



BY  
AUTHOR OF "THE 1399CS" IN  
CHAPTER III—CONTINUED.

"She calls herself a witch," answered Keyork with considerable scorn. "I do not know what she is, nor what to call her—a sensitive, an hysterical subject, a medium, a witch—a fool, if you like, or a charlatan, if you prefer the term. Beautiful she is, at least, whatever else she may not be."

"Yes, she is beautiful."  
"So you have seen her, have you?" The little man again looked sharply up at his tall companion. "You have had a consultation—"

"Does she give consultations? Is she a professional seer?" The Wanderer asked the question in a tone of surprise. "Do you mean that she maintains an establishment upon such a scale out of the proceeds of fortune-telling?"

"I do not mean anything of the sort. Fortune telling is excellent! Very good!" Keyork's bright eyes flashed with amusement. "What are you doing here—I mean in this church?" He put the question suddenly.

"Pursuing—an idea, if you please to call it so."

"Not knowing what you mean, I must please to call your meaning by your own name for it. It is your nature to be enigmatic. Shall we go out? If I stay here much longer I shall be petrified instead of embalmed. I shall turn into dirty old red marble, like Tziho's effigy there, an awful warning to fortune philosophers, and an example for the edification of the faithful who worship here."

They walked toward the door, and the contrast between the appearance of the two brought the ghost of a smile to the thin lips of the pale scrawling, who was occupied in renewing the tapers upon one of the side altars.

"So you were pursuing an idea," said the little man as they emerged into the narrow street. "Now, ideas may be divided variously into classes, as for instance, ideas which are good, bad or indifferent. If you have an idea upon any subject I will utterly annihilate it to my own most profound satisfaction: if you have none concerning any special point, I will force you to accept mine, as mine, or to die the intellectual death. That is the general theory of the idea."

"And what does it prove?" inquired the Wanderer.

"If you knew anything, answered Keyork, with twinkling eyes, 'you would know that a theory is not a demonstration but an explanation. But, by the hypothesis, since you are not I, you can know nothing certainly. Now, my theory explains many things, and among others the adamant nature of the substance vanity, upon which the showman, nature, projects in fast fading colors the unsubstantial images of men. Why do you drag me through this dismal passage?"

"I passed through it this morning and missed my way."

"In pursuit of the idea, of course. That was to be expected. Prague is constructed on the same principle as the human brain, full of winding ways, dark lanes and gloomy arches, all of which may lead somewhere, or may not."

"The self which you propose to preserve from corruption, since you think so poorly of the lodger and the lodging. I wonder that you should be anxious to prolong the sufferings of the one and his lease of the other."

"It is all I have," answered Keyork Arabian. "Did you think of that?"

"That circumstance may serve as an excuse, but it does not constitute a reason."

"Not a reason? Is the most abject poverty a reason for throwing away the daily crust? Myself is all I have. Shall I let it perish when an effort may preserve it from destruction?"

"So soon as you speak of enjoyment, argument ceases," answered the Wanderer.

"You are wrong, as usual," returned the other. "It is the other way. Enjoyment is the universal solvent of all arguments. Enjoyment! Enjoyment is the protest of reality against the tyranny of fiction."

"Have wisdom and study led you no farther than that conclusion?"

Keyork's eyes brightened suddenly, and a peal of laughter, deep and rich, broke from his sturdy breast and rolled long echoes through the dismal lane. But his ivory features were not discomposed, though his white beard trembled and waved softly like a snowy veil blown about by the wind.

"If wisdom can teach how to prolong the lease, what study can be compared with that of which the results may beautify the dwelling? What more can any man do for himself than to make himself happy? The very question is absurd. Is it for the sake of improving the physical condition or of promoting the moral ease of mankind at large that you are dragging me through the slums and byways and alleys of the gloomiest city on this side of eternal perdition? You admit that you are pursuing an idea. Perhaps you are in search of some new and curious form of mildew, and when you have found it—or some-



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thing else—you will name your discovery—fungus Præensis or Cryptogamus minor erraticus—the Wanderer's toadstool. But I know you of old, my good friend. The idea you pursue is not an idea at all, but that specimen of the genus homo known as 'woman,' species 'lady,' variety 'true love,' vulgar designation 'sweetheart.'

The Wanderer stared coldly at his companion. "The vulgarity of the designation is indeed only equalled by that of your taste in selecting it," he said coolly. Then he turned away, intending to leave Keyork standing where he was.

But the little man had already repented of his speech. He ran quickly to his friend's side and laid one hand upon his arm. The Wanderer paused and again looked down.

"Is it of any use to be offended with my speech? Am I an acquaintance of yesterday? Do you imagine that I could ever be my intention to annoy you?" The questions were asked rapidly, in tones of genuine anxiety. "Indeed, I hardly know how I could suppose that. You have always been friendly—but I confess—your names for things are not—always—"

The Wanderer did not complete the sentence, but looked gravely at Keyork, as though wishing to convey very clearly again what he had before expressed in words.

"Come, forgive my lack of skill, and do not let us quarrel. Perhaps I can help you. You may know Prague well, but I know it better. Will you allow me to say that I know also whom it is you are seeking here?"

"Yes, you know. I have not changed since we last met, nor have circumstances favored me."

"Tell me—have you really seen this Unorna and talked with her?"

"This morning."

"And she could not help you?"

"I refused to accept her help until I had done all that was in my power to do."

"You were rash. And have you now done all, and failed?"

"I have."

"Then, if you will accept a humble suggestion from me, you will go back to her at once."

"I know very little of her. I do not altogether trust her—"

"Trust her! Power of Eblis—or any other powers! Who talks of trust? Does the wise man trust himself? Never. Then how can he dare trust anyone else?"

"Your cynical philosophy again," exclaimed the Wanderer.

"Philosophy? I am a mysosopist! All wisdom is vanity, and I hate it! Autology is my study, autopathy my ambition, autonomy my pride, I am I, one, indivisible, central! Oh I! Hail and live forever!"

Again the little man's rich bass voice rang out in mellow laughter.

"You are happy, Keyork," he said.

"You must be, since you can laugh at yourself so honestly."

"At myself? Vain man! I am laughing at you, and at every one else, at everything except myself."

"Can you tell me nothing more of her? Do you know her well?"

"She does not offer her help to every one. You would have done well to accept it in the first instance."

"I had supposed, from what you said of her, that she made a profession of clairvoyance, or hypnotism, or mesmerism—whatever may be the right term now-a-days."

"It matters very little," answered Keyork, gravely. "I used to wonder at Adam's ingenuity in naming all living things, but I think he would have made but a poor figure in a tournament of modern terminologists. No, Unorna does not accept remuneration for her help when she vouchsafes to give it."

"And yet I was introduced to her presence without even giving my name."

"That is her fancy. She will see any one who wishes to see her, beggar, gentleman or prince. But she only answers such questions as she pleases."

Keyork Arabian was silent, as though he were reflecting upon Unorna's character and peculiar gifts before describing them to his friend. The Wanderer preferred the little man's silence to his wild talk, but he was determined, if possible, to extract some further information concerning Unorna, and before many seconds had elapsed he interrupted Keyork's meditations with a question.

"You tell me to see for myself," he said. "I would like to know what I am to expect. Will you not enlighten me?"

"What?" asked the other, vaguely, as though roused from sleep.

"If I go to Unorna and ask a consultation of her, as though she were a common somnambulist, and if she designs to place her powers at my disposal, what sort of assistance would I most probably get?"

"Of two things, one will happen," he answered. "Either she will herself fall into the abnormal state, and will answer correctly any questions you put to her, or she will hypnotize you, you will yourself see—what you wish to see."

"You yourself. The peculiarity of the woman is her duality, her double power. She can, by an act of volition, become hypnotic, clairvoyant—whatever you choose to call it. Or, if her visitor is at all sensitive, she can reverse the situation, and play the part of a hypnotizer. I never heard of a like case."

"After all, I do not see why it should not be so," said the Wanderer, thoughtfully. "At all events, whatever she can do is evidently done by hypnotism, and such extraordinary experiments have succeeded of late—"

"I did not say that there was nothing but hypnotism in her process."

"What then? Magic?" The Wanderer's lip curled scornfully.

"I do not know," replied the little man, speaking slowly. "Whatever her secret may be, she keeps it, even when speaking in sleep."

"I will go," answered the Wanderer, after a moment's hesitation.

"Very good," said Keyork Arabian. "If you want to find her again, come to my lodging. Do you know the house of the Black Mother of God?"

"Yes—here is a legend about a Spanish picture of our Lady once preserved there—"

"Exactly, it takes its name from that black picture. It is on the corner of the Fruit market, over against the window at which the Princess Windischgratz was shot. I live in the upper-story. Good-by."

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motionless and hardly breathing.

"I have been mistaken," Unorna continued at last. "Forgive—forget—"

Israel Kafka rose to his feet and threw back a step from her side.

"How easy it is for you!" exclaimed the Moravian. "How easy! How simple! You call me, and I come. You let your eyes rest on me, and I kneel before you. You sigh, and I speak words of love. You lift your hand, and I crouch at your feet. You frown—and I humbly leave you. How easy!"

"You are wrong and you speak foolishly. You are angry and you do not weigh your words."

"Angry! What have I to do with so common a madness as anger? I am more than angry. Do you think that, because I have submitted to the veering gusts of your good and evil humors these many months, I have lost all consciousness of myself? Have you promised me nothing? Have you given me no hope? Have you said and done nothing whereby you are bound?"

"I never gave you either pledge or promise," answered Unorna in a harper tone. "The only hope I have ever extended to you was this, that I would one day answer you plainly. I have done so. You are not satisfied. Is there anything more to be said? I do not bid you to leave my house forever, any more than I mean to drive you from my friendship."

"From your friendship. Ah, I thank you. Unorna, I most humbly thank you. For the mercy you extend in allowing me to linger near you, I am grateful. Your friend, you say? Ay, truly, your friend and servant, your servant and your slave, your slave and your friend—your friendship—I have no words—"

"Take it, or take it—"

"Will," Unorna glanced at his angry face and quickly looked away.

"Take it? Yes, and more too, whether you will give it or not," answered Israel Kafka, moving nearer to her. "Yes, whether you will, or whether you will not—I will have all your friendship, your love, your life, your breath, your soul—all or nothing."

"You are wise to suggest the latter alternative as a possibility," said Unorna, coldly, and not heeding his approach.

The young man stood still and folded his arms.

"Do you mean what you say?" he asked, slowly. "Do you mean that I shall have not all, but nothing? Do you still dare to mean that, after all that has passed between you and me?"

Unorna raised her eyes and looked steadily into his.

"Israel Kafka, do not speak to me of daring."

But the young man's glance did not waver. The angry expression of his features did not relax.

"Where is your power now?" he asked suddenly. "Where is your witchery? You are only a woman, after all—you are only a weak woman."

Very slowly he drew nearer to her side, his lithe figure bending a little as he looked down upon her. Unorna leaned far back, withdrawing her face from his as far as she could, but still trying to impose her will upon him.

"You cannot," he said, between his teeth, answering her thought.

Men who have tamed wild beasts alone know what such a moment is like. A hundred times the brave man has held the tiger spellbound, and crouching under his cold, fearless gaze.

To draw back, to let his glance waver, to show so much as the least sign of fear, is death. The moment is supreme, and he knows it.

Unorna grasped the arms of her chair, as though seeking her physical support in her extremity. Between her and her mistake the image of what should be stood out, bright, vivid and strong. A new conviction had taken the place of the old, a real passion was flaming upon the altar whereon she had fed with dreams the sem lance of a sacred fire.

"You do not really love me," she said softly.

Israel Kafka started, as a man who is struck unawares. The monstrous untruth which filled the words broke down his guard, sudden tears welled the penetrating sharpness of his gaze and his hand trembled.

"I do not love you? I! Unorna—Unorna!"

The first word broke from him in a cry of horror and stupefaction. But her name, when he spoke it, sounded as the death moan of a young wild animal wounded beyond all power to turn at bay.

She knew that the struggle was over and that she had gained the mastery, though the price of victory might be a broken heart.

"You thought I was jesting," she said in a low voice. "But there was no jest in what I said—nor any unkindness in what I meant, though it is all my fault. But that is true—you never loved me as I would be loved."

"Unorna—"

"No—I am not unkind. Your love is young, fierce, inconstant; but terrible, half boyish; ready to turn into hatred at one moment, to melt into tears at the next—"

"It pleased you once," said Israel Kafka in broken tones. "It is not less love because you are weary of it, and of me."

"Weary, you say? No, not weary—and very truly not of you. You will believe that today, tomorrow you will still try to force life into your belief—and then it will be dead and gone like all thoughts which have never entered into the shapes of reality. We have not loved each other. We have but fancied that it would be sweet to love, and the knife of truth has parted the web of our dreams, keenly, in the midst, so that we see before us what

is, though the ghost of what might have been is yet lingering near."

"Who wove that web, Unorna? You or I?" He lifted his heavy eyes and gazed at her coiled hair.

"What matters it whether it was your doing or mine? But we wove it together—and together we must see the truth—"

"If this is true, there is no more 'together' for you and me."

"We may yet glean friendship in the fields where love has grown."

"Friendship—the very word is a wound! Friendship—the very dregs and lees of the wine of life! Friendship—the sour drainings of the heart's cup, left to moisten the lips of the damned when the blessed have drunk their fill. I hate the word, as I hate the thought!"

Unorna sighed, partly, perhaps, that he might hear the sigh and put upon it an interpretation soothing to his vanity, but partly, too, from a sincere regret that he should need to suffer as he was evidently suffering. She had half believed that she loved him, and she owed him pity. Women's hearts pay such debts unwillingly, but they pay them, nevertheless.

"I am sorry," said Unorna. "You will not understand—"

"I have understood enough—I have understood that a woman can have two faces, and two hearts, two minds, two souls—it is enough, my understanding need go no further. You sighed before you spoke. It was not for me—it was for yourself. You never felt pain or sorrow for another."

He was trying to grow cold and to find cold words to say, which might lead her to believe him stronger than he was and able to master his grief. But he was too young, too hot, too changeable for such a part.

"You are wrong, Israel Kafka. You would make me less than human. If I had promised, if I had said one word—and yet, you are right, too, for I have let you think in earnest what has been but a passing dream of my own thoughts. It was all wrong, it was all my fault—there, lay your hand in mine and say that you forgive me, as I ask forgiveness."

He was still standing behind her, leaning against the back of her chair. Without looking around, she raised her hand above her shoulder, as though seeking for his. But he would not take it.

"Is it so hard?" she asked, softly.

"Is it even harder for you to give than for me to ask? Shall we part like this—not to meet again—each bearing a wound, when both might be who? Can you not say a word?"

"What is it to you whether I forgive you or not?"

"Since I ask it, believe that it is much to me," she answered, slowly turning her head until, without catching sight of his face, she could just see where his fingers were resting on her chair. Then, over her shoulder, she touched them, and drew them to her cheek. He made no resistance.

"Shall we part without one kind thought?"

"Is this friendship?" asked Israel Kafka. Then he sank upon his knees beside her and looked up into her face.

"It is friendship—yes—why not? Am I like other women?"

"Then why need there be any parting?"

"If you will be my friend, there need be none. You have forgiven me now—I see it in your eyes. Is it not true?"

He was at her feet, passive at last under the superior power which he had never been able to resist.

"Sit beside me, now, and let us talk," she said.

Like a man in a dream, he rose and sat down near her.

Unorna laughed, and there was something in the tone that was not good to hear.

"You are only my slave, after all," said Unorna, scornfully.

"I am only your slave, after all," he repeated.

"I could touch you with my hand and you would hate me and forget that you ever loved me."

"You would hate me and forget that you ever loved me," she repeated, dwelling on each word as though to impress it upon his consciousness.

"Say it. I order you."

"I should hate you and forget that I ever loved you," he said, slowly.

"You never loved me."

"I never loved you."

Again Unorna laughed, and he joined in her laughter, unintelligently, as he had done before. Israel Kafka sat motionless in his chair, staring at her with unwinking eyes. Yet the man was alive and in the full strength of his magnificent youth, supple, active, fierce by nature, able to have killed her with his hands in the struggle of a moment. Yet she knew that without a word from her he could neither turn his head nor move in his seat.

"I must ask him," she said, unconsciously.

"You must ask him," repeated Israel Kafka from his seat.

For the third time Unorna laughed aloud, as she heard the echo of her own words.

"Whom shall I ask?" she inquired contemptuously, as she rose to her feet.

The dull, glassy eyes sought hers in painful perplexity, following her face as she moved.

"I do not know," answered the powerless man.

Unorna came close to him and laid her hand upon his head.

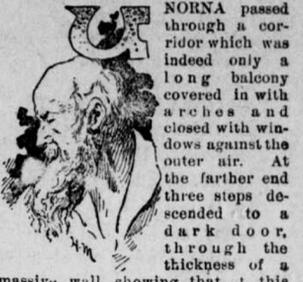
"Sleep, until I wake you," she said.

The eyelids drooped and closed at her command, and instantly the man's breathing became heavy and regular. Unorna's full lips curled as she looked down at him.

"And you would be my master!" she exclaimed.

Then she turned and disappeared among the plants, leaving him alone.

CHAPTER V.



NORNA passed through a corridor which was indeed only a long balcony covered in with arches and closed with windows against the outer air. At the farther end three steps descended to a dark door, through the thickness of a massive wall, showing that this point Unorna's house had at some former time been joined with another building beyond, with which it thus formed one habitation. Unorna paused, holding the key as though hesitating whether she should put it in the lock, and then with an impatient frown, opened the door and went in. She passed through a small, well lighted vestibule and entered the room beyond.

In one of the lounges, not far from