

MY NOISY BOY.

LAST YEAR.
I hear him out upon the porch.
His feet like mallets falling.
I hear him now behind the house,
Like drunken Sioux he's squalling.

I hear him in the kitchen now,
He's crawled upon the table;
To bear away from that bad boy,
I do not think I'm able.

He's plumping now toward my room;
I'll have to bar the door.
Or else my writing for to-day,
Of course, I must give o'er.

THIS YEAR.
I cannot hear, upon the porch,
The clatter of his feet;
I cannot hear his shouts of joy
Or laughter flowing sweet.

I cannot hear him in the hall,
The long I strive to hear;
What would I give, my friends, to have
Those noisy footsteps near!

Oh could I now unbar the door!
Oh, wouldn't be joy,
And inspiration to my pen
To greet my noisy boy!
—James N. Johnson, in *Yankee Brass*.



CHAPTER VI.—CONTINUED.

The dwelling of his friend, as Alonzo soon found, was in no way suggestive of being habited by a king's petted idol. Sobriety and simplicity prevailed everywhere, yet the cloister-like somberness never became too heavy, and now and then it revealed bursts of refreshing brilliance in a fall of rare tapestry or a stretch of blazoned windows. While the two friends tarried late that evening in the groined dining-room with its tall wax candles (having been left to their cigars, coffee and Burgundy by a servant of perfect training) they talked of many things. But chief among these topics the recent troubles of Alonzo stood forth. He told all which had passed between himself and Kathleen, finally adding:

"I don't altogether approve my own conduct now that I look back upon it."

"Approve it!" exclaimed Eric. "My dear boy, you are delicious. Why, it's just as if Caligula should declare to-day that he thought he had behaved a trifle impolitely yesterday."

"Really, Eric, I was not prepared."

"To be called cruel? Of course you were not. You expected to have me agree with you that you've been a martyr."

"I have been—to that horrible Mrs. Kennard."

"But by your own showing you quite defeated her. Kathleen was willing to defy her authority."

"Willing—yes."

"And you wanted the poor girl to prostrate herself before you in an ecstasy of submission. Of course you did. All losers, in like circumstances, do. Don't bite your lips and glare at me, dear Lonz. It shows in you a new spirit of rebellion for which I am totally unprepared. Always before this you have recognized my right to scold you when you deserved it."

"But you've never before scolded me unjustly, Eric. Let us talk, however, of something else. How is it that you, so sapient in the ways of lovers, have found no wife among all these charming ladies of Saltravia?"

"I marry a Saltravia lady!" broke from Eric, while he nearly spilled the glass of Chambourcier that he was lifting to his lips. "You might as well talk of my marrying some celestial creature who had lately arrived here from the planet Mars."

"What do you mean? I thought they adored you."

"Some of them detest me, my dear Lonz."

"Ah! Jealousy of the king?"

"Partly. But there's another cogent reason. Many of them look upon me as a hideous vandal."

"A vandal—you?"

"Yes—and it's so odd when one thinks of it. A vandal of culture! I swooped down on their dear valley and shattered (at Clarimond's command) its immemorial ugliness. Talk of the romance of the past! Adobe huts are scarcely dimmer than were some of their ancestral lodgments. Oh, yes, I've been to them, as it were, a very barbarian of civilization."

"But this was the king's tyranny, not yours."

"They imagine that I have put all these atrocious refinements into Clarimond's head. They realize that he is that anomalous and unprecedented person, a nineteenth century king; but they blame me, at the same time, for aggravating his fallacies."

"Then they think it is a fallacy to believe in surrounding oneself with beauty?"

"They prefer to surround themselves with memories. And they had many. Saltravia, you know, is ridiculously old. After all, it was a very stern demolition. I probably tore up hearthstones that were eight or nine centuries old. I was quite pitiless."

"Pitiless, as Caligula?"

"Ah, Lonz, you're angry at me!"

"No."

"Well, well, persevere in your grudge and you'll make me apologize." Here Eric looked with melancholy at his half consumed cigar. "An apology, you know, is the murder of a prejudice. And I'm so fond of my prejudices! They're my cherished children. I spend half my time in training them to live thrifty, reputable lives. Besides, we're not to begin our bachelor days together by even the semblance of a quarrel."

Alonzo started. "Are we to live here together, you and I?" he asked.

"Not unless you desire it."

"Oh, Eric!" And Alonzo's eyes filled with tears. "In this lovely castle!"

"A castle pour vous, my friend."

"But—but Eric. It's too infernally sweet of you."

"Infernally sweet is just what I want to be called. It reminds me of the fine steel art. It makes me think of Le-

sante de Lile's poetry. Bandesire (as that wonderful sayer of happy things, Oscar Wilde, not long ago) declared, when he dropped into Saltravia and spent a few days in the palace with Clarimond) is chiefly great as a poet for having discovered the beauty in ugliness. Nothing except that is left us now, in this unacademic age. The moment that one is classical nowadays he is denounced as commonplace."

But Alonzo was not listening. If his wounded life needed any balsamic touch it was just these tidings that here in this lovely valley, in this choice abode, he should secure a lasting home with the friend of his heart.

"It is too kind, too generous of you, Eric," he at length found voice to say: "And when I make my trips here and there about the continent you have decided that I am always to return to—yourself?"

"Unless you are very bored. Then you will be frank and tell me, and then we shall certainly quarrel." Instant I become conscious that I have bored anybody my egotism will leap forth like a tiger. It's a crime of which no one has yet had the audacity to accuse me. I keep a jeweled eastern dairly ready to plunge into any such offender; for when he commits his offense I wish my crime as an assassin to possess at least the saving grace of picturesqueness."

"Oh, Eric, how good you are, how good you are!"

"Crime," continued Eric, pouring himself another glass of Burgundy, "was never so disreputably prosaic as now. That reminds me, dear Lonz. I shall speak to the king to-morrow on this particular subject. I shall ask him if he will not kindly punish any new act of assassination at which the weapons used have been of an inferior and vulgar sort, with something prettily sixteenth century in the way of torture previous to the actual infliction of death."

"I am back with you again in Paris," said Alonzo, "while listening like this to all your serious absurdities. But are you sure that if I don't take the place of any Saltravian bride I shall not stand in the way of one with a different nationality. You tell me that the hotels should be redecorated and made attractive to a wholly new order of guests."

"And Clarimond has changed all that. He opens his arms to Americans. And you? Don't you open yours to anyone, feminine American in particular?"

Eric answered at first with a shrug.

"My dear boy, I've been so horribly busy. Besides—"

"Ah, there's a besides?"

"Oh, a very commonplace one. If you recall, I staid on in Paris for a good while after you left." His voice fell, and for instant there were tears in it. "Some day I'll tell you just what happened. Only, don't ask me until I offer to tell you, Lonz; and that may be never." He suddenly tossed his large, virile head, and gave his yellow beard a quick, nervous pull. In another moment he was the old radiant trifler, with not a hint of that hidden sorrow which it occurred to his hearer that he might possibly never learn. "Frankly, as I've now made up my mind, I could never marry an American woman unless she were a mute."

"Eric, what do you mean?"

"The voice of the American woman, my dear Lonz, is a horror!"

Alonzo laughed. "Why except the American man?"

"I don't. But one doesn't marry the American man."

"True. One doesn't. But I've known not a few American girls whose voices—"

"Of course you have. So have I. Oh, yes, those exceptions are vocally enchanting. But the ordinary girl of my own country always reminds me, when she is charming, of a splendid full blown thistle. There are few lovelier flowers than the thistle when seen in perfection. It has unique perfume, and a symmetry that repays the closest observation. But try to pluck it and you are sure to recoil."

"Bah," replied Alonzo, laughing; "it's the same affair with a moss-rose."

Eric frowned with a great gloom.

"Lonz, you have done the most scandalous injury. I can pardon the man who smites me on the cheek or who robs me from the person. But for him who wantonly spoils one of my smiles I can only cherish a Borgia's hatred."

Then they both broke into a laugh, their eyes meeting in amical joyance under the wax lights that beamed on their fruits and wine. "I won't admit your hatred to be quite Borgia," urged Alonzo, "for I am sure this velvet Burghundy hasn't been poisoned."

"You poison it with your own sarcasm," returned Eric. Then, after a slight pause: "There will be a late moon-to-night. Shall we watch it for a minute from the terrace?"

They were presently standing together on the stone walk outside, feeling their temples fanned by a breeze that seemed to blow straight from the ruddy moonrise at which they gazed. The moon herself moved through a Lair of stagnant ebon cloud, edging it with spectral fire; but her light flooded the hollow of a great gorge in the mountain just below her, and stole from one of my precious bits of antique tapestry, coif on head and hawk on wrist. I shall continue to act just as if she had never annoyed me by her curious worm-eaten prejudices and I shall write her regularly, once a month, letters full of the most dutiful filial sentiments."

This resolve Clarimond faithfully carried out. The princess, meanwhile, though she had retreated, had not given up her battle. She was secretly agitated by a dread that her son would make some terrible democratic marriage; for he had already shocked her by asserting that he thought morganatic unions revolting and even criminal, and there was no written law in his little realm against a sovereign marrying whomsoever he chose.

Alonzo started. "Are we to live here together, you and I?" he asked.

"Not unless you desire it."

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doors. Suddenly the crackings of whips were heard, and three or four vehicles that might have been coaches of state rolled into momentary distinctness, and then were swallowed again by the gloom.

"She has crossed the frontier once more, after numberless threats," mated Eric. "Intolerable woman, to come at such a time as this! But so like her—so like her! It has all been pre-meditated, just to cause talk and to give trouble. Hark! they are cheering her."

Alonzo listened, and heard a volume of sound by no means deafening.

"Is it not absurd?" pursued Eric.

"It's like an opera bouffe with grand chorus of Saltravian citizens you know, about two dozen strong. And what's absurd still, she's horribly unpopular here; they quite detest her."

"Of whom, pray, are you speaking?" asked Alonzo, with evident interest.

"Of the princess of Brindisi, mother of the king, and the most insolent and arrogant woman in Europe."

CHAPTER VII.

It was indeed true that King Clarimond had abruptly received tidings which told him his mother had just crossed the Saltravian frontier. Between the princess and himself relations of a most frosty character had existed for several years. Few people, however, remained long on good terms with the princess. Her disposition was now merely overbearing; it brimmed with all the worst bigotries of the dark ages, and to say of her that she believed in the "divine rights of kings" would have been mildly to express her mental savagery. The course of her son and only child, Clarimond, had almost maddened her since his accession to the throne. She had detested his father, her first husband, the Archduke Conrad, and in Clarimond she saw the paternal traits accentuated, made more hideous, more nauseating. Conrad had presumed in her presence to be like a loathsome republican doctrinaire, and his early death had seemed to her like a heavenly vengeance for such audacity. Marrying soon afterward an old Italian prince of great wealth and extreme conservatism, she again became a widow when it even vaguely entered her head that the son whom she had left with his tutors and guardians in Saltravia stood the remotest chance of ever being king. The princess adored Italy, and shrank from the cares of motherhood. Besides were not Conrad's people taking charge of the boy and his enormous fortune? But, suddenly, when the sick old king lost his heir by a lightning stroke of disease, and when only two other lives could be counted on between himself and the succession, Hildegarde, princess of Brindisi, began to feel her spirit dilate with a haughty hope. For those two other heirs, had they not been sickly from their cradles, and was not one of them a fragile girl with a pulmonary ill of stubborn menace?

The girl died within a year after her brother, and the old king, who deeply loved her, became almost an imbecile through this double bereavement. Then tidings were brought the princess in Naples that her son might soon inherit the rule of Saltravia, as both the reigning monarch and his last left child were at the point of death. It was now that she hurried to her own child, whom she had seen only at intervals, and in a bored, perfunctory way, during the past decade.

But Clarimond, taking the reins of government at an age when his wrists were quite sinewy enough to hold them, had no sympathy with his mother's dictates and desires. To the princess his views, his tendencies, his avowals, were a mingled amazement and disgust.

"I am covered with remorse and shame," she would say to her intimates, "that this rebel against all the most sacred customs and precedents of royalty should actually be my son! He will bring Saltravia to the verge of ruin; he will infuriate the emperor; he will compromise himself past remedy and plunge me into untold embarrassments."

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of ceremony and punctilio which it would be certain to engender.

Now, at last, after many false alarms, a telegram had abruptly come to him stating that she had reached a small town about three miles distant, and there awaited his presence. It was there a little after nightfall. The king, who was just settling himself at dinner, gave a despairing sigh. There seemed to him the most studied kind of mischievous in this entire proceeding. But of course her entrance into the kingdom, after so long an absence, must be greeted with due and prompt honors. As for honors military, these, at such an hour, were next to impossible. A cortège of royal coaches and a fairly copious escort the annoyed Clarimond soon caused to be prepared. But as a consequence of what she chose to consider his mortifying rudeness, the princess was driven to the palace in one of her most supercilious furies.

At first, during the homeward drive, she would scarcely speak to her son. Beside her sat a beautiful young girl of a very pronounced blonde type named Bianca d'Este, allied to the illustrious race who bear that name. The princess had recently induced this young lady to become her chief companion, and with what mirth it was only too plain. In one of her recent letters to Clarimond she had openly written:

"I have added to my household the most charming of girls, Bianca d'Este. In lineage she is your equal, for her blood is not merely royal, but very ancient as well. I should love to see her seated at your side on the throne of Saltravia; and it is high time you married her. I have added to my household the most charming of girls, Bianca d'Este. In lineage she is your equal, for her blood is not merely royal, but very ancient as well. I should love to see her seated at your side on the throne of Saltravia; and it is high time you married her. I have added to my household the most charming of girls, Bianca d'Este. In lineage she is your equal, for her blood is not merely royal, but very ancient as well. I should love to see her seated at your side on the throne of Saltravia; and it is high time you married her. I have added to my household the most charming of girls, Bianca d'Este. In lineage she is your equal, for her blood is not merely royal, but very ancient as well. I should love to see her seated at your side on the throne of Saltravia; and it is high time you married her. I have added to my household the most charming of girls, Bianca d'Este. In lineage she is your equal, for her blood is not merely royal, but very ancient as well. I should love to see her seated at your side on the throne of Saltravia; and it is high time you married her. I have added to my household the most charming of girls, Bianca d'Este. In lineage she is your equal, for her blood is not merely royal, but very