

***ARTHUR
W. MARCHMONT***



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MARRIAGE***

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

[Cover](#)

[Titlepage](#)

[Text](#)

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CHAPTER I

THE "IMPERIAL MARRIAGE"

When the Kaiser planned the marriage between his kinswoman, the Princess von Altenvelt, and his handsome favourite, the Prince von Graven--the "Imperial Marriage," as the Court gossips styled it--there did not appear to be even the remotest possibility that it could ever be any concern of mine.

The news was almost the last I sent through to my paper, the *London Newsletter*, for I heard of it just before I resigned my position as Berlin Special Correspondent, on succeeding to my uncle's fortune. I had remained on in the capital, ostensibly to give a lift to my successor, my old Varsity chum, Gerald Bassett, but in reality for a reason which no one knew, except my sister, Bessie. And she only guessed it was on Althea's account.

Sisters have a knack of ferreting out these secrets, and I gathered that she had guessed mine because she had dropped more than one hint that Althea, being a great friend of hers, would be very welcome as a sister-in-law.

That was the position when, at a dance one night, Hugo von Felsen told me with a grin on his thin long malicious face that the Imperial Marriage was in danger because Prince von Graven had fallen in love with Althea and she with him.

I had always detested von Felsen, and had only tolerated him in my newspaper days because, as the son of a powerful Minister, Count von Felsen, he could sometimes be tapped for valuable information. The fact that this news came from him made it seem even worse than it was.

"You can see for yourself," he added. "There they are, together. All Berlin knows about it. Look, everybody is watching them"; and his close-set cunning eyes were fixed on my face as if he knew how his words would affect me, and was pleased.

"They are worth looking at, anyhow," I answered, with a shrug of indifference. They were. In my eyes Althea was the most beautiful girl in the room. The type of a lovely brunette, with perfectly moulded features, large lustrous eyes instinct with tenderness and sympathy, and a figure of consummate grace. But then I looked at her with the eyes of a lover. The Prince was also strikingly handsome. Tall, with a soldierly bearing, and as fair as Althea was dark, his face was marred only by the weakness of the mouth.

"We only want the Kaiser himself and the Princess von Altenvelt to complete the picture, eh?" sneered von Felsen with a chuckle of malice. "How his High-and-Mightiness would enjoy the sight! As much as you do, Bastable."

"Yourself, you should say, rather, judging by your looks," I retorted. "It is nothing to me."

"You wouldn't have a chance, if it were," he snapped.

I was not going to let him see how hard I was hit by the news, and as the band struck up then I turned away in search of my partner. This was Chalice Mennerheim; really Althea's niece, although the relationship appeared a little

absurd as there was only a year or so between them. I meant to find out from her whether there was any foundation for von Felsen's insinuation.

Chalice had a remarkable voice, and Althea had brought her to Berlin to be trained by Herr Grumpel, the great professor, whose influence at Court was as powerful as his skill in voice culture was great.

After a couple of turns round the room I led her into one of the conservatories. She was very vain and intensely selfish, and would have been really pretty, had it not been for a certain hard, calculating expression in her light blue eyes. They always suggested to me the eyes of an unskilfully painted picture.

I paid her a number of compliments and then led round to the subject of the Prince, observing casually that I had just heard some news about him.

"Tell me," she said, with a quick side glance and a very musical laugh, as she laid her hand on my arm with a little coaxing gesture. "It's awfully wicked, and Althea is always at me about it; but I love scandal. And I'm scarcely twenty yet. What I shall be at thirty makes me shudder. A regular old scandal-monger, I expect."

"You are not shuddering; only smiling and looking very pretty. The Prince thinks you very pretty too, I presume, by the way he was looking at you when you were dancing with him just now."

She laughed again. "What were you going to tell me?"

"They say the Imperial Marriage is in danger because he----" I left the sentence unfinished intentionally.

"Go on. Go on. Because----? Tell me."

"Haven't you noticed anything which would enable you to finish the sentence?"

"You don't mean--Althea?" Her voice sank to a whisper.

I felt a grip at my heart at this confirmation. "Half the people here were watching them just now as they stood together in the centre of the room."

She burst suddenly into a fit of merry, irresponsible laughter. "Isn't it fun?" she cried. I suppose it was, to her. I did not see the humour of it, however.

"There may not be much laughter in it when the Kaiser hears," I growled.

"Ah, the Kaiser!" and she shrugged her shapely shoulders petulantly. "What business has he to turn matchmaker? Why should not the Prince marry whom he pleases? Think what an ugly thing is that Princess von Altenvelt!" She appeared to be quite indignant on Althea's account.

"It would cost the Prince the Emperor's favour and his position at Court," I replied; "and probably he would be packed off to some fever hole in the Colonies on military service. Nice for Althea, that. The Kaiser can be hard when he likes."

"It is unjust! Infamous!" she exclaimed vehemently. "Poor Althea! But you don't think that really? The Kaiser likes him too well."

"He has done it before, remember." Jealousy plays odd pranks with a man. Here was I finding a sort of morbid delight in drawing this gloomy picture, when in reality I wished Althea all the happiness in the world. But the smart of my disappointment was so fresh that I felt positively spiteful for the moment.

Chalice cast her eyes down, and in the pause a partner came to look for her. She threw me a little nod and a smile, as if we had had the pleasantest chat, and flitted off prattling to her partner and making eyes at him as I had seen her make them to a hundred other men before.

I sat on and brooded. I had been a self-centred ass not to have seen things, and a fool to dream that such a girl as Althea would ever give me a second thought. And then with a sigh I resolved to get out of Berlin without loss of time. I was walking off to the smoking room when I came on Althea sitting alone.

"I believe you have actually forgotten that this was our dance, Mr. Bastable," she said with a reproachful look and a smile. She always spoke English, and spoke it remarkably well.

I had forgotten it, and mumbled a lame apology.

"Let us sit out the remainder of it then. I am rather tired. And you look as if the weight of a throne were on your shoulders. Are you worried?"

I dropped into the seat by her side and began to make small talk, although every pulse in my body was leaping with the desire to speak of the feeling that filled my heart.

At length she spoke of Chalice. "You were talking to her just now," she said, "and appeared to be discussing some very grave subject."

I resolved suddenly to get the truth from her. "It was about you, in fact."

"About me?" she asked in surprise.

"I don't know whether you'll think I'm putting my foot in it, but I should like to tell you something."

"What a grave preface!" she said jestingly, but with an earnest look.

I fidgeted uneasily under her gaze. "The fact is, I heard something from von Felsen, and Chalice confirmed it--about you and Prince von Graven."

She pressed her hands together quickly, and a tinge of colour crept up into her cheeks. "Chalice confirmed it?" she repeated. "What did she say?"

"Well, the fact is--you see, when you and the Prince were standing together in the middle of the room a while back, a whole lot of people were staring at you; and--there was a lot of talk as to what the Kaiser would be likely to do when he--when he heard about you two."

I kept my eyes on the ground and felt many parts of a fool in the pause which followed. Then Althea laughed, and I looked up.

"It is a very awkward position, of course; and equally of course you do not quite understand it. I--I meant to tell you and Bessie all about it. I will do so one day. We must be more careful for the future." And again she laughed.

Her laughter nettled me. It ought not to have done so, of course. She could not possibly know how I felt. "If you wish to avoid the Kaiser's anger, you certainly must be. But I am going off to England by the afternoon mail to-morrow," I declared bluntly.

My reference to the Kaiser stopped her laughter, and she looked very grave for a moment. Then she got up. "I must say good-bye to you then, I suppose."

We shook hands; and then to my surprise she added: "I wish I knew what the Kaiser would do. It would let the thing

be cleared up."

"I wish you happiness with all my heart," I replied earnestly.

"Thank you, Mr. Bastable. I am sure you do. I should like-- -- But of course I can't. Good-bye"; and with this she turned away a little abruptly.

I told my sister as we were driving home that I was going to England on the following day, and she guessed at once that Althea was the cause, and got the truth out of me.

"I don't believe it, Paul," was her verdict; "but perhaps the best thing is for you to go away. A change will do you good; and as Aunt Charlotte is coming here I must stay behind." Aunt Charlotte was Mrs. Ellicott, a wealthy, childless widow, who made a great favourite of Bessie and was to leave her her money.

A sleepless night's reflection confirmed me in my resolve to go away, and the next afternoon found me at the station.

Then the unexpected happened. I was looking after my luggage and Bessie had gone off to buy me some papers, when Althea came hurrying up to me.

"Oh, Mr. Bastable, I remembered you would be here. I am in desperate trouble. Will you help me?"

She was pale and, although she smiled, I could see she was trembling with nervous excitement. "Of course I will. Tell me," I replied quickly. To help her, I was ready to toss every plan I had formed into the melting-pot of change.

"I am to be arrested."

"Arrested! You!" I exclaimed in profound astonishment.

She laid her hand on my arm and made a brave effort to smile again. "I think it is on account of--of Prince von

Graven." Her voice died down gradually as she said this hesitatingly, until it was little more than a whisper; and her eyes fell.

"And where is *he*, then?" I blurted out, like the clumsy lout I was.

I guessed of course that the news had reached the Kaiser's ears and he had taken prompt action. But that the Prince should have left her to bear the brunt of the Imperial anger alone in this way was downright cowardice.

"You don't understand, Mr. Bastable," she said, biting her lip. "But I---- Oh, they are following me now. What am I to do?"

I pulled myself together. "Do you mean the police?"

"I don't know. I was on the point of leaving the house when they came. The maid, Lotta, helped me to slip away; but I think they followed me."

"Do they know you well by sight?"

"I think not. I passed one of them outside. I got a cab, but they followed."

"It will be all right. Bessie is here. Don't worry. We'll see you through."

Bessie came hurrying up with an exclamation of surprise at seeing Althea.

"Don't stop to ask any questions, Bess," I said. "Fräulein Korper is in some bother. Take her into one of the waiting-rooms and change cloaks and hats with her. She can come back to me; but you must drive off somewhere in a cab. Get out when you are a mile or so away, and then go home on foot. There isn't a moment to lose. Quick, both of you."

Bessie hurried Althea away almost before I had finished speaking, and I turned to see that my luggage was put back into the cloak-room instead of being registered. I made the excuse that one of the trunks had been forgotten.

Althea returned before I had finished, and I gave her a critical look. My sister had been wearing a long drab driving coat and a very plain, essentially English golf cap; and I could not restrain a smile at the change they effected in Althea. No German would dream of taking their wearer for one of his countrywomen.

She was still nervous, and as she came up she whispered that the men she meant had just entered the station.

A glance in the direction she indicated showed me that I knew one of them--a police agent, named Dormund. Not the one who had seen her, fortunately.

"It will be all right," I said reassuringly. "Now just a touch or two more, and you will pass as English. Put your hair back right out of sight; slip on these sun spectacles, purse up your lip and show as many of your teeth as possible--you know the German cartoon of the average English girl; look as plain and formidable as you can; and only speak to me to snap out a word or so, as if we were quarrelling."

She tried to follow my directions, and I was glad to see her smile in amusement, despite her alarm.

"That's better. I know one of the men, and he will probably come over and speak to me. We are supposed to be brother and sister for a minute or two--he has never seen Bessie--and we are wrangling because you have left one of my trunks behind and caused me to lose the train in

consequence. Be looking among those trunks over there, so that you can keep your face averted."

"He is not the man who saw me," she whispered, when I pointed to Dormund, who caught sight of me soon afterwards and came over.

"Why you couldn't see that all the things were brought beats me," I exclaimed in a loud, irritable tone to Althea. "I thought you could be trusted to count as far as four without a mistake. Giving all this infernal trouble. I shall have to go back for it, and so miss the train. Enough to make a man almost swear."

Dormund was now close and had heard much of what I said and was looking intently at Althea.

"Heir Bastable, excuse me," he said.

I turned on him quickly and irritably, and then smiled. "Hullo, Herr Dormund. I wondered who the deuce it was, and was within an ace of venting a bit of temper on you for the interruption. My sister has forgotten a trunk of mine, and now I shall miss the train," I gestured toward Althea. She had her profile toward him, and his face showed me that he had no suspicion.

"Ah, your sister," he said; and raised his hat and looked first at her and then to me as if expecting an introduction. "I heard you were leaving Berlin to-day," he continued, when I did not take the hint. "It is indeed annoying."

A scowl and an angry murmur gave him the measure of my temper. "It's a marvel to me that women can make such blunders," I growled.

"Where are you going?"

"London. And now there's no train till the night mail, and I hate night travelling."

"Have you been long in the station?"

"About half an hour or so. It took my sister that time to find out that she had made any mistake at all"; and I shot another wrathful glance at Althea. There was no doubt about my being in a very bad temper over it.

"Then perhaps you can do me a little service. You know Fräulein Korper, I believe? Have you seen her here within the last few minutes?"

"My dear fellow, I haven't had eyes for anything but my luggage, and not enough eyes to see all that even," I replied with a short angry laugh. "Have you seen anything of Althea Korper here, Bessie?" I called.

"No," she snapped, as irritably as I had spoken before. It was well done.

"Thank you," I replied in the same snappy tone, "I am sorry," I said to Dormund; "don't you know her by sight then?"

"Unfortunately, no."

I lowered my voice. "You're surely not seeking her officially?"

He smiled and threw up his hands, leaving me to infer what I pleased.

"By Jove," I exclaimed. "Can't say I wish you luck, Dormund." Then I turned to the porter. "Here, get these trunks to the cloak-room. I'll drive back for the other and see if I can catch the train after all. Come along, Bessie."

She acted the sulky sister to the life and succeeded in keeping her face almost entirely averted from Dormund.

He remained with me while I got rid of the luggage and then while I chartered the cab; and I began to wonder if after all he had not some suspicion and whether he would let Althea go.

She had kept behind us and when the cab was ready, the door of which Dormund himself held open, she hurried past him and took her seat. He closed the door and stood bareheaded while we drove off.

I drew a breath of relief.

"Will he follow us?" asked Althea nervously.

"Not he. He hasn't a thought of the trick we've played him."

"Oh, Mr. Bastable, how could you do it so naturally? I was positively trembling the whole time."

"You needn't worry about anything now," I said reassuringly. "Try to fix your thoughts on what is to be done next."

"I don't know what to do," she murmured.

Neither did I. Nor did I seem to care. The unexpectedness of it all had taken my breath away. The whole position was so unreal that I was in the clouds.

A few minutes before I had been bent only upon rushing away in search of distraction from the galling rack of my disappointment on her account; and now she had rushed to me in the hour of her trouble, and was by my side, trusting to me to get her out of it all.

I would do it at any cost; but for the moment I was so elated by the proof of her confidence, that I could think of nothing else.

CHAPTER II

COMPLICATIONS

Althea was at first unwilling to go to our house, as such a course might involve us in some way with the authorities; but I would not listen to her objections.

"Let me suggest one precaution," I said as the cab stopped. "That you hold your handkerchief to your face as you enter. We have one German servant, Gretchen, and she had better not recognize you. The other two are English, and will hold their tongues."

She adopted the suggestion, and when we entered the house we found that Bessie had already arrived and had explained that I had missed the train. She kissed Althea and fussed over her in the way girls have, and I could see that she was bursting with curiosity to know everything.

After a few minutes she suggested that I should send a telegram home to say I was not going; and as I saw that she wished to be left alone with Althea, I went off at once. It turned out to be lucky that I did, for Lieutenant von Bernhoff, a man who took a great deal more interest in Bessie than she did in him, was just getting out of a cab as I left the house.

"What has happened, Bastable? I went to the station to see you off, and Dormund told me you weren't going. From what he said I was afraid that something had happened to your sister."

I shut down a smile. "There's nothing the matter. One of my trunks was left behind, and I had to put off my journey. I'm on my way to wire to my people at home. Come with me." He was no favourite of mine, and as a friend of Dormund's, about the last man in Berlin to be trusted with the secret of Althea's presence in the house.

He went with me to send the telegram, and plagued me with a hundred questions about Bessie, the reason for her having to wear spectacles, and so on; and when we reached the house again he wanted to come in and see her.

"You must excuse her to-day, von Bernhoff. The place is all sixes and sevens on account of my intended departure," I said with a shrug.

"You found your lost trunk, I hope? Dormund told me you were in a fine temper about it."

"I am much obliged to him, but he might mind his own business."

"He was minding it in a sense," he replied with a grin. "I had promised to introduce him to your sister. He knows, you know"; and he grinned meaningly.

"A pity you were not there earlier then," I said carelessly, repressing a smile at what would have been the result if he had been.

"I shall bring him some day to introduce him," he declared as we shook hands.

"By all means. He is a good fellow. But not until I get back to Berlin."

"He is awfully keen to know her--now"; and with this somewhat cryptic remark he grinned again and turned away.

I went upstairs wondering curiously whether Dormund had said anything else about the "Bessie" he had seen at the station to start von Bernhoff's suspicions. The complications were beginning already.

But Althea and Bessie appeared to be taking the matter lightly, for a burst of merry laughter from them both rang out as I opened the door.

"Paul of the grave face!" cried Bessie. "Look at him, Althea."

Althea's eyes were shining brightly, and the colour had returned to her cheeks, as I saw when she looked up at my entrance.

"It is good to find you like this," I said.

"It is Bessie. She is wonderful," said Althea.

"There is just no trouble at all," declared Bessie, coming toward me with a light of pleasure dancing in her eyes. "It is the most ridiculous mistake, Paul; and all this bother to-day appears to be the result of it. Shall I tell him?" Althea nodded. "About the Prince von Graven. It isn't Althea he cares for at all. It's Chalice. Althea has let every one believe it, lest Chalice's prospects should be injured."

I started and caught my breath in surprise and almost fierce delight at this wonderful news. But Bessie was a thoughtful little body, and she had placed herself purposely so that Althea should not see the effect upon me; and to give me time to recover myself, she added: "You'll have some tea, won't you, Paul? Ring the bell for another cup."

I turned away and rang the bell, and then with a big effort I choked down my delighted surprise and drew a chair close to the others.

"So it's Chalice, eh?" I asked quietly.

"Of course no one must know it except you two," said Althea.

Bessie laughed mischievously. "Even that doesn't much matter, does it, Paul?"

"It makes no end of a difference," I said gravely. "But why on earth have you allowed the mistake to be made? Both you and Chalice herself let me share it last night, too."

"It is for Chalice's sake," said Althea. "You had just come from her, and I saw what she had told you. You know she is in my care, and that I promised my sister on her death-bed that I would look after her."

"You speak as if she were a child and you a grave and sedate matron, Althea," declared Bessie. "And there can't be more than a year or two between you."

"Three years, Bessie. Chalice is only twenty; and I am her aunt, you know."

We all smiled at this. "But that is no reason why you should get into all this bother on account of the Prince," objected Bessie.

"The simplest thing will be to let the truth be known," I put in.

"Oh no, no," protested Althea vehemently. "Anything but that; at any rate for the present. Herr Grumpel declares her voice will take the whole country by storm; and she is to make her *début* soon. She has a brilliant future before her, and if she were to incur the displeasure of the Court at such a time it would ruin everything."

"But Prince von Graven won't wish his wife to be a singer," I objected, "even supposing such a marriage were

ever sanctioned."

"Chalice declares she will not do a thing to hurt his interests. That is why she will not have a betrothal."

"But what about you, Althea?" cried Bessie indignantly. "Are you to be packed off to prison or out of the country in order that the secret may be kept?"

"It must be kept, Bessie," said Althea very decidedly.

"I think a little plain talk to the Prince would be a good thing," I suggested.

"He thinks only of Chalice, and will not do anything against her wish."

"Something like a deadlock, then," I murmured. If everything was to hinge only on Chalice's wishes, the case promised to be awkward. We were silent for a while, and then I said: "You will be placed in a very ugly fix. We all know what the Kaiser is when any one opposes him. You surely won't go to the extreme of letting yourself be arrested?"

This appeared to alarm her seriously. "No, no. There are other reasons, too," she exclaimed hastily.

"Then your only course is for you to leave the country."

"I can't even leave Berlin while Chalice is here."

"Then take her with you."

"There is Herr Grumpel. If she left now, it would ruin everything."

I tossed up my hands with a smile. The position was impossible.

"Hadn't you better fetch your trunks from the station, Paul?" asked Bessie.

"I'm afraid there's nothing in them that will solve this puzzle."

"At any rate you will not go home now," she retorted meaningly. "And while you go for them, Althea and I can talk things over. I have made up my mind. She must, of course, stay with us for the time."

"No, no," protested Althea. I rose, delighted at the idea.

"We shall have everything settled by the time you're back, Paul."

"There's Gretchen, remember," I replied as I went out of the room.

I walked to the station and started to think things over, but there was one thought which for the time crowded out all others. Althea was not in love with the Prince! Thank Heaven for that. And compared with that, nothing mattered. I would find some way out of the tangle, and in the meantime--well, I could hope again. And then I began dreaming and planning with the sanguine vanity of a man very much in love and once more able to hope for the best.

Dormund was still at the station, and met me as I entered. "Ah, Herr Bastable, going on your journey after all?"

"Not to-night. I don't travel at night if I can help it."

"Well that is perhaps as well. It will give you more time. All passports have to be viséd afresh. But of course I can see to that for you, if you like."

"Why's that? Anything happened?"

"It would interest you if you were still on your paper. Trouble with those cursed Poles again. A plot to rob one of the Imperial couriers of his papers. We had news from Koln

and prevented it; but some of the scoundrels are known to be here in Berlin, and we are watching for them. If we were to behead a few of them it would save a lot of trouble."

"There would be so many less to make the trouble, anyway," I replied carelessly. "Do you know the people in it?"

"I know who is at the bottom of it, and so do you; for you have written about him often enough. That Baron von Ringheim. There's no proof, of course; there never is; but proof or no proof, I'd put him in safe keeping if I had my way. He's the most dangerous man in Europe to our Government."

"I think you have him on the brain, Dormund," I laughed.

"I'd rather have him under lock and key," he retorted almost angrily. "But get the evening paper; you will see something about it there."

I had heard a good deal about this Baron von Ringheim. He had been banished many years before for some offence against the Government, and his estates had been confiscated. He was believed to have allied himself with all parties who had grievances against the Government; had been very active in the work of sedition; and was credited with having originated a policy of combination among them for the common purpose of discrediting the Government. The policy had been very successful, with the result that, whenever a daring coup of any sort was made or attempted, he was credited with the responsibility.

"Then I suppose I owe it to the Baron that if I go tomorrow I must get my passport viséd," I replied after a pause.

"Yes; but of course it will only be a form in your case. By the way, Lieutenant Bernhoff was here after you left this afternoon. He came to bid you good-bye, he said; but I suppose it was more to see your sister. He tells me he has hopes some day of----eh?" and he smiled insinuatingly.

"One never knows what may happen, Dormund."

"He is a good fellow, and rich. He would have done me the honour to present me to your sister this afternoon. You may have seen that I was very interested in her."

"We must find another occasion then. I am sure the pleasure will be mutual," I said with a smile, the meaning of which he fortunately did not understand.

"You are very good." He was pleased at the compliment.

I assumed a more confidential air. "By the way, Dormund, I've been thinking a good deal about that arrest you were after--of Fräulein Korper."

"You know her well?"

"She is a very great friend of my sister." I managed to suggest more than the words implied and he smiled. "I can't bring myself to think of her as a criminal of any sort. It took my breath away."

"Of course I can't tell you anything I know officially, but there can be no harm in my saying that the arrest was ordered from Count von Felsen's office."

"I'm not after newspaper copy," I laughed. "But it bewildered me."

At that moment some one came up to him and he excused himself. I bought the evening paper and drove off home with my trunks.

I had not learnt much in regard to Althea, but the fact that the arrest had been ordered from Count von Felsen's office might mean that it was connected with her supposed relations with Prince von Graven. It was certainly unusual, and the Kaiser's hand might well be in the background.

Then I read the account of the affair Dormund had spoken of. It read very much like one of the Baron's coups. The courier had been in possession of some very important State papers, and these had all but fallen into the hands of those who had attempted to steal them. The same thing had been done more than once before, I knew. The object was to get hold of such things, and then make them public at the moment when they would do the greatest damage.

At the present time the Kaiser's naval policy was the target at which they were striking, and the temper of the people was in such a ticklish condition that any well-aimed blow might hamper those in power dangerously. If the old Baron was at the bottom of it, he was certainly a very astute tactician. And if I knew anything of the feelings of the authorities, he and his friends would have a very bad time of it if they were caught.

I was folding up the paper when I had a very ugly shock. I caught the name, "ALTHEA KORPER," in bold type in the centre of a police notice.

It was an advertisement announcing her flight, seeking information about her, and warning all who connived at her escape or gave her shelter that they would render themselves liable to prosecution. To this was added a minute and detailed description.

This was something indeed. It threw a fresh light upon the reason for the arrest. It was impossible to believe that so drastic a step as this would be taken merely because of the affair with the Prince. There must be more behind than I had thought.

Even the Kaiser would not go to the length of setting the police to hound down a girl merely because a man had fallen in love with her, and a Court marriage scheme threatened to go wrong in consequence. The idea was simply preposterous.

But what could the arrest mean then? I must see if Althea could throw any light on it, and warn her. We should have to steer a very careful course, or there would be serious trouble. That was certain.

I tore the notice out of the paper and put it in my pocket, and when I reached home I was careful not to show the real concern I felt.

"I have persuaded Althea to remain with us for a time, Paul," declared Bessie.

"Good. As a matter of fact it would be a little difficult for you to leave Berlin for a day or two," I said to Althea, as lightly as I could. "There has been some bother with the recalcitrant Polish party"; and I went on to give the gist of my talk with Dormund.

"Can I see the paper?" she asked. "I am a Pole, you remember."

I had not remembered it, and the coincidence struck me forcibly. I gave her the paper, and said I would see about my luggage while she read it.

"Don't go, please, Mr. Bastable. I have something to tell you," she said, looking up from the paper. "About this. I must go away at once."

"No, no, Althea," declared Bessie. "We shan't let you go, shall we, Paul?"

"I will tell you, and you will see that I must. You know what is here about the Baron von Ringheim, Mr. Bastable. This is evidently the reason for my arrest. I have misled every one. I did it for Chalice's sake. My name is not Korper at all; it is that"--and she pointed to the paper--"von Ringheim. I am his daughter. Now you will understand why I must hide."

There was a pause. I looked at Bessie, and our eyes met.

I took the police advertisement from my pocket and handed it to her in silence. She read it at a glance, and read also my meaning--that I would not let her decide what to do without knowing all the facts.

She gave it back to me with a smile.

"While you were at the station, Paul, I had a quarrel with Gretchen. She was insolent, so I discharged her on the spot."

I breathed a sigh of relief. She was with me in the resolve to stand by Althea, let the consequences be what they might.

CHAPTER III

CHALICE

We had great difficulty in persuading Althea to remain with us, and should not have succeeded if Bessie had not put on her hat and vowed that she would go with her wherever she went. Then we came to a compromise--Althea was to stay that night and decide on her plans the next morning.

By that time I had induced Chalice to try and clear away one at least of the tangles by letting the facts be told about the Prince von Graven, and to get the Prince himself to ascertain the real cause for the steps against Althea.

I sent a note to him, hinting at the reason why I wished to see him immediately, and he answered the letter in person. He professed himself greatly distressed at what had occurred; but it had not suggested itself to him that he should remedy matters by acknowledging the truth.

"I will be frank with you, Mr. Bastable. The greatest pressure has been put upon me to induce me to abandon my--to consent to my betrothal to the Princess von Altenvelt; and this is apparently the result of my refusal."

"But do you seriously think a drastic step like this would be taken on such a slight foundation?" I objected.

"I haven't thought about that. It is drastic, isn't it? But you know the Emperor is liable to fits of temper."

"The order for the arrest issued from the office of Count von Felsen; will you make inquiries as to its real reason?"

"Of course I will. The Minister and I are unfortunately at daggers drawn. He is jealous of the favour with which the Emperor honours me. I will do all I can."

"There is certainly one other thing you can do, Prince!" He began to fidget uneasily at this. "I mean explain the mistake and that it is Fräulein Chalice Mennerheim whom you desire to marry."

"My dear sir, I would marry her to-morrow; but she will not have even an open betrothal. What can I do?" Where Chalice was concerned he was obviously like clay in the hands of the potter.

"I am going to see her at once," I said as I rose.

"If you can prevail with her, you will do me the greatest favour in the world," he exclaimed eagerly, grasping my hand with warmth.

I went off then to see Chalice, leaving the Prince to go to Althea. It required very slight discernment to see that we should do little with him. He had his own battle to fight at Court, and that was more than sufficient to monopolize all the firmness he possessed. And I expected but little more help from Chalice.

An incident, to which I attached no significance at the time, occurred as I entered the house of Frau Steiner, where Althea and Chalice had their lodgings. I gave my card to the servant, and she took it first into a room leading off the hall, and then carried it upstairs. While I was waiting, a dark,

striking-looking Jewess came out as if to leave the house. She stopped suddenly, surprised to see me still in the hall, hesitated, and then returned quickly to the room.

I knew her by sight. Her name was Hagar Ziegler. She was the daughter of a money-lender whose shady methods I had had to investigate on more than one occasion while I had been on the *Newsletter*. I was called upstairs to Chalice a moment later, and thought no more of the incident.

I had not expected to find Chalice very concerned about Althea, and was not therefore surprised when she received me as calmly as though I were making just an ordinary call.

"This is a delightful surprise, Herr Bastable," she exclaimed with a lovely smile, as she gave me her hand. "But you catch me in deshabille. I was practising." As a matter of fact she was rather elaborately gowned, and I knew she was very particular in such matters. There was very little of the girl about Chalice.

"I should ask your pardon for coming at such an hour and without notice; but I have come about Fräulein Korper."

"About Althea? Oh, that is good of you. Of course I've been terribly anxious about her. And worry is so bad for the voice."

"I sympathize with you, I am sure."

Her sense of humour was not keen, and she accepted this as quite genuine. "Everyone is so good to me," she murmured. "And where is Althea?"

"Do you not know what occurred yesterday afternoon?"

"I was at Herr Grumpel's all the afternoon--I had a most trying lesson. He was in a horrible temper, and it quite put me out. Well, when I came home, Althea was gone, instead