

Havoc

by

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Crowned Heads Meet

Bellamy, King's Spy, and Dorward, journalist, known to fame in every English-speaking country, stood before the double window of their spacious sitting-room, looking down upon the thoroughfare beneath. Both men were laboring under a bitter sense of failure. Bellamy's face was dark with forebodings; Dorward was irritated and nervous. Failure was a new thing to him - a thing which those behind the great journals which he represented understood less, even, than he. Bellamy loved his country, and fear was gnawing at his heart.

Below, the crowds which had been waiting patiently for many hours broke into a tumult of welcoming voices. Down their thickly-packed lines the volume of sound arose and grew, a faint murmur at first, swelling and growing to a thunderous roar. Myriads of hats were suddenly torn from the heads of the excited multitude, handkerchiefs waved from every window. It was a wonderful greeting, this.

"The Czar on his way to the railway station," Bellamy remarked.

The broad avenue was suddenly thronged with a mass of soldiery - guardsmen of the most famous of Austrian regiments, brilliant in their white uniforms, their flashing helmets. The small brougham with its great black horses was almost hidden within a ring of naked steel. Dorward, an American to the backbone and a bitter democrat, thrust out his under-lip.

"The Anointed of the Lord!" he muttered.

Far away from some other quarter came the same roar of voices, muffled yet insistent, charged with that faint, exciting timbre which seems always to live in the cry of the multitude.

"The Emperor," declared Bellamy. "He goes to the West station."

The commotion had passed. The crowds in the street below were on the move, melting away now with a muffled trampling of feet and a murmur of voices. The two men turned from their window back into the room. Dorward commenced to roll a cigarette with yellow-stained, nervous fingers, while Bellamy threw himself into an easy-chair with a gesture of depression.

"So it is over, this long-talked-of meeting," he said, half to himself, half to Dorward. "It is over, and Europe is left to wonder."

"They were together for scarcely more than an hour," Dorward murmured.

"Long enough," Bellamy answered. "That little room in the Palace, my friend, may yet become famous."

"If you and I could buy its secrets," Dorward remarked, finally shaping a cigarette and lighting it, "we should be big bidders, I think. I'd give fifty thousand dollars myself to be able to cable even a hundred words of their conversation."

"For the truth," Bellamy said, "the whole truth, there could be no price sufficient. We made our effort in different directions, both of us. With infinite pains I planted - I may tell you this now that the thing is over - seven spies in the Palace. They have been of as much use as rabbits. I don't believe that a single one of them got any further than the kitchens."

Dorward nodded gloomily.

"I guess they weren't taking any chances up there," he remarked. "There wasn't a secretary in the room. Carstairs was nearly thrown out, and he had a permit to enter the Palace. The great staircase was held with soldiers, and Dick swore that there were Maxims in the corridors."

Bellamy sighed.

"We shall hear the roar of bigger guns before we are many months older, Dorward," he declared.

The journalist glanced at his friend keenly. "You believe that?"

Bellamy shrugged his shoulders.

"Do you suppose that this meeting is for nothing?" he asked. "When Austria, Germany and Russia stand whispering in a corner, can't you believe it is across the North Sea that they point? Things have been shaping that way for years, and the time is almost ripe."

"You English are too nervous to live, nowadays," Dorward declared impatiently. "I'd just like to know what they said about America."

Bellamy smiled with faint but delicate irony.

"Without a doubt, the Prince will tell you," he said. "He can scarcely do more to show his regard for your country. He is giving you a special interview - you alone out of about two hundred journalists. Very likely he will give you an exact account of everything that transpired. first of all, he will assure you that this meeting has been brought about in the interests of peace. He will tell you that the welfare of your dear country is foremost in the thoughts of his master. He will assure you - "

"Say, you're jealous, my friend," Dorward interrupted calmly. "I wonder what you'd give me for my ten minutes alone with the Chancellor, eh?"

"If he told me the truth," Bellamy asserted, "I'd give my life for it. For the sort of stuff you're going to hear, I'd give nothing. Can't you realize that for yourself, Dorward? You know the man - false as Hell but with the tongue of a serpent. He will grasp your hand; he will declare himself glad to speak through you to the great Anglo-Saxon races - to

England and to his dear friends the Americans. He is only too pleased to have the opportunity of expressing himself candidly and openly. Peace is to be the watchword of the future. The white doves have hovered over the Palace. The rulers of the earth have met that the crash of arms may be stilled and that this terrible unrest which broods over Europe shall finally be broken up. They have pledged themselves hand in hand to work together for this object, - Russia, broken and humiliated, but with an immense army still available, whose only chance of holding her place among the nations is another and a successful war; Austria, on fire for the seaboard - Austria, to whom war would give the desire of her existence; Germany, with Bismarck's last but secret words written in letters of fire on the walls of her palaces, in the hearts of her rulers, in the brain of her great Emperor. Colonies! Expansion! Empire! Whose colonies, I wonder? Whose empire? Will he tell you that, my friend Dorward?"

The journalist shrugged his shoulders and glanced at the clock.

"I guess he'll tell me what he chooses and I shall print it," he answered indifferently. "It's all part of the game, of course. I am not exactly chicken enough to expect the truth. All the same, my message will come from the lips of the Chancellor immediately after this wonderful meeting."

"He makes use of you," Bellamy declared, "to throw dust into our eyes and yours."

"Even so," Dorward admitted, "I don't care so long as I get the copy. It's good-bye, I suppose?"

Bellamy nodded.

"I shall go on to Berlin, perhaps, to-morrow," he said. "I can do no more good here. And you?"

"After I've sent my cable I'm off to Belgrade for a week, at any rate," Dorward answered. "I hear the women are forming rifle clubs all through Servia."

Bellamy smiled thoughtfully.

"I know one who'll want a place among the leaders," he murmured.

"Mademoiselle Idiale, I suppose?"

Bellamy assented.

"It's a queer position hers, if you like," he said. "All Vienna raves about her. They throng the Opera House every night to hear her sing, and they pay her the biggest salary which has ever been known here. Three parts of it she sends to Belgrade to the Chief of the Committee for National Defence. The jewels that are sent her anonymously go to the same place, all to buy arms to fight these people who worship her. I tell you, Dorward," he added, rising to his feet and walking to the window, "the patriotism of these people is something we colder races scarcely understand. Perhaps it is because we have never

dwelt under the shadow of a conqueror. If ever Austria is given a free hand, it will be no mere war upon which she enters, - it will be a carnage, an extermination!"

Dorward looked once more at the clock and rose slowly to his feet.

"Well," he said, "I mustn't keep His Excellency waiting. Good-bye, and cheer up, Bellamy! Your old country isn't going to turn up her heels yet."

Out he went - long, lank, uncouth, with yellow-stained fingers and hatchet-shaped, gray face - a strange figure but yet a power. Bellamy remained. For a while he seemed doubtful how to pass the time. He stood in front of the window, watching the dispersal of the crowds and the marching by of a regiment of soldiers, whose movements he followed with critical interest, for he, too, had been in the service. He had still a military bearing, - tall, and with complexion inclined to be dusky, a small black moustache, dark eyes, a silent mouth, - a man of many reserves. Even his intimates knew little of him. Nevertheless, his was the reticence which befitted well his profession.

After a time he sat down and wrote some letters. He had just finished when there came a sharp tap at the door. Before he could open his lips some one had entered. He heard the soft swirl of draperies and turned sharply round, then sprang to his feet and held out both his hands. There was expression in his face now - as much as he ever suffered to appear there.

"Louise!" he exclaimed. "What good fortune!"

She held his fingers for a moment in a manner which betokened a more than common intimacy. Then she threw herself into an easy-chair and raised her thick veil. Bellamy looked at her for a moment in sorrowful silence. There were violet lines underneath her beautiful eyes, her cheeks were destitute of any color. There was an abandonment of grief about her attitude which moved him. She sat as one broken-spirited, in whom the power of resistance was dead.

"It is over, then," she said softly, "this meeting. The word has been spoken."

He came and stood by her side.

"As yet," he reminded her, "we do not know what that word may be."

She shook her head mournfully.

"Who can doubt?" she exclaimed. "For myself, I feel it in the air! I can see it in the faces of the people who throng the city! I can hear it in the peals of those awful bells! You know nothing? You have heard nothing?"

Bellamy shook his head.

"I did all that was humanly possible," he said, dropping his voice. "An Englishman in Vienna to-day has very little opportunity. I filled the Palace with spies, but they hadn't a

dog's chance. There wasn't even a secretary present. The Czar, the two Emperors and the Chancellor, - not another soul was in the room."

"If only Von Behrling had been taken!" she exclaimed. "He was there in reserve, I know, as stenographer. I have but to lift my hand and it is enough. I would have had the truth from him, whatever it cost me."

Bellamy looked at her thoughtfully. It was not for nothing that the Press of every European nation had called her the most beautiful woman in the world. He frowned slightly at her last words, for he loved her.

"Von Behrling was not even allowed to cross the threshold," he said sharply.

She moved her head and looked up at him. She was leaning a little forward now, her chin resting upon her hands. Something about the lines of her long, supple body suggested to him the savage animal crouching for a spring. She was quiet, but her bosom was heaving, and he could guess at the passion within. With purpose he spoke to set it loose.

"You sing to-night?" he asked.

"Before God, no!" she answered, the anger blazing out of her eyes, shaking in her voice. "I sing no more in this accursed city!"

"There will be a revolution," Bellamy remarked. "I see that the whole city is placarded with notices. It is to be a gala night at the Opera. The royal party is to be present."

Her body seemed to quiver like a tree shaken by the wind.

"What do I care - I - I - for their gala night! If I were like Samson, if I could pull down the pillars of their Opera House and bury them all in its ruins, I would do it!"

He took her hand and smoothed it in his.

"Dear Louise, it is useless, this. You do everything that can be done for your country."

Her eyes were streaming and her fingers sought his.

"My friend David," she said, "you do not understand. None of you English yet can understand what it is to crouch in the shadow of this black fear, to feel a tyrant's hand come creeping out, to know that your life-blood and the life-blood of all your people must be shed, and shed in vain. To rob a nation of their liberty, ah! it is worse, this, than murder, - a worse crime than his who stains the soul of a poor innocent girl! It is a sin against nature herself!"

She was sobbing now, and she clutched his hands passionately.

"Forgive me," she murmured, "I am overwrought. I have borne up against this thing so long. I can do no more good here. I come to tell you that I go away till the time comes. I go to your London. They want me to sing for them there. I shall do it."

"You will break your engagement?"

She laughed at him scornfully.

"I am Idiale," she declared. "I keep no engagement if I do not choose. I will sing no more to this people whom I hate. My friend David, I have suffered enough. Their applause I loathe - their covetous eyes as they watch me move about the stage - oh, I could strike them all dead! They come to me, these young Austrian noblemen, as though I were already one of a conquered race. I keep their diamonds but I destroy their messages. Their jewels go to my chorus girls or to arm my people. But no one of them has had a kind word from me save where there has been something to be gained. Even Von Behrling I have fooled with promises. No Austrian shall ever touch my lips - I have sworn it!"

Bellamy nodded.

"Yes," he assented, "they call you cold here in the capital! Even in the Palace - "

She held out her hand.

"It is finished!" she declared. "I sing no more. I have sent word to the Opera House. I came here to be in hiding for a while. They will search for me everywhere. To-night or to-morrow I leave for England."

Bellamy stood thoughtfully silent.

"I am not sure that you are wise," he said. "You take it too much for granted that the end has come."

"And do you not yourself believe it?" she demanded. He hesitated.

"As yet there is no proof," he reminded her.

"Proof!"

She sat upright in her chair. Her hands thrust him from her, her bosom heaved, a spot of color flared in her cheeks.

"Proof!" she cried. "What do you suppose, then, that these wolves have plotted for? What else do you suppose could be Austria's share of the feast? Couldn't you hear our fate in the thunder of their voices when that miserable monarch rode back to his captivity? We are doomed - betrayed! You remember the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, a blood-stained page of history for all time. The world would tell you that we have outlived the age of such barbarous doings. It is not true. My friend David, it is not true. It is a more terrible thing, this which is coming. Body and soul we are to perish."

He came over to her side once more and laid his hand soothingly on hers. It was heart-rending to witness the agony of the woman he loved.

"Dear Louise," he said, "after all, this is profitless. There may yet be compromises."

She suffered her hand to remain in his, but the bitterness did not pass out of her face or tone.

"Compromises!" she repeated. "Do you believe, then, that we are like those ancient races who felt the presence of a conqueror because their hosts were scattered in battle, and who suffered themselves passively to be led into captivity? My country can be conquered in one way, and one way only, - not until her sons, ay, and her daughters too, have perished, can these people rule. They will come to an empty and a stricken country - a country red with blood, desolate, with blackened houses and empty cities. The horror of it! Think, my friend David, the horror of it!"

Bellamy threw his head back with a sudden gesture of impatience.

"You take too much for granted," he declared. "England, at any rate, is not yet a conquered race. And there is France - Italy, too, if she is wise, will never suffer this thing from her ancient enemy."

"It is the might of the world which threatens," she murmured. "Your country may defend herself, but here she is powerless. Already it has been proved. Last year you declared yourself our friend - you and even Russia. Of what avail was it? Word came from Berlin and you were powerless."

Then tragedy broke into the room, tragedy in the shape of a man demented. For fifteen years Bellamy had known Arthur Dorward, but this man was surely a stranger! He was hatless, dishevelled, wild. A dull streak of color had mounted almost to his forehead, his eyes were on fire.

"Bellamy!" he cried. "Bellamy!"

Words failed him suddenly. He leaned against the table, breathless, panting heavily.

"For God's sake, man," Bellamy began, -

"Alone!" Dorward interrupted. "I must see you alone! I have news!"

Mademoiselle Idiale rose. She touched Bellamy on the shoulder.

"You will come to me, or telephone," she whispered. "So?"

Bellamy opened the door and she passed out, with a farewell pressure of his fingers. Then he closed it firmly and came back.

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