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## SPORT ROYAL

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Illustrated by S. C. Williams

HEIDELBERG seems rather a tourist-ridden, hackneyed sort of place to be the mother of adventures.

Nevertheless, it is there that my story begins. I had been travelling on the Continent, and came to Heidelberg to pay my duty to the Castle, and recruit in quiet after a spell of rather laborious idleness at Homburg and Baden. At first sight, I made up my mind that the place would bore me, and I came down to dinner at the hotel looking forward only to a bad dinner and an early bed. The room was so full that I could not get a table to myself, and, seeing one occupied only by a couple of gentlemanly looking men, I made for it, and took the third seat, facing one of the strangers, a short, fair young man, with a little flaxen mustache and a soldier-like air, and having the other who was older, dark and clean-shaven, on my left. The fourth seat was empty.

The two gentlemen returned my bow with well-bred negligence, and I started on my soup. As I finished it, I looked up and saw my companions interchanging glances. Catching my eye, they both looked away in an absent fashion, each the while taking out of his pocket a red silk handkerchief and laying it on the table by him. I turned away for a moment, then suddenly looked again and found their eyes on me, and I fancied that the next moment the eyes wandered from me to the handkerchiefs. I happened to be carrying a red handkerchief myself, and, thinking either that something was in the wind or perhaps that my friends were having a joke at my expense (though, as I said, they looked well-bred men), I took it out of my pocket and, laying it on the table, gazed calmly in front of me, my eyes naturally falling on the fair young man.

He nodded significantly to the older man, and held out his hand to me. I shook hands with him, and went through the same ceremony with the other.

"Ah!" said the young man, speaking in French, "you got her letter?"

I nodded.

"And you are willing?"

The first maxim for a would-be adventurer is always to say "yes" to questions. A "no" is fatal to further progress.

"Yes," I answered.

"It will be made worth your while, of course," he went on.

I thought I ought to resent this suggestion.

"Sir," I said, "you cannot possibly mean to suggest—"

The young man laughed pleasantly.

"My dear fellow," he said, "ladies have their own ways of paying debts. If you don't like it—I" and he shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh," I said, smiling, "I misunderstood you."

"It is, of course," said the old man, speaking for the first time, and in a loud whisper, "of vital

importance that His Royal Highness' name should not appear."

This really began to be mysterious and interesting. I nodded.

"That goes without saying," said the young man. "And you'll be ready?"

"Ready!" I said. "But when?"

"Didn't I tell you? Oh, six o'clock to-morrow morning."

"That's early hours."

"Well, you must, you know," he answered.

"And," added the old man, "the Countess hopes you'll come to breakfast afterward at ten."

"I'll be there, never fear," said I, "and it's very kind."



"Stop!" cried the Baron

"Bravo!" said the young man, clapping me on the shoulder (for we had risen from table). "You take it the right way."

As may be supposed, I was rather puzzled by this time, and decidedly vexed to find I should have to be up so early. Still, the mention of His Royal Highness and the Countess decided me to go on for the present; probably the real man—for, unless it were all a mad joke, there must be a real man—would appear in the course of the evening. I only hoped my new friends would, in their turn, take it in the right way when that happened.

"Have you a servant with you?" asked the young man, as we said good-night.

"No," said I, "I am quite alone."

"You are a paragon of prudence," he answered smiling. "Well, I'll call you early, and we'll slip out quietly."

Just as I was getting into bed, the waiter knocked at my door and gave me a note. It bore no address.

"Is it for me?" I asked.

"Yes, sir," he answered. "You are the gentleman who dined with Herr Vooght and M. Dumergue?"

I supposed I was, and opened the note.

"You are generous and forgiving, indeed," it said (and said it in English). "What reward will you claim? But do be careful. He is dangerous.—M."

"The devil!" I exclaimed.

The next morning I was aroused at five o'clock by my two friends.

"Good morning, Herr Vooght," said I, looking just between them.

"Good morning," answered the old man.

"Now, my dear fellow, come along. There's a cup of coffee down stairs," said the other, whom I took to be Dumergue.

After coffee, we got into a close carriage with a pair of horses, and drove two or three miles into the country; my companions said little. Dumergue twice asked in a joking way how I felt, and Vooght puzzled me very much by remarking:

"They are bringing all the necessaries; but I don't know what they will choose."

When this was said, Dumergue was humming a tune. He went on for five minutes, and then said, with a touch of scorn:

"My good Vooght, they know our friend's reputation. They will choose pistols."

I could not repress a start. No doubt it was stupid of me not to have caught the meaning of this early expedition before, but it really never struck me that our business might be a duel. However, so it seemed, and apparently I was one of the principals. Dumergue noticed my little start.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Do they know my name?" said I.

"My dear friend, could you expect the Baron to fight with an unknown man? The challenge had to be in your name."

I had clearly been the challenger. I was consumed with curiosity to know what the grievance was, and how the Countess was concerned in the matter.

"The Countess assured us," said Vooght, "that she had your authority."

"As fully as if I had been there," I answered, and Dumergue resumed his tune.

I was sincerely glad that the name of my original had been given, for his reputation for swordsmanship had evidently saved me from a hole in my skin. I was a fair hand with a pistol; but,