

JENNIE BAXTER, JOURNALIST.*

BY COTTREL HOE.

Illustrated by ADOLF THIEDE.

NUMBER III.—THE DUCHESS OF CHISELHURST'S BALL.



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"There! Now you are my prisoner, about to be punished for flattery," cried the Princess. "I saw by the motion of the chair that you had just jumped up from it when I disturbed you, so there you are, back in it again.

What were you thinking about? A rocking-chair lends itself deliciously to meditation, and we always think of someone very particular as we rock."

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

"How nice of you to say that; and as one good turn deserves another, here is proof

that a certain young lady has been in *my* thoughts."

As she spoke, the Princess took from her pocket an embossed case of Russian leather, opened it and displayed a string of diamonds, lustrous as drops of liquid light.

"I want you to wear these stones in remembrance of our diamond mystery—that

is why I chose diamonds—and also, I confess that I want you to think of me every time you put them on. See how conceited I am! One does not like to be forgotten."

Jennie took the string, her own eyes for a moment rivalling in brilliancy the sparkle of the gems; then the moisture obscured her vision and she automatically poured the stones from one hand to the other, as if their scintillating glitter hypnotised her. She tried once or twice to speak, but could not be sure of her voice, so remained silent. The Princess, noticing her

agitation, gently lifted the necklace and clasped it round the girl's white throat, chattering all the while with nervous haste.

"There! you *can* wear diamonds, and there are so many to whom they are unbecoming. I also look well in diamonds—at least, so I've been told over and over again, and I've come to believe it at last. I



"Now confess that you never saw a prettier girl."

suppose the young men have not concealed from you the fact that you are a strikingly good-looking girl, Jennie. Indeed, and this is brag if you like, we two resemble one another enough to be sisters, nearly the same height, the same colour of eyes and hair. Come to the mirror, Miss Handsomeness, and admire yourself."

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

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

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

"You are very, very kind, but I cannot accept so costly a present."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I dare not tell you, Princess; not until my project proves a success or a failure. We women—some have our way made for

us—others have our own way to make. I am among the others, and I hope you will remember that if you are ever angry with me."

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

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

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



Illustration by Thiede, 1880

"She presented herself to the editor of the *Daily Bugle*."

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

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

"Well, Miss Baxter," he said, "you have been extraordinarily successful in solving the diamond mystery, and I congratulate you.

My letter reached you, I suppose. Have you given any thought to the problem that now confronts us? Can you get us a full report of the Duchess of Chiselhurst's ball, written so convincingly that all the guests who read it will know that the writer was present?"

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

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

"How much?"

"Whatever is necessary."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"On the night of the ball I should like you to have three or four expert shorthand writers here; I don't know how many will be necessary—you understand more about that than I do; but it is my intention to dictate the report right along as fast as I can talk until it is finished, and I don't wish

to be stopped or interrupted, so I want the best stenographers you have; they are to relieve one another just as if they were taking down a parliamentary speech. The men had better be in readiness at midnight; I shall be here as soon after that as possible. If you will kindly run over their type-written MS. before it goes to the compositors, I will glance at the proofs when I have finished dictating."

"Then you hope to attend the ball yourself."

"Perhaps."

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

"So I understood from your letter."

Again the editorial interjection did duty for a laugh.

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

Jennie, with the thousand pounds at her disposal, went to Paris, took rooms at the most aristocratic hotel, engaged a maid, and set about the construction of a ball dress that would be a dream of beauty. Luckily, she knew exactly the gown-making resources of Paris, and the craftsmen to whom she gave her orders were not the less anxious to please her when they knew that the question of cost was not to be considered. From Paris she telegraphed in the name of the Princess von Steinheimer to Claridge's Hotel for an apartment on the night of the ball, and asked that a suitable equipage be provided to convey her to and from that festival.

Arriving at Claridge's, she was aware that her first danger was that someone who knew the Princess von Steinheimer would call upon her; but on the valid plea of fatigue from her journey she proclaimed that under no circumstances could she see any visitor, and thus shipwreck was avoided at the outset. It was unlikely that the Princess von Steinheimer was personally known to many who would attend the ball; in fact, the Princess had given to Jennie as her main reason for refusing the invitation the excuse that she knew no one in London. She had been invited merely because of the social position of the Prince in Vienna, and was

unknown by sight even to her hostess, the Duchess of Chiselhurst.

It is said that a woman magnificently robed is superior to all earthly tribulations. Such was the case with Jennie as she left her carriage, walked along the strip of carpet which lay across the pavement under a canopy, and entered the great hall of the Duke of Chiselhurst's town house, one of the huge palaces of Western London. Nothing so resplendent had she ever witnessed, or even imagined, as the scene which met her eye when she found herself about to ascend the broad stairway at the top of which the hostess stood to receive her distinguished guests. Early as she was, the stairway and the rooms beyond seemed already thronged. Splendid menials in gorgeous livery, crimson the predominant colour, stood on each step at either side of the stair. Uniforms of every pattern, from the gorgeous oriental raiment of Indian princes and eastern potentates, to the more sober, but scarcely less rich apparel of the diplomatic corps, ministers of the Empire, and officers, naval and military, gave the final note of magnificent and picturesque decoration. Like tropical flowers in this garden of colour were the ladies, who, with easy grace, moved to and fro, bestowing a smile here and a whisper there; and yet, despite her agitation, a hurried, furtive glance around brought to Jennie the conviction that she was, perhaps, the best-gowned woman among that assemblage of well-dressed people, which recognition somewhat calmed her palpitating heart. The whole environment seemed unreal to her, and she walked forward as if in a dream. She heard someone cry, "The Princess von Steinheimer," and at first had a difficulty in realising that the title, for the moment, pertained to herself. The next instant her hand was in that of the Duchess of Chiselhurst, and Jennie heard the lady murmur that it was good of her to come so far to grace the occasion. The girl made some sort of reply which she found herself unable afterwards to recall, but the rapid incoming of other guests led her to hope that, if she had used any unsuitable phrase, it was either unheard or forgotten in the tension of the time. She stood aside and formed one of the brilliant group at the head of the stairs, thankful that this first ordeal was well done with. Her rapidly beating heart had now opportunity to lessen its pulsations, and as she soon found that she was practically unnoticed, her natural calmness began to return to her.

She remembered why she was there, and her discerning eye enabled her to stamp on a retentive memory the various particulars of so unaccustomed a spectacle whose very unfamiliarity made the greater impression on the girl's mind. She moved away from the group, determined to saunter through the numerous rooms thrown open for the occasion, and thus, as it were, get her bearings. In a short time all fear of discovery left her, and she began to feel very much at home in the lofty crowded salons, pausing even to enjoy a selection which a military band, partly concealed in the foliage, was rendering in masterly manner, led by the most famous *impresario* of the day. The remote probability of meeting anyone here who knew the Princess reassured her, and there speedily came over her a sense of delight in all the kaleidoscopic dazzle of this great entertainment. She saw that each one there had interest in someone else, and, to her great relief, found herself left entirely alone with reasonable assurance that this remoteness would continue to befriend her until the final gauntlet of leave-taking had to be run; a trial still to be encountered, the thought of which she resolutely put away from her, trusting to the luck that had hitherto not deserted her.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The young man laughed. "Indeed," he said, "had I served my country as faithfully as I have been true to my remembrance of you, Princess, I would have been an ambassador long ere this, covered with decorations. Have you then lost all recollection of that winter in Washington five years ago; that whirlwind of gaiety which ended

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Oh, this *is* jolly," cried Jennie, quite forgetting the dignity of a Princess. "You



"Her fan concealed the lower part of her face."

by wafting you away to a foreign country, so that the eventful season clings to my memory as if it were a disastrous western cyclone? Is it possible that I must re-introduce myself as Donal Stirling?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The young man, with visible reluctance, directed his thoughts from the one to the many, and named this person and that, while Jennie, with the pencil attached to her

card, made cabalistic notes in shorthand, economising thus both space and time. When at last she had all the information she desired, she leaned back in her chair with a little sigh of supreme content. Whatever might now betide, her mission was fulfilled, if she could once get quietly away. The complete details of the most important society event of the season were at her fingers' ends. She closed her eyes for a moment to enjoy the satisfaction which success leaves in its train, and when she opened them again found Lord Donal in his old posture, absorbed in the contemplation of her undeniable beauty.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Lord Donal Stirling never took his eyes from the face of his companion, and he saw

a quick pallor overspread it. He leaned forward and whispered—

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"So soon? Without even visiting the Embassy? I am distressed to hear of so speedy a desertion, and yet, knowing the charms of the Schloss Steinheimer, I can hardly wonder at your wish to return there. The Prince, I suppose, is as devoted as ever to the chase. I must censure His Highness,

next time we meet, for not coming with you to London; then I am sure you would have stayed longer with us."

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

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

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

"It is most kind of you, Princess, to cheer an old man's heart by such gracious words. It is our misfortune that affairs of State chain us to our

pillar, and, indeed, diplomacy seems to become more difficult as the years go on, because we have to contend with the genius of rising young men like Lord Donal Stirling here, who are more than a match for old dogs that find it impossible to learn new tricks."

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



"Next instant the aged diplomat was bending over her outstretched hand."

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

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

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

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

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

"You young people, you young people!" murmured the Ambassador, bending again over the hand presented to him, "what unheard-of things you do."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"And what is worse, Lord Donal, you

have shown it, which is the one unforgivable fault in diplomacy."

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

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

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

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

She leaned back in her chair and said wearily—

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

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

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

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

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

Eager as she was to be gone, she knew that she should display no haste. Expecting to find a stair at the other end of the gallery, she sought for it, but found none. Filled with apprehension that she would meet Lord Donal coming up, she had difficulty in timing her footsteps to the slow measure that was necessary. She reached the bottom of the stair in safety and unimpeded, but once on the main floor a new problem

presented itself. Nothing would attract more attention than a young and beautiful lady walking the long distance between the gallery end of the room and the entrance stairway entirely alone and unattended. She stood there hesitating, wondering whether she could venture on finding a quiet side-exit, which she was sure must exist in this large house, when, to her dismay, she found Lord Donal again at her side, rather breathless, as if he had been hurrying in search of her. His brows were knit and there was an anxious expression on his face.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"No; there was little trouble there. He expects to meet you later in the evening. But a telegraphic message has come from Meran, signed by the Princess von Steinheimer, which expresses a hope that the ball will be a success, and reiterates the regret of her Highness that she could not be present. Luckily this communication has not been shown to the Duchess. I told the Duke, who read it to me, knowing I had been with you all the evening, that it was likely a practical joke on the part of the Prince; but the Duke, who is rather a serious person, does not take kindly to that theory, and if he knew the Prince he would dismiss it as absurd—which it is. I have asked him not to show the telegram to anyone, so there is a little time for considering what had best be done."

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

"That would be impossible, and the attempt might lead to unexpected complica-

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

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

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

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

"My lord, excuse me."

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

A sign brought a serving man up the stairs.

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

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

"My Lord Duke, it never occurred to me to question the identity of guests I met under your hospitable roof. I knew the Princess five years ago in Washington, before



“Lord Donal turned with an ill-concealed expression of impatience.”

she was married. I have not seen her in the interval, but until you showed me the telegraphic message there was no question in my mind regarding her."

"But the American Ambassador is positive."

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

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

"There, my Lord Duke, you see everything is as it should be. If you will give me that stupid telegram, I will make some quiet inquiries about it. Meanwhile, the less said the better. I will see the American Ambassador and convince him of his error.

And now I must make what excuses I can to the lady for my desertion of her."

Placing the paper in his pocket, he hurried down the stair and out to the street. There had been some delay

about the coming of the carriage, and he saw the lady he sought at that moment entering it.

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

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

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

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

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

with a long, slender white glove in his hand.

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



"A chagrined young man stood alone on the kerb."