

THE INDISCRETION OF ELSBETH

by Bret Harte

The American paused. He had evidently lost his way. For the last half hour he had been wandering in a medieval town, in a profound medieval dream. Only a few days had elapsed since he had left the steamship that carried him hither; and the accents of his own tongue, the idioms of his own people, and the sympathetic community of New World tastes and expressions still filled his mind until he woke up, or rather, as it seemed to him, was falling asleep in the past of this Old World town which had once held his ancestors. Although a republican, he had liked to think of them in quaint distinctive garb, representing state and importance--perhaps even aristocratic pre-eminence--content to let the responsibility of such "bad eminence" rest with them entirely, but a habit of conscientiousness and love for historic truth eventually led him also to regard an honest BAUER standing beside his cattle in the quaint market place, or a kindly-faced black-eyed DIENSTMADCHEN in a doorway, with a timid, respectful interest, as a possible type of his progenitors. For, unlike some of his traveling countrymen in Europe, he was not a snob, and it struck him--as an American--that it was, perhaps, better to think of his race as having improved than as having degenerated. In these ingenuous meditations he had passed the long rows of quaint, high houses, whose sagging roofs and unpatched dilapidations were yet far removed from squalor, until he had reached the road bordered by poplars, all so unlike his own country's waysides--and knew that he had wandered far from his hotel.

He did not care, however, to retrace his steps and return by the way he had come. There was, he reasoned, some other street or turning that would eventually bring him to the market place and his hotel, and yet extend his experience of the town. He turned at right angles into a narrow grass lane, which was, however, as neatly kept and apparently as public as the highway. A few moments' walking convinced him that

it was not a thoroughfare and that it led to the open gates of a park. This had something of a public look, which suggested that his intrusion might be at least a pardonable trespass, and he relied, like most strangers, on the exonerating quality of a stranger's ignorance. The park lay in the direction he wished to go, and yet it struck him as singular that a park of such extent should be still allowed to occupy such valuable urban space. Indeed, its length seemed to be illimitable as he wandered on, until he became conscious that he must have again lost his way, and he diverged toward the only boundary, a high, thickset hedge to the right, whose line he had been following.

As he neared it he heard the sound of voices on the other side, speaking in German, with which he was unfamiliar. Having, as yet, met no one, and being now impressed with the fact that for a public place the park was singularly deserted, he was conscious that his position was getting serious, and he determined to take this only chance of inquiring his way. The hedge was thinner in some places than in others, and at times he could see not only the light through it but even the moving figures of the speakers, and the occasional white flash of a summer gown. At last he determined to penetrate it, and with little difficulty emerged on the other side. But here he paused motionless. He found himself behind a somewhat formal and symmetrical group of figures with their backs toward him, but all stiffened into attitudes as motionless as his own, and all gazing with a monotonous intensity in the direction of a handsome building, which had been invisible above the hedge but which now seemed to arise suddenly before him. Some of the figures were in uniform. Immediately before him, but so slightly separated from the others that he was enabled to see the house between her and her companions, he was confronted by the pretty back, shoulders, and blond braids of a young girl of twenty. Convinced that he had unwittingly intruded upon some august ceremonial, he instantly slipped back into the hedge, but so silently that his momentary presence was evidently undetected. When he regained the park side he glanced back through the interstices; there was no movement of the figures nor break in the

silence to indicate that his intrusion had been observed. With a long breath of relief he hurried from the park.

It was late when he finally got back to his hotel. But his little modern adventure had, I fear, quite outrun his previous medieval reflections, and almost his first inquiry of the silver-chained porter in the courtyard was in regard to the park. There was no public park in Alstadt! The Herr possibly alluded to the Hof Gardens--the Schloss, which was in the direction he indicated. The Schloss was the residency of the hereditary Grand Duke. JA WOHL! He was stopping there with several Hoheiten. There was naturally a party there--a family reunion. But it was a private enclosure. At times, when the Grand Duke was "not in residence," it was open to the public. In point of fact, at such times tickets of admission were to be had at the hotel for fifty pfennige each. There was not, of truth, much to see except a model farm and dairy--the pretty toy of a previous Grand Duchess.

But he seemed destined to come into closer collision with the modern life of Alstadt. On entering the hotel, wearied by his long walk, he passed the landlord and a man in half-military uniform on the landing near his room. As he entered his apartment he had a vague impression, without exactly knowing why, that the landlord and the military stranger had just left it. This feeling was deepened by the evident disarrangement of certain articles in his unlocked portmanteau and the disorganization of his writing case. A wave of indignation passed over him. It was followed by a knock at the door, and the landlord blandly appeared with the stranger.

"A thousand pardons," said the former, smilingly, "but Herr Sanderman, the Ober-Inspector of Police, wishes to speak with you. I hope we are not intruding?"

"Not NOW," said the American, dryly.

The two exchanged a vacant and deprecating smile.

"I have to ask only a few formal questions," said the Ober-Inspector in excellent but somewhat precise English, "to supplement the report which, as a stranger, you may not know is required by the police from the landlord in regard to the names and quality of his guests who are foreign to the town. You have a passport?"

"I have," said the American still more dryly. "But I do not keep it in an unlocked portmanteau or an open writing case."

"An admirable precaution," said Sanderman, with unmoved politeness. "May I see it? Thanks," he added, glancing over the document which the American produced from his pocket. "I see that you are a born American citizen--and an earlier knowledge of that fact would have prevented this little contretemps. You are aware, Mr. Hoffman, that your name is German?"

"It was borne by my ancestors, who came from this country two centuries ago," said Hoffman, curtly.

"We are indeed honored by your return to it," returned Sanderman suavely, "but it was the circumstance of your name being a local one, and the possibility of your still being a German citizen liable to unperformed military duty, which has caused the trouble." His manner was clearly civil and courteous, but Hoffman felt that all the time his own face and features were undergoing a profound scrutiny from the speaker.

"And you are making sure that you will know me again?" said Hoffman, with a smile.

"I trust, indeed, both," returned Sanderman, with a bow, "although you will permit me to say that your description here," pointing to the passport, "scarcely does you justice. ACH GOTT! it is the same in all countries; the official eye is not that of the young DAMEN."

Hoffman, though not conceited, had not lived twenty years without knowing that he was very good-looking, yet there was something in the remark that caused him to color with a new uneasiness.

The Ober-Inspector rose with another bow, and moved toward the door. "I hope you will let me make amends for this intrusion by doing anything I can to render your visit here a pleasant one. Perhaps," he added, "it is not for long."

But Hoffman evaded the evident question, as he resented what he imagined was a possible sneer.

"I have not yet determined my movements," he said.

The Ober-Inspector brought his heels together in a somewhat stiffer military salute and departed.

Nothing, however, could have exceeded the later almost servile urbanity of the landlord, who seemed to have been proud of the official visit to his guest. He was profuse in his attentions, and even introduced him to a singularly artistic-looking man of middle age, wearing an order in his buttonhole, whom he met casually in the hall.

"Our Court photographer," explained the landlord with some fervor, "at whose studio, only a few houses distant, most of the Hoheiten and Prinzessinen of Germany have sat for their likenesses."

"I should feel honored if the distinguished American Herr would give me a visit," said the stranger gravely, as he gazed at Hoffman with an intensity which recalled the previous scrutiny of the Police Inspector, "and I would be charmed if he would avail himself of my poor skill to transmit his picturesque features to my unique collection."

Hoffman returned a polite evasion to this invitation, although he was conscious of being struck with this second examination of his face, and the allusion to his personality.

The next morning the porter met him with a mysterious air. The Herr would still like to see the Schloss? Hoffman, who had quite forgotten his adventure in the park, looked vacant. JA WOHL--the Hof authorities had no doubt heard of his visit and had intimated to the hotel proprietor that he might have permission to visit the model farm and dairy. As the American still looked indifferent the porter pointed out with some importance that it was a Ducal courtesy not to be lightly treated; that few, indeed, of the burghers themselves had ever been admitted to this eccentric whim of the late Grand Duchess. He would, of course, be silent about it; the Court would not like it known that they had made an exception to their rules in favor of a foreigner; he would enter quickly and boldly alone. There would be a housekeeper or a dairymaid to show him over the place.

More amused at this important mystery over what he, as an American, was inclined to classify as a "free pass" to a somewhat heavy "side show," he gravely accepted the permission, and the next morning after breakfast set out to visit the model farm and dairy. Dismissing his driver, as he had been instructed, Hoffman entered the gateway with a mingling of expectancy and a certain amusement over the "boldness" which the porter had suggested should characterize his entrance. Before him was a beautifully kept lane bordered by arbored and trellised roses, which seemed to sink into the distance. He was instinctively following it when he became aware that he was mysteriously accompanied by a man in the livery of a chasseur, who was walking among the trees almost abreast of him, keeping pace with his step, and after the first introductory military salute preserving a ceremonious silence. There was something so ludicrous in this solemn procession toward a peaceful, rural industry that by the time they had reached the bottom of the lane the American had quite recovered his good humor. But here a new astonishment awaited him. Nestling

before him in a green amphitheater lay a little wooden farm-yard and outbuildings, which irresistibly suggested that it had been recently unpacked and set up from a box of Nuremberg toys. The symmetrical trees, the galleried houses with preternaturally glazed windows, even the spotty, disproportionately sized cows in the white-fenced barnyards were all unreal, wooden and toylike.

Crossing a miniature bridge over a little stream, from which he was quite prepared to hook metallic fish with a magnet their own size, he looked about him for some real being to dispel the illusion. The mysterious chasseur had disappeared. But under the arch of an arbor, which seemed to be composed of silk ribbons, green glass, and pink tissue paper, stood a quaint but delightful figure.

At first it seemed as if he had only dispelled one illusion for another. For the figure before him might have been made of Dresden china--so daintily delicate and unique it was in color and arrangement. It was that of a young girl dressed in some forgotten medieval peasant garb of velvet braids, silver-staylaced corsage, lace sleeves, and helmeted metallic comb. But, after the Dresden method, the pale yellow of her hair was repeated in her bodice, the pink of her cheeks was in the roses of her chintz overskirt. The blue of her eyes was the blue of her petticoat; the dazzling whiteness of her neck shone again in the sleeves and stockings. Nevertheless she was real and human, for the pink deepened in her cheeks as Hoffman's hat flew from his head, and she recognized the civility with a grave little curtsy.

"You have come to see the dairy," she said in quaintly accurate English; "I will show you the way."

"If you please," said Hoffman, gaily, "but--"

"But what?" she said, facing him suddenly with absolutely astonished eyes.

Hoffman looked into them so long that their frank wonder presently contracted into an ominous mingling of restraint and resentment. Nothing daunted, however, he went on:

"Couldn't we shake all that?"

The look of wonder returned. "Shake all that?" she repeated. "I do not understand."

"Well! I'm not positively aching to see cows, and you must be sick of showing them. I think, too, I've about sized the whole show. Wouldn't it be better if we sat down in that arbor--supposing it won't fall down--and you told me all about the lot? It would save you a heap of trouble and keep your pretty frock cleaner than trapesing round. Of course," he said, with a quick transition to the gentlest courtesy, "if you're conscientious about this thing we'll go on and not spare a cow. Consider me in it with you for the whole morning."

She looked at him again, and then suddenly broke into a charming laugh. It revealed a set of strong white teeth, as well as a certain barbaric trace in its cadence which civilized restraint had not entirely overlaid.

"I suppose she really is a peasant, in spite of that pretty frock," he said to himself as he laughed too.

But her face presently took a shade of reserve, and with a gentle but singular significance she said:

"I think you must see the dairy."

Hoffman's hat was in his hand with a vivacity that tumbled the brown curls on his forehead. "By all means," he said instantly, and began walking by her side in modest but easy silence. Now that he thought her a conscientious peasant he was quiet and respectful.

Presently she lifted her eyes, which, despite her gravity, had not entirely lost their previous mirthfulness, and said:

"But you Americans--in your rich and prosperous country, with your large lands and your great harvests--you must know all about farming."

"Never was in a dairy in my life," said Hoffman gravely. "I'm from the city of New York, where the cows give swill milk, and are kept in cellars."

Her eyebrows contracted prettily in an effort to understand. Then she apparently gave it up, and said with a slanting glint of mischief in her eyes:

"Then you come here like the other Americans in hope to see the Grand Duke and Duchess and the Princesses?"

"No. The fact is I almost tumbled into a lot of 'em--standing like wax figures--the other side of the park lodge, the other day--and got away as soon as I could. I think I prefer the cows."

Her head was slightly turned away. He had to content himself with looking down upon the strong feet in their serviceable but smartly buckled shoes that uplifted her upright figure as she moved beside him.

"Of course," he added with boyish but unmistakable courtesy, "if it's part of your show to trot out the family, why I'm in that, too. I dare say you could make them interesting."

"But why," she said with her head still slightly turned away toward a figure--a sturdy-looking woman, which, for the first time, Hoffman

perceived was walking in a line with them as the chasseur had done--
"why did you come here at all?"

"The first time was a fool accident," he returned frankly. "I was making a short cut through what I thought was a public park. The second time was because I had been rude to a Police Inspector whom I found going through my things, but who apologized--as I suppose--by getting me an invitation from the Grand Duke to come here, and I thought it only the square thing to both of 'em to accept it. But I'm mighty glad I came; I wouldn't have missed YOU for a thousand dollars. You see I haven't struck anyone I cared to talk to since." Here he suddenly remarked that she hadn't looked at him, and that the delicate whiteness of her neck was quite suffused with pink, and stopped instantly. Presently he said quite easily:

"Who's the chorus?"

"The lady?"

"Yes. She's watching us as if she didn't quite approve, you know--just as if she didn't catch on."

"She's the head housekeeper of the farm. Perhaps you would prefer to have her show you the dairy; shall I call her?"

The figure in question was very short and stout, with voluminous petticoats.

"Please don't; I'll stay without your setting that paperweight on me. But here's the dairy. Don't let her come inside among those pans of fresh milk with that smile, or there'll be trouble."

The young girl paused too, made a slight gesture with her hand, and the figure passed on as they entered the dairy. It was beautifully clean and fresh. With a persistence that he quickly recognized as

mischievous and ironical, and with his characteristic adaptability accepted with even greater gravity and assumption of interest, she showed him all the details. From thence they passed to the farmyard, where he hung with breathless attention over the names of the cows and made her repeat them. Although she was evidently familiar with the subject, he could see that her zeal was fitful and impatient.

"Suppose we sit down," he said, pointing to an ostentatious rustic seat in the center of the green.

"Sir down?" she repeated wonderingly. "What for?"

"To talk. We'll knock off and call it half a day."

"But if you are not looking at the farm you are, of course, going," she said quickly.

"Am I? I don't think these particulars were in my invitation."

She again broke into a fit of laughter, and at the same time cast a bright eye around the field.

"Come," he said gently, "there are no other sightseers waiting, and your conscience is clear," and he moved toward the rustic seat.

"Certainly not--there," she added in a low voice.

They moved on slowly together to a copse of willows which overhung the miniature stream.

"You are not staying long in Alstadt?" she said.

"No; I only came to see the old town that my ancestors came from."

They were walking so close together that her skirt brushed his trousers, but she suddenly drew away from him, and looking him fixedly in the eye said:

"Ah, you have relations here?"

"Yes, but they are dead two hundred years."

She laughed again with a slight expression of relief. They had entered the copse and were walking in dense shadow when she suddenly stopped and sat down upon a rustic bench. To his surprise he found that they were quite alone.

"Tell me about these relatives," she said, slightly drawing aside her skirt to make room for him on the seat.

He did not require a second invitation. He not only told her all about his ancestral progenitors, but, I fear, even about those more recent and more nearly related to him; about his own life, his vocation--he was a clever newspaper correspondent with a roving commission--his ambitions, his beliefs and his romance.

"And then, perhaps, of this visit--you will also make 'copy'?"

He smiled at her quick adaptation of his professional slang, but shook his head.

"No," he said gravely. "No--this is YOU. The CHICAGO INTERVIEWER is big pay and is rich, but it hasn't capital enough to buy you from me."

He gently slid his hand toward hers and slipped his fingers softly around it. She made a slight movement of withdrawal, but even then--as if in forgetfulness or indifference--permitted her hand to rest

unresponsively in his. It was scarcely an encouragement to gallantry, neither was it a rejection of an unconscious familiarity.

"But you haven't told me about yourself," he said.

"Oh, I," she returned, with her first approach to coquetry in a laugh and a sidelong glance, "of what importance is that to you? It is the Grand Duchess and Her Highness the Princess that you Americans seek to know. I am--what I am--as you see."

"You bet," said Hoffman with charming decision.

"I WHAT?"

"You ARE, you know, and that's good enough for me, but I don't even know your name."

She laughed again, and after a pause, said: "Elsbeth."

"But I couldn't call you by your first name on our first meeting, you know."

"Then you Americans are really so very formal--eh?" she said slyly, looking at her imprisoned hand.

"Well, yes," returned Hoffman, disengaging it. "I suppose we are respectful, or mean to be. But whom am I to inquire for? To write to?"

"You are neither to write nor inquire."

"What?" She had moved in her seat so as to half-face him with eyes in which curiosity, mischief, and a certain seriousness alternated, but for the first time seemed conscious of his hand, and accented her words with a slight pressure.

"You are to return to your hotel presently, and say to your landlord: 'Pack up my luggage. I have finished with this old town and my ancestors, and the Grand Duke, whom I do not care to see, and I shall leave Alstadt tomorrow!'"

"Thank you! I don't catch on."

"Of what necessity should you? I have said it. That should be enough for a chivalrous American like you." She again significantly looked down at her hand.

"If you mean that you know the extent of the favor you ask of me, I can say no more," he said seriously; "but give me some reason for it."

"Ah so!" she said, with a slight shrug of her shoulders. "Then I must tell you. You say you do not know the Grand Duke and Duchess. Well! THEY KNOW YOU. The day before yesterday you were wandering in the park, as you admit. You say, also, you got through the hedge and interrupted some ceremony. That ceremony was not a Court function, Mr. Hoffman, but something equally sacred--the photographing of the Ducal family before the Schloss. You say that you instantly withdrew. But after the photograph was taken the plate revealed a stranger standing actually by the side of the Princess Alexandrine, and even taking the PAS of the Grand Duke himself. That stranger was you!"

"And the picture was spoiled," said the American, with a quiet laugh.

"I should not say that," returned the lady, with a demure glance at her companion's handsome face, "and I do not believe that the Princess--who first saw the photograph--thought so either. But she is very young and willful, and has the reputation of being very indiscreet, and unfortunately she begged the photographer not to destroy the plate, but to give it to her, and to say nothing about it, except that the plate was defective, and to take another. Still it would have ended there if

her curiosity had not led her to confide a description of the stranger to the Police Inspector, with the result you know."

"Then I am expected to leave town because I accidentally stumbled into a family group that was being photographed?"

"Because a certain Princess was indiscreet enough to show her curiosity about you," corrected the fair stranger.

"But look here! I'll apologize to the Princess, and offer to pay for the plate."

"Then you do want to see the Princess?" said the young girl smiling; "you are like the others."

"Bother the Princess! I want to see YOU. And I don't see how they can prevent it if I choose to remain."

"Very easily. You will find that there is something wrong with your passport, and you will be sent on to Pumpernickel for examination. You will unwittingly transgress some of the laws of the town and be ordered to leave it. You will be shadowed by the police until you quarrel with them--like a free American--and you are conducted to the frontier. Perhaps you will strike an officer who has insulted you, and then you are finished on the spot."

The American's crest rose palpably until it cocked his straw hat over his curls.

"Suppose I am content to risk it--having first laid the whole matter and its trivial cause before the American Minister, so that he could make it hot for this whole caboodle of a country if they happened to 'down me.' By Jove! I shouldn't mind being the martyr of an international episode if they'd spare me long enough to let me get the first 'copy' over to the other side." His eyes sparkled.

"You could expose them, but they would then deny the whole story, and you have no evidence. They would demand to know your informant, and I should be disgraced, and the Princess, who is already talked about, made a subject of scandal. But no matter! It is right that an American's independence shall not be interfered with."

She raised the hem of her handkerchief to her blue eyes and slightly turned her head aside. Hoffman gently drew the handkerchief away, and in so doing possessed himself of her other hand.

"Look here, Miss--Miss--Elsbeth. You know I wouldn't give you away, whatever happened. But couldn't I get hold of that photographer--I saw him, he wanted me to sit to him--and make him tell me?"

"He wanted you to sit to him," she said hurriedly, "and did you?"

"No," he replied. "He was a little too fresh and previous, though I thought he fancied some resemblance in me to somebody else."

"Ah!" She said something to herself in German which he did not understand, and then added aloud:

"You did well; he is a bad man, this photographer. Promise me you shall not sit for him."

"How can I if I'm fired out of the place like this?" He added ruefully, "But I'd like to make him give himself away to me somehow."

"He will not, and if he did he would deny it afterward. Do not go near him nor see him. Be careful that he does not photograph you with his instantaneous instrument when you are passing. Now you must go. I must see the Princess."

"Let me go, too. I will explain it to her," said Hoffman.

She stopped, looked at him keenly, and attempted to withdraw her hands. "Ah, then it IS so. It is the Princess you wish to see. You are curious--you, too; you wish to see this lady who is interested in you. I ought to have known it. You are all alike."

He met her gaze with laughing frankness, accepting her outburst as a charming feminine weakness, half jealousy, half coquetry--but retained her hands.

"Nonsense," he said. "I wish to see her that I may have the right to see you--that you shall not lose your place here through me; that I may come again."

"You must never come here again."

"Then you must come where I am. We will meet somewhere when you have an afternoon off. You shall show me the town--the houses of my ancestors--their tombs; possibly--if the Grand Duke rampages--the probable site of my own."

She looked into his laughing eyes with her clear, stedfast, gravely questioning blue ones. "Do not you Americans know that it is not the fashion here, in Germany, for the young men and the young women to walk together--unless they are VERLOBT?"

"VER--which?"

"Engaged." She nodded her head thrice: viciously, decidedly, mischievously.

"So much the better."

"ACH GOTT!" She made a gesture of hopelessness at his incorrigibility, and again attempted to withdraw her hands.

"I must go now."

"Well then, good-by."

It was easy to draw her closer by simply lowering her still captive hands. Then he suddenly kissed her coldly startled lips, and instantly released her. She as instantly vanished.

"Elsbeth," he called quickly. "Elsbeth!"

Her now really frightened face reappeared with a heightened color from the dense foliage--quite to his astonishment.

"Hush," she said, with her finger on her lips. "Are you mad?"

"I only wanted to remind you to square me with the Princess," he laughed as her head disappeared.

He strolled back toward the gate. Scarcely had he quitted the shrubbery before the same chasseur made his appearance with precisely the same salute; and, keeping exactly the same distance, accompanied him to the gate. At the corner of the street he hailed a droshky and was driven to his hotel.

The landlord came up smiling. He trusted that the Herr had greatly enjoyed himself at the Schloss. It was a distinguished honor--in fact, quite unprecedented. Hoffman, while he determined not to commit himself, nor his late fair companion, was nevertheless anxious to learn something more of her relations to the Schloss. So pretty, so characteristic, and marked a figure must be well known to sightseers. Indeed, once or twice the idea had crossed his mind with a slightly jealous twinge that left him more conscious of the impression she had

made on him than he had deemed possible. He asked if the model farm and dairy were always shown by the same attendants.

"ACH GOTT! no doubt, yes; His Royal Highness had quite a retinue when he was in residence."

"And were these attendants in costume?"

"There was undoubtedly a livery for the servants."

Hoffman felt a slight republican irritation at the epithet--he knew not why. But this costume was rather a historical one; surely it was not entrusted to everyday menials--and he briefly described it.

His host's blank curiosity suddenly changed to a look of mysterious and arch intelligence.

"ACH GOTT! yes!" He remembered now (with his finger on his nose) that when there was a fest at the Schloss the farm and dairy were filled with shepherdesses, in quaint costume worn by the ladies of the Grand Duke's own theatrical company, who assumed the characters with great vivacity. Surely it was the same, and the Grand Duke had treated the Herr to this special courtesy. Yes--there was one pretty, blonde young lady--the Fraulein Wimpfenbuttel, a most popular soubrette, who would play it to the life! And the description fitted her to a hair! Ah, there was no doubt of it; many persons, indeed, had been so deceived.

But happily, now that he had given him the wink, the Herr could corroborate it himself by going to the theater tonight. Ah, it would be a great joke--quite colossal! if he took a front seat where she could see him. And the good man rubbed his hands in gleeful anticipation.

Hoffman had listened to him with a slow repugnance that was only equal to his gradual conviction that the explanation was a true one,

and that he himself had been ridiculously deceived. The mystery of his fair companion's costume, which he had accepted as part of the "show"; the inconsistency of her manner and her evident occupation; her undeniable wish to terminate the whole episode with that single interview; her mingling of worldly aplomb and rustic innocence; her perfect self-control and experienced acceptance of his gallantry under the simulated attitude of simplicity--all now struck him as perfectly comprehensible. He recalled the actress's inimitable touch in certain picturesque realistic details in the dairy--which she had not spared him; he recognized it now even in their bowered confidences (how like a pretty ballet scene their whole interview on the rustic bench was!), and it breathed through their entire conversation--to their theatrical parting at the close! And the whole story of the photograph was, no doubt, as pure a dramatic invention as the rest! The Princess's romantic interest in him--that Princess who had never appeared (why had he not detected the old, well-worn, sentimental situation here?)--was all a part of it. The dark, mysterious hint of his persecution by the police was a necessary culmination to the little farce. Thank Heaven! he had not "risen" at the Princess, even if he had given himself away to the clever actress in her own humble role. Then the humor of the whole situation predominated and he laughed until the tears came to his eyes, and his forgotten ancestors might have turned over in their graves without his heeding them. And with this humanizing influence upon him he went to the theater.

It was capacious even for the town, and although the performance was a special one he had no difficulty in getting a whole box to himself. He tried to avoid this public isolation by sitting close to the next box, where there was a solitary occupant--an officer--apparently as lonely as himself. He had made up his mind that when his fair deceiver appeared he would let her see by his significant applause that he recognized her, but bore no malice for the trick she had played on him. After all, he had kissed her--he had no right to complain. If she should recognize him, and this recognition led to a withdrawal of her prohibition, and their better acquaintance, he would be a fool to cavil

at her pleasant artifice. Her vocation was certainly a more independent and original one than that he had supposed; for its social quality and inequality he cared nothing. He found himself longing for the glance of her calm blue eyes, for the pleasant smile that broke the seriousness of her sweetly restrained lips. There was no doubt that he should know her even as the heroine of DER CZAR UND DER ZIMMERMANN on the bill before him. He was becoming impatient. And the performance evidently was waiting. A stir in the outer gallery, the clatter of sabers, the filing of uniforms into the royal box, and a triumphant burst from the orchestra showed the cause. As a few ladies and gentlemen in full evening dress emerged from the background of uniforms and took their places in the front of the box, Hoffman looked with some interest for the romantic Princess. Suddenly he saw a face and shoulders in a glitter of diamonds that startled him, and then a glance that transfixed him.

He leaned over to his neighbor. "Who is the young lady in the box?"

"The Princess Alexandrine."

"I mean the young lady in blue with blond hair and blue eyes."

"It is the Princess Alexandrine Elsbeth Marie Stephanie, the daughter of the Grand Duke--there is none other there."

"Thank you."

He sat silently looking at the rising curtain and the stage. Then he rose quietly, gathered his hat and coat, and left the box. When he reached the gallery he turned instinctively and looked back at the royal box. Her eyes had followed him, and as he remained a moment motionless in the doorway her lips parted in a grateful smile, and she waved her fan with a faint but unmistakable gesture of farewell.

The next morning he left Alstadt. There was some little delay at the Zoll on the frontier, and when Hoffman received back his trunk it was accompanied by a little sealed packet which was handed to him by the Customhouse Inspector. Hoffman did not open it until he was alone.

There hangs upon the wall of his modest apartment in New York a narrow, irregular photograph ingeniously framed, of himself standing side by side with a young German girl, who, in the estimation of his compatriots, is by no means stylish and only passably good-looking. When he is joked by his friends about the post of honor given to this production, and questioned as to the lady, he remains silent. The Princess Alexandrine Elsbeth Marie Stephanie von Westphalen-Alstadt, among her other royal qualities, knew whom to trust.