like the divinities painted in frescos for ceilings. Her skin was of radiant whiteness. The pupils of her gray eyes gave out a greenish light, and her silky hair was a faded washed-out red.

Owing to the marvelous whiteness of her complexion, her flesh appeared somewhat soft, but a fresh fragrance emanated from it, "the fragrance of running brooks," to use the words of her admirers. Her nostrils were rather wide, and in the stress of emotion they quivered, like those of a horse, thus recalling her glorious ancestor, the virile Cossack of the Czarina.

The ball was nearly over before she noticed the Spaniard. There were so many officers constantly at her heels, greeting her cruel jokes and vulgar expressions with a smile of gratitude! – Suddenly Saldaña, who was standing between two doorways, was startled by a clear but commanding female voice.

"Your arm, Marquis."

And before he could offer it to her the young Princess took it, and led him off to the buffet in the drawing room.

Nadina drank a good sized glass of vodka, preferring this liquor of the people to the champagne which the servants were pouring out in large quantities. Then smiling at her companion she drew him into the embrasure of a window where they were almost hidden by the curtains.

"Your wounds!.. I want to see your wounds!"

Saldaña was dumfounded at the command of this great lady accustomed to carrying out her most whimsical ideas. Blushing like a soldier, who had lived all his life among men, he finally drew up the left sleeve of his uniform, revealing a brown, hairy forearm, with large tendons, and deeply furrowed by the scar of a bullet wound received back in Spain.

The Princess admired his athletic arm, with its dark skin, cut by the jagged white of the new tissue.

"The other – the others! I want to see the rest of them!" she commanded, gazing at him fiercely, as though she were ready to bite, while her lips, moist and shining, curved sharply downward.

She had seized his arm with a hand that trembled, while with the other she tried to undo the gold cords on the officer's breast.

Saldaña drew back, stammering. "Oh! Princess!" What she desired was impossible. It was impossible to show the other wounds to a lady…

He felt on the one visible scar the contact of two lips. Nadina, bowing her proud head, was kissing his arm.

"Hero!.. Oh! my hero!"

Immediately afterward she drew herself up again, cold and distant, with no other sign of emotion than a slight quivering of her nostrils. No longer was she tormented by the desire to see immediately those frightful scars of which she had heard from some of the comrades of the brave adventurer. She was sure of being able to see them to her heart's content whenever she pleased.

In a few days the rumor began to circulate that the Princess Lubimoff was to be married to the Spaniard. She herself had started the news going, without bothering to ascertain beforehand the inclination of her future husband.

The arguments with which she justified her decision could not have been more weighty. She was blond and Saldaña was

dark. They had both been born at outermost limits of Europe. These considerations were sufficient to make a happy marriage. Besides, the Princess was convinced that she had always been fond of Spain, although she would not have been able to place it accurately on the map. She recalled certain verses of Heine mentioning Toledo, and others by Musset addressing Andalusian Marquises of Barcelona; and she used to hum a love song about the oranges of Seville… Her hero must surely be from Toledo, or, better yet, an Andalusian from Barcelona.

In vain certain people of the court spoke of the Czar's not allowing the match. A great heiress marrying a foreign soldier banished from his country!.. But the Princess by her very conduct, gave the sovereign to understand her will.

"Either I marry him, or I start out as a dancer in a Paris theater."

It was rumored that Saldaña was about to be deported.

"So much the better: I will go and join him, and be his sweetheart."

The old Prince, her guardian, lamented this obstinacy on the part of the Court. If it had not been for this opposition, Nadina's caprice for Saldaña, like so many of her whims, would have lasted only a few days. It was said that perhaps the Emperor, in order to break her will, would dispossess her of her vast estates in Siberia. The grandchild of the Cossack shrieked in reply that she would kill herself rather than obey.

At last the ruler prudently allowed her to fulfil her desire. In

getting married she would give up her eccentricities perhaps, and the Russian court, so rich in scandals, would have one less.

The wedding journey of the Princess Lubimoff lasted all her life. Only twice, for reasons relating to her great fortune, did she return to Russia. Western Europe was more favorable than the court of an autocrat to her love of freedom. In the first year of her marriage, while in London, she had a son, who was to be the only child. She allowed him to be called Michael, like his father, but insisted that he should have a second name, Fedor, perhaps in memory of Dostoiewsky, her favorite novelist, whose character inspired in her a feeling of sympathy, through a certain resemblance to herself.

No one succeeded in ascertaining with certainty whether or not Don Miguel Saldaña felt happy in his new position as Prince Consort, which permitted him to enjoy all the pleasure and magnificence of immense wealth. According to Spanish customs, he started out to impose his will as a husband and a man of character, to curb the eccentricities of his wife. Vain determination! The very woman who at times could be sentimental and moan at the thought of social inequalities and the suffering of the poor, could, by her fiery impetuosity, reduce the stoutest and most firmly steeled will.

In the end Saldaña relapsed into silence, fearing the aggressiveness of the daughter of the Cossack. To keep his prestige as a great noble, anxious for the respect of the servants and for the consideration of his guests, he feared violent scenes

that filled the drawing rooms and even the stairways of his luxurious residence with feminine shrieks. He did not care more than once to see the Princess with one kick send the oaken table flying against the dining room wall, while all the porcelain and crystal service smashed into bits with one catastrophic crash.

When the Paris architects had carried out the orders of the Princess, the family left the castle they were occupying in the vicinity of London. A group of rich Parisians, Jewish bankers for the most part, were covering the level grounds around the new Park Monçeau, with large private dwellings. The Princess Lubimoff had an enormous palace, with a garden of extraordinary size for a city, built in this quarter. She even set up a tiny dairy behind a grove of trees, and without leaving her place she could enjoy the rôle of a country woman, whipping cream and churning butter, in imitation of Marie Antoinette, who likewise played at being a shepherdess in the Petit Trianon.

At times a wave of tenderness swept over her, and she adored and obeyed her husband, pushing her humility to extremes that were alarming. She told her visitors about the General's campaigns, and his daring exploits back in Spain, a land which inspired in her a romantic interest, and which for that very reason she did not care ever to see. Suddenly she would cut her eulogies short with a command:

"Marquis, show them your wounds."

As proof of her tenderness, she refrained from getting angry when her husband refused.

She always called him "Marquis," perhaps in order to keep the princely title for herself alone, perhaps because she felt that he should not be deprived of a rank he had gained with his blood. The Marquis never paid any attention to this breach of etiquette. His wife had already committed so many!

A year after their marriage, when the news reached London that Alexander II had been killed by the explosion of a Nihilist bomb, the Princess ran about her apartments like a mad woman, and took to her bed after an extraordinary fit of anger.

"The wretches! He was so good!.. They've killed their own father."

And thereafter when Saldaña entered the luxurious dwelling in Paris, he often came across strange visitors, at whom the lackeys in breeches stared in amazement. They were uncouth girls with spectacles, and cropped hair, carrying portfolios under their arms; men with long hair and tangled beards, whose eyes contained the startled expression of visionaries; Russians from the Latin Quarter under police surveillance, terrorists, who appealed not in vain to the generosity of the Princess, and used her money perhaps to make infernal machines which they sent back to their country and hers.

When the Prince Michael Fedor recalled his childhood memories, he could see his father holding him on his knees and caressing him with his firm hands. The child would gaze up at the dark face and large mustache that joined Saldaña's closely cropped mutton chop whiskers. He could not be sure whether the

moisture in those black, commanding eyes came from tears; but after he learned Spanish he was sure that the Marquis had often murmured, as he smoothed the tiny brow:

"My poor little boy!.. Your mother is mad!"

When Michael reached the age of eight, the problem of his education caused the Princess to show her motherly concern for a few weeks. One of those visitors, who so greatly worried the servants, brought his books and his frayed garments from a narrow street near the Pantheon, and took up his abode in the lordly dwelling of the Lubimoffs. He was a silent young man, given to the study of chemistry, and forbidden to return to his country. The very day of his arrival, a secret service agent came and questioned the porter of the palace.

"I want my son to know Russian," said the Princess. "Besides, he will learn a great deal from Sergueff. Sergueff is a real man of learning, and worthy of a better fate."

Saldaña insisted that he should likewise have a Spanish teacher, and she raised no objections. All the members of her family had possessed to an unusual degree the talent of the Slavs for learning languages easily.

"Prince Michael Fedor," said his mother, "is the Marquis of Villablanca, and ought to know the language of his second country."

On this account the General once again sought out his former companions in arms who were still scattered in various parts of Paris. The fame of his enormous wealth had brought him

many requests, even from persons of whom he had formerly stood in awe. But although the Princess, who was generous to a fault, allowed him the management of her fortune, Saldaña, with chivalrous unyielding integrity, felt that he had no right to her money, and gradually came to avoid the insistent suppliants. Besides, a great change had come over this silent man during his travels through Europe. The former soldier of the absolute monarchy was now an admirer of England and her constitutional history.

"You see things differently when you travel about," was all he said. "If all my fellow countrymen had only seen the world."

One day the new teacher presented himself at the palace. He was twelve years younger than Saldaña. He had been under the latter's command toward the end of the war, and instead of calling him by his title of Marquis or Prince he addressed him proudly, at every opportunity, as "my General."

The General had not the slightest recollection of him; but the fact that he could give exact details of the last campaign, and had been recommended by various friends, did not permit of any doubt as to his veracity. He must have been one of those lads who had run away from home and joined the Carlist bands, making up those forces of irregulars whom Saldaña, unable to tolerate their frequent atrocities, more than once threatened with execution en masse. The teacher claimed that the General himself had given him a subordinate's commission in the last months of the war, owing to his having a better education than his ragged comrades.

Thus Marcos Toledo entered the palace of the Lubimoffs.

The solemn husband of the Princess laughed with boyish glee upon hearing the story of Toledo's first experiences as an *emigré* in Paris.

During the first few months, since he did not know French, he used to stop the priests in the street, to talk with them in Latin. He eked out a miserable existence, giving lessons on the guitar, and lecturing in a Polyglot Institute, where the auditors did not pay the slightest attention to the subjects discussed, but tried simply to accustom their ears to his Spanish pronunciation.

Seven francs and a half, for talking an hour and a half! But Toledo made up for the smallness of the compensation in the pleasure it gave him to orate about the happy days of Philip II, so much superior to "these days of liberalism."

"At present, I have only one ambition, General," he ended by saying, "and that is to dress well."

The passion for luxurious display came from his youthful days as a guerrilla, when he would steal red and yellow petticoats from peasant women in order to make uniforms for himself. In Paris, he did not feel so keenly the lack of nutritious food, as he did the fact that he was obliged to wear clothes that did not belong to any known fashion.

When he was given quarters on the top floor of the palace, like the Russian teacher, and the General had selected various garments for him from his large wardrobe, Toledo felt he had realized all the dreams that he had elaborated while running

about Paris as a persistent agent for a thousand unsaleable things.

His fellow countrymen, former comrades in poverty, admired him on seeing him all dressed up like a rich man, and often riding in the carriage of a Prince. It scarcely seemed honorable that he, a former fighter, should occupy a position as a teacher, and he used to say in an apologetic manner:

"I am now General Saldaña's *aide-de-camp*. I don't think it will be long before we take to the mountains again."

Young Prince Michael admired his Russian teacher, because his mother affirmed that he was a great scholar. The boy felt a certain fear in the presence of this melancholy sage. On the other hand, Michael Fedor treated the Spaniard with an air of friendly and patronizing superiority. Toledo made his father laugh, and that was enough to cause the son to consider him an inferior being, but one worthy of esteem nevertheless, because of his docility and patience.

"Say: is it true that you were going to be a priest?" Michael Fedor used to ask Toledo. "Is it true that after you left the seminary you were a druggist's clerk?"

"Prince," the teacher replied with dignity, "I am Don Marcos de Toledo. My name tells my nobility, in spite of everything that envious people may say, and I have a right to use the 'Don' since I am an officer and your father, the Marquis, gave me my commission."

In a short time the pupil was speaking Spanish correctly. It seemed that he had learned it as rapidly as possible in order to

be better able to poke fun at his *hidalgo* teacher.

The father also contributed to the education of the heir of the Lubimoffs the one thing he was able to teach. Every morning, after the lessons given by the Russian, which left the little fellow with a solemn face, Saldaña would wait for him in a large room on the ground floor.

"Prince, on guard!"

And he, who had been the best blade in the Carlist army, and had on his conscience the slashing of a skull to the jawbone in a duel during the Turkish campaign, smiled proudly when he saw how this eleven year old boy stood his ground during the fencing lesson, parrying the hard blows and returning them successfully at the least unguardedness on his father's part. Michael Fedor was going to be a splendid fighting man, a worthy descendant of the Cossack of Russia, and of the guerrilla of the Spanish mountains.

But Saldaña was not to enjoy this satisfaction for long. Among his various "lucky wounds," which only bothered him slightly with the changing of the seasons, there was one which from time to time inflicted periods of acute pain. For many years he had carried in his body a Spanish bullet which the sawbones of his guerrilla band had been unable to extract. When the surgeons of London and Paris attempted the operation it was too late.

One morning the General's valet, on entering the room, found him dead.

Michael Fedor never forgot the sorrow he had felt on that occasion, nor the sumptuous funeral which the Princess had

ordered, equal to that of a king deceased in exile. But what he remembered most clearly was the extraordinary grief of his mother. She too wanted to die. Her Russian maids were once obliged to snatch from her hands a phial of laudanum, receiving for their pains a few more blows than usual. Then, with her hair streaming down her back, she ran about wailing like a madwoman in front of all the portraits of the General. Oh! Her hero! Now she really knew how much she loved him…

For several months she received her visitors in a drawing room with black furnishings and curtains. Wearing loose mourning garments, she half reclined on a sofa in front of a full length portrait of Saldaña. His swords, his uniforms, and even a Russian saddle were on exhibition in the drawing room, which had been converted into a sort of museum of the deceased.

"He died like the man he was!" moaned the widow. "He was killed by his wounds."

At this period began the ultimate stage in the rise of Don Marcos Toledo. The Russian scholar receded into the background. A part of the dead man's glory passed to his humble fellow countryman who had witnessed his great exploits. One evening, the Princess, while engaged in conversation in the drawing room museum with some noble relatives who had arrived from Russia, wept so copiously at the memory of her husband, that she decided to leave the room for a moment.

"Colonel, your arm."

Toledo was present in company with his pupil, and looked

around with an expression of bewilderment. The Princess had to repeat her command in a more imperious voice. "Colonel, your arm!" She was speaking to him! For some time Don Marcos thought that the new title was a whim of the Princess and that some day when he was least expecting it his commission as "Colonel" would be withdrawn.

But when the first months of mourning had passed and the widow, tiring of solitude, started to resume her social calls, she insisted on being accompanied by Toledo, and on introducing him to her acquaintances in the aristocratic world.

"He is the aide-de-camp of the dead Marquis," she explained.

The very title he had invented to give himself an air of importance in the eyes of his half-starved companions in poverty! Toledo no longer questioned the validity of his promotion. Now that the Princess was presenting him as her husband's aide-de-camp, he might well be a Colonel. And a Colonel he was, even for the young Prince, who at first had given him the title to make fun of him, but finally came to call him "Colonel" by force of habit.

Toledo's dreams of splendid and showy toggery were now realized magnificently. With the Princess he did not need to fear the scruples sometimes shown by Saldaña, who hated extravagance and mismanagement. The great lady even felt disdain for those who were niggardly in availing themselves of her generosity. Don Marcos was enabled to change his attire several times a day, and held long conferences with famous

tailors. He sought personal elegance. He wished to dress like a gentleman of distinction, but at the same time to wear clothes of a cut that would plainly show that he was accustomed to uniforms: He had in mind something like a Napoleonic Marshal obliged to wear a dress suit. Through his barber, likewise, he effected a great transformation. He imitated the manner in which the General had worn his hair, with a part that started at his forehead and ended at the back of his neck, and with stray locks hanging down at the temples. His mustache was taught to mingle with his side whiskers, in the Russian fashion. In accompanying the Princess, he learned to kiss ladies' hands with the grace and ease of an old courtier. He also learned to carry on long conversations without saying anything, to keep himself in the background, practically unseen, while his superiors were talking.

When the Princess, after the first year of mourning, resolutely returned to her box at the Opera, Don Marcos attended her, remaining discreetly in the rear, like the Chamberlain of a Queen. One evening, during an intermission, on passing to the front of her box, the Princess heard the Colonel telling an old French general, a friend of the house, about the battle of Villablanca.

"And the Marquis said to me: 'Now it's your chance, Toledo: Let's see how you can make out with a bayonet charge.' So I bared my sword, and at the head of my regiment…"

"He's a true soldier," interrupted the Princess, "a worthy companion of my hero… The Marquis often talked to me about

him."

And at that moment she was really sure she had heard the silent Saldaña relate the gallant deeds of his aide-de-camp.

The Russian teacher, regarded by Toledo as an unpleasant person who would bear watching, soon left the Lubimoff palace. Perhaps he was jealous of the Colonel's growing influence; perhaps mysterious reasons needed his attention far from Paris. The Princess did not mind in the least the disappearance of the scholar. She had forgotten her rebellious looking Russians; she stopped giving them money. At present she had other interests.

She suddenly evinced a desire to live for some time in London, and for this reason, she granted her son's request to be allowed to travel alone throughout Europe.

"You're a man now; you will soon be fourteen. Travel, and don't stop at expense; always remember that you are Prince Lubimoff… The Colonel will go with you. He will be your aide, as he was for the heroic Marquis."

His first trip was to Spain. Michael Fedor wanted to see his father's native land. Toledo thought it in point for the young Prince to show great admiration for Spain. Michael must remember they were in the enemy's country. Toledo was a Carlist Colonel who had refused amnesty, and had declined to recognize the reigning dynasty! But they traveled for three months in Spain, without being noticed except for the largeness of their tips. It is quite true that Toledo avoided coming in contact with any of his former comrades. He felt that he now belonged to a different

world. Inwardly he felt the same change the General had.

As soon as Michael Fedor had recovered from his first enthusiasm for bull fighting, they continued their travels across the continent as far as Russia, arriving considerably later than the numerous letters of introduction sent by the Princess Lubimoff to her relatives. The Prince remained there a year, visiting his less distant estates, and making the acquaintance of all the great families in his mother's circle of friends. The Colonel talked grandiloquently about everything related to war with various generals who received him as an equal. Was he not the aide and companion in heroic deeds of Saldaña, whom they had known in the war against Turkey, when they were mere subalterns?

The former friends of the Princess Lubimoff told her son some unexpected news. His mother had announced her forthcoming marriage to an English gentleman. She had written to the Czar asking his authorization. This news startled no one save Michael Fedor. The times of the wild Nadina had long since passed. Her actions aroused no further interest. Other young Princesses had effaced her memory with adventures that caused even greater commotion. No one save a few of the ladies of the old court, when they forgot their cares and interests as mothers, would bring to mind the Princess Lubimoff, recalling days of vanished youth, which for old people are always more interesting than the present.

When the young man returned to the Paris palace, he found his mother as much of a Princess as ever, but married to a Scotch

gentleman, Sir Edwin Macdonald.

"Some day you will leave me," she said with a tragic note in her voice she used on great occasions. "A Prince Lubimoff should live at the court, serve his Emperor, be an officer in the Guard; and I need a companion, some one to lean on. Sir Edwin is the personification of distinction; but don't ever think that I shall forget your father. Never!.. My hero!"

Michael Fedor saw a gentleman who, indeed, was "the personification of distinction"; attentive to everyone, very precise in his bearing, a man of few words, who shut himself up for long hours – studying, according to the Princess. English politics was his preoccupation, and his one great dream was to return to Parliament, which he had been forced to leave by defeat at election.

This cold man, with a pale smile and extreme insistence on good form even in the most trivial actions, neither displeased Michael as a step-father nor appealed to him as a friend. He was an inoffensive, somewhat stuffy person, whom Michael grew accustomed to seeing every day in his father's former place, and whom he had expected to see sooner or later anyhow.

This marriage brought other people to the Lubimoff palace, with all the intimacy inspired by relationship.

One of Sir Edwin's brothers had been obliged, like all the second sons in wealthy British families, to go out in the world and earn his living. After a life of adventure, he had finally settled down in the United States, near the Mexican border, and had

soon found himself, through a marriage with an heiress of the country, much richer than his elder brother.

His wife was a Mexican. She owned famous silver mines in the interior and vast ranches on the border. She had only one daughter; and the latter was in her eighth year when Arthur Macdonald died as a result of a fall from his horse. The widow, with her little Alicia, moved to Europe. She wanted to live in London, to be near her brother-in-law, Sir Edwin, then a member of Parliament, and much admired by the Mexican woman as one of the directors of the world's affairs. Later she established herself in Paris, as the capital most to her taste, and as the place where she could meet many people from Mexico.

The Princess Lubimoff treated her relative well, although her friendship suffered sudden changes, often going from extreme affection to sudden coldness.

She and Doña Mercedes could talk about mines and vast estates, although neither of them had any accurate knowledge of their respective fortunes. They estimated their wealth only by the enormous quantities of money – millions of francs a year – which their distant business agents sent them, and which they spent without knowing just how. There was another thing which attracted the Princess, in her moments of good will, to Doña Mercedes: she herself was blond, while the Spanish Creole still kept traces of Hispanic-Aztec beauty, with a dark, somewhat olive complexion, large, wide-open, almond eyes, and hair astonishing for its blackness, brilliancy, and length.

But an instinctive rivalry frequently embittered the relations of the two multi-millionaires. The Princess was sure that her own wealth was far the greater. When Doña Mercedes talked about Mexican silver, she mentioned Russian platinum! "What is silver worth compared to platinum!" And in order completely to floor her opponent, the Princess would bring out her family history. Beginning with the remote Cossack ancestor, who almost became the legitimate husband of Catherine the Great, she paraded before her Mexican rival generals, marshals of the Emperor's household, hetmans, followed by their retinues of half savage horsemen, princes and ambassadors. Sir Edwin's wife talked as though she belonged to the reigning house, letting it be understood that her famous ancestor had played a part in the establishing of one of the Czars. For this reason she had always been shown special consideration at court.

Doña Mercedes, inwardly jealous of so much greatness, nevertheless smiled a sweet enigmatic smile, as though she were to say, "That is all very far away – and perhaps a lie."

Then immediately she would begin talking in her rapid whimsical French, a French which she had never been able to free from numerous Spanish locutions that still clung tenaciously.

"Mama was an intimate friend of Eugenie… Don't you know who Eugenie is? The Empress, the wife of Napoleon III. When Madame Barrios – that was my mother's name – was announced at the Tuileries, the doors were opened wide. Papa was one of the men who made Maximilian emperor."

Over against the aristocratic grandeur of the Saint Petersburg court she set the image of the Mexican court, of the brief Empire which had ended in the execution of the Archduke Maximilian, and the madness of his bride, Carlotta. The Emperor endeavored to establish the musty old etiquette of the Austrian Court, but the Mexican matrons, when they called on the young Empress, said in the frank maternal fashion of the colonies: "How is everything, Carlotta?.. How do you like the country, my dear?"

Moved by a similar frankness, Doña Mercedes would end her discourse by saying carelessly:

"Papa, seeing that the Empire was going badly, recognized Juarez as the head of the government, and joined the side of the Republic. He did it to save our mines."

Then she would talk on for a long time about the Barrios, who, according to her, were descendants of the most ancient aristocracy of Spain. All the nobles of Madrid were therefore relatives of hers. Everybody knew that! As a child she had seen at home a lot of papers which proved her right to the title of Marchioness; but owing to the revolutions in her country, and her travels, she no longer knew where to find them.

If the Princess referred to the splendor of her palace, the Creole would immediately mention her elegant private mansion in the Champs Élysées. The arrival of Colonel Toledo, as a valorous adornment giving the princely residence military prestige, did not intimidate Doña Mercedes. She too had a Spaniard, an Aragonese cleric, who acted as a sort of royal

private chaplain, and whom she considered a man of science, because, bored by his sinecure in her employ, he had taken up elementary astronomy, and had set up a telescope on the roof of her house.

Whenever the Mexican lady dared to imitate her entertainments, her carriages or her clothes, the Princess Lubimoff would audibly lament the fact that Paris was not in Russia, where she might call on the chief of police to force this low-bred Creole to show the respect due to her superiors. But after these bursts of anger she would feel a sudden wave of tenderness for Doña Mercedes. "In spite of your illiteracy," she would say, "you are a woman of natural talent and the only one with whom I can talk for an hour at a stretch."

Between these two declining beauties, who had seen themselves the center of attraction and adoration in former years, there was a common bond, something which moved them both like far off lovely music, like the cherished memory of youth: It was the daughter of Doña Mercedes, the vivacious Alicia Macdonald.

Doña Mercedes seemed to see her own beauty, renewed with fresh vigor, in her child. But in this she was mistaken. Alicia added to her dark southern splendor the slenderness and slightly boyish freedom of movement of her father's race. The Princess, observing the girl's independent character, thought she saw herself back once more in the days when she was beginning to shock the Imperial Court. This too was a mistake. She herself

had been able to follow all her most wilful impulses, without fear of gossip. She possessed everything. Besides her immense wealth, she had the advantages of birth, enabling her to elevate any man whatsoever to her own level, no matter how far beneath her he might be. Alicia had one ambition; to unite her fortune with a great title of the old aristocracy in order to be presented at court. Since her fifteenth year this desire had been fixed, calculating design, dissimulated under apparent recklessness. From her fairy-story days, her mother had talked to her about wonderful marriages, and of princes who in former times used to marry shepherdesses, but who were in search nowadays of millionaires' daughters.

Michael Fedor felt somewhat embarrassed at meeting this girl in his palace. She looked at him so boldly, with such a dominating expression, as though everything and everyone should bow before her!

She had beauty of a type more fascinating than conventional. Her complexion, slightly tinged with a strange golden orange color, her large eyes a trifle slanting, her luxuriant hair, which, fleeing its bondage of hairpins, seemed alive and coiling like a cluster of snakes, gave her an exotic charm. The rest of her body revealed a modern physical education. Her limbs were firm and agile from continued exercise and play.

Doña Mercedes seemed to urge Alicia and Michael toward each other from the first meeting.

"Don't stand on formality," she said in a motherly way. "You

are cousins."

Although Michael didn't succeed in making out this relationship, he endeavored to treat the young girl in a friendly manner, while the Creole mother smiled as she already pictured Alicia with the coronet of a princess, bowing before the Czar. Princess Lubimoff was in one of her kindly moods; for the moment she did not believe in caste and privileges, to the extent that she would again have given money to the long-haired individuals who used to visit her. She accepted her friend's ambitious projects tolerantly and without comment.

The Prince, meanwhile, was telling the Colonel his impressions.

"Too much of a young lady! I like the others better."

Don Marcos, having been Michael's companion in wide and joyous travels, knew whom the boy meant by "the others"; for Prince Lubimoff had begun very young to nibble at the grapes of life.

On other occasions it irritated him that, with her unabashed demeanor of a foolish virgin, she should seem so much like "the others."

"She's worse than a boy. If you only knew, Colonel, the things she says to me!"

As for Alicia she was not wholly satisfied with the young Prince. She was accustomed to seeing other men make an effort to be gracious and show her flattering attentions, while Michael manifested a haughty character, like her own, arguing with her,

and even daring to contradict her.

Occasionally, accompanied by Toledo, they went out together for a gallop in the Bois de Boulogne. All this was torture for Don Marcos, who had been a mountain warrior! But his present position called for certain duties. So he rode along as well as could be expected from a colonel of infantry.

Alicia was a tireless rider. At the residence in the Champs-Élysées, Doña Mercedes had frequently been obliged to look for her in the stables, where she made herself at home among the hostlers and coachmen, and talked with professional authority as she supervised the grooming of the horses. Afterwards, when she came back into the drawing room her hair would have a decidedly horsey odor. Back in her native land she had mounted a horse and clung to it before she knew how to walk. In Paris she boldly made her way among the vehicles, knocked down the passersby occasionally, and often found her mad gallops intercepted by the police.

The Colonel endeavored to keep up with her. He never said anything, but his heart was heavy. The Prince protested against her racing in this fashion, which might have been all very well on her native plains. The girl's retorts widened the breach between them, with feelings of hostility. "No one is going to talk to me like that, not even my mother," she said. "I'm old enough to know what I ought to do." She was fifteen.

One morning in the Bois, coming to a cross road that happened to catch her fancy, Alicia started her horse for the

Avenue without consulting her companion.

"No, this way," Michael called in a commanding voice.

"I don't like that; this is the way!" she answered aggressively.

The Prince made an effort to cut her off by crossing ahead of her, and she spurred her horse against Michael's with a shock that brought the two animals to their knees. The Colonel, who was behind them, caught an exchange of angry glances, and harsh words. Alicia raised her whip, and struck the Prince across the shoulders.

"You do that to *me*!" shouted Michael furiously.

The face of this scion of the old Cossack Lubimoff underwent a rapid series of expressions, finally taking an aspect of extreme ugliness and savagery. His nostrils seemed to dilate even more than usual. He raised his whip and struck, but Toledo had put his horse between the two, receiving the tip of the lash on his cheek, which began to bleed. The sight of blood and the thought that the blow was intended for her, drove the young woman mad with rage.

"Brute! Savage!.. Russian!"

This seemed too mild, and she stopped for a moment, to think up a greater insult. Her childhood memories helped her; the legend she had heard from the half-breeds back in her own land inspired her with a new affront, as if Michael Fedor were Fernan Cortes.

"Spaniard!.. Murderer of Indians!"

And fearing a new lashing after that supreme insult, she fled

at a mad pace without stopping until she reached the Arch of Triumph.

After this incident Doña Mercedes lost all hope of her daughter's becoming a Lubimoff.

"A Russian Princess!" she said scornfully. "Why, everyone is a Prince in Russia!.. A mere English baron is better, or a French or Spanish count."

Michael was in a mood no more conciliatory when the Colonel lectured him.

"I don't want to hear anything more about that wench!" said he.

And the Princess, in one of her petulant moments averred that she considered this word the proper one. These relatives of Sir Edwin had always seemed to her very ordinary people. Likewise it seemed to her very natural that her son should think of going back to Russia to fill his station as a Prince. The life of caste and privilege there was more suitable to his rank than the democratic ways of Paris, where certain American Indians, because they had millions, could imagine they were the equals of the Lubimoffs.

Prince Michael remained in Russia until he was twenty-three. His military studies were passed brilliantly, according to Toledo, and the boy succeeded in distinguishing himself among the most famous cavalry officers of the Guard. He took prizes in exhibitions of horsemanship. With his revolver he could pot coins held up at fifty paces by his comrades. He wielded the sabre with a skill that his Cossack ancestor and General Saldaña would

have admired. Every morning in the courtyard of his Petersburg palace he found awaiting him a life-sized dummy made of the firm sticky clay used by sculptors. He would stay for half an hour in front of it, going through his exercises. It was not enough to be able to strike one's enemy. The important thing was to strike well, with the greatest possible depth and force. And the head and limbs of the dummy went flying, severed by the steel blade. The study of military science was all well enough for those in the infantry or the artillery – sons of clerks and merchants!

At first the Colonel was astonished at the magnificence and extravagance of Russian life. Finally he came to take it all quite naturally, as though he had been accustomed to something similar from his earliest boyhood. "My son, remember the name you bear," the Princess used to write to the Prince. "Do not disgrace it. Spend according to what you are." And the son, without asking her for anything, followed her advice faithfully by coming to a direct understanding with the Russian administrators. Don Marcos figured that the Lieutenant in the Guard was spending something over three millions a year. His racing stables were the most celebrated in the capital. Many famous beauties of the court and the theaters were on good terms with Prince Michael Fedor. His supper parties in the Lubimoff palace or in the fashionable restaurants were sought after by all the young men of the aristocracy. To be invited to one of them was an extraordinary honor, something like being a member of an academy of supermen. It often happened that toward morning

on nights of such parties celebrated women finished by dancing naked on the tables, so that the host "might not be displeased."

Sometimes these celebrations ended in drunken brawls, where wine mingled with blood. The Colonel had seen one of these suppers result in a duel between two of the guests. It took place in the palace garden, just before dawn. One of the men was killed. His best friends carried the corpse to the quay of the Neva, and placed a revolver in his hand to make it look like a case of suicide.

No: Don Marcos did not care much for those nocturnal feasts. He considered them dangerous. On one occasion, a youthful Grand Duke, absolutely drunk, amused himself by daubing the Colonel's whiskers with caviar, until, tired of such brazen familiarity, the Spaniard in turn put his hand in the dish and smeared the other man's august face with green. The duke hesitated for a moment whether or not to kill him, but finally embraced him, covering him with kisses and shouting aloud, "This is my father."

Toledo preferred his own honorable and quiet friendships with General Saldaña's former companions in arms; solemn personages who talked to him about world politics and future wars. Besides, the Prince's generosity permitted the Colonel secret pleasures, less noisy, and agreeably unostentatious.

One night, returning to the Lubimoff palace after two o'clock, he saw there was a supper party in the great dining hall used on gala occasions. Some fifty guests had assembled, and in the course of the night many more had arrived. It seemed that the

news had spread throughout all the pleasure resorts of the capital, attracting all the youthful libertines.

Opposite the Prince was seated a Cossack officer, short, lithe as a panther, dark skinned, with Asiatic eyes. His wrinkled uniform showed signs of recent traveling. Michael Fedor showed him the greatest attention, as though he were the only guest. Toledo, being acquainted with all the friends of the house, was unable to place this uncouth Cossack, who looked as though he had come from some remote garrison in Siberia. Some one offered to relieve his uncertainty. He was startled on learning that it was the brother of a court lady who just at that moment was being much talked about on account of her extreme familiarity with Michael Fedor. The two men looked at each other with keen interest, exchanging silent toasts in huge glasses of champagne. At the other end of the hall arose the ceaseless wail of gypsy violins. Several dark skinned girls with striped aprons of many colors were dancing about the tables. But in spite of that, Don Marcos, glancing about, felt instinctively a note of gloom.

"Leon, the sabres!"

The Prince, after looking at his watch, had arisen and given this order to his body servant, who was standing behind him. All the guests rushed for the doors forming a jam, like a crowd, pushing and shoving, at the entrance to a theater. There was no reason now to conceal their real feelings. They were eager for the promised spectacle. The Colonel finally found some one who could talk intelligibly.

"He came last night, to ask the Prince to marry his sister. A thirty-eight day trip… The Prince refuses… It isn't often you'll see a match like this… He's the best swordsman in Siberia."

The garden was covered with snow. It was night, and the uncertain moon illumined it with slanting rays, lengthening immeasurably the shadows of the trees. More than a hundred men formed in two black masses on the borders of the walk. The Colonel noticed the arrival of several servants. One was bringing swords; the rest were carrying large trays with bottles and glasses.

Michael Fedor bowed to his enemy, his eyes shining with kindliness and drink.

"Would you like another glass of something?"

The Cossack thanked him with a gesture, and immediately Toledo saw him remove his long coat, the breast of which was adorned with cartridge pouches. Then he took off his shirt, and finally remained in nothing save his trousers and high boots. Then he stooped, and seizing two handfuls of snow, began to rub his wiry body and muscular arms.

The Prince, like many of the spectators, shivered slightly with surprise and cold; but nevertheless that the condition of the combat might be equal, Lubimoff felt it imperative that he should follow the example of his hardy adversary. While he was removing the upper part of his uniform several torches were lighted and began to blaze like red stars in the semi-darkness of the moonlit garden.

Don Marcos could see the two men face to face. They were

bare from the waist up. Their breasts shone from the moisture of the recent massage. In their hands quivered sabres as sharp as razors.

"Ready!"

Some one was directing the fight.

"Why this is barbarous!" thought the Spaniard. "These men are savages."

He did not dare say it aloud because he was a soldier, and more than that, a Colonel; but during the rest of his life he never could forget that scene.

They crossed swords, parried, attacked, the Prince with firm poise, the other with catlike agility. Toledo could see that their bodies were blood red, but at the moment he thought it an effect of the torchlight. As they drew near him, circling about in their deadly play, he realized that they were actually red with blood. Their bodies seemed covered with a purple vestment that was torn to shreds and the shreds quivered at the ends as the blood dripped off. Standing out against that warm moist garment rose their white arms. The Prince was getting the worst of it. Toledo suddenly saw a deep gash appear in his brow; a moment later he thought he saw one of his ears hang half severed from the skull. But that wild cat from the steppes always sprang free from every sabre thrust. No one dared intervene; it was a duel without quarter, without rest, with no condition save the death of one or the other combatant. At times they came together, forming a single body bristling with white flashes in the shadow of the

trees; a moment later they appeared apart, seeking each other in the fiery circle of the torches.

Suddenly Toledo heard a wild cry of pain, the howl of a poor animal caught unawares. The Prince was the only one still standing. A straight thrust had slashed his adversary's jugular. Lubimoff stood there a moment motionless. Then his superhuman strength, which had sustained him until then, left him. With the loss of blood, all the weariness of the struggle came over him like a shot. He too tottered and fell, but into the arms of friends. There was not a single doctor among the spectators. No one had thought of that. They considered the presence of one unnecessary in an encounter that could end only in death.

All the curiosity seekers left the garden, following the unconscious Prince. A few servants stayed behind, gathered about the body of the Cossack. He was lying face downward. With respectful awe they watched as his legs quivered for the last time, as the blood slowly emptied itself from the neck, and spread out across the snow, in a black stain that was beginning to take on a bluish tinge in the livid light of dawn.

At the court, which had already shown frequent alarm over the Prince's notorious adventures, this event caused a great stir. Lubimoff's duels, his love affairs, his scandalous entertainments, annoyed the young Emperor, who had taken it upon himself to improve the morals of his associates.

In aristocratic gatherings, the freakish whims of the almost

forgotten Nadina Lubimoff were brought to memory and discussed again. The young Cossack was related to people of influence, and his death contributed to the complete disgrace of his sister.

Michael Fedor had not yet entirely recovered from his wounds, when he received the order to leave Russia. The Czar was banishing him, and for an indefinite period. He might live in Paris with his mother.

"That's all right; so long as they respect his income," was the Colonel's only comment.

Arriving in Paris, the Prince was convinced of his mother's insanity. That was something he had suspected for some time, from her letters. Sir Edwin had died, rather suddenly, three years before, in England, following defeat in an election. The palace in the Monçeau quarter had suffered an interior transformation that represented a cost of several millions. The Princess was devoting all her time to it. The Arabic, Persian, Greek, or Chinese drawing rooms, the construction and decoration of which had made the fortune of two architects and several dealers in doubtful antiques, had just disappeared; while furnishings acquired years before as extremely rare pieces had been scattered to the four winds as though they were mere rubbish of no value. The palace remained the same as before on the outside; but the interior, beginning with the stairway, was rebuilt in imitation of a medieval castle. Not a single window remained without its stained glass, not a room but was shrouded in the vague half light of a cellar. All the

conventional Gothic known to modern contractors was employed by order of the Princess in the restoration of the house. Three stories and one entire wing had been torn down to form the nave of a cathedral.

Michael saw advancing toward him a tall austere woman, with long transparent fingers, and large, staring, uncanny eyes. She was dressed in black, with loose sleeves that almost touched the ground, and with a white bonnet fitting close to the head beneath her mourning veils. In spite of the fact that she had a rosary at her wrist and talked with the air of a martyr, her son imagined that he was looking at an opera singer.

The expulsion of the Prince from Russia had caused her neither surprise nor sorrow.

"Those Romanoffs have always disliked us. They cannot forget that your illustrious ancestor, so they say, used to beat Catherine when he caught her with anyone else."

Her thoughts rose above all such worldly considerations. She had never, as a matter of fact, taken any stock in religion; but now she declared herself a Catholic. She had made no public declaration of conversion, to be sure, but she felt she must adopt the belief. Her new and final personality demanded it.

"Your father approves of my new stand. Often in the night I have talked with my hero. He is glad to see me in the path of truth."

No sooner had Michael Fedor and the Colonel arrived, than they noticed the strange visitors who were frequenting

the palace. The long haired terrorists had been succeeded by numerous fortune tellers, soothsayers, clairvoyants, and solemn professors of occult sciences. A plain old lamp-stand, which looked as though it might have walked upstairs by itself from the concierge's quarters, was jumping about and rapping, at all hours, in the bedroom of the Princess.

One day she decided to tell her son the great secret of her life. At last she knew who she was; the spirits had revealed to her the knowledge of her true personality. In one of her many previous existences she had been the most unfortunate and beautiful, the most "romantic", of queens. The soul of the Russian princess, Nadina Lubimoff, centuries ago had dwelt in the body of Mary Stuart.

"That is why I always had a special liking for the story of the unhappy queen. And now I know why, when I saw Sir Edwin in London, I fell in love with him on the spot, in the most irresistible fashion. His ancestors were Scottish."

Such reasons were to her as unanswerable as all the others which had guided her actions. And to pay homage to the queenly soul which was, according to all her mystic attendants, reincarnated in her, she was going to live like the beheaded sovereign of Scotland, copying the Queen's clothes as she had seen them in pictures, converting her palace into a mediæval castle, and eating from antique plates nothing but Renaissance delicacies, the recipes for which she had employed a history professor to discover in ancient chronicles.

Carriages now rarely entered the Court of Honor of the palace. The grand stairway was growing mossy between its steps. Not so the delivery entrance. There, each day, the professionals of "the beyond" appeared, poorly dressed and suspicious looking men and women, who were exploiting the Princess, generous as a queen – and was she not one? – under the guise of aiding her in the manipulation of the lamp table, and conjuring up historic phantoms which, to prove their presence, moved the carpets, made the pictures fall from the walls, changed the positions of the chairs, and committed other childish deviltries.

Doña Mercedes avoided visiting the Princess. Her simple faith caused her to be frightened at queens that last for centuries, and at those halls with old furniture that seemed to palpitate with mysterious life. She preferred the quiet wholesome conversation of the priests whom she was supporting for herself. The Aragonese vicar had allowed himself to be snatched away in triumph by another devout millionaire. He had grown tired, no doubt, of the excessive ease and idleness afforded him by his penitent, and was bored with astronomical observations on the roof of the dwelling in the Champs-Élysées.

At present she was offering her hospitality to a Monsignor, a Bishop *in partibus*, who directed the widow's money into various pious charities of his own invention.

Alicia had married a French Duke, twenty years her senior, and after a few months of marriage was causing herself to be very much talked about. Doña Mercedes, offended, was punishing

her by seeing her very seldom, in hopes that such coldness would cause the Duchess de Delille to follow the example of her mother. In the meantime, the latter was concentrating all her family affection on the Monsignor, a saint, and a man of the world, who in the evening, to avoid a discordant note, took off his cassock and sat down at table in a tuxedo, while a flock of mechanical birds sang and flapped their wings in the large gilded cage in the Creole's dining room.

Michael Fedor saw Alicia twice in the Lubimoff palace. She did not feel there the uneasiness her mother experienced, and even declared the manias of the Princess very original and interesting. Afternoons when she was bored, and paid the Princess a visit, she too seemed to believe in the lamp table and in the "Queen's" protégés with the mystic gestures.

She too consulted them to find out whether she would be happy, and especially whether she would be greatly loved, although she never told who it was that was supposed to love her. On other occasions she asked the oracle, with a note of jealous anxiety in her voice, what a certain unknown person was doing at that particular time. The name of the person was kept secret, but some months he would be dark and at other times he would be blond. She and the lamp table understood each other perfectly.

"I always said that girl was cleverer than her mother," the Princess affirmed.

When Alicia first met the Prince, on his return home, she burst out laughing, and almost embraced him.

"Do you remember how we used to hate each other? Do you remember that day in the Bois when we whipped each other?"

She looked at him with an air of interest, scrutinizing him from head to heel without detecting anything of the displeasing youth of former times. She knew of his adventures in Russia, his loves, his duels, his expulsion. An interesting man! A Byronic fellow! Besides, she had heard that he was a bit of a brute with women.

"Come and see me. We must be friends. Remember we are relatives."

Michael scrutinized her also, but with a certain seriousness. He had heard a great deal about her since arriving in Paris. During her three years of married life the Duke had tried twice to divorce her. It weighed on his mind to think that he should be enjoying immense wealth just in return for allowing her to bear his name. When he shook hands with a friend, he was never sure of the latter's relations with his wife. But Alicia had married the Duke in order to be a Duchess, and in the end the couple came to a practical agreement. Half of her income was to go to the Duke, who was to travel, or, if he wished, reside in Paris with a former mistress. Alicia might live as she pleased in her splendid white mansion in the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne, and display a ducal coronet on her underwear, on her silver, and on the doors of her motor cars.

The little horsewoman of the Mexican plains, trained to morning gallops, had been transformed into a woman of proud

and arrogant beauty. To Michael she looked like a California orange, golden, gleaming, wafting a strong sweet fragrance.

Inwardly he winced at the gaze of those dark eyes, so enticing and fascinating, so provoking and commanding, in full consciousness of power.

But no. He remembered that various men whom he disliked, had, according to common gossip, already preceded him in falling under Alicia's spell. And for the time being he was interested in a French actress, whom he had met on the train returning from Russia.

Besides, he suddenly beheld her again in his imagination as she was years before. Perhaps she had not changed. She was used to managing men with a firm hand, to changing from one to another, as though they were post horses. He and Alicia would quarrel at their second meeting. They might easily end by coming to blows.

He saw no more of her. New preoccupations changed the direction of his thoughts. One day in the street he met a Russian who seemed old and ill. It was Sergueff, his former teacher. Sergueff must now have been some forty years of age. He looked as though he were in his seventies, with a dirty white beard, grayish skin, and a wrinkled almost motheaten face, with no sign of life save in the two green holes that marked his eyes. From Saint Petersburg they had sent him to a prison in Siberia. He had escaped, crossed half of Asia on foot and alone, as far as a Chinese seaport, and there he had taken ship for the United

States. The story of this tour of the world was told in a few words, as though it were a single walk on the boulevards.

Michael Fedor took him to the palace. The Colonel seemed dismayed by Sergueff's presence, and drew back into his shell. He must remember his own connections with nobles of the Russian court! Some of them were former generals of police!

The son of Princess Lubimoff talked for several days with the fugitive. The memory of his own expulsion from the court caused Michael vaguely to sympathize with this man who was likewise an exile. Besides, in the depths of his mind something of his mother's character was stirring, with all its inconsistencies and hazy vague desires. The officer of the Guard listened as attentively as a scholar to the doctrines of the revolutionist.

"Why, those men are right!" he exclaimed with the passionate enthusiasm that the Princess herself expressed for every novelty.

For the first few days he felt a yearning for martyrdom, a deep desire for renunciation, the mystic abnegation of the man of his race. He thought of many princes like himself, educated at court, with high social positions, who had given away their wealth to live among the poor and dedicate their lives to the triumph of truth and justice. He would do the same. He would reawaken to true life, and he was sure that his mother would approve. General Saldaña had given his blood to rehabilitate the past; he would give his to overcome all obstacles in the pathway of the future. Times change. The past consists of a certain number of centuries; the future is infinite.

But Lubimoff was not a true Russian. No sooner had he decided to carry out his mystic determination, than the Latin love of pleasure reawakened in him. Life is good, and offers many pleasant things! For him the tree of life was still overflowing with sap; there still remained for him so many leafy springs, so many fruitful summers! Later, perhaps, when only the dry wood remained…

The one positive and immediate result of this resurrection was Michael's sense of his own ignorance and of the emptiness of his life. There was something in the world besides knowing languages, wielding rapiers, and riding horses. Man should seek the realization of his greatness in more serious enterprises than love making, duels and betting. Fate, in giving him wealth, had exempted him from the harsh necessity of work. But that was no reason why he should renounce making his mark in the world, as he passed through it, just as thousands of his predecessors had done, and as millions of men to come would continue to do.

For the first time in his life Michael sought the comradeship of books, and this initial reading stirred him with a new desire. He made up his mind to know the world, to see strange countries, to struggle with the blind forces, which form the pulsing of the planet, and to live the coarse rough adventures of men who go from port to port. His father had told him of remote ancestors of the Saldaña family, who had gained titles and fortunes by setting sail from humble Spanish harbors, swooping out like sea gulls across the gloomy Ocean, in the track of Columbus and

the Pinzons, in search of new lands of mystery. An ancestor of his, disembarking with the aged Ponce de Leon in Florida, in search of the famous "Fountain of Youth," had been one of the discoverers of the present United States. The first Saldaña to be a noble had obtained his title of "don" by founding a city in the neighborhood of Panama. Why should he not be a navigator like his forebears, a wanderer of the seas, enjoying exotic pleasures, and perhaps succeeding in wresting some secret from the blue deep?

Life in that palace which his mother's mania had rendered ugly, was becoming uncomfortable and distasteful, and was impelling him to flee. The Princess did not make the slightest objection, when informed that her son desired to buy a yacht to navigate the seven seas. Let him do so, by all means! It was a princely pastime, quite worthy of a Prince Lubimoff. They were constantly growing richer. The oil, the platinum, all the precious ores of their properties and the products of their lands, as large as nations, made up an enormous income. The preceding year it had reached the sum of seventeen million francs: a million a month! For a single private family it meant unbelievable wealth, and the Princess Lubimoff, who had temporarily regained her sanity, modestly added:

"But for a queen it isn't much."

In England Michael purchased a sailing yacht, with a sharp bow, bold masts, and an auxiliary engine, and gave it the Spanish name for the sea gull, the "Gaviota."

His idea was to continue on the ocean the life he had led on land, selecting, however, only its most interesting phases. For that reason he decided to take Sergueff along. The teacher seemed melancholy, as though the comforts and the liberal sums of money which the Prince bestowed on him weighed on his conscience like remorse. He had something more urgent to do in the world than voyage idly hither and thither in a luxurious boat. He disappeared one day, to return to Russia, as though the gallows had a fascination for him. Or was it that he preferred, in case of better luck than that, to travel once again around the world, but in his own manner?

The Colonel, as the aide de camp of the Prince, felt obliged to embark. He had never yet left "his boy's" side! But, oh, he was not blessed with sea legs, and, much less, with a sea stomach! He was a hero of the mountains! They were obliged to send him back to Paris from a port in Brazil.

The voyage of the *Gaviota* lasted for five years. In the second year Michael Fedor thought his career as a navigator was about to be interrupted. The war between Russia and Japan had just broken out and he cabled from a Pacific port, asking for his former place in the Guard. The reply was a long time in coming. The Czar was still angry with him and kept him in exile.

"So much the better!" Michael finally said to himself in a voice choked with anger. He guessed what was going to happen; what was to be the final fate of those brave Russians of the sharp sabers, when they came to face the astute little yellow men who

had silently gone on appropriating the most scientific occidental arts of killing.

His adventures in the various ports, his relations with women of every race and color, were sufficient to fill his life.

"I am studying geography," he wrote Don Marcos, after inquiring about his mother's health. "I am studying the geography of love."

It was not long before he was obliged to interrupt his cruise to return to the Princess. The physicians had ordered her away from the Paris palace, with its gloomy decorations so stimulating to her obsessions. They were sending her to the Riviera to drink sunlight and open air.

And poor Maria Stuart, absolutely *incognito*, went from one large hotel to another, occupying entire floors with her retinue of much beaten Russian servants and much adored soothsayers and witch doctors. She was the despair of the hotel keepers, who were always glad to see her depart, though she alone paid more than all the other guests put together.

Her son found her looking like a specter in her flowing mourning garb. She was weaker and thinner, and her eyes had taken on an alarming, fixed stare, which gave one the creeps. Her complexion had lost its former whiteness, gradually growing darker as though burned by an inner fire. For the moment her sole preoccupation was the construction of a palace on the Blue Coast. On French territory, in sight of Monte Carlo, she had bought a small promontory, a spur of land and rocks jutting out

into the sea, a ridge covered with century-old olive trees and gnarled pines. She was kept busy quarreling with a stubborn old couple, an aged peasant and his wife, who were refusing to sell her the extreme point of the headland. She had already spent many thousands of francs on the plans of the future palace. Architects, painters, and landscape gardeners were constantly working for her, making studies of the historic past, in the endeavor to view of the Mediterranean an enormous Scottish castle express her imaginings. Her idea was to erect in full as Scotch as could possibly be imagined; in short, according to the Princess, it was to be "a novel of Walter Scott, done in stone."

Michael was frightened. The sumptuous dungeon in Paris was to be repeated in the face of that luminous sea, in one of the most smiling landscapes of the earth. Behind his mother's back he talked with all the men who were working on the future Villa Sirena, the "Villa of the Sirens." The Princess had selected this name, in the conviction that on moonlight nights the daughters of the briny deep would come and visit her, singing on the reefs beneath her window. That was the least they could do for her!

Each day the veil of mystery was opening more widely before her eyes, allowing her to see things which for others were invisible.

Don Marcos, who, deserted by his former pupil, had gone back to the Princess, likewise received instructions from Lubimoff. He was to prevent the unhappy lady from perpetrating such a sacrilege on the Mediterranean. But what could the poor

Colonel do with that madwoman who spent whole weeks without speaking to him, as though she did not know who he was!

The Prince returned to his yacht, and a year later being by chance in upper Norway on his return from an expedition to the Arctic Ocean, he received the sad but expected news. His mother had died, just as she saw rising from among the olive trees and pines of the rosy promontory, the beginning of huge stone walls artificially blackened like the painted panels in the antique shops, and which looked as though they were about to fall in ruins from mere age, as soon as they had risen from the ground.

CHAPTER III

MICHAEL arrived in time to receive the body of the Princess in Paris. Before her death her mind had been illuminated by the sudden flare of reason which is the signal of the end in cases of serious mental disturbances. She had left various papers on which she had noted loans made to certain persons, and judicious suggestions for her son in regard to the management of the enormous fortune. She wanted to be buried beside her husband, her first husband, "the hero," in the Père Lachaise cemetery. During the last years she had stayed in Paris, she had been seized once more by the craze for building, and had busied herself with the preparation of her final dwelling place. Beside the mausoleum of the Marquis of Villablanca, whose image, frowning and indomitable, held in one hand a broken sword, she had set up another monument no less ostentatious with a statue which was supposed to be her exact likeness and was nothing less than the semblance of the unhappy Queen of Scots, as it appears in the engraving of the Romanticist period.

During the funeral ceremonies, Michael Fedor met again many persons who formerly visited the Lubimoff palace, and whom he had thought were dead. Doña Mercedes in tears embraced him. She had become extraordinarily stout, and the coppery complexion inherited from her Aztec ancestors had taken on an unhealthy ascetic pallor. She looked like the Mother

Superior of a noble convent of nuns. At her side, Monsignor, in his silk cassock and with an air of compunction, was moving his lips to save the dead woman's soul. "My son! We have all our sorrows." And as she said this, the poor lady looked at another woman elegantly dressed in mourning who stood there somewhat aloof, in the cemetery, and seemed utterly incapacitated by the ceremony which had obliged her to rise before noon.

The Duchess de Delille also came forward to meet him, taking both his hands and giving him a strange glance.

"Your mother loved me … really loved me. During these last years we saw each other very often."

Michael nodded assent. He knew that already. The Princess Lubimoff had been the one loyal friend of this passionate unscrupulous woman, who was gradually losing every one's respect. She had defended Alicia when other high society women declared open war and closed their doors to her, fearing for their husbands' fidelity. As she used to play every winter at Monte Carlo, she had been in the company of the Princess up to the last moments.

"She loved me more than my mother ever did… Perhaps she remembered that I might have been her daughter."

The Prince walked away, as though annoyed by this allusion. He had heard such things about her!.. But all during the ceremony he kept seeing her in his mind's eye. She was still beautiful, but so strangely beautiful. Her skin had lost the golden tinge of ripened fruit, and now was pale, the dull white of

Japanese paper. Her large eyes, which gave off green and yellow glints, stared with disturbing fixity and seemed at the same time to have a blank expression, as though covered by an invisible spider web. Her least bitter enemies accused her of a certain propensity for spirits. She drank all sorts of American mixed drinks like an habitué of the bars. Other people attributed her pallor and the continual darkly bewildered look in her eyes to morphine, opium and all the various liquids and perfumes producing lethargy and creating "artificial paradise." The little Alicia of former years was drinking, draining it to the last drop from the cup of life in deep draughts.

Michael Fedor thought that he had seen the last of her, but a few days later he began to receive letters. He was alone, and must be feeling sad, so she was inviting him to come and eat with her, informally, of course, as was natural among close relatives. His evasions brought fresh invitations by telephone. The Prince, like a person fulfulling a tiresome social obligation, finally went one evening to her little palace in the Avenue du Bois, one of the numerous imitations of the Petit Trianon, which are to be found in various parts of the world.

The Duchess de Delille was proud of this edifice and the tiny garden with its sharp, gilded grating, in front of which all fashionable Paris passed. Michael was acquainted with the drawing rooms without ever having been inside them. The illustrated journals, which cover the styles of wealthy social life, had published photographs, in Europe and America, of

the interior of her residence. Gossip had kept him informed of Alicia's strange life. She had suddenly been taken with the mad desire of seeing people, of being admired, and of astonishing every one by her prodigality. She gave a series of great fêtes, and publicly protested because the municipality of Paris would not allow her to illuminate the entire Champs Élysées and the Arch of Triumph so that her guests might ride up to her very door in a fiery apotheosis. She had given a garden party in the Bois de Boulogne, with water sports, and dances of sacred dancers, brought from Asia. The buffet supper had been prepared for three thousand guests. On another occasion, for a single costume ball, she spent a hundred thousand francs, to transform part of her residence into an interior of Persian style and the next day she began to have the rooms restored to their original state.

Suddenly she would disappear, and people would wink and make malicious comments because she left no address. Some new love affair! Hers were nearly always wandering fancies, that called for long trips and new horizons! Perhaps she was in Constantinople or in Egypt; perhaps she was in hiding in one of the large New York hotels. At times such guesses were right; and then again the most intimate friends of the Duchess could affirm that she had not left Paris. Was not her automobile standing in front of the door?

This was another of Alicia's eccentricities. At all hours of the day and night, one of her various expensive cars was kept in readiness in front of the stairway. Three chauffeurs divided the

service between them. They stayed in the porter's quarters; and as soon as the bell was heard, they had only to put on their gloves, run to the machine, and start the motor. She often chose the most extraordinary hours for going out. Sometimes it would be just after returning from a ball, then again she would get up for a ride after she had gone to bed. Frequently she would select the early morning hours which were usually her time of soundest sleep.

At times the chauffeurs would succeed each other, week after week, without leaving the gate of the mansion. The Duchess did not care to go out. She no longer felt her sudden impulses to ride aimlessly about Paris, while the city slept, pay unseasonable calls, or glide through the woods on the outskirts of the capital at the height of some violent storm. Meantime, the autos seemed to age, as they stood there motionless, now with their wheels deep in the snow of the courtyard, and again with the glass of the wind shield flecked with the tear drops of the slanting rain, that swept under the glass covered porte-cochère. During all such periods, Alicia, in spite of her restless impulsive nature, would be spending whole days in bed, telling her intimate friends that to keep one's beauty one must take a "rest cure" from time to time. She would entertain her friends at dinner without getting out of bed. The table would be spread in luxurious fashion in her large bedroom, and lying between the sheets, with the dishes within reach on a tiny table, she would laugh and chat for hours with her guests. Months would go by without her seeing the outside of her house, while the costly objects in her rooms, amassed to indulge

her whims, were quite forgotten. Her vanity was satisfied, at such times, by the mere fact of having constructed a costly jewel case to harbor her idleness.

The Prince met her in a little reception room on the ground floor. She was in truth receiving him with absolute lack of ceremony. She was dressed in a black tunic of her own invention, a combination of the Greek peplum and the Japanese kimono. Her bare arms floated free from the soft silk that almost seemed to live, it clung so closely to her body. Underneath it, half revealed, were the contours and perfumed warmth of her flesh, hidden by no inner veils. Michael glanced at his tuxedo and gleaming shirt-front as though his own costume were quite out of place.

As she took him to the elevator, which was white and quilted like a glove box, he caught a rapid glimpse of the drawing rooms of the lower floor, ostentatious, but left in a shadow almost as dark as night; of the large dining-hall, deserted, with the furniture covered; of the little dining-room in which there were no signs whatsoever of preparations… Where was she taking him?.. Was the table set in her bedroom?

The elevator passed the second floor without stopping? "We are going to my study," said Alicia. "I eat there when I am alone."

The Prince was amazed at the so-called "study," a large room which occupied a major portion of the third floor, and in which only one or two books in a small book-rack were to be seen. The place was decorated in imitation "Far East" style: plain black

lacquer furniture, silk either of pale shades or of an intense dark purple, and an array of frightful idols. A diffused bluish light, like that used in night scenes on the stage, descended from the ceiling. A screen, embroidered with a design in gold, formed a sort of second more intimate room, the floor of which was covered with white rugs of fur, with long, silky hair. Heaped about were dozens of pillows of various colors adorned with winged reptiles and unheard of flowers.

An exotic, penetrating odor made Lubimoff wince. He knew that perfume. And there was a look of severity in his eyes as he glanced sharply at the Duchess.

"Sit down," she said. "They are going to serve us."

As the Prince looked about, without seeing any sort of a chair, Alicia set him an example, dropping on a heap of cushions. Michael sat down in the same fashion, beside a tiny mother of pearl table no bigger than a tabouret. On it a lamp with a dark shade let fall a circle of soft light. Inwardly the Prince began to feel a boiling of suppressed anger as he thought of his evening wasted.

"You must have eaten this way often," she continued, "you have traveled more than I. The style of decoration must be familiar to you."

Yes; he knew the style, the original and authentic style, and for that very reason he did not care to see it again in imitation. Besides obliging him to eat on the floor, there in a house on the Avenue de Bois… What an affectation!

But in a short time his opinion began to change. A poseur she undoubtedly was, but affectation had already become a more or less natural trait in her, a sort of second nature. He guessed that even in its slightest details none of this had been prepared especially for him. Alicia lived and ate there when she was alone just as she was doing then. She was prey to a desire to be different from other people even when no one was noticing her.

The servant in charge of the meal was a copper-colored man with a long down-curling mustache. He was dressed in a black tuxedo, with a white cloth wrapped around his legs like a skirt. He had long hair, done up on his head like a woman's and held in place by a tortoiseshell comb. The Asiatic was placing the huge trays containing the food on the floor: Some of the dishes were of ancient hammered silver, others of many colored lacquer, or of semi-transparent materials made in imitation of emerald, topaz, and red sealing wax.

For Michael the meal looked like something a great chef might have prepared if he had suddenly gone mad and made up the dishes in the midst of his ravings. There was not a single item that suggested the harmonious course of an ordinary dinner. The palate acted on the imagination, awakening memories of distant travels, visions of far off lands. Exotic preserves alternated with hot dishes. Pastry flavored with penetrating perfumes was served along with sharp, biting, or intensely bitter sauces.

Alicia, half reclining on the cushions, looking at the dishes without appetite, extended her hand carelessly toward the most

unusual delicacies, and those with the most pungent and racy savors. Clearly the perversion of her palate was profound. She herself saw to it that Michael's glass was always filled. It was a drink of her own invention, having a champagne base. It burned and rasped his mouth, paralyzing all other sensation with its stinging coolness. It penetrated his nostrils with a lingering scent of the rarest flowers and of Asiatic spices.

Speaking of the dead Princess, Alicia came to mention her own mother. They were now on terms of open hostility. Her eyes began to gleam with defiance as she was reminded of Doña Mercedes, confined in the Champs-Élysée residence with her court of clericals, and showing herself in public only for the organizing of pious works. She was trying to starve her only daughter to death!.. And as Michael smiled at this explosion of anger, she explained her grievances.

"She gives me hardly anything; a mere nothing: half a million francs. And I have to hand two hundred and fifty thousand a year over to my husband: a rather expensive lover, whom I avoid seeing. You are really rich, my dear, and don't understand such things… Since the fortune is all in her name, she tries to starve me out and keeps her money to squander it with the priests… Poor Señora! She can't find any admirers now except that *Monsignor* and other sponges like him… And I, her own daughter, have to implore her like a beggar for the crumbs she gives me, seasoned with sermons… Oh, if it hadn't been for your mother! She really was a great lady: I never lamented my poverty

to her in vain; she gave me even more than I asked for. You know of course that I owe you some money. A little… I don't know how much. Didn't you really know that?.. I shall pay you back when I get my inheritance."

And with brutal frankness she expounded her full thought.

"When will that bigot leave me in peace?.. Old people ought to make way for the young. What fun do they get out of going on living?"

They had finished eating. She went on filling both their glasses with her special drink. At first Michael had found it repugnant, but in the end he was attracted to its refreshing fragrance which gently troubled the senses, like an intoxication with perfumes.

"Of course you use the pipe," said Alicia simply.

He shook his head and thought of the odor which struck him on entering. He knew what sort of a "pipe" it was, and gazed about the study. The smoking den must be in some hidden corner!

"A man like you!" she went on. "A sailor! And I fooled myself into thinking we'd smoke together!"

She even gave him to understand that the hope of being able to give him that forbidden pleasure was the principal reason for her invitation. She became resigned when she learned that the Prince, vigorous as he was, suffered nausea every time he attempted to experiment with that Asiatic vice. And while he lighted a havana, Alicia took from a silver case the cigarettes which she smoked in the presence of the "uninitiated": Oriental tobacco,

but heavily dosed with opium. Suddenly Michael was convinced of something of which he had a presentiment the moment he entered the place, or even earlier, the moment their glances had met in the cemetery. He saw her half rising from the cushions, with a panther-like contraction of her muscles, as though she were ready to spring at him. It was the concentrated impulse of the beast, beautiful and sure of its power, unable to wait, and not knowing how to feign.

Alicia had forgotten the demi-tasse she held in her hand, as she sat there, looking at him fixedly. The tiny blue electric spark dancing in her eyes was something well known to Michael.

It was the offering glance of female silence, inviting violence, and mastery. He had encountered that glance often along his path of triumph as a conquering millionaire… He felt he must say something at once to break the silent charm of the beautiful witch, who, sure of her final victory, was smiling and blowing puffs of cigarette smoke toward him. So Michael alluded to her amorous fame, to the great number of lovers she was supposed to have had. That might widen the distance between them.

"Ah! You too?" said Alicia laughing, with masculine frankness. "I don't suppose your morals are the same as Mamma's! You are not going to read me a sermon on my behavior. Although, after all, Mamma doesn't blame me for what I do. What makes her angry is the fact that I am not afraid of what people say, and that sometimes I am attracted to unknown men of low birth. Poor Señora! If I were to have an affair with a king

or a crown prince, perhaps she'd even let us see each other in her house, and have her *Monsignor* mount guard into the bargain."

She remained silent for a moment. That disturbing glance was still fixed on Michael.

"It is true; I have had a lot of men. And how about you? Do you think I don't know about your wanderings all over the planet in quest of types of women unknown to the novels and capable of giving new sensations?.. We have both done the same: only it wasn't necessary for me to travel around so much to learn just what you have learned… And you are not so absurd as to imagine, as certain men do, that our cases are not to be compared because we are of different sexes."

The Prince listened silently as she expounded her ideas. She was deeply in love with life, and in return she demanded all that life could give her… The minds of other women were occupied with questions of a material nature: desire for wealth, longings for luxury, domestic cares… As for her, she possessed everything; to-morrow held no worries for her; not even in regard to her beauty, sustained as it was by wonderful health, and seeming to increase in spite of age and her prodigal waste of energies.

In her life, made up of caprices, always completely satisfied, even to the point of satiety, only one thing interested her, from its infinite variety and from its many phases, which might seem to vulgar people a monotonous repetition of one another, but which in reality were distinct for a mind attuned, as hers was, to exquisite sensations. That thing was love.

"Oh please understand me, Michael; don't sit there laughing to yourself. You know me too well ever to imagine that I believe in love as the majority of women do. I know that a certain amount of illusion is necessary to color the material aspect of love; we all lie about it a little, and we enjoy the lie even though we know it as such; but way down deep, I laugh at love as the world understands it, just as I laugh at so many things which people venerate… I don't want lovers, I want admirers. I am not looking for love; I care more for adoration."

She was proud of her beauty. She spoke of Venus as though the goddess were a real person. She admired the Olympic serenity with which the Deity of Passion gave herself to gods and men, never surrendering her superiority even at the moment when she was submitting to the domination of the stronger sex. Alicia considered herself a super-beauty, belonging to a sphere outside the ordinary limits of vice and virtue. She thought herself a living work of art; and art is neither moral nor immoral; its mission is fulfilled when it is beautiful.

"Poets, painters, and musicians seek to abandon themselves to the greatest number of admirers. They do their utmost to enlarge their circle of public worshipers and with feminine coquetry they try to attract new suitors. I am like them. I do not need to create beauty, for as they say, I have it in myself. I am my own work, but I love glory; I need admiration; and for that reason I give myself generously, content with the happiness which I apportion, but keeping my public at my feet, without allowing myself to be

dominated by those whom I seek."

Michael was sure that many artists must have left their imprint on that woman's life. It was evident in the words and imagery with which she endeavored to express her enthusiasm for her own body. Her pride in her beauty was boundless. What were the ambitions of men, compared to the satisfaction of being lovely and desired? Only the glory of warriors, of blood-stained conquerors, whose names are known even in the remotest wilds of the earth, equals the glory that a woman feels in the sense of universal power over men.

"To me," continued Alicia, "the truest and most beautiful thing ever written is 'the old men on the wall.'"

The Prince looked at her questioningly; so she went on to explain. She referred to the old Trojan men in the *Iliad*, who were protesting against the long siege of their city, against the blood sacrifice of thousands of heroes, against poverty and hardship, all due to the fault of a woman… But Helen, majestic in her beauty, passed before the old men, trailing her golden tunic; and they all lapsed into silent contemplation, rapt in wonder, as though divine Aphrodite had descended upon earth; and they murmured like a prayer: "It is indeed fitting that we should suffer thus for her. So lovely she is!"

"I like to see men suffer on my account. How glorious if I might be the cause of a great slaughter, like that ancient immortal woman!.. I have an exultant feeling of pride when I notice that envy and spite are whispering behind my back, starting all that

gossip that makes my mother so furious. Only extraordinary people stir up torrents of abuse… And afterwards, in the drawing rooms, the very same austere gentlemen who have seconded all that their wives and daughters have to say against me, look at me with sly admiring glances, as I pass; and some of them blush in confusion and others turn pale. It is easy to guess that I have only to beckon and their silent admiration would… I too have my 'old men on the wall.'"

Michael suddenly realized that while she was talking she had been coming gradually closer, from cushion to cushion as she lay resting on her elbows. She was almost at his feet, with head held high, endeavoring to envelop him in a wave of magnetism from her fixed and dominating eyes. She seemed like a black and white snake, twisting forward little by little among the cushions as though they were rocks of various colors.

"The only man of whom I have ever thought the least bit, the only one I ever considered at all different from other men," she continued in a half whisper, "is you… Don't be alarmed: it isn't love. I am not going to invert rôles, and propose to you. Perhaps it is because, as children, we used to hate each other; because you never wanted me. That is such an unheard of thing in my life, that it alone is enough to interest me."

She put her hands on his knees, as though she were about to rise.

"When I saw you in the cemetery, after so many years, I remembered all that I had heard about you. Many women whom

I know have been sweethearts of yours, and I said to myself: Why not I, too? Then I thought of all the men who have come into my life, and I added: Why not he?" …

And now Alicia's elbows were resting on his knees, and as the Prince was seated on but two pillows, their lips and eyes were almost on a level. As she talked he could feel her breath on his face. It was like the breeze in an Asiatic forest, whispering beneath the moon. The spices and flowers with which the wine was saturated seemed to float in that volatile caress.

Michael tried to avoid her advance, but one of Alicia's hands was already on his shoulder. He merely shook his head.

"Don't be afraid," she added, exaggerating the caressing quality of her sigh. "There are no embarrassing obligations with me. You may leave me when you wish; perhaps I shall be the one to leave you first. I have wanted you for the last few days. You must surely desire me as the others do… Let us live this moment, like people who know the secret of life and all it can give… Then if we tire of each other, good-by, with no hard feeling and no pining!"

When from time to time in after years the Prince recalled that scene, he always felt a certain dissatisfaction with himself. He was sure he had seemed brutal as well as ridiculous. In his travels he had approached women frequently in the most matter of fact way, often remembering them afterwards with some repugnance; yet here he was, rebelling with a feeling of offended modesty at the advances of the Duchess. No! With her, never! Rising within

him he felt the same displeasure that had once made him raise his whip in his youth.

He found himself on his feet in the middle of the study, looking anxiously toward the door and muttering stupid excuses. "No, I must go: it is late. Some friends are waiting for me…" She had gained control of herself. She too was standing looking at him with astonishment and wrath.

"You are the only one who could do a thing like this," she said, in a cutting tone, as they parted. "I see it all clearly now. I hate you as you hate me. My whim was a stupid one. You have permitted yourself a liberty which no one in the world will ever be able to take again. If I were younger than I am I would thrash you again as I did in the Bois; but instead, just consider that I am repeating everything I said then."

They did not see each other again.

When the Prince had set in order everything concerning the inheritance from his mother, he thought of resuming his voyages, but on a more magnificent scale. It was no longer necessary for him to ask the Princess for money. He was one of the great millionaires of the world. Those who were in charge of the administration of his affairs – an office with numerous clerks, almost equalling the government bureau of a small state – made the announcement that the fifteen million francs which the Princess had received annually would soon be twenty, through the development of Russian railways, which allowed more intensive working of his mines.

The Colonel was commissioned to have the heavy medieval walls of Villa Sirena torn down, and the place replanned according to the Prince's tastes. The latter hated architectural resuscitations. He could not bear modern buildings patterned to flatter the pride of the rich proprietors, after the Alhambra, the palaces of Florence, or the solemn and orderly constructions of Versailles.

"The furniture ought to correspond to the period," said Michael, "and people ought to live in such houses as they lived in in the century which produced that particular style. People living in an ancient house ought to dress and eat as in former times… What an absurdity to reconstruct those historic shells, with the interior arranged to suit the needs of modern men who are forced to commit an anachronism at every step!"

He recalled the project of a millionaire friend of his, a member of the Institute, who had built a Roman house on the Riviera, Roman in all the exactness of its details. At the house-warming the guests were obliged to sleep on corded beds and to eat reclining on couches; and even more intimate conveniences were modeled on the principle of hygiene known to the ancient Cæsars. Within twenty-four hours they all pretended they had received urgent telegrams calling them to Paris, and the owner himself after a few months, left his house in charge of a keeper to show to tourists as a museum.

Michael was fond of modern architecture, whose cathedrals are machine shops and large railway stations. Applied to

dwellings it pleased him for its lack of style: white walls, a few moldings, rounded corners, with no angles whatsoever, so that the dust might be pursued to its remotest hiding places, wide openings letting in the breeze and the sunlight, double walls between which hot or cold air, and water at various temperatures, could circulate.

"Up to the present time," the Prince asserted, "man has lived in magnificent jewel cases of art and filth. Modern architects have done more in the last thirty years to make life pleasant than the artist-builders, so much admired by history, did in three thousand. They have declared running water and the bath-room as indispensable, things which were unknown to kings themselves half a century ago. They have invented the furnace and the water closet. Don't talk to me about the magnificent palaces of Versailles, where there was not a single toilet, and where every morning the lackeys were obliged to empty two hundred vessels for the king and his courtiers. Often to be through quicker, they threw their contents out of the majestic windows, and sometimes it would fall on the sedan chair and the retinue of a Dauphine or an ambassador."

Toledo applied himself to supervising the construction of Villa Sirena in accordance with the desires of the Prince, making it a plain white building, and without any definite style of architecture. Lubimoff himself, at the proper time, would take charge of the artistic touches, placing famous pictures, statues, tapestries, or rugs, just where they would be most pleasing to the

eye. The house was to be a harmony of simple, pure lines. The walls were to have heating and cooling systems for the different seasons, and running water was to be available in abundance everywhere. Each room was to have its electric lights and its electric fan.

The Prince found it a much easier task to make over his wandering ocean residence. He simply sold the Gaviota, which reminded him of his youthful dependence on his family, and went to the United States to look into an advertisement. Three years before a certain multimillionaire had begun the construction of a yacht, designed to be more luxurious and of greater tonnage than that of any European sovereign. As the American was about to witness the consummation of this triumph of the democratic kings of industry over the historic kings of the Old World, he was killed in an automobile accident, and his heirs did not know what to do with the leviathan which would only be of use to an immensely rich, and, in their opinion, somewhat crazy traveler. They were thinking of selling it at a loss to the Kaiser, William II, having decided finally to endure his demands as a sharp business man, when Prince Lubimoff appeared. A week later on the white stern and bows of the yacht a new name in gold letters was displayed, a name that was repeated in addition on the life preservers and on the various tenders, the dingies, the steam launches, and the motor boats. The American yacht had become the *Gaviota II*.

It had the tonnage of a small trans-Atlantic liner and the speed

of a torpedo boat. Each day the wealth of an ordinary man went up in smoke through the *Gaviota II's* double funnels. During a trip to some distant island, the supply of coal gave out. Immediately a collier chartered by the Prince, came to meet the *Gaviota II* in the farthest seas to fill the bunkers with fuel.

Quiet harbors came to be illuminated at night, as though the sun had risen. When the Prince gave a *fête*, the ship would be a blaze of glory from the water to the mastheads, its outline marked by electric bulbs of various colors, while powerful searchlights shot out movable streams of radiance and drew the waves, the shores, and rows of city houses from the depths of the darkness. At other times, the white fire of the *Gaviota II's* monstrous eyes would flash on walls of ice towering to the clouds, and seals, penguins, and polar bears would waken from sleep frightened by the strange luminous, puffing monster that darted off like lightning into the mystery of night.

To be the owner of a floating palace which, when anchoring off large cities, drew such crowds of sightseers as rare spectacles only attract, was not enough for Michael Fedor. So he created something more interesting even than the luxurious salons, and the refinements of comfort of the *Gaviota II*: he built up an orchestra.

Sensuous delight in music was for him the most exquisite of emotions. When his ears were satiated with the sweetness and melody of traditional music, he sought unknown and often bizarre composers, who aroused his curiosity; but he always

came back to demanding as the *pièces de résistance* of his harmonic feasts, the masters who had been his first love, and above all, Beethoven.

Treated as though they were officers, paid to their liking, and with the added inducement of being able to see a great deal of the world, musicians from every country offered their services to the yacht's orchestra. Famous concert players and young composers came in as mere instrumentalists. Some were ill, and sought to regain their health in a voyage around the world in real luxury and without expense; others embarked through love of adventure, to see new lands in this floating castle, in which everything seemed organized for an eternal holiday. There were never less than fifty of them.

"My orchestra is the finest in the world," the Prince would proudly say when his guests complimented him after one of the concerts his musicians gave at rare intervals on land.

In tropical nights, beneath the enormous honey-colored moon changing the sea to a vast plain of quick-silver, the musicians, seated in evening clothes before the rows of music racks illuminated by tiny electric lights, would weave on the quiet air, which seemed to have retained the first faint cries of the planet at its birth, the most original melodies, the most subtle combination of sounds that the sublime rapture of artists in god-like inspiration ever created. The music floated out behind the boat in the mystery of the ocean, like a scarf unfolding, breaking and scattering in fragments, with the smoke of the funnels. When

the orchestra paused one could hear the distant subdued beat of the propellers, churning the foam with a humming sound; and then from time to time the slow tolling of the bell calling the men on watch, or the cry of the lookout snuggled into the crow's nest on the mainmast, reporting his vigilance with the rhythmic intonation of a muezzin from a minaret. And the monotonous music of the sea gave an impression of night, and of immensity, to the music of man.

At the foot of the companionways, or on the outjutting parts of the lower decks, the various officers and officials of the Prince gathered to hear the concert in the night. On the prow the sailors squatted, listening to the music in religious silence, as is often the case with simple men when confronted with something they do not understand, but which inspires awe. Aft, the only listener would be Michael Fedor, standing at a distance from the music, and with his back toward the musicians, watching at his feet, the divided, foaming waters which rushed by like a double river far out and away from the boat. As occasionally he raised his cigar to his lips, his pensive features would appear for a moment in the darkness, lighted by the red glow.

The yacht held another more silent group. Those who succeeded in getting on board in the ports always obtained a distant glimpse of a woman or two with white shoes, blue skirts, jackets with rows of gold buttons, masculine collars and neckties, and officers' caps. No one knew for certain how many such women there may have been. The men of the crew were

forbidden access to the central quarters of the boat, and to the upper deck. Some of them, chancing to break the rule through oversight, had met the Prince's companions attired in elegant naval uniforms, or more lightly clad, like dancers, in elaborate and exotic costumes. At the large ports, steam launches landed these mysterious and beautiful travelers for a few hours on shore. It was remarked that they dressed with modest elegance and that they would speak various languages.

When the *Gaviota II* returned and anchored in the same harbor she had visited the preceding year, those whose curiosity had been aroused found that the personnel of the wandering harem had been completely renewed. They might occasionally recognize one or two of the former ladies, but now their faces wore the placid expression of the odalisque who has been supplanted, but is nevertheless contented with luxury and oblivion.

Some years Michael Fedor suspended his travels, during the summer, to take up his abode at fashionable beaches. The women who accompanied him on his long voyages remained on board, with all the lavish comforts to which they were accustomed. At other times he parted with them, as one dismisses a crew when a ship goes out of commission, at the end of a trip.

Immediately he became interested in women living stay-at-home lives, in shore society, and in summer flirtations at famous watering places. He would take up his abode in a hotel on the coast, while his yacht was to be seen rising from the azure waters,

motionless, like a palace of mystery and magnificence, the center of all feminine imaginings.

Living in Biarritz he came to know Atilio Castro intimately through learning that they were related on his father's side. The Spaniard admired the fascination exercised by the Prince, often without wishing to do so, on all women.

Never at any period had women been more strongly attracted by luxury or felt less scruples in the means of obtaining it than at present. This was the opinion of Castro. Lavish display, which in other centuries had been within reach of only the very few families, was now possible for every one. All one needed to indulge in it was money. Besides, it was necessary to take into account present-day progress in material things, which has made life easier, but at the same time has increased our needs.

"The motor car and the pearl necklace have made more victims than the wars of Napoleon," said Atilio.

"These two things are like the gala uniform of women, and those who are forced to go without them consider themselves unfortunate and ill treated by fate. This twin image has shattered the illusions of maidens and the fidelity of wives. Mothers in middle class society, with melancholy dejection written on their faces as though they had made stupid failures of their lives, advise their daughters: 'If you are going to get married, make sure you will get an auto and a pearl necklace.' And long after the modest marriage this desire still remains, strengthened by maternal advice. Luxury is the one thought, luxury at whatever

cost. Luxury has been democratized. It is within reach of all, obtainable through money, which has no taint, no odor, no sign of its origin."

"You are the great provider of the expensive motor car of fashionable make and of the rope of pearls," continued Castro. "You are the great Sultan of magnificence. Your signature to a check is enough to sweep a woman off her feet in a torrent of gold. Make the most of your opportunity! The period in which you were born has left you an open field for your talents."

And the Prince, who was not at all in need of such advice, went his way as conqueror through a world in which the best accredited virtues collapsed before his attack. Even sincere resistance finally appeared to him to be a clever device for postponing surrender and increasing the market value of desire. The millions from Russia were scattered broadcast in smaller and smaller subdivisions, maintaining the well being and display of many homes, indulging the taste for luxury of numerous ladies, and keeping numberless factories busy producing elegant novelties of female luxury. A few women felt a sincere interest in Michael Fedor for his own sake, because of the mysterious prestige of his voyages in a boat which was talked about as though it were an enchanted palace; and also because of his adventures with celebrated actresses and women of high society, which made him more attractive. But once their vanity and curiosity were satisfied, they allowed their own self-interest to have a word. "Why should I be any more altruistic than the rest?"

They were not obliged to use cunning or round-about phrases in formulating their requests. Some at the second meeting, took on a melancholy air, and spoke of the sad realities of life. But the generous Prince anticipated their desires. He preferred to pay his mistresses and dazzle them with splendid gifts. Thus he could regard them as favored slaves covered with jewels. In this way also, it was easier to break with them: He could go away from them whenever he so desired, satisfied with his own behavior, and quite unmoved by their tears and laments. From his semi-oriental Russian ancestors he had inherited a great sensual capacity, which caused him to be attracted to women, and at the same time to feel an inalterable scorn for them. He indulged them but could not love them; he adored them, but was stirred to indignation when they presumed to be on terms of equality with him. He was capable of ruining himself, of braving death for them, but he was ready to thrust them aside with his foot if they tried in the least to govern his life. The ambitious ones who feigned deep, passionate love for him in the hope of marriage, the sentimental ones who tried to interest him with psychological subtleties, and those who kept their maternal enthusiasm even in adultery, and murmured in his ear how happy they would be to have a child who might resemble him, waited for him in vain the following day. "Neither deep passion, nor children!" … Two trails of smoke were soon rising from the yacht, carrying its owner to another port or perhaps to another continent: or if he wished to flee from a city in the interior, he gave orders that his

private car should be coupled to the first train that was leaving.

These flights were never undertaken without a generous remembrance. Michael Fedor's munificence continued for those whom he had abandoned. Each year new names were added to his budget, like that of a reigning house which allots pensions to its forgotten servants. But the pensions of Prince Lubimoff were for the maintenance of luxury and not of life. The most modest were over thirty thousand francs a year. The average was double that amount.

"Your Excellency: there will have to be a revision," his administrator would say.

Michael would examine the list of names, hesitating at a few. He could not recall clearly the persons who bore them. Then suddenly he would smile, as certain visions were suddenly and attractively awakened in his mind. He was immensely wealthy: why not keep up the luxury which was the one dream of all of them?.. He was not disturbed by the jealous thought that his successors would be reaping the benefit of that luxury.

He felt a certain god-like pride in making his generosity felt at all times, without letting himself be seen. In Paris a jewelry shop managed by a Jew of Spanish origin limited its entire business to the production of the Prince's gifts. His gems of high intrinsic value, with no false artifices, had a certain family resemblance, a sort of imaginary perfume which enabled the women who displayed them to recognize each other. When it was least expected, at tea time, in the dining-room of a hotel, at

an elegant watering place at a dance, two women who had just met would gaze at each other's ears and breast in silence, until the boldest, blushing imperceptibly under her rouge, would ask simply: "You knew Prince Lubimoff too?.."

Atilio Castro felt a deep admiration for his relative, less on account of his triumphs than of the iron constitution required to sustain them.

"What a Cossack! A regular Cossack!.. He is a true descendant of that lover of the Great Catherine!"

Nevertheless, frequently the yacht would hurriedly put out to sea on long voyages, without its master being forced to flee from any dangerous or entangling passion. He was running away from himself, from his perverse imagination and curiosity, which made him seek and allure different women, upsetting his peace of mind, without rousing in him any real desire. He undertook the most extraordinary voyages, for the sake of the bracing air and the sense of restfulness the sea brings. The orchestra accompanied him; but the "harem" remained on shore. He had gone completely around the globe, following the shortest route; then he had repeated this circumnavigation, but over a zig-zag course, to become acquainted with all the coasts of the earth. At present he was on going on whimsical trips; he was sailing from one hemisphere to another for the pleasure of visiting one or another of the small islands which seem lost in the Pacific, and are so tiny that on the maps they look like mere dots placed after long names traced on the blue colored surface.

Returning from one of these excursions on which he went around the world as though it were his personal property, he received by wireless the news that Germany had declared war against Russia and France.

He felt no great surprise. He knew William II personally. It was because of him that Prince Lubimoff avoided cruising off the coast of Norway in summer.

The year following his acquisition of the *Gaviota II* he had come across the Imperial yacht in those parts. The Kaiser, like an officious, all-knowing neighbor, came to see him in order to look over the yacht, examining it in all its details, giving advice, reviewing the men and materials, making a dissertation on the engines and interrupting himself to advise certain changes in the uniform of the crew. After a breakfast on his own yacht, and luncheon on the Emperor's, Prince Michael had had enough of this unexpected friendship. Lohengrin, with his winged helmet, white mantle, and both hands on the hilt of his sword, was less unbearable than this gentleman with turned up mustache, and wolfish teeth, dressed like a sailor, who laughed a false and brutal laugh, and (whenever he met on the seas a multimillionaire from America or Europe) played the rôle of a man of great simplicity and of an unconventional sovereign. Money inspired deep veneration in this story-book hero, this mystic with a mind fed on grandeur. Michael had never shared the enthusiasm of various snobs for the German Emperor. He smiled at the Hohenzollern's theatrical tastes, his war-like bravadoes, and his

intellectual ambitions which pretended to embrace the whole knowable universe.

"He is a comedian," Michael said on receiving the news of the war, "a comedian who for a long time is going to make the whole world weep… And to think that the fate of mankind should depend on such a man!.."

Michael Fedor considered himself as a being set apart from the rest of mankind. He lamented the war as something terrible for the rest, but which could not influence his own particular fate. Since a madness for blood had descended upon Europe, he would go on sailing distant seas. Thanks to his wealth he could keep beyond the margins of the struggle.

But times changed rapidly; life was not the same: all old values had lost their significance. In spite of her Russian flag, the *Gaviota II* found herself halted by some English torpedo boats and was forced to submit to a minute inspection. They could not believe that any one should be cruising for pleasure when all the seas had been converted into a battlefield. In the latitude of the Azores it became necessary to force the yacht's engines to escape from a German corsair.

Besides, fuel was getting scarce. The various coaling stations located here and there on the coast were reserved exclusively for the warships. Important news kept coming by wireless from far-off Paris, where the chief agent of the Prince was located. Communication had been broken off between the Paris office and the administrators of the Lubimoff fortune in Russia. No

money was coming from there, and the French banks, with their vaults closed by the *moratorium*, were willing secretly to lend money to a millionaire like the Prince, but not in quantities sufficient to meet his current needs.

The yacht came to anchor in the port of Monaco, and Michael Fedor, on arriving in Paris, almost laughed, as though witnessing some preposterous change in the laws of nature. The heir of the Lubimoffs in need of money, and compelled to make an effort to obtain it – something he had never done in all his life! Here he was having to ask for loans at frightfully usurious rates, on the security of his distant and famous wealth, which for the first time was regarded somewhat contemptuously!..

When communications were reëstablished in an intermittent fashion between Western Europe and Russia – which was practically isolated – the administrator of the Prince gave a look of despair. The collections had been reduced eighty per cent.

"According to that, I am going to be poor?" asked Lubimoff, laughing, the news seemed so unbelievable and absurd.

It was very difficult to send money as far as Paris. Besides the rouble was decreasing in value at a dizzy rate. Millions on reaching France became mere hundred thousands. Mobilization had left the mines without workmen; there was no outlet for the produce; the peasants, seeing their sons in the army, refused to pay any money, and even to work. The Russian government, to keep as much money as possible at home, limited to small amounts the money sent to citizens residing abroad.

"The Czar putting me on a pension!" said the Prince in amazement. "A thousand or two thousand francs a month!.. How absurd!"

But he did not laugh long. His anger against the Russian court, which had gradually been growing in his subconsciousness ever since his expulsion so long ago from Petersburg, now moved by a selfish impulse suddenly flared up. The Czar and his counselors, desirous of Russianizing all Eastern Europe, were responsible for the war. They certainly might have kept peace with Germany. Why disturb the peace of the world, for the sake of a little race of people in the Balkans?

He coolly made fun of certain of his friends who, by devious routes across Europe and the icy Northern seas, returned to Russia to regain their former commissions in the army. As for him, he had no desire to die for the Czar. It made little difference to him whether his country were governed by Germans. There were times when he even thought that would be preferable, so long as peace were restored rapidly, allowing him once more to reap the benefit of his wealth, and resume the life he had been leading a few months before, or, as it now seemed, a half century before.

The next two years went by for Lubimoff like a nightmare. What sort of a world was he living in?.. His former friends were disappearing. Some of the frivolous women who had made life pleasant for him were not moved in the least by the unfortunate events which were happening; but others showed themselves to

be heroic and self-sacrificing, forgetting all they had done before, feeling a new soul developing within them.

The Prince suddenly found himself dragged along by the world happenings. A mysterious and irresistible force was pushing against him, causing him to lose his balance, just as he was reaching the pinnacle of his life, so pleasant, so vast, crowned with a halo of such glory. And now, once started, he was tumbling head over heels, of his own inertia, and each step he struck as he descended, gave him a harder blow, a more painful surprise. How far would this landslide take him?.. What would he strike at the end of this unheard-of fall?..

His interviews with his Paris administrator seemed to him like something taking place in another world, subject to ridiculous laws. These conferences always ended with the same order on his part:

"Try and get some money. Ask for a loan… I am Prince Lubimoff, and this cannot last. Whoever wins – it is all the same to me – order will be reëstablished, and I shall pay my creditors immediately."

But the administrator answered, with a look of dismay: "Raise money on property in Russia?.." Taking advantage of the former prestige of the Prince, he had been able to negotiate various loans; but time was passing and the enormous interest was accumulating. Lubimoff in spite of cutting down expenses and doing away with pensions, was in need of money for his current living expenses.

The fall of the Czar gave a ray of hope to this magnate who hated the Imperial government. "With the Republic the war will be over sooner and we shall come back to the proper order of things." His egoism made him conceive of a Republic as a form of government occupied chiefly with restoring the wealth of beings of fortunate birth. The meager shreds of his fortune which now and then still got as far as Paris were suddenly cut off. The fountain of wealth was dry. The crumbling of a whole world had dammed its source, and perhaps forever.

"Your Excellency must sell," the administrator was always saying. "You must do without everything that is superfluous. We must liquidate in time. Who knows how long the present state of affairs may last!"

The yacht was lying idle in Monaco harbor. Almost the entire crew, composed of Italians, Frenchmen, and Englishmen, had left it to go and serve in the navies of their respective nations. Only a few Spaniards remained on board, to keep the boat clean.

The *Gaviota II* was renamed by the English admiralty, and turned over to the Red Cross. When he signed the bill of sale, Michael Fedor felt that he was giving up his whole past. The romantic prestige of his mode of life was vanishing now for all time; the *Arabian Nights* palace was being converted into a hospital ship… What a world!

The English millions afforded him a year of respite. The administrator paid the huge debts, and he was able to live without economizing, in Paris, a Paris nearing the end of its third year of

war with inexplicable tranquillity, resuming its usual pleasures as though all danger were past. Love affairs with two distinguished women, whose husbands were called to arms – although they were not at the front – caused him to spend a few months, now at Biarritz, now on the Riviera, and now at Aix-les-Bains.

His agent disturbed these enjoyments. He was constantly repeating the same advice: "You must sell." The Prince's fortune was already like an old ship drifting aimlessly. The administrator had stopped the last leaks with the money from the most recent sale, but warned him at every moment that she was taking in water through new ones.

In the end Michael Fedor grew accustomed to misfortune, accepting it serenely.

The sale of the palace built by his mother moved him less than that of his yacht.

At the same time his desires had changed. He was beginning to tire of love adventures, which seemed to be the only object of existence. His fresh and vigorous constitution, which had amazed Castro, suddenly broke down. But this was more the result of worry than of physical wear and tear.

He felt that he was poor, and was he not accustomed to pay royally for his love affairs? Not being able to reward women with luxury, he would rather flee in order not to accept from them and be obliged to tolerate from them their caprices. He preferred to master his desires, as long as he could not satisfy them with all the grandeur of an oriental potentate. Besides he was tired of love,

and all the pleasant things of life a man can find in this world!..

He thought of his friend Atilio, of the Colonel, of Villa Sirena, white and shining in the Mediterranean sunlight, among the olive trees and cypresses.

"The earth is being swept by the deluge. Perhaps the old lands will once more appear; perhaps they will remain submerged forever… Let us take refuge in our Ark, and wait and hope."

CHAPTER IV

AFTER glancing with satisfaction at the imposing aspect of Villa Sirena, the adjoining buildings, and the surrounding groves, the Colonel said to Novoa:

"The part you see cost less than what you don't see. There is a great deal of money spent under ground here."

Turning away from the residence, Don Marcos pointed to the gardens, which lay extended before them in terraces, some on a level with the roof of the "villa," others descending like a mighty stairway almost to the water's edge.

He recalled the promontory as it was when the late Princess first thought of buying it; an ancient refuge of pirates; a tongue of rocks wild and storm-swept when the *mistral* was blowing, with deep caves gnawed by the surge, which caused the land above to crumble, and threatened to break it lengthwise into a chain of reefs and islets.

"The bulwarks we have had to build!" he continued. "You should have seen the stone we had to put in here, – enough to build a wall around the whole city!"

There were walls more than twenty yards thick, descending in a gradual slope from the gardens to the sea. In places, it was possible to see their foundations in the natural rocks which emerged from the water like greenish beads always awash in the foam; in other places the masonry went down and down

until it was lost from view in the watery depths. They were like the breakwaters one sees in harbors. They covered the original hollows of the promontory, the caves, the inlets that were forming, and all the jagged spaces, which had been filled with rich soil.

These tremendous works of masonry were Toledo's pride, owing to their cost and grandeur. He called his fellow-countryman's attention to the proportions of the ramparts, worthy of a monarch of olden times.

"And they are not only strong," he continued, "but look, Professor! They are all 'artistic.'"

The blocks of stone had been cut in large hexagons which fitted together in a uniform mosaic, each piece outlined by a cement border.

At intervals there were large openings, so that the earth might rid itself of its moisture; but each one of these blind windows held some sort of wild vegetation, some hardy, aromatic plant, obstinately parasitic, spreading downward over the wall and covering it with flowers for the greater part of the year. The thick groves at the summit, and the long balustrades arched with wine-colored clematis, seemed to exude a flowery, green, inferior form of life, pouring it out seaward through the gaps in the wall.

"When you see it from a boat below you will appreciate it better. Señor Castro says it reminds him of the hanging gardens of Babylon, and of Queen Semiramis. He is the only one who would think of such comparisons. All I can say is that it meant

doing all this! Imagine all the stone. A whole quarry! And I wish you could have seen the bargeloads of rich soil it took to fill the hollows, level the ground, and make a decent garden!"

He grew enthusiastic as he talked about the modern flower gardens stretching around the villa and along the iron railing bordering the Menton road; and he lavished his praise on their harmonious elegance, and the majestic regulation to which the plants were forced to conform. That was how *he* felt a garden should be, like many another thing in life: perfect order, a sense of subordination, and respect for the hierarchies, each thing in its place, with no individual rivalries to cause confusion. But he was afraid to expound his "old-fashioned" tastes, recalling the jests of the Prince and Castro. They preferred the park, which the Colonel always thought of as the "wild garden."

They had availed themselves of the extremely ancient olive trees already on the promontory as a beginning for the park. These trees could not be called old, exactly. Such an appellation would have been petty and inadequate to their age. They were simply ancient, of no visible age. They had an air of changeless eternity about them which made them seem contemporaries of the rocks and the waves themselves. They looked more like ruins than like trees, like heaps of black wood, twisted and overthrown by a storm, or piles of wood, warped and hollowed and scorched by some fire long since past. With them also the invisible part was more important than the portions exposed to the light. Their roots, as large around as tree trunks, went out of sight, wound

their way through the red earth, and then appeared once more thirty or forty yards beyond. Some of the trees had died on one side, only to come to life again on the other. What had been the trunk five hundred years before, now appeared as a mutilated stump, table shaped, severed by ax or shattered by thunderbolt; and the root, showing above the soil, was flowering again in its turn, changing into a tree, to continue an apparently limitless existence, in which centuries counted as years. The hearts of other trees were gnawed away and empty; and these supported only half of their outer shell, looking like a tower with one side blown out by an explosion; but on high they displayed an almost ridiculous crown of foliage, a few handfuls of silvery leaves scattering along the sinuous black branches. Below, the gnarled roots which seemed to have preserved in their knotted windings the sap that was the first life of the earth, embraced a much larger radius on the ground than that occupied by the branches in the air. Other olive trees, that were only three or four hundred years old, stood erect with the arrogance of youth, leafy and exuberant, casting a light, trembling, almost diaphanous shadow, like that of frosted glass which swayed with the capricious will of the wind.

"His Excellency says that there are olive trees here that were seen by the Romans. Do you believe it, Professor? Can it be that any of these trees date back to the time of Jesus Christ?"

Novoa hesitated in replying. The Colonel continued his observations as they walked along between walls of well-trimmed shrubbery towards the end of the park.

"Look: there is the Greek garden."

It was an avenue of laurels and cypress trees with curving marble benches, and in the background a semi-circular colonnade.

"I would have liked to plant a great many palms: African, Japanese, and Brazilian, like those in the gardens of the Casino. But the Prince and Don Atilio detest them. They say that they are an anachronism, that they never existed in this region, and were imported by the wealthy people who have been building for the last fifty years on the Blue Coast. All those two fellows admire is the ancient Provençal or Italian garden: olive trees, laurels, and cypresses – but not the huge, funereal cypresses with bushy tops, that we use in Spain, to decorate the *calvaries* and cemeteries. Look at them: they are as light and slender as feathers. To keep the wind from blowing them over you have to plant two or three together in a clump."

They had reached the extreme limit of the park, where the leafiest olive trees were growing. They walked along open pathways through high masses of wild and fragrant vegetation, whose vigorous vitality seemed to challenge the salt breeze. The plants had stiff leaves, and gave out strong exotic perfumes. As Novoa breathed in the fragrance, it evoked visions of far-off lands; and in truth it seemed almost as though an odor of Hindoo cooking or Oriental incense were floating through that wild garden. A variety of creepers hung from tree to tree. Though it was still winter these natural garlands had already begun to

bloom, owing to the warm breezes of an early Spring. They stood out with all the gay splendor of a courtly festival, against the chaste pale green of the olive trees.

"Don Atilio says that all this makes him think of a Mozart symphony."

The deep blue Mediterranean lay at their feet, its slow swells combed by a sharp reef that broke the streaming water into clouds of spray. Here the promontory divided, forming two arms of unequal length. The shortest was a prolongation of the park, carrying the magnificent vegetation which flourished on its back, into the very waters. The other descended to the sea in a chaos of rocks and loose earth, with no growth save a few twisted pines, clinging to the soil, obstinately determined to prolong their death struggle. The barren loneliness of this tongue of land drew a sad smile from the Colonel each time he gazed at the dividing wall. The rugged point was eaten away by the sea with caves that threatened to cut it in two. It had no regular place of entrance, being separated from the mainland by the gardens of Villa Sirena, and shut off by a hostile wall, which represented the inalienable rights of ownership, and was a source of constant indignation and amazement to Don Marcos.

Doubtless that was why he turned away from it, gazing out toward where Monaco lay beyond the rocky cliffs.

"It is lovely, Professor: one of the most delightful panoramas anywhere. There is good reason for people to come here from the farthest ends of the earth!"

He let his glance rest on the violet colored mountains that, at the farthest horizon, projected out upon the sea, like the limit of a world. They were the so-called Mountains of the Moors, which, with Esterel Point, form a branch of the Maritime Alps, a separate mountain chain, which juts into the Mediterranean. In the opposite direction lay a portion of the pseudo-Blue Coast, which begins at Toulon and Hyères. But this part did not interest the Colonel. What he saw, more in imagination than in reality, was a bird's-eye view of the real Blue Coast, his own Blue Coast – that of the aristocratic and wealthy people on whom he was in the habit of calling, in their elegant villas and expensive hotels.

The Maritime Alps form a giant wall, parallel to the sea. In some places they fall steeply toward the Mediterranean with the sharp slope of a bulwark, without the slightest break to mask the abrupt descent. At other points the incline is gentler, creating waves of stone, miniature mountains which stand out above the water, forming capes and placid inlets. And on these sheltered shores, from Esterel to the Italian frontier, wealthy people, sensitive to cold, arriving in pilgrimages every winter, had finally converted the sleepy provincial villages into world-famous capitals. Fishing hamlets were transformed into elegant towns; the large Paris and London hotels erected enormous annexes on the deserted bays; the most expensive shops of the Boulevards opened branches in tiny settlements where a few years before every one had gone barefoot.

In his mind Toledo went over the undulating line of celebrated

places, overlooking the sea from the promontories, or nestling in the little horseshoe bays to profit more directly by the refraction of the winter sunlight from the red walls of the Alps: Cannes, which inspired in him a certain awe on account of its quiet distinction – the place where consumptives and old people of renown desire to die – Antibes, with its square harbor and its walls which, according to Castro, recalled the romantic seascapes painted by Vernet; Nice, the capital where people come together to spend their money, copying Parisian life; the deep bay of Villefranche, the harborage of battleships; Cap-Ferrat and the beautiful Point Saint-Hospice, a former den of African pirates, jutting out from it; Beaulieu, with its Tunisian palaces, the homes of American multimillionaires, who always keep open house, and who had often invited the Colonel to luncheon there; Eze, the feudal hamlet, hanging grimly to the side of the Alps, and falling in ruins around its decaying castle, while down below, the people who fled from it are forming a new town, beside the gulf which their predecessors proudly called the Sea of Eze; Cap d'Ail, which serves as a sort of portico to the adjoining Principality; the Rock of Monaco, carrying on its giant's back a walled city; opposite it the dazzling Monte Carlo; and beyond, Cap-Martin, with somber vegetation, reserved and lordly, the ultimate shelter of dethroned kings; and lastly, close to Italy, pleasant Menton, the stronghold of Englishmen, another place for invalids of distinction, where every self-respecting consumptive feels obliged to end his days.

"Think of the money that has been spent here!" Don Marcos exclaimed.

Fifty years before, the Corniche railway in successfully finding its way through this mountain region had been considered a marvelous piece of work; but now for the convenience of winter visitors, the same work had been repeated in every direction. Smoothly curving roads, clean and firm as a drawing-room floor, extended along the seashore, ascended the Alpine heights, passing from crest to crest on lofty viaducts, or burrowing the hills in long tunnels. Where the perpendicular rock would not allow a ledge to be cut the engineer had made one with buttresses many yards high, the bases of which were lost to view in the waves.

A new dream had been added to the many which the blessed in this world's goods may realize – the owning of a house on the Riviera! Within fifty years, every architectural whim, every possible fancy of rich people bent on creating sensations, had covered this shore of the Mediterranean with villas, Greek, Arabic, Persian, Venetian, and Tuscan palaces, and dwellings of other distinct or indescribable styles. The palm tree was imported and acclimated as a native plant.

"Enormous fortunes have been invested here; three generations have been ruined, and as many more enriched. When you think what it was a century ago, and see what it is now…!"

The Colonel spoke of an Englishwoman's tomb, completely abandoned on the extreme point of Cap-Ferrat. She was

a forerunner of the present winter visitors, a youthful contemporary of Byron, charmed by the beauty of the Mediterranean, and by the pathless and practically unexplored mountains. On her death, they buried her on the deserted promontory, because she was a Protestant. The fishermen and peasants of this lonely coast shunned the stranger, denying her the rights of hospitality even in their cemeteries.

"This happened less than a century ago. And such poverty as there was! The only products of the country were thick skinned oranges, lemons, and these olives. The trees are very pretty, very decorative, but they bear an exceedingly small pointed olive, all pit. Compare them with ours in Andalusia, Professor! And to-day there are millionaires, born right here on the Riviera, who have grown rich merely by selling the wretched fields of their fathers. The red land, abounding in stones, is bought by the yard, even in the most out of the way spots, like lots in large cities. When you least expect it, at a turn in the road, you come across a miserable hut with a little land around it that takes your fancy. The roof of the building sags, and the wind blows through the cracks in the wall. The owners sleep with the pig, the chickens, and the horse. This same poverty and shiftlessness you find among the peasants almost everywhere. You happen to think that you might build up a country home there without much expense. Surely the good people won't ask very much, no matter how inflated their ideas of value may be! But when you ask the price, after much talk, and many doubts, they finally say

in the most casual manner: 'A hundred and fifty thousand francs, or two hundred thousand.' When you protest in amazement they reply, pointing to the mountains, the sun, and the sea: 'And the view, monsieur.'"

The red soil of the Alps amounts to little for its power of production: it is the situation that gives it its value. And the native has grown rich selling, so much per yard, the sunlight, the azure of the Mediterranean, the orange color of the mountains and the dazzling glory of the clouds at sunset, the shelter of the distant rock which, like a screen, turns aside the icy breeze of the *mistral*.

"If you only knew how inexplicably obstinate some of these people are!"

As Don Marcos spoke he turned and pointed out to Novoa the miserable strip of land that seemed fastened like a curse to the gardens of Villa Sirena. The Princess Lubimoff with all her millions, had not been able to buy the tip of that promontory. It belonged to an old married couple without any children. "That is their house," he added, pointing to a sort of yellowish cube, halfway up the mountain, beside a road that cut across the red and black slope.

The Princess, after acquiring the promontory for her medieval castle, had considered the acquisition of the small extremity a mere trifle. "Give them what they ask," she said to her business agent. And in spite of her recklessness with money, she was amazed to learn that they refused two hundred thousand francs for a few rocks undermined by the waves, and a couple of dozen

dying pines.

"I was present at the interviews with the old people. The agent of the Princess offered five hundred thousand, six hundred thousand, and the couple did not seem to grasp the meaning of the figures. The Princess lost her patience, lamenting the fact that they were not in Russia, in the good old days. She even talked of engaging an assassin in Italy – as she had read in certain novels – to get rid of the stubborn old pair. It was just like her Excellency, – but she was really very kind at heart! Finally, one day, she shouted to us: 'Offer them a million, and let us be done with it!' Imagine, Professor, more than two thousand francs a yard; you could buy land at that rate in the business district of a big city! We went up to their cottage. They didn't bat an eyelash when they heard the figure. The old woman, who was the more intelligent of the two, let Her Excellency's lawyer explain what a million meant. She looked at her husband for a long time, in spite of the fact that she was the only one of the two who was doing any thinking, and finally accepted; but on condition that the Princess should erect, on the outermost point, a chapel to the Virgin. It was a wish that her simple imagination had cherished all her life. Without the chapel, she would not accept the million. 'Don't worry, we'll build the chapel!' we said. The day set for signing the papers, we found the two old people, sitting in the lawyer's office side by side, with bowed heads. The lawyer received us, wringing his hands, and looking toward heaven with an expression of despair. They would not accept! It was no use

insisting. They wanted to keep things just as they had received them from their forefathers. 'What would we do with a million?' groaned the old woman. 'We would lead a terrible life!' We tried to talk to her about the chapel, in order to persuade her; but they both fled, like people finding themselves in bad company, and afraid of being tempted."

The colonel looked once more at the dividing wall.

"Her Excellency being a born fighter, immediately had the partition raised before beginning the foundation of the castle. As you see from here, the old people can reach their property only by the beach; and on stormy days they have to enter the water up to their knees. That doesn't matter; from that time on they became more attached than ever to their land. They used to come down from the mountains every Sunday, to sit at the foot of the wall. By constantly measuring the point they succeeded in discovering an error made by the architect, who had been a trifle flustered owing to the haste enforced upon him by the Princess. He had made a mistake of eighteen inches, and half the width of the wall was on the old people's land. The peasant woman, in spite of the fact that she had a sort of superstitious fear of the majesty of the law, threatened to bring suit even though she might be forced to sell her hut and field on the mountain to fight the case. It was necessary to tear down the wall, and build it up again, half a yard farther this way. It meant some sixty thousand francs lost – nothing for the Princess – and yet I suspect at times, that the affair may have hastened her death."

Don Marcos felt that he must pause a moment out of respect for the deceased.

"The old woman has died too," he continued, "and her husband comes here only from time to time. When he finds that one of his pine trees has fallen, through the wearing away of the soil, he sits down close beside it, just as though he were watching beside a corpse. At other times he spends hours looking at the sea and the huge rocks, as though calculating how long it would take the waves to break his property to pieces. One afternoon, going on foot from La Turbie to Roquebrune, I ran across him near his hut, where he was pasturing some sheep. With his long beard he looked like a patriarch; and he is always the same, leaning on his staff, with a dirty tam-o'shanter on his head, and a rough cape about his shoulders. Besides, he always has a pipe in his mouth, though he rarely smokes. 'The million is waiting,' I said in fun, 'whenever you want to come and get it.' He didn't seem to understand me. He smiled with a look of vague recognition, but perhaps he thought I was some one else. His gaze was fixed on Monte Carlo, a bird's-eye view of which lay at our feet. He must spend hours and weeks like that. His face looks as though it were carved of wood, or molded in terra cotta; he seldom speaks, and no one can guess the substance of his reflections. But I think that every day the same identical amazement must be renewed, and that he will die without ever recovering from his surprise. He sees the expanse of waters, which is always the same, the eternal hills, that never change, the house built by his ancestors, which

was old when he was born, the olive groves, the mighty rocks … but that city has sprung up, since he was a grown man, from a plateau covered with thickets, and burrowed with caves, and it is enlarged each year with new hotels, new streets, and more domes and turrets!"

The Colonel suddenly forgot the old peasant. With his fellow-countryman, Novoa, he felt quite talkative, and he imagined that his thoughts flowed more freely and vigorously, through this contact with a man of learning. Besides, he felt a certain pride in being able to talk like an old inhabitant, of the many things of which the new-comer was ignorant.

"The fortress you see over there practically belonged to us at one time," he went on, pointing to the Castle of Monaco. "For a century and a half it had a Spanish garrison. Our great Charles V" – and the old Legitimist spoke the name with a note of deep respect – "once slept there. And there, too."

Turning, he pointed out on the mountain summit of Cap-Martin the village of Roquebrune, huddled about its ruined castle.

"The archivist of the Prince of Monaco is studying the numerous letters in his possession written by our great Emperor to the Grimaldi family. When the historians of the Principality wish to establish the indisputable independence of their tiny land, they cite as the origins of the state the treaties signed at Burgos, Tordesillas, and Madrid."

In a few words he went over the history of the little country,

which came into being around a little harbor. Semitic sailors gave it the name of Melkar – the Phœnician Hercules – and the word gradually changed into the present one, Monaco. The Guelphs and Ghibellines of Genoa fought for possession of its castle, until a Grimaldi, disguised as a monk, entered the enclosure by surprise and opened the gates to his friends, making the ancient Hercules Harbor an estate of his family for all time. "This friar, sword in hand," continued Don Marcos, "is the one that figures on both sides of the coat of arms of Monaco. From that time on the history of the Grimaldis is similar to that of all the ruling houses of those days. They made war on their neighbors, and quarreled among themselves, to the extent that brother even assassinated brother. The sailors of Monaco plied the trade of corsair, and their flag was even used to give distinction to the pirates of other countries. The alliance of the Grimaldis with Spain allowed them to use the title of Prince for the first time. Charles V addressed them in his letters as 'dear Cousins,' and gave them other honorary titles. This great rock was of exceeding importance to the Spanish Monarchs who had lands in Italy and needed to keep the route safe. The Kings of France were very anxious, on their part, to do away with this obstacle and win the Grimaldis over to their side. You must realize that for a hundred and fifty years the latter kept their agreements faithfully, and that during all this time the subsidies that had been promised them from Madrid were sent only at rare intervals. Two galleys from Monaco always figured in the rolls of the Spanish navy.

Only when the decline of Austria began to cause us to lose our influence in Europe, did the Grimaldis, like people fleeing from a house that is tumbling down, abandon us. At that particular moment, Richelieu was making France a great power, and they went with him. One night amid thunder and lightning, when the garrison, composed for the most part of Italians in the service of Spain, were carelessly asleep, the French caught them unawares, disarmed them, after killing a few who tried to resist, and finally sent the remainder courteously to the Spanish Viceroy at Milan, with the notice that the alliance must be considered broken forever.

"The Grimaldis became the liege-lords of France. Later they went to Versailles, as courtiers, or served in the King's armies. During the Revolution they were persecuted, like all the other princes, and a beautiful lady of the family was guillotined. Napoleon kept them in his military following as aides-de-camp, and the long peace of the Nineteenth Century caused them to return and take up their abode once more in their tiny Principality.

"They were so poor!" Toledo went on. "They were obliged to keep up the show and pomp of a court, since in a small state where all are neighbors, the Prince has to exaggerate formality, in order to hold the people's respect. The same expenses must be defrayed as in a large nation; the maintenance of courts, administrative offices, and even a diminutive army for internal safety. And the whole Principality produced nothing but lemons

and olives… You can see for yourself how poor and how hard pressed they must have been, not knowing how to raise funds, especially since under the rule of Florestan I, the grandfather of the present Prince, there was an attempted revolution, owing to the decree of the Sovereign that the olives of the country should be pressed exclusively in the mills of his estate.

"Later under Charles III, the situation became still more difficult. The Principality was dismembered. The two cities, Menton and Roquebrune, dependencies of Monaco, full of enthusiasm for the Italian Revolution, declared their freedom, and joined the Kingdom of Savoy. Shortly after, when Napoleon III acquired the former County of Nice they fell under the control of France. And thus Monaco was isolated within French territory, with its sovereignty clearly recognized; but a sovereignty that embraced only a single city on a rocky height, a small harbor, and a little surrounding land overgrown with parasitical vegetation; about as much ground as a peaceful citizen might cover in a morning walk. How was the tiny State to be maintained?

"It was saved by gambling. Don't imagine as some people do, that the idea originated with the Ruler of Monaco. Many German Princes had had recourse to some enterprise to support their domains. It is a German invention; but gambling on the shore of the Mediterranean, under a winter sun that seldom fails, is quite a different thing from gambling in Central Europe. At first the business was unsuccessful. They established a miserable

Casino in old Monaco, opposite the Palace, in what is now the barracks of the Prince's Guard. The betting was very slight. It was necessary to come by diligence, over the Alpine heights, following the old Roman route, and to descend from La Turbie by roads that were like ravines. One had to be very anxious indeed to gamble. Later the Casino was transferred to the harbor below, where the La Condamine district is to-day: another failure. The lessees of the gaming privileges went bankrupt, and were unable to fulfill their obligations to the Prince. And then the Corniche Railway was put through, placing Monaco on the road between Paris and Italy; and all the gamblers and idlers of the world came flocking here within a few years. What a transformation!"

The Colonel recalled once more the old peasant, who, pasturing his sheep on the Alpine slope, spent hours and hours with his eyes fixed on the marvelous city, stretching out below, on the very spot that, as a young man, he had seen covered with thickets.

"That was the beginning of Monte Carlo. Opposite the rock of Monaco, forming the other side of the harbor, there was an abandoned plateau, only some sixty years ago. Scattered about the gardens of the Square, among the tropical trees, there are still a few scraggly olive trees left from those times. They have been spared as relics of the days of poverty. Where we now find the Casino, the large hotels, and the most elegant tea-houses, there were caves dating back to prehistoric times, which in less remote periods served as haunts for thieves. On account of the

grottoes this wild plateau was nicknamed *The Caverns*. Some of the things you have seen in the Anthropological Museum in Monaco, stone axes, human bones, etc., came from those caves. And the abandoned plateau, in some ten or twelve years, was converted into Monte Carlo, the great city of world fame, leaving on the heights opposite in obscurity and more or less in oblivion, the historic Monaco, which at present is merely one of its suburbs. Monte Carlo has grown so that it extends from one end of the Principality to the other; the entire national territory is covered with houses, and each year it over-flows still farther beyond the boundary line. The French part is called Beausoleil. You have only to cross the Square in front of the Casino, ascend the sloping gardens, and mount a stairway to the Boulevard du Nord, to find one of the rarest sights in Europe. One sidewalk belongs to the Prince of Monaco, and the other across the street, to the French Republic. The shopkeepers pay different taxes and obey different laws, according to whether their show windows are on the left or on the right."

Toledo remained thoughtful for a moment.

"The miracles accomplished by roulette!" he continued. "The magic power of 'red and black'! They say the Casino is a marvel of poor taste, but the walls and ceilings fairly drip with gold, as in a rich church. The theater there is the first to produce many operas that become famous throughout the world. The countless hotels are like palaces. Monte Carlo bristles with domes and turrets like an oriental city. The streets with their scrupulously

clean pavements, seem like drawing-rooms. There isn't a trace of dirt. And think of the gardens! The Alps, here, form a wonderful screen; we live in a sunny shelter; almost a hothouse. But at times the *mistral* blows, and it is cold. I don't know how it is possible for all those tropical plants that are so fresh and luxuriant, and all those trees that originate in a climate as hot as an oven, to live here. The poor old olives must be as amazed as I myself at finding themselves in such company. 'Trente et Quarante' must be a powerful fertilizer! I'm sure that if the gambling were to stop, all this tropical vegetation would vanish like a dream."

The silent Professor greeted these words with a smile.

"And what a transformation in the people!" the Colonel continued. "Notice the crowd some Sunday; none of them like workmen, all equally well dressed! The girls here copy what they see worn by the elegant society women; and imagine how many of the latter come here! You never see a beggar, nor a man in rags. To be born here means something: one's livelihood is assured. The Casino takes care of every one; there is always a place for every citizen in the gambling rooms, in the gardens, or in the theater; and if not, on the police force, in the administrative offices, or in the Prince's household – and the latter is paid for with the Company's money too. To achieve the dignity of being put in charge of a gaming table is the native's highest ambition. He may earn as much as a thousand francs a month, not counting the tips. That is more perhaps than you will ever earn, Professor. And he ends his days in a little villa he has built on the heights of

Beausoleil, where he can look after his garden, with a view below of the Casino – the house of the Good Fairy that dispenses all blessings. They all have enough to live on as long as they know how to keep a silent tongue, and mind their own business. An old cab driver, whom I sometimes engage, was bold enough one evening to talk quite frankly with me, owing to the fact that he was slightly intoxicated. His wife has been for some twenty years now in the Ladies' Section of the Casino toilets; his daughters work as cleaners; his sons are employed in the theater. They all bring in money. Moreover, the old men retire on pay, the sick are not forgotten, and the widows and orphans of every employee that dies during service are paid pensions. 'It's a great country, sir,' the driver said to me, 'the best in the world. Every one can make a living, as long as he's wise enough to keep his mouth shut, and not make trouble.' And you can depend upon it, they are all discreet. Moreover they watch one another, and are afraid of being denounced by their best friend, if they talk about the latest scandal, or a gambler's suicide. Among strangers not one of them lets on that he knows anything."

"And supposing one of them were to talk?" asked Novoa. "Or if one of them were to make trouble?"

"They would banish him. It is a paternal despotism, and does not dare inflict harsher punishments. The police of the Prince make him go half way across the street, and put him on the French sidewalk… Don't laugh; it is a cruel penalty. Exiles to other places finally grow accustomed to their misfortune, since

they live at a great distance, and see their native land only in their mind's eye. But a man who is exiled here can almost reach out and touch his country with his hand; he has only to cross the width of the street. As the land slopes downward, he can see his house a few roofs beyond. He sees the smoke from breakfast coming out of the chimney, and yet he cannot sit down to his own table; the family is at the windows, and he has to talk to them by signs. Moreover, and worst of all, he sees that the rest who were prudent go on leading their pleasant lives in the shadow of the Casino, while he has to seek a new profession at much harder work. His torment becomes unbearable, and he finally flees to some distant city, to let a few years go by, so he may be pardoned."

Don Marcos began to praise Monte Carlo again; "People who lose their money in the Casino always retain an unpleasant memory of it; but where can one find a quieter, cleaner, or more peaceful city, with its Spring-like climate in mid-winter?

"Everybody comes here sooner or later; lots of rogues, of course; but you find famous people too, and you can enjoy society of distinction. I scarcely ever gamble, and for that reason I appreciate the beauty of the scenery. And more than that: at times I have the satisfaction one feels in getting things for nothing; and when I gaze at the lovely walks, when I attend the concerts and operas, and enjoy the sweet tranquillity of a city in which there are no poor, and no desperate revolutionists, I say to myself: 'The gamblers pay for this, and you get the benefit of it.

They lose so that you may enjoy life.'"

As Novoa smiled again, the Colonel expressed his admiration still more glowingly.

"It seems impossible that roulette should have performed so many miracles! And there must be others besides those which lie before our eyes. Gambling has paid the cost of this delightful harbor of La Condamine: a harbor for yachts, with elegant docks that are really promenades. It must have had a hand also in the restoration of the castle of the Prince. It even helps to develop the spiritual life of the place, and increase the prestige of religion. Before roulette came none of the clergy were of higher rank than priests. Since the triumph of the Casino there has been a Bishop, and canons; and a beautiful Byzantine cathedral has been erected, which, according to Castro, needs only to have Time darken it a bit. The Sunday masses are one of the chief attractions of the Principality. The Nice papers print the program of the music that will be sung by the choir, alongside the program of the concert at the Casino: '*Canto piano* of the most celebrated masters, the Italian Palestrina, or the Spanish Vitoria.'"

Novoa interrupted him.

"There is the Museum of Oceanography too. That alone is enough to remove any taint from the money which has come from the Casino."

He said this with the pleasing voice and the somewhat distracted expression that were natural to him; but in his words there was the mystic ardor of the firm believer.

The Colonel nodded assent. The Museum which roused the Professor's enthusiasm was the work of the Prince, and as for himself, Don Marcos felt a deep respect for "Albert," as he called the sovereign familiarly. "Albert" had been an officer in the Spanish navy. As a lieutenant commander he had sailed the coast of Cuba; in his books he had praised the old Spanish sailors, his first masters in the art of navigation. What more was needed to inspire veneration in Don Marcos?

"Whenever he attends a ceremony in his Principality he wears the uniform of a Spanish admiral. And he is a man of science: you know that better than I do."

He gave Novoa a chance to speak. Three-fourths of the earth were covered with water, and for centuries and centuries humanity took no interest in investigating the mysterious hidden life of the ocean depths. Navigators, skimming the surface, went their way, guided by routine methods or by fragmentary experience, without succeeding in embracing the fixed and regular laws of the atmospheric or ocean currents. Science, which has to its credit so many discoveries in a single century of existence, halted in dismay at the edge of the sea. The scientists in the laboratories only need material for their work, and that is easily obtained; but to study the seas, to live on them for years and years, is another matter. For that, it was necessary to have ships and men at one's disposal, to construct new and costly apparatus, to spend millions, to cruise patiently and leisurely here and there over the ocean wastes, with no fixed goal, waiting for the great

blue depths casually to reveal their secrets. That meant a great outlay, with slight returns. Only a sovereign, a king, could do that; and that was what the former officer in the Spanish navy, on becoming a Prince, had done.

"Thanks to him," Novoa proceeded, "oceanography, which scarcely amounted to anything, has become to-day an important study. His yachts have been floating laboratories, cruisers of science, which have gradually made the first conquests of the deep. With his drifting buoys he has been able to demonstrate in a conclusive manner the circular drift of the Atlantic currents; with his careful soundings he has brought to light the mysteries of deep sea life at various levels of the great body of water. Scientists have been enabled to sail the sea and study, with no material restrictions, thanks to him. Through his generosity handsome books have been published, museums have been opened, and excavations have been made in the earth which throw enlightenment on the origin of man."

"And all this," the Colonel interrupted, persisting in the admiration already expressed, "with the money from the Casino! Gambling has defrayed the expenses of the cruisers of science, the coal and men for far-off expeditions, the printing of books and journals, the subsidies for young men anxious to perfect their scientific training; the Institute of Oceanography in Paris; the Museum of Oceanography in Monaco, where you are working; the Museum of Anthropology and… And you have to figure that all this is merely a tip left by the stockholders of the gambling

corporation. Just imagine what the Casino produces! And lots of people consider it terrible!"

"It doesn't make any difference where wealth comes from as long as it is put to useful purposes," said the Professor, with a note of hardness in his voice. "No one asks a government the origin of its funds, when they are used for some good purpose. Often they have been extorted with more cruelty and violence than those which come from here, where the people all flock of their own free will. It is a good thing that the money of scheming, foolish people, and of those who feel their lives are empty and don't know how to fill them, should be used for once to accomplish something great and human. Think what this Prince of a tiny State has done for science in the course of a few years. If only the great Emperors would devote the enormous forces at their command to similar enterprises! If only Kaiser Wilhelm had done the same, instead of preparing for war all his life, how humanity might have progressed!"

The Colonel, considering himself a warrior by profession, only half admitted the truth of the Professor's words. The sword, the glory won on the battle-field, were something after all, and the world would be ugly without them, it seemed to him. But he remained silent, not venturing to spoil his friend's enthusiasm.

"All the sins on the one hand are redeemed on the other." Saying this, Novoa pointed to the huge Casino, with its multi-colored domes and towers, rising from the table-land of Monte Carlo. Then tracing with his finger an imaginary arc above the

harbor, he paused when it pointed to the eminence on the left, where, on the cliffs of Monaco, a large square edifice rose, the walls of which descended to the water's edge. It was the Museum of Oceanography, a fine new building in stone that, in that atmosphere so seldom streaked with rain, still retained its waxy whiteness.

Don Marcos smiled at the contrast. "Don Atilio says the same thing. Every time he gazes at the view from here, he looks at the two buildings separated by the mouth of the harbor, and occupying the two promontories. He says the one justifies the other, and adds: 'They are …' What is it he says? – an antithesis. No; it's something else."

The metallic booming of a gong drifted through the trees from Villa Sirena, summoning the guests, who were scattered through the park, or had not appeared as yet from their rooms. The Colonel listened with pleasure: "Luncheon!"

He gave a last look at the two enormous buildings, one of them bristling with sharp and many colored pinnacles, the other plain and square, of uniform whiteness. Between the promontories, at the water's surface, two new breakwaters meet, closing the mouth of the harbor. At the outermost extremity of each is a beacon: one red, the other green.

The Colonel tapped his brow and looked at his compatriot with a smile. "Oh, yes, I remember. He says the Casino and the Museum are a symbol."

The little group which Castro had labelled "Enemies of

Women" had now been in existence two weeks with no disharmony and no obstacles to the perfect happiness of the members. Complete freedom was theirs! Villa Sirena belonged to them all, and the real owner seemed merely like an additional guest.

Arising late in the morning, Castro saw the Prince in a corner of the garden with his shirt open at the neck and his bare arms wielding a spade. The thing that made the new life complete for him was the cultivating of a little garden, and having the gratification of eating vegetables and smelling flowers that were the product of his own toil. This man who had always been surrounded by a corps of servants to attend to all his wants, was anxious now to be self-dependent, and feel the proud satisfaction of one who relies entirely on his own hands. Vainly he invited Castro to join him in this healthy, profitable exercise, which was at the same time a return to primitive simplicity.

"Thanks; I don't care for Tolstoi. As far as the simple life goes this is all I want." And he stretched out on the moss, under a tree, while the Prince went on digging his garden. They talked for a while of their companions. Novoa was in the library, or wandering about the park. Some mornings he would take the early train for Monaco to continue his studies at the Museum. As for Spadoni, he never arose before noon, and often the Colonel would have to pound on his door so that he would not be late for lunch.

"He never gets to sleep until dawn," said Castro. "He spends

the night studying his notes on the way the gambling has been going. He gets into my room sometimes when I'm asleep, to tell me one of his everlasting systems that he has just discovered; and I have to threaten him with a slipper. In his room, among the music albums, he keeps piles of green sheets that give each day's plays for a year at all the various tables in the Casino. He's crazy."

But Castro took care not to add that he often asked Spadoni to lend him his "archives" in order to verify his own calculations; and in spite of his making fun of the latter's discoveries, he used to risk a little money on them, through a gambler's superstition that attaches great value to the intuitions of the simple-minded.

After luncheon, Castro and Spadoni would both hurry off to the Casino. The Prince, when not attending a concert, remained with Novoa and the Colonel in a *loggia* on the upper story, looking out over the sea. The war had filled that part of the Mediterranean with shipping. In normal times the sea presented a deserted monotonous appearance, with nothing to arrest the eye save the wheeling of the gulls, the foamy leaps of the dolphins and the sail of an occasional fishing boat. The steamers and the large sailing vessels were scarcely ever to be seen even as tiny shadows on the horizon, following their course direct from Marseilles to Genoa, without following the extensive shore line of the Riviera gulf. But now the submarine menace had obliged the merchant ships to slip along within shelter of the coast. Convoys passed nearly every day; freighters of various nationalities, daubed like zebras to reduce their visibility, and

escorted by French and Italian torpedo-boats.

These rosaries of boats so close to the coast that one could read their names and distinguish their captains standing on the bridge, caused the Prince and the Professor to talk of the horrors of war.

At times the Colonel entered the conversation, but only to lament the difficulties which such a war presented to the fulfillment of his duties as steward. Each day his task was becoming more difficult. He was no longer able to find anything worth serving at a table like that of the Prince, and even so, the prices that he paid roused his indignation when he compared them with those of peace times! And the servants! He had sent to Spain for some, now that all those from the district were in the army; but the hotel proprietors had immediately enticed them away. They all preferred to serve in cafés or in places where people are continually coming and going, tempted by the chance of getting tips and of associating with the white-aproned chamber-maids.

He had improvised dining-room service with the two Italian boys from the Brodhigera, whose families were living in Monaco. The older and livelier of the two had the name of Pistola, and treated his companion in despotic fashion, bullying him with kicks and cuffs when the Colonel's back was turned. Atilio, for the sake of the rhyme, had nicknamed Pistola's comrade, Estola, and every one in the house accepted the name, even the boy himself.

"When you think of the work it cost me to make decent respectable looking servants out of them!" groaned Toledo. "And now it seems that they are going to be called back to Italy as soldiers. More men off for the war! Even these young lads that haven't reached the age yet! What shall we do when Estola and Pistola go?"

Many evenings, at the dinner hour, the rules of the community were rudely broken. The first to desert was Spadoni. He arrived sometimes after midnight, saying that he had dined with some friends. At other times he did not return at all. After a few days had gone by he would quietly appear, with the serene ingenuousness of a stray dog, just as though he had gone out only a few hours before. No one could ever find out exactly where he had been. He himself was not sure. "I met some friends." And in the same half hour, these friends would be at one moment some Englishmen from Nice, or at another a family from Cap-Martin, as though he had been in both places at the same time.

Atilio also used to absent himself. A gambling companion had shown him, in the Casino, the little cards divided into columns, which are used to note the alternating frequency of "red" and "black." Various ladies had taken similar documents from their hand-bags, where they lay among the handkerchiefs, the powder boxes, the lip sticks, the banknotes, and the various colored chips, which are used as money in the gaming. The indications all agreed. During the morning and afternoon the "bets" were all lost, and the house was winning; but from eight o'clock in

the evening on, undreamed-of fortune smiled on the players. The statistics could not be clearer; there was no possible doubt. And Castro would renounce the excellent food of Villa Sirena, satisfied with a glass of beer and a sandwich at the bar. Then at midnight he would return in a hired carriage, paying the astonished driver with prodigality. At other times he would stand in front of the gate fishing in his pockets to get together enough to pay for the cab. Fate had lied. Nor, on those occasions, would any of the prophets of the little cards have been able to lend him a cent.

Toledo muttered protests. This lack of orderly habits made him lament once more the scarcity of servants. The help always got up late on account of having to sit up and wait at night. For that reason, on the nights when all the companions of the Prince were present, the Colonel felt the satisfaction of the Governor of a fortress when he sees all the posterns locked and feels the keys in his pocket. After dinner they would listen to Spadoni. Seated at a grand piano, he would play according to his mood or according to the wishes of the Prince. Lubimoff was a melomaniac whose musical taste was cloyed, perverted, by an excessive refinement. He cared only for rare works, and obscure composers.

Castro, who was himself a pianist, at times was unable to hide his enthusiasm for the wonderful execution of the Italian virtuoso.

"And just think that after all he is an idiot!" he exclaimed, with the frankness of a man who is carried away by his feelings.

"All his faculties are warped, and narrowed, concentrated on a single purpose, music, without leaving anything for anything else. However, what's the difference? He's an idiot – but a sublime idiot."

There were nights when Spadoni remained with his elbow on the keyboard and his brow resting in his right hand, as though completely absorbed in music. As a matter of fact, the visions that were then whirling in his head, beneath those long locks, were red and black squares, many cards, and thirty-six numbers in three rows beginning with a zero. The Prince, annoyed by the silence, turned to Castro.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.