mad spirit of a vengeance such as mine car not be trifled with.' And with this he turned away.

"Pauly" said the gun-maker, turning t his body, after the men had gone away, "nat a word of this to my mother. Be

CHAPTER III.

That night Ruric Nevel had strange fancies while waking, and strange dreams while sleeping. Long and deeply did he ponder upon the strange business which had called Count Conrad to his shop, and in no way, under no light, could he get any reason from it. Why he, a youth who had never spoken with the proud Duke, save once on common business, and who was so far down in the social scale, should have been thus called upon to give a virtual consent to the bestowal of Rosalind Valdai's hand, was beyond his ken. He was but a poor artisan -she, a wealthy heiress and a scion of nobility-and she was under the legal guardianship of the Duke, whose word, so far as she was concerned, was law. And again-Conard Damonoff was a count, and reputed to be wealthy. To be sure, he was somewhat dissolute, but then a majority of his compeers were the same. Now, if this Count loved the lady Rosalind, and had asked for her hand, and the Duke was willing he should have it, why had this extraordinary proposal been sent to the poor gun-

Ruric asked this question of himself a hundred times. He would begin and lay down all the premises in his mind, and then he would try to make the deduction; but no reasonable one could he arrive at. One thought clung about him like a dim specter at night, which hope would make an angel, and which fear would paint a demon. Could it be possible that Rosalind had told her love for him, and that the Duke would pay some deference to it? He tried to think so. Hope whispered that it might

In the hall he threw on his heavy pelisse and having reached the nearest hostelry he took a horse and sledge and started off for the Kremlin, within which the Duke resid-

Within one of the sumptuously furnished apartments of the palace of the Duke of Tula, sat Rosalind Valdai. She was a beautiful girl, molded in perfect form, with the full flush of health and vigor, and possessing a face of peculiar sweetness and intelligence. She was only nineteen years of age, and she had been ten years an orphan. Her hair was of a golden hue, and the sunlight loved to dwell amid the clustering ourls. Her eyes, which were of a deep, liquid blue, sparkled brightly when she was happy; and when she smiled the lovely dimples of her cheeks held the smile even after it had faded from her lips. There was nothing of the aristocrat in her look-nothing proud, nothing haughty, but gentleness and love were the true elements of her soul, and she could only be happy when she knew that she was truly loved. She liked respect, but she spurned that respect which only aims at outward show, while the heart may be reeking with vilest sensualism.

Rosalind sat there, in the apartment which was hers for her own private use, and she was sad and thoughtful. One fair hand supported her pure brow, while with the other she twisted the ends of the silken sash that confined her heavy robe. Thus she sat when the door of her apartment was opened, and a young girl entered. The new comer was a small, fair creature, bright and quick, with that raven hair, which bespeak the child of Moslem blood. Her name was Zenobie, and she was now about sixteen years of age. Rosalind's father had picked her up on the battlefield from which the Turks had fled, and being unable to find any claimant he had brought her home, then almost an infant. And now she was Rosalind's attendant and companion. She loved her kind and gentle mistress, and would have laid down life itself in her

"How now, Zenobie?" asked Rosalind, as she noticed the girl hesitate.

"There is a gentleman below who would see you," the girl replied. "Tell him I can not see him," said Rose

lind, trembling. "But this is Ruric Nevel, my mistress."

"Ruric !" uttered the fair maiden, starting up, while the rich blood mounted to her brow and temples. "Oh, I am glad he has come. My prayers are surely answered. Lead him hither, Zenobie."

The girl departed, and ere long afterwards Ruric entered the apartment. He walked quickly to where Rosalind had arisen to her feet, and taking one of her hands in both his own he pressed it to his lips. He had had a well-formed speech upon his lips when he entered the roam. but 'twas gone now. He could only gaze into the levely face before him and murmur the name that sounded so sweetly to his ears. But the emotions of his soul became calm at length, and then he spoke with more freedom.

"Lady," he said, after he had taken a seat, "you will pardon me for this visit when you know its cause. And you will pardon me, too, if I speak plainly what I have to speak."

"Surely, sir-"

"Oh-call me Ruric. Let us at least not forget the friendship of childhood." "Then I am not a lady," said Rosalind.

"No, Rosalind."

"Ah, Ruric."

"As we were in childhood," whispered the youth.

"In all but years," returned Rosalind, in the same low tone.

"And I may wear the same image in my heart ?" "I cannot cast it from mine if I would."

"The image of childhood, dear Rosalind?" "Aye-save that it has grown to manhood, dear Ruric."

What more could he ask for love? He had not aimed at this confession so soon. But he put it not from him now. He gazed a moment into the fair maiden's kindling eye, and as he saw the love-lit tear gathering there and the happy smile working its way about the rosy lips, and away in the

joyous dimples, he opened his arms and clasped the fondly loved one to his bosom. 'Oh, I am not deceived in this," he murmured. "Speak, dearest one."

"I can not forget the love of the happy times agone," the noble girl replied gazi g up through her happy tears. "Oh, how many and many an hour have I prayed to God that those days might return, and that the one true heart of earth I loved might be mine once more. Ruric, why should I hide the truth, or why set it aside? To me thou art all in all. I have no one else to love, and none to love me else, save the noble girl who brought to hither. I can tell you no more."

Happy Ruric! Happy at that momentforgetting all else but the love that gleamed out upon him then, he clasped the cherished bject ardently to his besom.

But the moments flew on, and at length his mind came to the subject of his visit. "Rosalind," he said, holding one of her fair hands in his grasp, "you know the

Count Conrad Damonoff? "Aye," returned the maiden, with a shudder. "He is here very often, aud he has forced himself upon my companion hip when, if he had sense, he must have knonw I liked it not."

"He is a suitor for your hand, is he

"He was: but he is not now." "Not now?" repeated Rurie, with sur prise. "What mean you?"

"Why-simply that he has asked the Duke for my hand, and that he was answer-

ed in the negative." "Did you hear the Duke answer him so?" "No; but so the Duke assured me he had done. But what mean you?"

"I will tell you. Yesterday the Count came to my dwelling, accompanied by Stephen Urzen. He had a paper drawn up by the Duke's own hand, in which I was made to say-or rather, by which the writer said—that he disclaimed all pretensions to your hand, and that he wished not to marry you—that he freely gave you up, meaning to seek within the sphere of his own social circle some companion when he wished. And this I was asked to sign."

"By the Count?" "Yes-by the Duke's orders." "Oh-it cannot be," uttered the fair girl.

"And he further assured me that the Duke had requested him to obtain my signature thereto, so that he might receive your hand without impediment."

"So that the Count might receive my

"But the Duke assured me only vesterday that I should be troubled nomore with the Count. May there not be some mistake? "There can be no mistake on my part. The instrument was in the Duke's own

"But you did not sign it." "Ask me if I took my own life-if I made ourse for all I loved."

"It is strange," the maiden murmured, yet," she added, looking up into her companion's face, "I do not think the Duke would be treacherous?"

"He may be," answered Ruric. "He knows how lightly our noble emperor holds empty titles, and perhaps he fears if this matter came to the imperial ear, and you should claim the right to marry with whom. you pleased, Peter would grant your prayer. Hence he wished to get my claim set aside so that he may have a clearer field in which to move. Do you know how the Duke's affairs stand at present ?"

Rosalind thought awhile ere she answerd; and then, while a startled expression came to her face she said :

"Ruric. I do remember now that between the Duke and young Damonoff there is some matter of dispute. There is some question

"Ah." uttered the youth earnestly.

"How is that?" "Why-as near as I can understand it. there was a dispute between the Duke and the elder Damonoff concerning the own rship of Drotzen, the estate on the Don, in Kaluga; and since the father's death Conrad has maintained his family claim. You

sisters, and this estate belonged to them." "And now," suggested Ruric, " may not the Duke mean to compromise this matter by giving your hand to the Count, and taking Drotzen in exchange?"

know the Duke and the old Count married

"Oh, I cannot think so," the maiden returned earnestly. "The Duke would not do that. He is kind to me, I am sure. He loves me as though I were his own child. I know he does, for in a thousand ways he has shown it. He is mindful of my comfort, and anticipates my every want. No, no : if he is deceiving any one he must be

deceiving the Count." Ruric started as a new suspicion flashed upon him. Had the Duke sent Damonoff upon that mission on purpose to get him into a quarrel. "By my soul," thought the youth to himself, "the Duke knows that I have taught the sword-play, and he knows that the Count would be no match

for me. So he thinks in this subtle manner to make me an instrument for ridding him of a plague." But the youth was careful not to let Rosalind know of this. He knew she would be unhappy if she knew that a duel was likely to come off between himself and the Count.

After some minutes of comparative silence Ruric touched upon a point which lay very near his heart.

"Rosalind," he said, taking both her hands in his own, "there is one point upon which we have never spoken; and I know you would have me speak plainly and candidly. You know my situation. My father and your father fought side by side, but my father fell, while yours returned to his home. For his eminent services your father received a title and a noble estate from the grateful Feodor, while my father was only forgotten. Hence our stations are now widely different. Yet I am not poor. No other man in the empire can compete with me in the manfacture of arms, and from my labor I derive a handsome income. You know it all. And now, if other ob-

stacles were removed, would you give me your hand, and become mine for life?"
"Aye, Rurio," the noble girl answered, "Aye, Ruric," the noble girl answered, with beaming eyes and a joyful expression of countenance. "Were you reduced to the lowest estate of poverty, so long as your generous, pure soul was free, I should only be the more anxious to lift you up. Oh,

only the truth of my husband's love."

"Bess you, dearest," Ruric murmured, clasping the fair being to his bosom. And for a long while Rosalind's head lay upon the shoulder of the man she so truly, fondly

That was not the time for bringing forward doubts and fears. Ruric had many questions in mind concerning the impedi-ments that stood in the way of their union, but he kept them to himself now. At length he arose to take his departure, and he simply said, as he drew the maiden to his side :

"You will not allow the Duke to give your hand away." "Never, Ruric."

"If he asks you for your hand to bestow upon any of his friends, you will tell him-"That my heart is not mine to give, and that my hand cannot go without it."

"Oh—bless you, Rosalind—bless you!

God keep and guard you ever." There was one warm, ardent pressure of lip to lip, and then Ruric Nevel turned

away, and was soon in the open court. Here he entered his sledge, and then drove to the barracks in the Khitagorod, where he inquired for Alaric Orsa, a lieutentant of the guard. The officer was quickly found, and as he met Ruric his salutation was warm and cordial. He was a young man, not over five-and-twenty, and one of the finest-looking soldiers in the guard.

"Alaric," said the gun-maker, after the first friendly salutations had passed, "I may have a meeting with Conrad, Count Damonoff. He has sought a quarrel-insulted me most grossly-aimed a blow at my head-and I knocked him down. You can judge as well as I what the result must

"Most surely he will challenge," cried the officer, excitedly.

"So I think," resumed Ruric, calmly. "And now, will you serve me in the event?" "With pleasure," "I may refer his messenger to you?"

"Yes-surely. And how shall I act? What will you do ?" "Knock him down again under the same provocation.

"I understand. You wish to retract nothing?" "No. Listen: I will tell you all since I

seek your aid." And thereupon Ruric related all that had occurred at the time of the Count's visit to

"Good!" uttered Alaric, as the gun. maker finished. "He must challenge you and then you'll punish him. He's too proud now. He can handle some of his lilytops who associate with him; and perhaps he thinks he can do the same when he comes out among the harder men. But never mind-I will be punctual and faith-

Ruric reached home just as his mother was placing the board for dinner. He often went away on business, and she thought not of asking him any questions.

CHAPTER IV.

In the afternoon Ruric retired to his shop, where he went to work upon a gun which had been ordered some days before. As yet he had said nothing to Paul concern. ing the affair of the day before since his return from the Kremlin. He asked him now, however, if anyone had called.

"Only the monk," returned Paul, without seeming to consider that there was anything very important in the visit.

"Do you mean the black monk-Valdimir?" asked the young man, starting. "Yes, my master. He called here about the middle of the forenoon. He wanted one of the small daggers with the pearl

haft." "And did you let him have one?" "Certainly. He paid me four ducate for it, and would have paid more had I been

willing to take it." "And did he make any conversation?" "Yes. He asked me why the Count Damonoff came here yesterday."

"Ha-How he did he know of their visit?" "He was waiting at the inn for a sledge when he overheard the Count and his com panion convers ng upon the subject." "And did he ask you any questions touch-

ing the particulars ?" "Yes-many."

"And how answered you? "I told him the whole story, from beginning to end. I found that he knew some thing of their purpose from what he accidently overheard, and rather than have him go away full of surmises, I told him all."

"Of the message, too?" "Yes, my master. I told him all that happened, from the showing of the paper which the Duke had drawn up, to the de-

parture of the angry man." "And what did the monk say?" Ruric asked very earnestly.

"Why-he said he knew the Count, and that he was a proud, reckless fellow, and worth but little to society. That was all. He did not seem to care much about it any. way; only he said he should have done just as you did, and that every law of justice would bear you out. He had more curiosity than interest, though I am sure all his sympathies are with you."

"Very well," returned Ruric. "It can matter little what the monk thinks about it, though I would rather have him know the truth if he must know anything, for I would not be misunderstood."

"He understands it all now, my master; and I trust you are not offended at the liberty I took in telling him."

Not at all, Paul-not at all." Here the conversation dropped, and the work was resumed in silence. It was past three o'clock when Ruric's mother came and informed him that a gentleman in the house would speak with him.

"Is it Stephen Urzen?" asked the youth. His mother said it was. Then bid him come out here."

Claudia retired and in a few moments more the gentleman made his appearance. "Ruric Nevel," he said, bowing very stiffly and haughtily, "I bring a message from the Count Damonoff. "Very well, sir," returned the gun-maker

proudly. "I am ready to receive it. Thereupon Urzen drew a sealed note from his pocket and handed it to Rurie, who took it and broke the seal. He opened it, and read as follows:

"RURIC NEVEL -An insult of the most ag-

my love knows only the heart whereon it is secured, and for my future of joy I ask only the truth of my husband's love."

gravating nature has for the time leveled all distinction of caste between us. Your blood alone can wash out the stain. I would blood alone can wash out the stain. I would not murder you outright, and in no other way but this can I reach you. My friend, the bearer of this, will make all arrangements. If you dare not meet me, say so, that all may know who is the coward.

> When Ruric had read the missive he erushed it in his hand, and gazed its bearer some moments in the face without speaking. "Will you answer?" asked Urzen. He spoke more softly than before, for he saw

something in the gun-maker's face he dared not provoke. "Are you acquainted with Alaric Orsa, a lieutenant of the guard ?"

"Yes, sir-I know him well." "Then let me refer you to him. He will make all necessary arrangement, and I shall hold myself bound by his plans. I trust that is satisfactory."

"Yes, sir." "Then you and I need have no more to

"Only on one point," said Urzen, with some little show of confusion. "You are the challenged party, and you will have the choice of weapons. The Count has not mentioned this—mind you he has not; but I, as his friend, deem it no more than right to speak of it-I trust you will choose a gentleman's weapon. In the use of the pistol, or the gun, he is not versed.'

"While you imagine I am," said Ruric with a contemptuous curl of the lip; for he knew that the man was lying. He could see by the fellow's very looks that Damonoff had commissioned him to broach this

"Of course you are," returned Urzen. "And the Count is most excellently versed in the use of the sword, is he not?"

"He is accounted a fair swordsman." "Aye-so I thought. But it matters not to me. The thought had not entered my mind before, save that I supposed swords would be the only weapons thought of. However, Orsa will settle it with you. I have given him no directions all, save to serve me as he thinks proper, and to act upon the understanding that if I have given offence to the Count, I would do the same again under provocation. You understand

"1 do, sir." returned Urzen, in a choking

"Then wait a moment, and I will give you a message to Orsa." Thus speaking Ruric went to his desk. and upon the bottom of the missive he had received from the Count he wrote :

"DEAR ALARIC-I send this to you by the

same hand that bore it to me, and you are

hereby empowered to act for me as you may deem proper. I shall be governed strictly by your arrangements. "RURIC." Having written this he showed it to Urzen, and asked him if he would bear it to the lieutenant. An affirmative reply was given, and then simply folding the note in the opposite way from the original fold, the

gun-maker superscribed it anew to the lieutenant, and handed it to his visitor. Urzen took it, and with a stiff bow, but without speaking, he turned and left the place That evening, about eight o'clock, a sledge drove up to Ruric's door, and Alaric Orsa entered the house. He called the youth

aside, and informed him that the arrangements had all been made. "Damonoff is in a hurry," he said, "and we have appointed the meeting at ten o'clock to-morrow forenoon. It will take place at the bend of the river just beyond the Viska

"And the weapons?" asked Ruric. "Swords," returned Orsa. "The Count will bring his own, and he gives you the privilege of selecting such a one as you

"I thank you, Alaric, for your kindness thus far, and you may rest assured that I shall be prompt.'

"Suppose I call here in the morning for you," suggested the visitor.

"I should be pleased to have you do so." "I will, then. I shall be along in good season with my sledge, and we will both reach the ground together."

Thus it was arranged, and then Orsa took When Ruric returned to his seat by the fireplace he noticed that his mother watched him narrowly, and with more than ordinary interest. He had once made up his mind that he would say nothing to his mother about the affair until it was over; but as the time was set, and the hour drew nigh, his mind wavered. When he was over where might he be! But he was cut short in his re-

flections by the voice of his mother. "Rurie," she said, and her voice trembled while she spoke, "you will pardon me for prying into your affairs, but I cannot hide from myself that something of more than usual moment is the matter with you. Why are these men calling to and fro? And why are you so thoughtful and moody? You know a mother's feelings-and you will pardon a

mother's anxiety." "Surely, my mother," the youth returned, gazing up for a moment, and then letting his eyes droop again. At length he resum. ed-"I had made up my mind to tell you all ere you spoke."

There was something deep and significant in Ruric's tone, and his mother quickly aught the spark.

"What is it?" she tremblingly uttered, moving her chair nearer to her child's side. "Listen," the young man said; and thereapon he detailed the circumstances attending the visit of the Count Damonoff to his shop. Then he told of his own visit to Rosslind, and its result; and then of the visit of

Stephen Urzen.
"And now, my mother," he added, without waiting for any reply, "you know it all. You see how I am situated. Remember, our nation has reached its present point by successful war. The soul of our nation is built upon military honor, and since our noble Emperor has opened the way of advancement of the lowest of his subjects who are brave and true, the coward is looked apon with disgust upon all hands. Yet, my mother, I would have you speak."

For some moments Claudia Nevel was si-

lent. But at length she said, while a tear

glistened in her eye:

"I have given one loved being up to my
country's good. Russie took my husband
from me, and I could ill afford to lose my son. Yet, rather than one stain should rest apon his name I would see him dead before me. Oh, Ruric, you know whether dis-honor would rest upon you were you to re-

fuse this challenge."
"I will speak, my dear mother," returned the youth in a tremulous tone, for his parent's kindness had moved him. "In my soul I should feel perfectly justified in re-fusing this meeting, for no principal of real honor is at stake. But were I to back out now from this. I should never meet another generous look in Moscow. Every one would point the finger of scorn towards me, and the word coward would always ring in my ears. It may be a false state of things—I feel that it really is so; but how can I help it? It is the curse of all great military epochs. Battle alone makes heroes. and so all must measure their honor by the force of their arms. The Count carries even now upon his brow the mark of my blow, and all will say he has a right to demand satisfaction though I know that he provoked the quarrel on purpose. I cannot refuse him on the ground of station, for he is above me in that. I must meet him."

"Then," said the mother, in low, calm tone, but with much effort, "you shall not feel that your mother thwart your design. If your own good judgment says, go-then go. If they bring your body to me in the stern grasp of death, I shall pray for the soul that has gone, and shall hope to meet you in the home of the redeemed. If you come back to me alive I shall thank God that you are spared; but alas! the joy will be clouded with the thought of blood upon your hands, and the knowledge that my joy is another's

grief." "No. no. my mother," cried Ruric, quickly and earnest y. "I will not have a fellow-being's blood on my hand if I can avoid it. Only to save my own life will I take his. He has done all this himself-all -all. The quarrel was his own, and the first blow was his. The challenge is his, and now is not the responsibility his also?" "It is my son, so far as he alone is concerned. If you have a responsibility it

has not the Emperor made some new law touching this practice of duelling?" "Yes-but only the challenger is responsible. The party challenged is held free from

must be to your own soul. But tell me-

blame in the eyes of the law." "Then I shall interpose no more objections," said the mother. She tried to speak hopefully, but she could not hide the fearful sadness of her heart. "Could fervent prayer avert the blow it should not fall; but I can only pray as one without power."

A long time after this was passed in silence. Both the mother and son seemed to have something upon their minds which they wished to say, but dared not. But the former at length overcame her reluctance. "Ruric, my son," she said, keeping back the tears that struggled for utterance in their silent speech, "is there any little word you leave ?-- any matter of moment-'

calmly by effort. I am yours, and all is yours. But I shall not fall." "Ah-be not too confident, my son. Let no such assurance lead you to forget your God. I have heard of this Count. It was he who slew Rutger; and Momjako, too, he slew in the duel. He is an expert swords-

"No, no," the boy answered, speaking

man, and surely means to kill you if he "I am aware of that, my mother. But do you not know that we are all prone to overlook our own powers when wondering upon the feats of others! I may be pardoned for assuring you that the only man who While in Spain I practised with some of the best swordsmen in the kingdom. But listen: I will send one word. For yourself I can tell you nothing which you do not know; but yet you may see Rosalind. If you do, tell her-but you know my soul.

You can tell her as you please. But I shall not fall." It was now late, and ere long Ruric kissed

his mother, and then retired to his bed. And the widow was left alone. With her eves she followed the retreating form of her beloved son, and when he was gone from her sight she bowed her head and sobbed aloud. When she reached her humble couch she knelt by the side thereof, and poured forth her pent-up soul to God. When her head had pressed the pillow she tried to hope-she tried to fasten one hope in her mind: but she looked only into the night. Not one ray of light reached her struggling soul. She opened her eyes of promise in vain-for she looked into gloom so utter that out of its depth loomed

only the blackness of Despair. Sleep on, Ruric. But ch, could'st thou know how thy fond mother's hear is racked

there'd be no sleep for thee ! On the following morning Ruric was up betimes and at the breakfast table not a word of the one all-absorbing theme was uttered. After the meal was finished the gunmaker went out to his shop and took down from one of the closets a long leathern case, in which were two swords, both of the same make and finish, only different in size. They were Toledo blades, and of most exquisite workmanship and finish. Rurie took out the heaviest one, which was a two-edged weapon with a cross-hilt of heavily gilded metal. He placed the point upon the floor and then with all his weight he bent the blade till the pommel touched the point. The lithe steel sprang back to its place with a clang, and the texture was not started. Then he struck the flat of the blade upon the anvil with great force. The ring was sharp and clear, and the weapon

remained unharmed. "By St. Michael, Paul, Moscow does not contain another blade like that. Damascus never saw a better."

Thus spoke the gun-maker to his boy as he balanced the beautiful weapon in his "I think you are right, my master," the

boy returned, who had beheld the trial of the blade with unbounded admiration. "But," he added, "could you not temper a blade like that ?" "Perhaps, if I had the steel. But I have it not. The steel of these two blades came

from India, and was originally in one weap-on—a penderous, two-handed affair, be-lenging to a Bengal chieftain. The metal possesses all the hardness of the finest razor, with the elasticity of the most subtle spring.

My old master at Toledo gave me these as a memento. Were I to mention the sum of money he was once offered for the largest one you would bardly credit it."

[To be continued.]

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