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# THE SCAPEGOATS

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ILLUSTRATED BY ARTHUR BECHER



PON the threshold of the Golden Pomegranate Monsieur Louis Quillan paused and gave the contented little laugh that had of late become habitual with him.

"We are *en fête* to-night, it appears. Has the king, then, by any chance dropped in to supper with us, Nelchen?"

Silently the girl bestowed a provisional pat upon one fold of the white tablecloth and regarded the result with critical approval. All being in blameless order, as any woman would, she shifted one of the candlesticks the width of a cobweb. The table was now garnished to the last resource of the Golden Pomegranate; the napery was snow, the glassware and the cutlery shone with a frosty glitter, and the great bowl of crimson roses afforded the exact splurge of vainglorious color and glow she had designed. Accordingly, being now at leisure, she now came toward Monsieur Quillan, lifting her lips to his precisely as a child might have done.

"Not the king, my Louis. None the less I am sure that monseigneur is a very great person. He arrived not two hours ago—" She told him how monseigneur had come in a coach, very splendid; even his lackeys were splendid: monseigneur would stay overnight and would to-morrow push on to Beauséant. He had talked with her—a kindly old gentleman, but so stately that she had been the tiniest thought afraid of him all the while. He must be some great nobleman, Nelchen considered—a marquis at the very least. Meantime Louis Quillan had drawn her to the window seat beneath the corridor, and sat holding one plump trifle of a hand, the while her speech fluttered birdlike from this topic to that, and he regarded Nelchen Thorn with

an abysmal content. God had been very good to him.

So he leaned back from her a little, laughing gently, and marked what a quaint and eager child it was. He rejoiced that she was beautiful, and triumphed still more to know that even if she had not been beautiful it would have made slight difference to him. The soul of Nelchen was enough. Yet, too, it was desirable that this soul be appropriately clad, that she should have, for instance, such big and lustrous eyes, plaintive eyes such as a hamadryad would conceivably possess, since they were beyond doubt the candid and appraising eyes of some woodland creature, and always seemed to find the world not precisely intimidating, perhaps, yet in the ultimate a very curious place where one trod gingerly. Still, she was a practical body, prone to laughter—as any person would be, in nature, whose mouth was all rotund and tiny scarlet curves. Why, it was to a dimple the mouth that Boucher bestowed on his sleek goddesses! Louis Quillan was at bottom sorry for poor Boucher painting away yonder at a noisy, garish Versailles, where he would never see that perfect mouth the artist had so often dreamed of. No, not in the sweet flesh at least; lips like those were both unknown and out of place at Versailles. . . .

"And he asked me, oh, so many questions about you, Louis—"

"About me?" said Louis Quillan blankly. He was all circumspection now.

"About my lover, you stupid person. Monseigneur assumed, somehow, that I would have a lover or two. You perceive that *he* is scarcely a stupid person." And Nelchen tossed her head, and not without a touch of the provocative.

Louis Quillan did what seemed advisable.





*Drawn by Arthur Becker.*

*"He regarded Nelben Thorn with abysmal content."*

"And furthermore, your stupidity is no excuse for rumpling my hair," said Nelchen presently.

"Then you should not pout," said Monsieur Quillan. "Sanity is entirely too much to require of any man when you pout. Besides, your eyes are so big and so bright they bewilder one. In common charity you ought to wear spectacles, Nelchen, in common charity toward mankind."

"Monseigneur, also, has wonderful eyes, Louis. They are like the stars—very brilliant and cool and incurious, yet always looking at you as though you were so insignificant that the mere fact of your existing at all was a trifle interesting."

"Like the stars!" Louis Quillan had flung back the shutter. It was a tranquil evening in September, with no moon as yet, but with a great multitude of lesser lights overhead. "Incurious like the stars! They do dwarf one, rather. Yet just now I protest to you I half believe *le bon Dieu* loves us so utterly that he has kindled all those pretty tapers solely for our diversion. He wishes us to be happy, Nelchen; and so He has given us the big, fruitful, sweet-smelling world to live in, and peace, and nimble bodies, and contented hearts, and love, and—why, in a word, He has given us one another. Oh, beyond doubt, He loves us, my Nelchen!"

For a long while the girl was silent. Presently she spoke, half hushed, as one in the presence of sanctity. "I am happy. For these three months I have been more happy than I had thought was permissible on earth. And yet, Louis, you tell me that those stars are worlds perhaps like ours—think of it, my dear, millions and millions of worlds like ours, and on each world perhaps a million of lovers like us! It is true that among them all no woman loves as I do, for that would be impossible. Yet think of it, *mon ami*, how inconsiderable a thing is the happiness of one man and of one woman in this immensity! Why, we are less than nothing, you and I! *Ohé*, I am afraid, hideously afraid, Louis—for we are such little folk, and the universe is so big. And always its storms go about it, and its lightnings thrust at us, and the waters of it are clutching at our feet, and its laws are immutable—oh, it is big and cruel, my dear, and we are adrift in it, we who are of such puny insignificance!"

Nelchen gave a tiny sob now, so that he again put forth his hand toward her.

"What a morbid child it is!" said Louis

Quillan. "I can assure you I have resided in the same universe just twice as long as you, and find that upon the whole this is an excellent world. There is, to be sure, an occasional tornado, or perhaps an earthquake, each with its incidental inconveniences; on the other hand there is every day an artistic sunset, as well as, I am credibly informed, a sunrise of which poets and energetic people are pleased to speak highly; while every year spring comes in like a cosmical upholsterer and refurbishes the entire place and makes us glad to live. Nay, I protest to you, this is an excellent world, my Nelchen! And likewise I protest to you, that in all its history there was never a luckier nor a happier man than I."

Nelchen considered.

"Well," she generously conceded, "perhaps, after all, the stars are more like diamonds."

Louis Quillan chuckled.

"And since when were you a connoisseur in diamonds, my dear?"

"Of course I have never *seen* any. I would like to, though; yes, Louis, what I would *really* like would be to have a bushful or so of diamonds, and to marry a duke—only the duke would have to be you, of course—and to go to court, and to have all the fine ladies very jealous of me, and for them to be very much in love with you, and for you not to care a *sou* for them, of course, and for us both to see the king." Nelchen paused, quite out of breath after this ambitious career in the imaginative.

"To see the king, indeed!" scoffed Louis Quillan. "Why, we would see only a very disreputable old rascal, if we did."

"Still," she pointed out, "I *would* like to see a king. Simply because I never have, you conceive."

"At times, Nelchen, you are positively feminine. Eve ate the apple for that identical reason. Yet what you say is odd, because—do you know?—I once had a friend who was by way of being a sort of king."

Nelchen gave a squeal of delight.

"And you never told me about him! I loathe you."

Louis Quillan did what seemed advisable.

"And furthermore, your loathsomeness is no excuse for rumpling my hair," said Nelchen presently.

"But there is so little to tell. His father had married the Grand Duke of Noumaria's daughter—over yonder between Silesia and





*Drawn by Arthur Hecher.*

*“‘See, my father,’ he said, ‘she was only a child.’”*

Badenburg, you may remember. And so last spring when the grand duke and the prince were both killed in that horrible fire, my friend quite unexpectedly became a king—oh, king of a mere celery patch, but still a sort of a king. Figure to yourself, Nelchen! they were going to make my poor friend marry the Elector of Badenburg's daughter—and Victoria von Uhm has perfection stamped upon her face in all its odious immaculacy—and devote the rest of his existence to heading processions and laying corner stones and signing proclamations and eating sauerkraut."

"But he could have worn such splendid uniforms!" said Nelchen. "And diamonds!"

"You mercenary wretch!" said he. Louis Quillan then did what seemed advisable; and presently he added: "In any event the horrified man ran away from Versailles."

"That was silly of him," said Nelchen Thorn. "And where did he run to?"

Louis Quillan considered.

"To Paradise," he at last decided. "And there he found a disengaged angel, who very imprudently lowered herself to the point of marrying him. And so he lived happily ever afterwards. And so till the day of his death he preached the doctrine that silliness is the supreme wisdom."

"And he regretted nothing?" Nelchen said, after a meditative while.

Louis Quillan began to laugh.

"Oh, yes! at times he profoundly regretted Victoria von Uhm."

Then Nelchen gave him a surprise, for the girl bent toward him and leaned one little hand on either shoulder.

"Diamonds are not all, are they, Louis?" she very gently breathed; and afterwards: "I thank you, dear, for telling me of what means much to you. I can always read between the lines, I think, because for a long while I have tried to know and care for everything that concerns you."

The man had risen to his feet.

"Nelchen——!"

"Hush!" said Nelchen Thorn. "Monseigneur is coming down to his supper."

And it was a person of conspicuous appearance, both by reason of his great height and leanness as well as his extreme age, who now descended the straight stairway leading from the corridor above. At court they would have told you that the Prince de Gâtinais was a trifle insane, but he troubled the court very little, since he had spent the last twenty years, with trivial intermissions, at

his château near Beaujolais, where, as rumor buzzed it, he had fitted out a laboratory and devoted his old age to the study of chemistry. "Between my flute and my retorts, my bees and my chocolate creams," he was wont to say, "I manage to console myself for the humiliating fact that even Death has forgotten my existence." For he had a child's appetite for sweets and was at this time well past eighty, though still quite as agile, in his own indolent fashion, as Antoine de Soyecourt had ever been, even when—a good half century ago—he had served, and with distinction, under Louis Quatorze.

To-night the Prince de Gâtinais was all in steel gray, of a metallic luster, with prodigiously fine and immaculate ruffles at his throat and wrists. You would have found something spectral in the tall, gaunt old man, for his periwig was heavily powdered, and his deep-wrinkled countenance an absolute white, save for the thin faintly bluish lips and the inklike glitter of his narrowing eyes, as he now regarded the man and woman who stood before him. Yet his face was not unkindly.

Louis Quillan had caught an audible breath at first sight of him. He did not speak, however, but merely waited, half defiant in attitude and with a tinge of sullenness.

"You have fattened," the Prince de Gâtinais said, at last. "I wish I could. It is incredible that a man who eats some five pounds of sugar daily should yet remain a skeleton." His voice was guttural to the extreme, and an odd slur ran through his speech, caused by the loss of his upper front teeth at Ramillies; yet the effect was singular rather than displeasing.

But Louis Quillan came of a stock not lightly abashed.

"I have fattened on a new diet, sir," he now said—"on happiness. But my faith! I am discourteous. Permit me, my father, to present Mademoiselle Nelchen Thorn, who has so far honored me as to consent to become my wife. Nelchen, this is my father, the Prince de Gâtinais."

"Oh—?" observed Nelchen, midway in her courtesy.

But the prince had taken her fingers and kissed them, quite as though they had been the finger tips of the all-powerful Pompadour at Versailles yonder.

"I salute the future Marquise de Soyecourt. You young people will in nature sup with me, then?"

"No, sir, for I am to wait upon the table,"



said Nelchen, "and father is at Sigéan overnight, having the mare shod, and there is only Léon, and, oh, thanks, monseigneur, but I had *much* rather wait on the table."

The prince waved his hand.

"My valet, mademoiselle, is at your disposal. Vanringham!" he called.

From his apartments above descended a floridly handsome man in black.

"Monseigneur——?"

"Go!" quickly said Louis de Soyecourt, while the prince spoke with his valet—"go, Nelchen, and make yourself even more beautiful if that be possible. He will never resist you, my dear—ah, no, that is out of nature."

"You will find more plates in the cupboard, Monsieur Vanringham," remarked Nelchen, as she obediently tripped up the stairway, toward her room in the right wing. "And the knives and forks are in the second drawer."

So Vanringham laid two covers in discreet silence; then bowed and withdrew by the side door that led to the kitchen. The prince had indolently seated himself beside the open fire, where he yawned and now looked up with a wintry smile.

"Well, Louis," said the Prince de Gâtinais, "so you have determined to defy me, eh?"

"I trust there is no question of defiance, sir," Louis de Soyecourt equably returned. "Yet I regret you should have been at pains to follow me, since I still claim the privilege of living my life in my own fashion."

"You claim a right that never existed, my son. It is not demanded of any man that he should be happy, whereas it is manifestly necessary that a gentleman should obey his God, his king, and his own conscience without swerving. If he also find time for happiness, well and good; otherwise, he must be unhappy. But above all he must intrepidly play out his allotted part in God's scheme of things, and with due humbleness recognize that the happiness or the unhappiness of any man alive is a trivial consideration as against the fulfillment of this scheme."

"You and Nelchen are much at one there," the marquis lightly replied; "yet for my part I fancy that Providence is not particularly interested in who happens to be the next Grand Duke of Noumaria."

The prince struck one withered hand upon the arm of his chair.

"You dare to jest! Louis, your levity is incorrigible. France is beaten, discredited among nations, naked to her enemies. She

lies here between England and Prussia as in a vise. God summons you, a Frenchman, to reign in Noumaria, and in addition affords you a chance to marry that weathercock of Badenbug's daughter. Ah, He never spoke more clearly, Louis. And you would reply with a shallow jest! Why, Badenbug and Noumaria just bridge that awkward space between France and Austria; your accession would confirm the empress—I tell you they have it in her own hand yonder at Versailles! I tell you it is all planned that France and Austria will combine, Louis! Think of it—our France on her feet again, mistress of Europe, and all of it your doing, Louis—Ah, my boy, my boy! you cannot refuse!"

Youth had ebbed back into the man as he ran on in a high disordered voice, pleading, clutching at his son with that strange new eagerness which had now possessed the Prince de Gâtinais. He was remembering the France that he had known; not the ignoble, tawdry France of the moment, misruled by women, confessors, and valets, but the France of his dead Sun King, and it seemed that the memory had brought back with it the youth of Antoine de Soyecourt for that instant. Just for a heart beat as his son stood irresolute the old man towered erect, his cheeks pink and every muscle tense. Then Louis de Soyecourt shook his head.

"Frankly, sir, I would not give up Nelchen though all Europe depended upon it. I am a coward, perhaps; but I have my chance of happiness, and I mean to take it. So Cousin Otto is welcome to the duchy. I infinitely prefer Nelchen."

"Otto! a general in the Prussian army, Frederick's property, Frederick's idolater!" The old man fell from an apex of horror to his former pleading tones. "But then it is not necessary you give up Nelchen. Ah, no, a certain latitude is permissible in these matters, you understand. She could be made a countess, a marchioness—anything you choose to demand, Louis. And you could marry Victoria von Uhm, just the same——"

"Were you any other man, sir," said Louis de Soyecourt, "I would of course knock you down. As it is, I can only ask you to respect my helplessness."

The Prince de Gâtinais sank back into his chair. He seemed incredibly old now.

"You are right," he mumbled, "yes, you are right, Louis. I have talked with her. With her that would be impossible. I ask your pardon, my son."

The younger man had touched him upon the shoulder.

"My father—" he began.

"Yes, I am your father," said the other dully, "and it is that which puzzles me. You are my own son, and yet you prefer your happiness to the welfare of France, to the very preservation of France. Never in six centuries has there been a de Soyecourt to do that. God and the king we served—six centuries—and you choose an innkeeper's daughter—" His voice trailed and slurred like that of one speaking in his sleep, for he was an old man, and by now his little flare of excitement had quite burned out, and weariness clung about his senses like a drug. "I will go back to Beaujolais—to my retorts and my bees—and forget there was never a de Soyecourt in six centuries, save my own son——"

You would have said the man was dying.

"My father!" Louis de Soyecourt cried, and shook him gently. "Ah, I dare say, you are right in theory. But in practice I cannot give her up. Surely, you understand—why, they tell me there was never a more ardent lover than you. They tell me—and you would actually have me relinquish Nelchen, even after you have seen her! Yet remember, sir, I love her much as you loved my mother—that princess you stole from the very heart of her court. Ah, I have heard tales of you, you perceive. And Nelchen means as much to me, remember—she means youth, and happiness, and a tiny space of laughter before I, too, am worms' meat; and a proper appreciation of God's love for us all; and everything a man's mind clutches at when he wakens from some forgotten dream that leaves him weeping with sheer adoration of its beauty. No, never was there a kinder father than you, sir. You have spoiled me most atrociously, I concede, and after so many years you cannot in decency whip about like this and deny me my very life. Why, my father, it is Louis who is pleading with you, Louis pleading for the life of his soul. And you have never denied me anything, sir! See, now, how I presume upon your weakness. I am actually bullying you into submission—bullying you through your love for me. Eh, we love greatly, we de Soyecourts, and give all for love. Your own life attests that, sir. Now, then, let us recognize the fact that we are de Soyecourts, you and I. Ah, my father——"

Thus he babbled on, for the sudden languor of the prince had alarmed him not a little,

and Louis de Soyecourt, to do him justice, loved his father with a heartier intensity than falls to the portion of most parents. To arouse the semi-conscious man was his one thought. And now he got his reward, for the Prince de Gâtinais opened his keen old eyes, a trifle dazedly, and drew a deep breath that shook the great frail body through and through.

"Let us recognize that we are de Soyecourts, you and I," he repeated, in a new voice; and then: "After all, I cannot drag you to Noumaria by the scruff of your neck like a truant schoolboy. Let us, then, recognize the fact that we are de Soyecourts, you and I."

"Heh, in that event," said the marquis, "we must both fall upon our knees forthwith. For look, my father!"

Nelchen Thorn was midway in her descent of the stairs. She wore her simple best. All white it was, and vaporous in texture, and yet the plump shoulders it displayed were not put to shame. Rather must April clouds and the snows of December retire abashed, as scandalously inefficient similes, the marquis meditated; and as she paused, starry-eyed and a thought afraid, even the Prince de Gâtinais could not find it in his heart greatly to blame his son.

"I begin to suspect," said the prince, "that I am Jacob of old, and you a very young cherub venturing out of Paradise through motives of curiosity. Eh, my dear, let us see what entertainment we can afford you during your brief stay upon earth." He took her hand and led her to the table.

Vanringham served. Never was anyone more blithe than the Prince de Gâtinais. The latest gossip of Versailles was delivered, though with discreet emendations; he laughed gayly; and he ate with an appetite. There was a blight among the cattle hereabout? How deplorable! Witchcraft, beyond doubt. And Louis passed as a piano tuner?—because there were no pianos in Manneville. Excellent! he had always given Louis credit for a surpassing cleverness; now it was demonstrated. In fine, the Prince de Gâtinais became so jovial that Nelchen was quite at ease, and Louis de Soyecourt vaguely alarmed. He knew his father, and that he should yield thus facilely was to him incredible. Still, his father had seen Nelchen, had talked with Nelchen . . . the eyes of the fearful man devoured her.

Now the prince rose to his feet.

"Fresh glasses, Vanringham," he ordered;



and then: "I give you a toast. Through desire of love and happiness you young people have stolen a march on me. Eh, I am not Sganarelle of the comedy! therefore, I cheerfully drink to love and happiness. I consider that Louis is not in the right, but I know that he is wise, my daughter, as concerns his soul's health, in clinging to you rather than to a tinsel crown. Of Fate I have demanded—like Sganarelle of the comedy—prosaic equity and common sense; of Fate he has in turn demanded happiness: and Fate will at her leisure decide between us. Meantime, I drink to love and happiness, since I, too, remember. I know better than to argue with Louis, you observe, my Nelchen; we de Soyecourts are not lightly severed from any notion we have taken up. So I drink to love and happiness! to the perdurable supplication of youth!" They drank.

"To your love, my son," said the Prince de Gâtinais, "to the true love of a de Soyecourt." And afterwards he laughingly drank: "To your happiness, my daughter, to your eternal happiness."

Nelchen sipped. The two men stood with drained glasses. Now on a sudden the Prince de Gâtinais groaned and clutched his breast.

"I was ever a glutton," he said hoarsely. "I should have been more moderate—I am faint——"

"Salts are the best thing in the world," said Nelchen, with fine readiness. She was halfway up the stairs. "A moment, monseigneur—a moment, and I fetch salts." Nelchen Thorn had disappeared into her room.

The prince sat drumming upon the table with his long white fingers. He had waved the marquis and Vanringham aside.

"A passing weakness—I am not adamant," he had said half peevishly.

"Then I prescribe another glass of this really excellent wine," laughed Louis de Soyecourt. At heart he was not merry, and his own unreasoning nervousness irritated him, for it seemed to him, quite irrationally, that the atmosphere of the cheery room was, without forewarning, become tense and expectant, appalled to much the hush that precedes the bursting of a thunderstorm. And accordingly he now laughed beyond temperance.

"I prescribe another glass, sir," said he. Eh, that is the true panacea for faintness—for every ill. Come, we will drink to the most beautiful woman in Poictesme—nay, I am

too modest—to the most beautiful woman in France, in Europe, in the whole universe! *Feriam sidera*, my father! and confound all mealy-mouthed reticence, for you have both seen her. Confess, am I not a lucky man? Come, Vanringham, too, shall drink. No glasses?—take Nelchen's, then. Come, you lucky rascal, you shall drink to the bride from the bride's own half-emptied glass. To the most beautiful woman— Why, what the devil——!"

Vanringham had blurted out an odd un-human sound and had gone ashen. His extended hand shook and jerked, as in irresolution, and presently struck the proffered glass from de Soyecourt's grasp. You heard the tiny crash very audible in the stillness, and afterwards the irregular drumming of the old prince's finger tips against the table. He had not raised his head, had not moved.

Presently Louis de Soyecourt came to him, without speaking, and placed one hand under his father's chin, and lifted his countenance like a dead weight toward his own. Thus the two men regarded one another. Their silence was rather horrible.

"It was not in vain that I dabbled with chemistry all these years," at last said the guttural voice of the Prince de Gâtinais. "Yes, the child is dead by this. Let us recognize the fact that we are de Soyecourts, you and I."

But his son had flung aside the passive wrinkled face, and then with a hard, straining gesture wiped the fingers that had touched it upon the sleeve of his left arm. He turned to the stairway. His right hand grasped the newel post and gripped it so firmly that he seemed less to surmount than by one despairing effort to lift his whole body to the first step. He ascended slowly, with a queer shamble, and disappeared into Nelchen's room.

"What next, monseigneur?" said Vanringham, half whispering.

"Why, next," said the Prince de Gâtinais, "I imagine that he will kill us both. Meantime, as Louis says, the wine is really excellent. So you may refill my glass, my man."

He was selecting from the comfit dish, with wariness, the bonbon of the most conspicuous allure, when his son returned into the apartment. Very tenderly Louis de Soyecourt laid his burden upon a settle and then drew the old man toward it.

"See, my father," he said, "she was only a

child. Never in her brief life had she wronged anyone, never, I believe, had she known an unkind thought. Always she laughed, you understand—oh, my father, is it not pitiable that Nelchen will never laugh any more?"

"I entreat of God to have mercy upon her soul," said the old Prince de Gâtinais. "I entreat of God that the soul of her murderer may dwell eternally in the nethermost pit of hell."

"I cry amen," Louis de Soyecourt said.

The prince turned toward him.

"And will you kill me now, Louis?"

"I cannot," said the other. "Is it not an excellent jest, that I should be your son and still be human? Yet as for your instrument, your cunning butler—" He wheeled. "Come, Vanringham!" he barked. "We are unarmed. Come, my man, for I mean to kill you with my naked hands."

"Vanringham!" The prince leaped forward. "Behind me, Vanringham!" As the valet ran to him the old Prince de Gâtinais caught a knife from the table and buried it to the handle in Vanringham's breast. The man coughed, choked, clutched his assassin by either shoulder; thus he stood with a bewildered face, shuddering visibly, every muscle twitching. Suddenly he shrieked, with an odd gurgling noise, and his grip relaxed, and Francis Vanringham seemed to crumple among his garments, so that he shrank rather than fell to the floor. His hands stretched forward, his fingers spreading and for a moment writhing in agony, and then he lay quite still.

"You progress, my father," said Louis de Soyecourt quietly. "And what new infamy may I now look for?"

"A valet!" said the prince. "You would have fought with him—a valet! He topped you by six inches. And the man was desperate. Your life was in danger. And your life is valuable."

"I have earlier perceived, my father, that you prize human life very highly."

The Prince de Gâtinais struck sharply upon the table.

"I prize the welfare of France. To secure this it is necessary that you and no other reign in Noumaria. But for that girl you would have yielded just now. So to the welfare of France I sacrifice the knave at my feet, the child yonder, and my own soul. Let us remember that we are de Soyecourts, you and I."

"Rather I see in you," began the younger man, "a fiend. I see in you an ignobler Judas——"

"And I in you the savior of France. Let us remember that we are de Soyecourts, you and I. And for six centuries our first duty has ever been the preservation of France. Your heart is broken, my son, for you loved this girl as I loved your mother, and now you can nevermore quite believe in the love God bears for us all; and my soul is damned irretrievably: but we are de Soyecourts, you and I, and accordingly we rejoice and drink to France, to the true love of a de Soyecourt! to France preserved! to France mighty once more among her peers!"

Louis de Soyecourt stood quite motionless. Only his eyes roved toward his father, then to the body that had been Nelchen's. He yelped like a wolf as he caught up his glass.

"You have conquered. What else have I to live for now? To France, you devil!"

"To France, my son!" The glasses clinked. "To the true love of a de Soyecourt!" And immediately the Prince de Gâtinais fell at his son's feet.

"You will go into Noumaria?"

"What does that matter now?" the other wearily said. "Yes, I suppose so. Get up, you devil!"

But the Prince de Gâtinais had caught at either ankle. His hands were ice.

"Then we preserve France, you and I. We are both damned, I think, but it is worth while, Louis. In hell we may remember that it was well worth while. I have slain your very soul, my dear son, but France is saved." The old man fell prone. "Forgive me, my son! For see, I yield you what reparation I may. See, Louis—I was chemist enough for two. Wine of my own vintage I have tasted, of the brave vintage that now revives all France. And I swear to you the child did not suffer, Louis, not—not much. See, Louis! she did not suffer." A convulsion tore at and shook the aged body, and twitched away the mouth that had smiled so resolutely.

Louis de Soyecourt knelt and caught up the wrinkled face between both hands.

"My father—!" he cried. Afterwards he kissed the dead lips tenderly.

"Teach me how to live, dear," said Louis de Soyecourt, "for I begin to understand—in part, I understand, my father." And for that moment even Nelchen Thorn was forgotten.