

**Arthur W. Marchmont**



*In the Name  
of a Woman*

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# **In the Name of a Woman**

**A Romance**



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# **CHAPTER I**

## **A NIGHT ADVENTURE IN SOFIA**

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“HELP!”

The cry, faint but strenuous, in a woman’s voice, rang out on the heavy hot night air, and told me that one of those abominable deeds that were so rife in the lawless Bulgarian capital was in progress, and I hastened forward in angry perplexity trying to locate the sound.

I knew what it meant. I had been strolling late through the hot, close streets between the Park and the Cathedral, when a woman closely hooded had hurried past me, dogged by a couple of skulking, scuttling spies, and I had turned to follow them. Across the broad Cathedral Square I had lost sight of them, and, taking at random one of the streets on the opposite side of the square, I was walking and listening for some sound to guide me in their direction.

“Help!” came the cry again, this time close to me from behind a pair of large wooden gates, one of which stood ajar. I pushed it open and crossed the courtyard before a large house, loosening as I ran the blade of the sword-stick I carried. The house was in darkness in the front, and as I dashed round to the back the cry was uttered for the third time, while I caught the sounds of struggling.

There was a light in one of the lower rooms, the long casement window of which stood partly open, and the beams came straggling in a thin line between some nearly closed curtains. With a spring I caught the ledge, and, drawing up my head level with the window, looked in.

What I saw told me that my worst fears were being realised. The woman who had passed me in the street was struggling with frantic effort to hold the door of the room against someone who was fighting to get in. Her cloak was off, and her head and face uncovered. She was a tall, lithe, strenuous creature, obviously of great strength and determination, and the whiteness of the face, now set and resolute, was thrown up into the strongest contrast by a mass of bright red hair, some of which the fierceness of the struggle had loosened. She was striving and straining with enormous energy, despite the fact that she was bleeding badly from a wound somewhere in the shoulder or upper arm.

As I glanced in, she turned her head in my direction with the look of a tigress at bay; and I guessed that she was calculating the possibilities of escape by means of the window. But the momentary relaxation of her resistance gave the men a better chance, and, to my horror, I saw one of them get his arm in and slash and thrust at her with his knife.

She answered with a greater effort of her own, however, and succeeded in jamming the man's arm between the door and the lintel, making him cry out with an oath that reached me.

But so unequal a struggle could only end in one way, and that very speedily unless I intervened; so I scrambled on to the window ledge, and with a cry leapt into the room. At the noise of my appearance, mistaking me no doubt for a third ruffian come to attack her, the woman's courage gave out; she uttered a cry of despair and rushed away to a corner of

the room. She released the door so suddenly that the two men came staggering and blundering into the room, almost falling, and I recognised them as the two rascals I had seen following her.

“Have no fear, madame; I am here to help you,” I said, and, before the two ruffians had recovered from the surprise of my appearance, I was upon them. One could not stop his rush till he was close to me, and, having him at this disadvantage, I crashed my fist into his face with a tremendous blow, knocking him down with such force that his head fell with a heavy thud against the floor, and his dagger flew out of his hand and spun clattering across the room almost to the feet of the woman.

The second was more wary, but in a trice I whipped out my sword, held him at bay, and vowed in stern, ringing tones that I would run him through the body if he wasn’t outside the room in a brace of seconds. I saw him flinch. He had no stomach for this kind of fight, and he was giving way before me when a cry from the man I had knocked down drew our attention.

The woman, seeing her chance, had picked up the rascal’s dagger, and with the light of murder in her eyes, was stealing upon the fallen man.

Instantly I sprang between her and him.

“No, no, madame; no bloodshed!” I cried to her; and then to the men, “Be off, while your skins are whole!” The words were not out of my lips before the unarmed man had already reached the door in full flight, and his companion, seeing I meant to act only on the defensive, and recognising

the uselessness of any further attack, followed him, though less precipitately.

“Why did you stop me killing such a brute?” cried the woman angrily, her eyes blazing. “They both meant to murder me, and would have done it if you had not come. They had earned death.”

“But I did not come to play the butcher,” I answered somewhat sternly, repelled by her indifference to bloodshed.

“Follow them and kill them now!” she cried vindictively. “Do you hear? Kill them before they carry the story of this rescue to their masters;” and in her frenzy she took hold of my arm and shook it, urging me toward the door.

“Better see to your wound,” I returned, as I sheathed my sword.

“Bah, you are mad! I have no patience with you!” She shrugged her shoulders as though I were little better than a contemptible coward, and walked to the end of the room and stood in the lamplight half turned away from me.

The pose revealed to me the full majestic grace of her form, while the profile of her face, as thrown into half shadow by the rather dim light of the room, set me wondering. It was not a beautiful face. The features, nose and mouth especially, were too large, the cheek bones too high, the colour too pale; but it was a face full of such power and strength and resource that it compelled your admiration and silenced your critical judgment. A woman to be remarked anywhere.

But when she turned her eyes upon me a moment later, they seemed to rivet me with an indescribable and irresistible fascination. In striking contrast to the rich red



hair and the pale skin, the eyes were as black as night. The iris almost as dark as the pupil, the white opalescent in its clearness, and fringed with lashes and brows of deep brown. She caught my gaze on her, and held it with a look so intense that I could scarcely turn away.

Her bosom was heaving, and her breath coming and going quickly with her exertions and excitement, and after a moment, without saying a word, she threw herself into a low chair and hid her face in her hands.

Who could she be? That she was a woman of station was manifest. The richness of her dress, the appointments of the room, told this plainly, even if her mien and carriage had not proclaimed it; and yet she seemed alone in the house. It was a position of considerable embarrassment, and for the moment I did not know what to do.

I had no wish to be mixed up in any such intrigue as was clearly at the bottom of this business; and though I was glad to have saved her life, I was anxious to be gone before any further developments should involve me in unpleasant consequences.

There was no more dangerous hornet's nest of intrigue and conspiracy than Sofia to be found in Europe at that time, and the secret mission which had brought me to the city about a fortnight before was more than enough to tax all my energies and power, without any such additional complication as this adventure seemed to promise. My object was to get to the bottom of the secret machinations by which Russia was endeavouring to close her grip of iron on the throne and country of Bulgaria, and, if possible, thwart them; and I had been trying and testing by every

secret means at my command to find a path that would lead me to my end. It must be a delicate and dangerous task enough under the best auspices, but if I were to be embarrassed now by the coils of any private vengeance feud, I ran a good chance of being baffled completely.

Even before this night the difficulties in my way had appeared as hopeless as the perils were inevitable; and I had felt as a man might feel who had resolved to stay the progress of a railway train by laying his head on the metals. But if this affair were as deadly as it seemed, I might find my head struck off before even the train came in sight.

Yet to leave such a woman in this helpless plight was the act of a coward, and not to be thought of for a moment; and I stood looking at her in sheer perplexity and indecision.

She lay back in her seat for some minutes, making no attempt to call assistance, not even taking her hands from her face, and paying no heed whatever to her wound, the blood from which had stained her dress.

I roused myself at length, and, feeling the sheer necessity of doing something, went to the door and called loudly for the servants.

“It is useless to call; there is no one in the house,” she said, her voice now trembling slightly; and with a deep sigh she rose from her chair, and after a moment’s pause crossed the room to me. She fixed her eyes upon my face; her look had changed from that of the vengeful Fury who had repelled me with her violent recklessness of passion to one of ineffable sweetness, tenderness, and gratitude. Out of her eyes had died down all the wildness, and what remained charmed and thrilled me, until I felt myself almost

constrained to throw myself at her feet in eagerness to do whatever she bade me.

“You will think me an ingrate, or a miser of my thanks, sir,” she said in a tone rich and soft; “and yet, believe me, my heart is full of gratitude.”

“Please say no more,” I replied, with a wave of the hand; “but tell me, can I be of any further service? Your wound—can I not get you assistance?”

She paid no heed to the question, but remained gazing steadfastly into my eyes. Then her face broke into a smile that transfigured it until it seemed to glow with a quite radiant beauty.

“Yes, indeed, you can serve me—if you will; but not only in the manner you think. The servants have deserted the house. I am alone to-night—alone and quite in your power.” She lingered on the words, paused, and then added: “But in the power of a man of honour.”

“How can I serve you? You have but to ask.”

“I wish I could think that,” was the quick answer, with a flash from her eyes. “But first for this,” and she rapidly bared the wound, revealing an arm and shoulder of surpassing beauty of form. “Can you bind this up?” For the moment I was amazed at this complete abandonment of all usual womanly reserve. The action was deliberate, however, and I read it as at once a sign of her trust and confidence in me, and a test of my honour. The hurt was not serious. The man’s blade had pierced the soft white flesh of the shoulder, but had not penetrated deep; and I had no difficulty in staunching the blood and binding it up.

"It is not a serious wound," I said reassuringly. "I am glad."

"That is no fault of the dastard who struck at me. It was aimed at my heart."

She showed not the least embarrassment, but appeared bent on making me feel that she trusted me as implicitly as a child. When I had bound up the wound she resumed her dress, taking care to put the stains of blood out of sight; and then, with a few swift, graceful movements, for all the stiffness of the hurt, she coiled up the loose tresses of her hair.

When she had finished she went to a cabinet, and, taking wine and glasses, filled them.

"You will pledge me?" and she looked the invitation. "We women are so weak. I am beginning to feel the reaction."

I was putting the glass to my lips when she stopped me.

"Stay, I wish to know to whom I owe my life?"

So powerful was the strange influence she exerted that I was on the point of blurting out the truth, that I was Gerald Winthrop, an Englishman, when I steadied my scrambled wits, and, mindful of my secret mission in the country and of the part I was playing, I replied:

"I am the Count Benderoff, of Radova."

She saw the hesitation, but put it down to a momentary reluctance to disclose my identity, for she answered:

"You will not repent having trusted me with your name, Count." Then, with a flashing, subtle underglance, she added, "And do you know me?"

"As yet, madame, I have not that honour, to my regret."

"Yet I am not unknown in Bulgaria," and she raised her head with a gesture of infinite pride.

"I am a stranger in Sofia," said I, in excuse of my ignorance.

"Even strangers know of the staunch woman-friend of his Highness the Prince. I am the Countess Anna Bokara."

I knew her well enough by repute, and her presence in the house alone and defenceless was the more mystifying.

"Permit me to wish you a speedy recovery from your wound, Countess," and to cover the thoughts which her words started I raised my glass. She seemed almost to caress me with her eyes and voice as she replied:

"I drink to my newest friend, that rare thing in this distracted country, a man of honour, the Count Benderoff, of Radova." As she set her glass down she added: "My enemies have done me a splendid service, Count—they have brought me your friendship. They could not have made us a nobler or more timely gift. The Prince has need of such a man as you."

I bowed but did not answer.

"You are a stranger here, you say. May I ask your purpose in coming?"

"I am in search of a career."

"I can promise you that," she cried swiftly, with manifest pleasure. "I can promise you that certainly, if you will serve his Highness as bravely as you have served me to-night. You must not think, because you see me here, seemingly alone and helpless, that I have lost my influence and power in the country. My enemies have done this—Russia through the vile agents she sends here to wound this distracted country

to the death—suborning all that is honourable, debasing all that is pure, undermining all that is patriotic, lying, slandering, scheming, wrecking, destroying, working all and any evil, bloodshed, and horror, to serve the one end ever in their eyes—the subjugation of this wretched people. My God! that such injustice should be wrought!”

The fire and passion flamed in her face as she spoke with rapid vehemence.

“But it is by such men as you that this can best be thwarted—can only be thwarted. I tell you, Count, the Prince has need of such men as you. Pledge me now that you will join him and—and me. You have seen here to-night the lengths to which these villains would go. Because of my influence with the Prince, and in opposition to Russia, I have been lured here by a lying message; lured to be murdered in cold blood, as you saw. You saved my life; I have put my honour in your hands; you have offered to serve me. You are a brave, true, honourable man. You must be with us!” she cried vehemently. “Give me your word—nay, you have given it, and I can claim it. You will not desert me. Make the cause of truth and honour yours, and tell me that my Prince and I may rely on you.”

She set me on fire with her words and glances of appeal, and at the close she laid her hands on mine, until I was thrilled by the infection of her enthusiasm, while her eyes sought mine, and she seemed to hunger for the words of consent for which she waited.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **“NOW YOU WILL HAVE TO JOIN US”**

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TEMPTING as the offer was which my strange companion made me, I could not bring myself to accept it without time for consideration, and my hesitation in replying irritated and seemed to anger her.

She thrust my hands away from her with petulant quickness.

“You are a man of strangely deliberate discretion, Count,” she said as she turned away to the end of the room and threw herself into her chair again, from which she regarded me with a glance half scornful, half entreating.

“If I do not accept at once, believe me it is from no lack of appreciation of the honour you offer me or the charm with which it is offered, but circumstances compel me to be deliberate.”

“Circumstances?” she cried, with a shrug of disdain and disappointment.

“I regret that I cannot explain them.”

I could not, without telling her the whole reason of my presence in Sofia; and that was of course impossible. My secret commission was from the British Government, and the intrigue which I had to try and defeat was designed to depose her Prince, and set on the throne in his place a woman who would be a mere tool in the hands of Russia.

I am half a Roumanian by birth, my father having married the Countess of Radova, and my childhood had been spent in the Balkan peninsula. It was on one of my visits to the

estates in Radova that I had come across the scent of this newest Russian intrigue, and as I had already had close communications with the British Foreign Office and accepted one or two missions of a secret character, I had volunteered for this, believing that single-handed I could effect secretly much more than could be done by the ordinary machinery of diplomacy. The Balkan States were in a condition of ferment and unrest; the war between Bulgaria and Servia had ended not long previously; Russia was keenly bent upon rendering her influence impregnable; and as no other European Government would interfere, our Foreign Office was loath to take open measures.

At such a juncture my services were readily accepted, and I had arrived in Sofia a couple of weeks before, and was just forming my plans, when this startling incident had occurred.

I had stipulated for a perfectly free hand as to the course I should pursue, and the means I should adopt to secure my end—a concession that had been granted me with the one stipulation that if I failed or if trouble arose through my agency our Foreign Office would be at liberty to disown me.

It will thus be seen how strongly I was tempted to accept the offer which the Countess Bokara made me, and which I knew she was in a position to carry out. But still I hesitated, unwilling to commit myself definitely to either side prematurely, lest such open alliance with the one side should make me a mark for the hostility of the other.

My instincts, sympathies, English associations and wishes all prompted me to accept the offer and throw myself heart and soul into the cause of the Prince; but I had to walk by



the cooler guidance of judgment, and it had before been in my thoughts rather to seek an alliance with the Russian party and find among their ranks the men and means for a counter intrigue to thwart theirs.

I resolved, therefore, not to pledge myself to this witching woman, whose strange personality wielded such fascinating influence.

Few as were the moments that sufficed for these reflections, they were too many for my companion's patience.

"How came you here to-night so opportunely?" she asked, breaking the silence suddenly.

"You passed me on the other side of the Cathedral Square, and I then observed you were being followed. I followed in my turn, lest you should be in need of assistance."

"There are not many men in Sofia who would have dared to interfere in such a cause. But for you I should be dead now," she shuddered, "and the Prince would have had one friend the less—or may I not say, two friends?"

"The Prince will always have a friend in me," I returned guardedly.

She made a movement of impatience.

"I want no general phrases." Then after a pause and in a different tone, she added: "Tell me, what arguments are the strongest that I can use with you, my friend? You said just now you were seeking a career. Have you ambitions? If so, I can promise you a splendid fulfilment of them. Do you wish riches? They shall be yours! Have you a heart? I will find you as fair a bride as man's eyes can rest upon. Have you

judgment? Aye, have you anything—except a commitment to the other side—and I can prevail with you. Join us, and before three months are over your head you shall be the Prince's right hand—and mine." The subtle witchery of her tone in the last two words was indescribable.

But I would not let her prevail, though her words and manner were well-nigh dazzling enough to carry me out of myself. The magnetism of her mere presence was overpowering.

"You are not fair to me, Countess. A man cannot reason coldly in the presence of such charms as you exert," I answered, stooping to flattery, though telling the truth.

She shook her head and tapped her foot on the ground.

"Say no, bluntly, if you will, but do not try to slip away with words of cheap and empty flattery. I am not appealing to you to join for my sake, gladly as I would welcome you, but for the sake of the Prince, for the cause of truth, for the honour and safety of Bulgaria. Stay—" as I was about to answer, "I have seen you act and I have read your character. I do not make mistakes. I know you are to be trusted. You have saved my life, at a greater risk than you may think, for you will be a marked man now; and I will do more than put my life in your hands—I will tell you everything. You will not reveal it—though, Heaven knows, betrayal is the religion of most men here," she exclaimed bitterly.

"I would rather you told me none of your secrets," I said, but she swept my protest aside with a wave of the hand.

"You wonder why you find me here in this house alone at night. You must wonder; I will tell you. It is my mother's

house—my own is across the city near the Palace—and to-night her own maid came to me with an urgent message that my mother had been stricken down suddenly and was dying, and that I must come at once. It was a lie, of course, though for the moment it blinded me. I hurried here on foot, too anxious even to wait for a carriage to be got ready, and when I arrived the place was empty. While I was wondering whether I had been betrayed, the men you saw—to whom keys of the place had been given—entered, and would assuredly have murdered me but for your arrival. That is how Russia plays her cards in Bulgaria.”

“How do you know they were Russian agents?”

“How do I know that when I am hungry I want to eat? Wearied, I need sleep? Bah! do you think I have no instincts, and do not know my enemies? How do I know their plans and plots?” She fired the questions at me with vindictive indignation and a smile of surprise that I should even ask such a thing. Then her expression changed to one of deep earnestness, her tone hard and bitter.

“I will tell you how you shall know it, too. They have tried every other means but this to separate me from my Prince. Threats at which I laughed; bribes to be anything I pleased, which I scorned; hints of his assassination, which I carried to him; everything—till only this was left; and now this,” and she touched her wound lightly. “And even this, thanks to your valour, Count, has now failed. And their object, you will ask? They have a plot to drive my Prince from Bulgaria, because he will not be their tool. You know he will not; all Europe knows it, and knows too that the only chance for Bulgaria’s real independence is that he shall remain on the

throne here. And remain he shall, I swear, by the great God they all profess to worship, in spite of all their crafty intrigue and bloodthirsty plotting. And yet, mark you, the worst danger lies not with them, but with the fools and traitors in Bulgaria itself whom they delude or suborn. There is not a self-interest to which they do not appeal, from the ambition of the fool to the corruptness of the knave. And God knows, both knaves and fools are plentiful enough here.”

“And their scheme?” I asked, moved by her intense earnestness.

She looked at me sharply.

“Then you do wish to hear it?” she asked, referring to my former protest. “You shall. There is a woman—a seemingly innocent, soft-natured thing, all sweetness and grace, but a devil; with the beauty of an angel and the heart of a vampire—a devil.”

Her fury was instant, overwhelming, absorbing.

“Did they propose marrying her to your Prince?” I asked, making a shot.

She darted at me a swift glance that might have been winged with hate at the mere suggestion. Then her eyes changed, and she laughed and said softly:

“You are the man for us. Calm as a sword and as sharp as the point. Yes, they dared even that—but I was in the way. In another woman’s hands they thought he might have been won round. But rather than see him the husband of that fiend, Christina, I myself would have plunged a dagger into his heart—and they guessed this, I suppose, and changed the plan. She is the Princess of Orli, as probably you know—for I don’t suppose you are quite as unknowing as you seem

—and apparently is all for Bulgaria and the Bulgarians. Like you, she is a Roumanian, and like you, if I read you right, she is driven from her country by the all-powerful Russian predominance—at least, that’s what she says. Isn’t that why you left?” she asked, with quick shrewdness.

“The Russian predominance there is undoubted,” I answered.

She liked the answer and laughed.

“Good! you are cautious, and I don’t blame you. For the lips that breathe out rashness breathe in danger, my friend. But now, will you join us? You can see the career that awaits such a man as yourself here—at the right hand of the Prince.”

“But if the Princess Christina is opposed to Russia, how does she threaten Bulgaria?”

“Aye, if?” and she laughed scornfully. “There is another complication. The woman has sold herself to the Russians. She is betrothed secretly to one of the worst of them all, a man of infinite vileness and treachery—the Duke Sergius. And the plot is that as soon as this Christina is on the throne, the precious pair are to be married, and Russia triumphs in despite of anything Europe may say to the contrary.”

“I see,” and so in truth I did; for in a moment the kernel of the whole movement was laid bare to me, as well as the objective of all my work in Bulgaria. I remained some moments buried in thought, and all the time my companion’s eyes were searching my face for a clue to my thoughts. “It is very Russian,” I said at length, equivocally; and at the words she made a quick gesture of impatience.

“You will not give me a sign,” she cried, and jumped to her feet impulsively. “But you will join us?” she asked. She came close to me as she waited for the answer, and when I did not answer, she added quickly, “Why do you hesitate?”

Before I could reply, we both heard a noise somewhere in the house.

“What can that be?” I asked. “You said there was no one in the house.”

“None, that I know;” and we both stood listening intently. “Those rascals may have left the place open and let in some of the thieves that infest the streets.”

“Those are no thieves’ footsteps,” I answered, as quick steps were heard approaching the room.

“It may be another attempt on me—but I have a brave defender now,” she said, under her breath.

I had a revolver with me and took it out of my pocket, glancing to see that the chambers were all loaded.

“You had better stand back at the end of the room there,” and I went towards the door.

At that moment it was opened quickly, and three men in uniform entered.

“Stand!” I called. “What do you want here?”

“I am an agent of the Government and hold an order for the arrest of the Countess Bokara,” answered the leader, coming to a sudden halt when he saw me in the way armed.

“Well, you cannot execute it now.”

“My orders are imperative, sir, and you will resist me at your peril.”

“I shall resist,” said I shortly. “Where’s your order?”

"I have it, that is enough," he replied with equal curtness.

"Produce it!"

"That is not in my instructions."

"Then I don't believe you have it. Leave the house before there is any further trouble."

"I must do my duty. Georgiew," he called to one of the two men, who had kept close to the door in fear, but now stepped up to his leader's side.

"Who has signed your order?" asked the Countess, interposing.

"One whose authority is sufficient for me."

"But not for me," she cried. I turned, and found to my surprise that she had come to my side, and was staring with fixed intensity into the man's face. "Not for me," she repeated.

"You must be prepared to accompany me, madame, nevertheless, and I trust you will come at once, and without causing trouble. We are three to one, sir, and fully armed; resistance will be useless," he added to me.

"If you were thirty to one I would not give way unless you produced your authority," I answered, my blood beginning to heat under his manner and tone.

"I ask you for the last time, madame, to come with me," and, with a sign to the others, he made ready to attack me.

"Aye, for the last time," said my companion, between her teeth, and before I could guess her intention, she gave a startling proof of her desperate resource and deadly recklessness.

With a suddenness that took me entirely by surprise, she snatched the revolver from me, and levelling it with quick aim, she fired two shots in rapid succession with deadly effect, for the two men standing near us fell dead at our feet, shot through the head. The third, who had kept near the door, with a coward's prudence, took to his heels incontinently, and left us alone with the dead.

"Good God! what have you done?" I cried, aghast at her deed. "These men were soldiers."

She laughed into my scared face.

"You don't suppose death counts for much in this country. This is only spy carrion," and with the utmost *sang-froid* she stooped and rifled the pockets of the dead leader, turning the body over for the purpose, and took from his pocket a paper which she held up for me to read. "I was sure of it."

"What the bearer does is by my order and authority.

(Signed), M. KOLFORT, *General*."

"General Kolfort is the implacable leader of the Russian party, and that document was my death warrant," she said.

In a moment I saw my danger, and she read my thought instantly.

"Yes, you are committed, my friend; now you will have to join us," and she smiled triumphantly in my face. "I am glad."



## **CHAPTER III**

### **THE PRINCESS CHRISTINA**

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THE amazing turn which events had taken through the terrible act of my companion filled me with consternation at the possible effects to us both; and after I had satisfied myself that the two men were dead and so beyond help, I paced the room in anxious, perturbed thought.

She was not in the least perturbed, and filled the minutes by going carefully through the leader's papers in search of anything that would tend to the confusion of her enemies. A low exclamation of pleasure told me that, when she found what she sought.

She showed no jot or tittle of remorse at this shedding of blood. To her the two men were no more than a couple of wild beasts who had attacked her, and had been killed in her self-defence. She was as hard and callous as any public executioner could have been.

"See here!" she cried at length. "Here are proofs enough of the villany," and she put papers into my hand which showed plainly enough that the whole matter had been planned by those high in the Russian party. One was no less than a clear but brief statement of instructions. If the first attempt at secret assassination failed, this endeavour by means of a pretended arrest by men in uniform dressed to look like officers was to be made, and the Countess was to be hurried to Tirnova to be dealt with there, should she reach the fortress alive.

“You will need these when the attempt is made to implicate you. Yours is a deadly sin—to have come between Kolfort and his vengeance—and you will need all your wits to get out of it with your life, even with these papers, unless you throw yourself under the protection of the Prince and his party. As I said, you will have to join us now, Count.”

“I shall still take time to consider,” I answered rather shortly. “You have given me plenty of food for thought. But now, what of your immediate safety? You cannot stay here.”

“Nor you, either. You let the third man escape, and by this time he is carrying his news of failure with feet winged with fear. I have done with this carrion,” and she cast a look of repugnance at the dead men, and turning away, resumed her cloak with great haste. “You will not decide now?” she asked, as she was ready to go.

“No, I must have time. But where will you go now?”

“I shall communicate with you. You will be a marked man from this hour, and easy to find,” she said significantly; “and if you are in danger sooner than you expect, do not hesitate to let me know. Our next meeting will be in the Prince’s palace, and the sooner the better.”

“Where will you go now?” I repeated.

“Do not fear for me. You will need all your efforts to save your own skin. Come!” She left the light burning, and led the way out of the house by a back entrance that opened on to a narrow alley, along which we hurried.

“I will see you safe to your home,” I said, when she stopped at the mouth of it and held out her hand. She smiled.

“No, no, I am in no danger; but for you, take this path as far as it goes, turn sharp to the right until you come to an avenue of trees, and at the bottom of that you will know where you are. Good-night, Count! and once more I thank you with all my heart for your service. But we shall both live to see my thanks in an alliance that will do great things for the Prince and for Bulgaria.”

She gave me her hand, and though I pressed her to let me see her safely across the city, she would not, but put me on my honour not to follow her, and turning, sped away, keeping in the shadow, and going at such a speed that she was soon out of my sight.

Then I followed the way she had told me, and found myself close to the street in which my hotel was situated. I walked slowly from that point, my brain in a whirl of excitement at all that had happened in the crowded hours of that night.

When I reached my hotel it was only to pace my room in restless, anxious, brain-racking thought of the net of complications in which I found myself involved, and the hundred dangers which appeared to have sprung up suddenly to menace me. It was in vain that I threw myself on my bed. I could not sleep. If I dozed, it was only to start up at the bidding of some dream danger, threatening me with I know not what consequences. It was long past the dawn before I slept, and when the servant called me, I sprang up, thinking it was my instant arrest that was intended.

But my wits were cooler and more collected for the rest, and when hour after hour of the anxious day passed and

nothing happened, I began to think I had exaggerated the risks of my position.

In the cool of the evening I rode out, and on my return ventured to find out and pass through the street of the previous night's adventure. Nothing unusual was astir. No one paid the least heed to me. I might have been an ordinary tourist without the least interest in anything but the scenery. So it was at my hotel. Nothing happened that evening nor on any of the three remaining days of the week, and I occupied myself with the business of preparing the large house which I had taken for my residence.

Yet, even the lack of any consequences to me had a grim significance. It seemed a fearsome thing, indeed, that murder could be attempted openly, and two of the would-be assassins shot dead in the effort, and yet the life of the city flow on without the least interruption, and, as it appeared, with never a person to ask a question about them or show the faintest interest in the event. Truly, as my strange companion in the adventure had said, death counted for little in the grim game of intrigue that was being played in the country.

I had provided myself with a few letters of introduction, and, knowing the average poverty of the people and the high esteem set on riches, I had dropped a number of judicious hints that I was a man of considerable wealth. I had taken the largest house I could find in the city, and by these means had opened a way into a certain section of society. It had been my original intention to use such opportunities as would thus be afforded to carry out my original intention. But the adventure with the Countess

Bokara would render this less necessary should I resolve to accept the offer of close service with the Prince which she had made me; and the few guarded inquiries I was able to make as to her influence confirmed completely my previous belief in her power to fulfil all she had promised.

Several days passed, and I was in this condition of comparative uncertainty when, toward the close of the week following my adventure, an incident occurred which gave me startling proof that, for all the apparent quietude, I myself was, as she had declared, a marked man.

I was sitting alone in a *café* one evening, my friends having left me, when my attention was attracted to the movements of three men, two being in uniform, at a table in a far corner of the place. They were busily occupied over some papers, and a constant succession of men kept coming to them, as it seemed to me, for some kind of instructions. As business was constantly transacted in this way at the *cafés*, I had at first no more than a feeling of idle curiosity; but when the thing had continued for an hour or more, my interest deepened, and I watched them closely, although, as I thought, unobserved by them.

At length a message was given them which appeared to cause great surprise, and they paid their score and hurried out of the place.

I followed them, still impelled mainly by curiosity; and as they were engrossed in conversation, talking and gesticulating, I had no difficulty in keeping them in sight as they passed through several streets, and at length entered a large house which filled one side of a small quadrangle, close on the street.

I stood awhile at the corner, scanning the house curiously, and made a mental note to ascertain to whom it belonged, and was in the act of turning away to retrace my steps to the hotel, when a man came out of the house, glanced about him as though in some doubt, and then looked closely at me. He walked to the corner of the street opposite, still looking at me, and after a minute of doubt, crossed to me.

"I am to give you this, sir," he said, speaking with the manner of a confidential servant.

"To me? I think not. What name?" I asked.

"I had no name given to me, but I was to say it was 'In the Name of a Woman!'"

"'In the Name of a Woman?'" I repeated. It could not be for me. I knew no such pass-word, and I connected it instantly with what I had seen at the *café*. I was about to send the man away, when it occurred to me that it might be a message from the Countess Bokara, and that, from a love of mystery, she had chosen this exceedingly ambiguous method of communication. I took the letter which the man held out, therefore, and read a message written in a woman's handwriting:—

"Follow the Bearer,  
In the Name of a Woman."

I was disposed to smile, but checked myself on seeing the servant's eyes fixed upon me.

"I am to follow you," I said gravely.

Without a word he led the way back to the house, through the deep gloomy archway, in which I noticed a