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SYNOPSIS.

Senator John Calhoun is offered the portfolio of secretary of state in Tyler's cabinet. He declines that if he accepts it means that Texas and Oregon must be added to the Union. He plans to learn the intentions of England with regard to Mexico, through Baroness Von Ritz, secret spy and reputed mistress of the English ambassador, Pakenham. He sends his secretary, Nicholas Trist, to bring the Baroness to his apartment. While searching for the Baroness' home, a carriage drives up and he is invited to enter. The occupant is the Baroness, who says she is being pursued. The pursuers are shaken off. The Baroness consents to see Calhoun. Nicholas notes that she has lost a slipper. She gives Nicholas the remaining slipper as a pledge that she will tell Calhoun all, and, as security, Nicholas gives her a trinket he intended for his sweetheart, Elizabeth Churchill. Nicholas is ordered to leave at once for Montreal on state business, by Calhoun, who has become secretary of state, and plans to be married that night. Tyler warns Pakenham that interference by England in the affairs of this continent will not be tolerated. The secret, however, that the joint occupancy of Oregon with Great Britain cease, and has raised the cry of "Fifty-four, Fifty-four or Fight." The Baroness tells Nicholas she will do her best to prevent his marriage. She returns the trinket and she promises to return her slipper. Nicholas enlists the services of Congressman Dandridge, a rejected suitor of Elizabeth's, to assist in the arrangements for the wedding and entrusts him with the return of the slipper to the Baroness. The Congressman gets drunk and sends the slipper to Elizabeth. The wedding is declared off, and Nicholas is ordered from the house by Elizabeth's father. Nicholas is ordered to gain access to a meeting of the Hudson Bay directors in Montreal and learn England's intentions regarding Oregon. Nicholas sees the Baroness leave the directors' meeting in Montreal, where he had failed to gain admission.

CHAPTER XIV.—Continued.

"Now you begin to question—now you show at last curiosity! Well, then, I shall answer. For more than one year, perhaps more than two, perhaps more than three!"
"Impossible!" I shook my head. "A woman like you could not be concealed—not if she owned a hundred hidden places such as this."
"Oh, I was known," she said. "You have heard of me, you know of me?"
"I still shook my head. "No," said I, "I have been far in the west for several years, and have come to Washington but rarely. Bear me out, I had not been there my third day before I found you!"
We sat silent for some moments, fixedly regarding each other.
"It was rumored in diplomatic circles, of course, that you were in touch with the ministry of England," I ventured. "I myself saw that much."
"Naturally. Of Mexico also! At least, as you saw in our little carriage race, Mexico was desirous enough to establish some sort of communication with my humble self!"
"Calhoun was right!" I exclaimed. "He was entirely right, madam, in insisting that I should bring you to him that morning, whether or not you wished to go."
She chuckled at the memory.
"How did he receive you, madam?" I asked. "I never knew."
"Why, took my hand in both his, and bowed as though I indeed were queen, he a king."
"Then you got on well?"
"Truly; for he was wiser than his agent, monsieur. He found answers by asking questions."
"For instance, he asked—"
"What had been my ball gown that night—who was there—how I enjoyed myself! In a moment we were talking as though we had been friends for years. The grand vizier brought in two mugs of cider, in each a toasted apple. Monsieur, I have not seen diplomacy such as this. Naturally, I was helpless."
"You told him somewhat of yourself?"
"He did not allow me to do that, monsieur."
"But he told you somewhat of this country?"
"Ah, yes, yes! So then I saw what held him up in his work, what kept him alive. I saw something I have not often seen—a purpose, a principle, in a public man. His love for his own land touched even me, how or why I scarcely know. Yes, we spoke of the poor, the oppressed, of the weary and the heavy laden."
"Did he ask you what you know of Mexico and England?"
"Rather what I knew of the poor in Europe. I told him some things I knew of that hopeless land—my own land. Then he went on to tell me of America and its hope of a free democracy of the people. Believe me, I listened to Mr. Calhoun. Never mind what we said of Mr. Van Zandt and Sir Richard Pakenham. At least, as you know, I paid off a little score with sir Richard that next morning. What was strangest to me was the fact that I forgot Mr. Calhoun's attire, forgot the strangeness of my errand thither. It was as though only our minds talked, one with the other. I was sorry when at last came Grand Vizier James to take Mr. Calhoun's order for his own carriage, that brought me home—my second and more peaceful arrival there that night."
"Then I did not fail as messenger, after all! You told Mr. Calhoun what he desired to know?"
"In part at least. But come now, was I not bound in some sort of honor

to my great and good friend, Sir Richard? Was it not treachery enough to rebuke him for his attentions to Dona Lucrezia?"
"But you promised to tell Mr. Calhoun more at a later time?"
"On certain conditions I did," she assented.
"I do not know that I may ask those?"
"You would be surprised if I told you the truth? What I required of Mr. Calhoun was permission and aid still further to study his extraordinary country, its extraordinary ways, its extraordinary ignorance of itself. I have told you that I needed to travel, to study, to observe mankind—and those governments invented or tolerated by mankind."
"Since then, madam," I concluded, stepping to assist her with her chair, as she signified her completion of our repast, "since you do not feel now inclined to be specific, I feel that I ought to make my adieux, for the time at least. It grows late. I shall remember this little evening all my life. I own my defeat, I do not know why you are here, or for whom."
"At what hotel do you stop?"
"The little place of Jacques Bertillon, a square or so beyond the Place d'Armes."
"In that case," said she, "believe me, it would be more discreet for you to remain unseen in Montreal. No matter which flag is mine, I may say that much for a friend and comrade in the service."
"But what else?"
She looked about her. "Be my guest to-night!" she said suddenly. "There is danger—"
"For me?" I laughed. "At my hotel? On the streets?"
"No, for me."
"Where?"
"Here."
"And of what, madam?"
"Of a man; for the first time I am afraid, in spite of all."
I looked at her straight. "Are you not afraid of me?" I asked.
She looked at me fairly, her color coming. "With the fear which draws a woman to a man," she said.
"Whereas, mine is the fear which causes a man to flee from himself!"
"But you will remain for my protection? I should feel safer. Besides, in that case I should know the answer."
"How do you mean?"
"I should know whether or not you were married!"

CHAPTER XV.

With Madam the Baroness.
It is not for good women that men have fought battles, given their lives and staked their souls.—Mrs. W. K. Clifford.
"But, madam—" I began.
She answered me in her own way. "Monsieur hesitates—he is lost!" she said. "But see, I am weary. I have been much engaged to-day. I have made it my plan never to fatigue myself. It is my hour now for my bath, my exercise, my bed, if you please. I fear I must bid you good night, one way or the other. You will be welcome here none the less, if you care to remain. I trust you did not find our little repast to-night unpleasant? Believe me, our breakfast shall be as good. Threlka is expert in omelets, and our coffee is such as perhaps you

may not find general in these provinces."
Was there the slightest mocking sneer in her words? Did she despise me as a faintheart? I could not tell, but did not like the thought.
"Believe me, madam," I answered hotly, "you have courage, at least. Let me match it. Nor do I deny that this asks courage on my part too. If you please, in these circumstances, I shall remain."
"You are armed?" she asked simply.
I inserted a finger in each waistcoat pocket and showed her the butts of two derringers; and at the back of my neck—to her smiling amusement at our heathen fashion—I displayed just the tip of the haft of a short bowie-knife, which went into a leather case under the collar of my coat. And again I drew around the belt which I wore so that she could see the barrel of a good pistol, which had been suspended under cover of the bell skirt of my coat.
She laughed. I saw that she was not unused to weapons. I should have guessed her the daughter of a soldier or acquainted with arms in some way. "Of course," she said, "there might be need of these, although I think not. And in any case, if trouble can be deferred until to-morrow, why concern oneself over it? You interest me. I begin yet more to approve of you."
"Then, as to that breakfast a la fourchette with madam; if I remain, will you agree to tell me what is your business here?"
She laughed at me gaily. "I might," she said, "provided that meantime I had learned whether or not you were married that night."
I do not profess that I read all that was in her face as she stepped back toward the satin curtains and swept me the most graceful courtesy I had ever seen in all my life. I felt like reaching out a hand to restrain her.
Then I recalled my mission; and I remembered what Mr. Calhoun and Dr. Ward had said. I was not a man; I was a government agent. She was not a woman; she was my opponent. Yet, but then—
Slowly I turned to the opposite side of this long central room. There were curtains here also. I drew them, but as I did so I glanced back. Again, as that earlier night, I saw her face framed in the amber folds—a face laughing, mocking. With an exclamation of discontent, I threw down my heavy pistol on the floor, cast my coat across the foot of the bed to prevent the delicate covering from being soiled by my boots, and so rested without further disrobing.
In the opposite apartment I could hear her moving about, humming to herself some air as unconcernedly as though no such being as myself existed in the world. I heard her presently through some passage not visible from the central apartments. Then without concealment there seemed to go forward the ordinary routine of madam's toilet for the evening.
At last she called out to me: "Monsieur!"
I was at my own curtains at once, but hers remained tight folded, although I heard her voice close behind them. "Eh bien?" I answered.
"It is nothing, except I would say that if monsieur feels especially grave

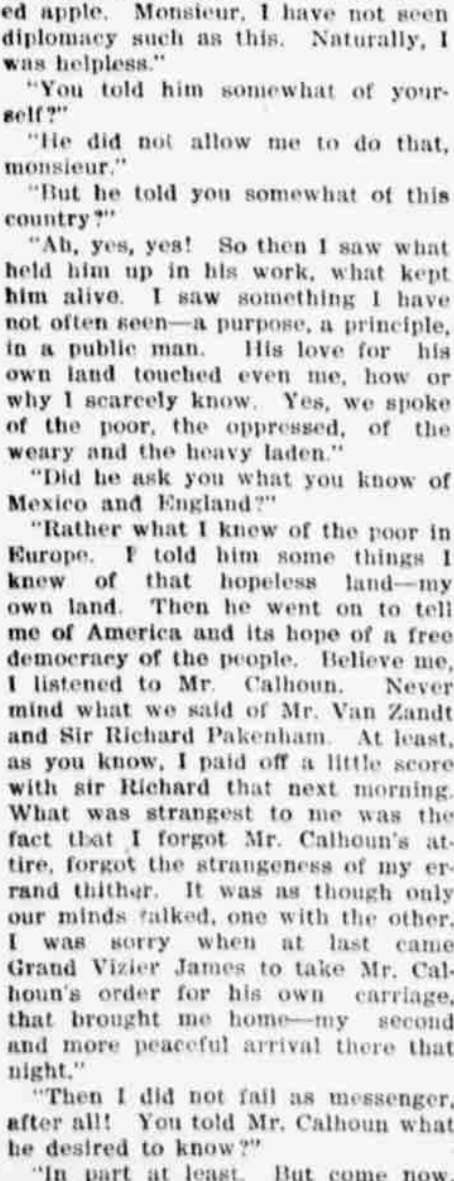
and reverent, he will find a very comfortable prie-dieu at the foot of the bed."
"I thank you," I replied, gravely as I could.
"And there is a very excellent rosary and crucifix on the table just beyond!"
"I thank you," I replied, steadily as I could.
"And there is an English Book of Common Prayer upon the stand not far from the head of the bed, upon this side!"
"A thousand thanks, my very good friend."
I heard a smothered laugh beyond the amber curtains. Presently she spoke again, yawning, as I fancied, rather contentedly.
"A la bonne heure, monsieur!"
"A la bonne heure, madam!"

CHAPTER XVI.

Dejeuner a la Fourchette.
Woman is a creature between man and the angels.—Honore de Balzac.

A government agent, it seems, may also in part be little more than a man, after all. In these singular surroundings I found myself not wholly tranquil. . . . At last toward morning, I must have slept. It was some time after daybreak when I felt a hand upon my shoulder as I lay still partly clad. Awakened suddenly, I arose and almost overthrew old Threlka, who stood regarding me with no expression whatever upon her brown and wrinkled countenance. She did no more than point the way to a door, where presently I found a bathroom, and so refreshed myself and made the best toilet possible under the circumstances.
My hostess I found awaiting me in the central room of the apartments. She was clad now in a girdled peignoir of rich rose-color, the sleeves, wide and full, falling back from her round arms. Her dark hair was coiled and piled high on her head this morning, regardless of current mode, and confined in a heavy twist by a tall golden comb; so that her white neck was left uncovered.
The little table in the center of the room was already spread. Madam filled my cup from the steaming urn with not the slightest awkwardness, as she nodded for me to be seated. We looked at each other, and, as I may swear, we both broke into saving laughter.
"I was saying," she remarked presently, "that I would not have you think that I do not appreciate the suffering in which you were plunged by the haste you found necessary in the wedding of your jeune fille."
"But I was on my guard." "At least, I may thank you for your sympathy, madam!" I replied.
"Yet in time," she went on, gone reflective the next instant, "you will see how very unimportant is all this turmoil of love and marriage. That torch of life!" she mused. "See! It was only that which you were so eager to pass on to another generation! That was why you were so mad to hasten to the side of that woman. Whereas," she mused still, "it were so much grander and so much nobler to pass on the torch of a principle as well!"
"Do not philosophize with me," I said. "I am already distracted by the puzzle you offer to me. You are so young and beautiful, so fair in your judgment, so kind—"
"In turn, I ask you not to follow that," she remarked coldly. "Let us talk of what you call, I think, business."
"My dear lady," I began, "my relation to the affairs of the American republic is a very humble one. I am no minister of state, and I know you deal with ministers direct. How, then, shall I gain your friendship for my country? You are dangerous to have for an enemy. Are you too high-priced to have for a friend—for a friend to our union—a friend of the principle of democracy? Come now, you enjoy large questions. Tell me, what does this council mean regarding Oregon? Is it true that England plans now to concentrate all her traders, all her troops, and force them west up the Saskatchewan and into Oregon this coming season? Come, now, madam, is it to be war?"
Her curved lips broke into a smile that showed again her small white teeth.
"Were you, then, married?" she said.
"I only went on, impatient. "Any moment may mean everything to us. I should not ask these questions if I did not know that you were close to Mr. Calhoun."
She looked me square in the eye and nodded her head slowly. "I may say this much, monsieur, that it has pleased me to gain a little further information."
"You will give my government that information?"
"Why should I?"
(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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"Were You Then Married?" She Asked.

was I not bound in some sort of honor

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