

# The Weary Kings | A Modern Romance

By Richard Voss

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## CHAPTER XXI.

**H**IDDEN as our white villa may be under the palms, the world still knows of us. We can take no walk, no drive, without being stared at. We are actually surrounded, watched, pursued. They try to express sympathy, admiration, respect and they ruin our Paradise. Sympathy for what? Because I would become a "citizen Prince?" And their "admiration!"

They appear to find Judica charming. She will never become a grande dame, for she is something more; she has a sublime womanhood that makes her a sovereign. When they salute her, which happens everywhere, she barely nods in her deadly embarrassment. If a queen did it, it would be taken as a sign of haughtiness; with Judica it has an effect as if she smiled at all, and the whole world is delighted with her.

And delighted with my child, delighted more and more in the Count. I observe it with secret amazement. He has no suspicion that I look into his soul and read in it as in an open book.

The Count adores my little Countess. If Judica were not a Countess of —, you and be a happy woman.

This sounds almost as if my child were unhappy now. God forbid it! She picks flowers and smiles at me, shedding glory from her own soul over my dark one, making me happy, and being happy herself.

She is happy still.  
Will it last long? Can it last long? Must night come again?

She does not think now of what they told her about me. She sees me at her side with a face like that of other men.

I am healthy. I bloom with youth. So she thinks—as I begin to think myself—that they wave a gloomy veil of lies about me to hide me from the eyes of the nation.

Will she be able to retain that belief as I do, if I ever let her look into the depths of my soul and see its darkness? She will not always remain my child; some day she will be my wife, soul of my soul. Will doubt and fear not seize her then?

I must hide my dark soul as long as possible from her bright one.

And another, a gloomy, tremendous shadow looms up, at present only in my mind, that they say is diseased. Should she ever learn what I have given for her, my rights to a Royal throne; should she ever realize the vastness of my sacrifice—would not despair crush her? And what then?

So I must veil myself. I must guard even my dreams. I must dissemble and lie.

There is one who knows all; one who watches me and spies on me as I do on him.

This one is my good friend Gebhardt!

And there is one who would perpetrate a crime if it were needed to save Judica from misfortune.

And this one is my good friend Gebhardt!

For my good friend Gebhardt loves my wife!

Things are not so simple and easy as a young and romantic soul pictures them. To escape all the consequences of my marriage to Judica I would have to flee with her into deserts.

In Mentone, in Nizza and in Cannes there are whole crowds of Kings and Princes. Of course they all know about me and my beautiful unequalled wife.

I care for no one, and am, therefore, impolite to all to the bounds of rudeness. Yet the Count is in constant receipt of inquiries as to whether or not "His Royal Highness" will receive visitors. "His Royal Highness regrets" is the answer to all. The Count excuses me with sublime courtly skill everywhere; but everywhere I injure and offend.

And yesterday!  
I strolled slowly along one of our garden paths when suddenly a man approached me. I recognized him at once. It was Prince Adalbert, who, should my brother die without heirs, was designated in the secret document signed by me as the man who is to be King.

At his appearance I had a feeling—God does not love those in whose souls he permits such feelings.

His Royal Highness hurried to me and said most cordially and cheerfully:  
"Forgive the invasion. I wished to see you, but since you are said to be unapproachable, I chose this way to reach you, you invisible one, you. You are badly guarded, however. There is no one here to prevent me from entering. So I entered and here I am."

My reply was:  
"Had you had the politeness to excuse yourself to be announced your very flattering desire would not have been fulfilled."

"So I thought, and therefore I came without being announced. Your reception is not particularly encouraging, but you must excuse me if I tell you that I am glad for all that to see you."

Nothing remained for me but to bear his presence. We strolled on, I dumbly, he gossiping without pause. And what gossip flowed from that fellow! With no word



SINCE SHE HESITATED I PRESSED HER: "WHAT DID YOU THINK TO MAKE YOU WEEP SO BITTERLY?"

did he mention the fact that I am not living alone here. He spoke of the most famous race horses that ran in Nezza, of the most famous shots who murdered pigeons in Monte Carlo, of the most "famous" women, and of his own fame as owner of race horses, as grand pigeon shot and as skilled gambler.

And this wretched creature is to take the inheritance of my fathers! Is this degenerate better than I; could he rule the land, my land, better; could he make the nation, my nation, more great and happy than I could? I wanted to hurl myself on him, to strangle him. That is what I thought while we walked together through all the bloom and glory.

And then Judica came walking toward us. She walked through a lane of salvia. They stood on both sides of her like wonderful flames. Through the flower-fire she came, like a vision. Never had I seen my child so beautiful.

Now I got my revenge. I stood still, thus forcing him to do the same. As Judica approached I said, as coldly and indifferently as possible, with a negligent motion of my hand in his direction:

"Prince Adalbert called to pay his respects to you. Unhappily, my dear cousin will not have time to take breakfast with us."

His Royal Highness, already startled by Judica's appearance, now was completely confused. His Royal Highness bowed with confusion, murmured something. Judica greeted him with her faint, charming nod, and in her embarrassment went by the future heir to the throne.

Now I was so polite as to accompany my suddenly silent visitor to the gates. I am safe against a second invasion from His Royal Highness.

I have made a visit to one of my own kind after all. But this one is a woman, and in other ways an exception. Therefore I went to her without my adjutant, as a simple human being.

Her Majesty resides in Mentone. In a villa next to the one in which the Empress, heavily punished, dwells. One tragic woman thus lives in sisterly companionship with another.

Her Majesty received me in a garden room which opens toward the ocean like a temple. White marble columns, wreathed with flowers, formed the foreground to the wonderful picture of sky and sea. Under one of the flowery arches stood the Queen in a black, trailing dress, like the gloomy genius of sorrow in the midst of a hymn of beauty.

"You have come alone?"  
"Was that not correct?"

"Since there are two of you, no."  
And she gave me her hand with a smile that acted like good enchantment.

We went up and down in the great hall. I had to tell her of Judica, ever and again of Judica! She has a way of listening that unlocks the heart, so that I had to suppress myself in order not to betray anything of that other being within me whom only I may know. Then she spoke of my marriage, my happiness, my refuge in beauty and love as only a woman can speak who has felt life's own misery and has conquered it through herself.

I remained until evening and had to promise to return with Judica. The Queen gave me a rosebud to take to her.

Today I attained the certainty that my child is passionately beloved. As a matter of fact I did not need the certainty. But now that I have it it still impresses me.

We—Judica, the Count and I—made a little tour to St. Hospice—a desolate, lonely, gray little monastery; a desolate, lonely, gray little church, with a desolate, lonely gray, little graveyard hanging to the bare brown cliffs, the purple ocean in the background, under a flaming evening sky. In the graveyard a single, wind-swept cypress; the sunken graves overgrown with weeds; here and there a crumbling wooden cross, and close to the ruined wall a lonely grave covered with narcissus.

We stood, gazed and said no word. Then I heard smothered sobs alongside of me. And I looked at my child and tears flowed down her cheeks. Frightened, I cried: "But, Judica!"

She begged with quivering lips: "Dearest, do not be angry with me."

"Why do you cry?"  
"I had to think—"

Since she hesitated I pressed her: "What did you think to make you weep so bitterly?"

"The thought came into my mind—"

"What? What?"

"If I should die I should wish to be buried here. Then you must come to me and throw narcissus over my grave."

"If you should die!"

And I saw the Count's face. It was white, distorted with terror. He looked at me. Silently we stood and looked into each other's eyes. Then I obtained the certainty. . . And he, too, perceived that I knew his secret.

I took my wife to the Queen. Her Majesty embraced and kissed Judica, would not permit her to leave her side during the visit. When she said farewell she said to me:

"Hold your happiness fast. She is a talisman."

The Queen uttered what I had known since the first day of my marriage; I have the talisman, possess the happiness of life, fully. And yet, and yet—

Often I ask myself if Judica is happy, so completely happy that she can see no end? Does it ever come to her in waking hours of night that her husband is her father's true son, the last of a dying race of Kings?

In that hour in the graveyard my child wished herself dead and hidden in the earth, not for her own sake, but for mine. Just as if she pressed that I—even now—so soon—I cannot write this.

## CHAPTER XXII.

In the Palace of Solitude, Spring.

We came unwillingly but—we came.

I had intended to send Judica to the Alpine farm for a short time, thinking it would satisfy her secret homesickness. But my child wished to remain with me. She implored me so fervently not to send her away that it startled me. Why does Judica not wish to see Miss Fritz again? Does she fear the wise, clear eyes? Why do I not wish to accompany her there? Do I fear those eyes?

My brother appears to be more lonely, more unhappy and more weary than ever, my sister-in-law more sorrowful, my mother more unapproachable, the spirits familiaris more spectral and—more necessary than ever.

The majesties are extremely friendly to me. The queen would like to know Judica, but may not on account of "possible consequences." The King spoke again of visiting us, but has not come. It is almost as if he felt shy. Certainly he wishes me well with all his heart and envies me with his whole soul as before. For the queen mother there is no such person as a Countess of Sarns. With the gift of the little golden cross that personage was abolished finally for my mother. And that is well.

Then there is another person at court. She does not interest me, but she exists and I cannot ignore her. Gebhardt's sister!

To show her that I do not fear her strength I said to her today:  
"Madame once did the favor to Solitude to wander there at times."

"Once, your Royal Highness."

She put a slight inflection on the first word. With all my politeness I continued:

"The King had the graciousness to close the palace park to the public from thoughtfulness for us. As you may know, I am married. It goes without saying that the park is at your service at all times. It