

CAVALIER OF CHANCE

EO 7960

THE SYDNEY HORLER NOVELS

The House in Greek Street
The Formula
Harlequin of Death
Tiger Standish
The Man Who Shook the Earth
High Stakes
My Lady Dangerous
Gentleman in Waiting
Adventure Calling
Prince of Plunder
Princess After Dark
The Spy
Cavalier of Chance
Checkmate
Danger's Bright Eyes
Horror's Head
Vivanti Returns
The Evil Chateau
The Screaming Skull
Lady of the Night
The Secret Service Man
The Mystery of No. 1
False Face
The House of Secrets
Vivanti
The Black Heart
In the Dark
Miss Mystery
The Curse of Doone
Chipstead of the Lone Hand

Heart Cut Diamond
Huntress of Death
The Worst Man in the World
The Mystery Mission
The Murder Mask
Wolves of the Night
S.O.S.
Death at Court Lady
The Menace
Secret Agent
Lord of Terror
Tiger Standish Comes Back
Life's a Game
Goal
The House of Wingate
Midnight Love
Romeo and Julia
McPhee
A Legend of the League
Song of the Scrum
Beauty and the Policeman
(Stories)
HORLERIANA
Excitement :
An Impudent Autobiography
Strictly Personal :
A Writing Man's Diary
Writing for Money :
The Blunt Truth about Modern
Authorship



CAVALIER OF CHANCE

SYDNEY HORLER



HODDER AND STOUGHTON

To
DORIS FARR
MY HAPPY ACCOMPLICE AT THE TYPEWRITER

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*The characters in this book are entirely imaginary,
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BOOM !

Big Ben struck one o'clock. The woman occupying the other end of the seat awoke with a start.

" Oh, Gawd ! " she whined, " I thought as 'ow I was in stir again, s'elp me if I didn't ! " She waited, pulling her filthy rags closer round her, for the unwilling listener to reply. As he kept silent, she continued in a tone of contempt : "'Igh an' mighty, ain't you ? That's one thing about stir : it brings you all down to one common thermoneter. No airs *there !* "

Still there was silence, and the woman, disgusted, turned her back and composed herself again to such sleep as was possible.

Lifting his head from his hands, Jimmy Hanray rose. He could not rest. For one thing, he was shivering cold, and for another, he was too hungry. A third reason why he preferred to walk rather than stay on the seat, was the unwelcome proximity of the hag who had slouched up half an hour before, and, after peering inquisitively at him, had settled herself in the other corner. By every sign she was a hardened outcast ; a human pariah ; and he had not been long enough on the border-line of actual want to become reconciled to such a companion.

It was dry, but bitterly cold. A fine night for the derelicts of London, amongst whom he must now number himself. As he started to walk quickly

towards Westminster, he could see them crouched beneath the Embankment wall, huddled on the seats, lurking in the arches of Hungerford Bridge—miserable wretches to whom Death, he should have imagined a few days before, would have come as a welcome friend.

This was his second night without a bed, and within that short, if tragic, space of time he had learned that even to the most miserable of God's creatures the desire to live clings with astonishing tenacity. These men and women might be riddled with disease, they might be starved, cold and footsore, and yet not one of the few with whom he had been forced to exchange words, had been utterly despairing. One man, after confessing to having been a few years before a master in a famous public school, had put it this way: "Even here on the Embankment, nothing is so bad but what it might not be worse. And who knows what may not turn up? A millionaire with a craze for social amelioration and helping the submerged may take it into his head to drive along here one night and give every one of us a helping hand. Yes, my young friend, such a miracle has been known to happen. But just one word of warning: if ever you want to rise clear of the morass, keep away from drink. Whisky has brought me to this. Yes . . ." and, muttering to himself, the speaker had settled himself to try to forget in the blessed oblivion of sleep.

This conversation had taken place the night before. Hanray had hoped that it would be the last time he would be forced to spend the sleeping hours in this tragic thoroughfare of the damned. But his quest for work—any kind of work—had proved as hopeless the following day as during the last four cursed weeks. Those to whom he had applied for a job (he had come down to pleading to be allowed to do any kind of manual

labour) had looked askance and had mostly turned away without asking him a single question. The swine !

Now he could see the Houses of Parliament and the Abbey rising majestically into the heavens ; there on the right was Scotland Yard. He cursed it all—Parliament, because the men who sat there making their damnably silly laws continued to ignore the like of him, and Scotland Yard because if he dared to commit a crime they would not take into consideration the fact that he was almost sick through want of food, and that he was shuddering now with the cold because his overcoat had been pawned.

“ An officer and a gentleman.” That, in the grimly ironic phrase, had been what he was styled only a few years back. And now—God ! what was he ? A case, if his sense of desolation increased, for suicide—nothing more. The murmur of the dark river, flowing so close, sounded like siren-music : it seemed to whisper an invitation to him.

Not that—not yet, at any rate. What was it that sodden ex-schoolmaster had said the night before ? One never knew what would happen. One night a millionaire might come driving along the Embankment—

“ I say.”

Someone had spoken—called him. He turned quickly. There at the kerb, not half a dozen yards away, was a man leaning from the window of a long, lean monster of a motor-car. Yet he had not heard the thing approach. But one glance at the engine, and he was able to appreciate the reason : this car was a Rolls.

He could scarcely realise that the man had addressed *him*. What could he want except to inquire the

way ; and the chauffeur surely ought to know his London ?

" I say," called the man again ; " I want to speak to you."

Although the voice had a snap of authority, it was not unkindly. The wild supposition came to Hanray that the miracle which the soused ex-schoolmaster had referred to the previous evening, had happened : this must be a millionaire interested in social problems.

He stepped forward. Yet his eagerness, curiously enough, was not due to thought of self. If his supposition was correct, such a man ought not to be kept waiting.

" Were you addressing me ? " He should have added " sir," he supposed, but somehow calling any man " sir," apart from the King or the Prince of Wales—and he had met both while serving in France—savoured too much of a cringing servility. The word was difficult to utter, and he left it alone.

" Yes. You won't think me too inquisitive if I ask you why you are not wearing an overcoat on a bitter night like this ? "

Hanray gave a ghost of a smile.

" That's easily enough answered," he said ; " I am not wearing an overcoat for the simple, but adequate, reason that I no longer possess one. My overcoat was pawned in a side-street off Holborn three days ago."

He made to move on. The glimpse he had of the luxurious interior of the car—the roomy seats upholstered in biscuit-coloured Bedford cord, the cigarette box, the rack for the newspapers, above all, the flowers in the slim silver vase—was too vivid a reminder of the gulf which stretched between him and the man to whom he was speaking. There could be no bridge between them—and, the devil ! he didn't intend

there should be; he wasn't going to have this millionaire's pity!

The man was speaking again.

"Very presumptuous of me to have stopped the car, perhaps, old chap—but, dash it, I want to help you."

"Help me!" So unexpected were the words that he repeated them stupidly, like a child endeavouring to master a new and difficult lesson. Then: "Why?" he asked; "who are you?"

"My name scarcely matters, and if I tell it you, as I'm quite willing to do, it won't convey anything. But it's Dorman."

"And do you make a practice, Mr. Dorman, of doing the decent to every down-and-out? If so, I should think you were kept pretty busy."

The clean-shaven face of the prospective benefactor wrinkled itself into a smile.

"Well, no," the other confessed, "and I don't mind admitting it wanted some courage to speak to you a moment ago. But the thought came as I drove along the Embankment, after coming from a dinner at the Savoy, how terribly unfair life was to a great many people. Here was I, for instance, in a £3,000 motor-car, warm and snug, with a good dinner inside me and excellent clothes on my back—and there, only a few yards away, were creatures who couldn't even afford a few coppers to get a night's shelter in some common lodging-house. The injustice of it compelled me to speak to you."

"Why me?" The man spoke earnestly and appeared deeply sincere, but Hanray's experience of life during the past evil years—ever since, in fact, he had taken off his uniform as an infantry officer and become a civilian—had taught him that the surface of things is too often cruelly deceptive. Mr. Dorman possibly

was all he was trying to picture himself to be, but many years' incessant fight with the world, and waging a losing battle all the time, leaves little room for belief in human nature. Hope, faith and charity are crushed out. Hanray had found that the Cheeryble brothers might read admirably in fiction, but they did not belong to real life.

The man in the car nodded.

"That is a fair, as well as a sensible question. I selected you because you looked, in spite of your—excuse me—shabby clothes, a gentleman."

"I was supposed to be one once," was the comment, spoken with an unbelievable bitterness; "'an officer and a gentleman'—good God!"

"You held the King's commission?" asked the man, using the stilted phrase.

"What's the sense of talking about that?" was the almost snarled answer. "Who cares a tinker's damn about ex-officers now? That was finished with years ago. They've done their job—some well, some badly—but the War's dead and forgotten. So let them all go to hell! Isn't that the correct sentiment, Mr. Dorman?"

The man shook his head.

"If you will come home with me, I will endeavour to demonstrate that you are wrong. Come, my young friend, show me that you retain sufficient faith in those of a different generation from yourself by getting into the car." He rapped on the window, and the chauffeur, leaving his seat instantly, held open the door as though to admit to the presence of his employer an honoured guest.

What followed, took on the shifting unreality of a dream. Hanray remembered standing like a fool, feeling dazed and bewildered, before being helped

into a seat by the side of the benevolent Mr. Dorman. The latter had regarded him intently—what alert, searching eyes the man had—and then everything went blank.

He wasn't sure, but he believed he must have fainted.

But then, he hadn't eaten for two whole days.

CHAPTER II

THE MYSTERIOUS
MR. DORMAN

THIS was the kind of room he remembered indistinctly as entering when a boy. He would walk into it quietly, afraid lest he should disturb his father, who would be working at just such another library table as the one against which his left arm was now resting.

It was a room in which art as well as money had been employed—a room, in short, of a tasteful as well as a wealthy owner. The carpet on the floor, the curtains at the windows, the books in the long, high shelves—how it all reminded him of what might have been!

"My dear fellow," said someone at his side, "you quite frightened me, going off into a faint like that."

Hanray contrived a wry smile.

"Stupid, wasn't it?" he replied, and his voice was so faint he scarcely recognised it. "That's the worst of having a stomach—and no food to put into it."

"I have ordered some sandwiches and coffee—it will be here immediately. Now, not another word until you have eaten."

When the food came, the derelict had to bite his lip: he could have cried. Sobs did rise in his throat, but he forced them back.

"It's—it's—damned decent of you," he said rather hysterically.

The sandwiches were good, but the coffee was better. How it warmed and comforted! There was at least a quart, and he drank the lot.

"Quite a hog, aren't I?" he said apologetically; "do you mind my saying that that's the first decent food I've had for over a fortnight?"

His host, obviously distressed, murmured a commonplace.

"You must forget all that," he said, "for it is finished. I am going to help you—it's a promise. You smoke?"

"I used to."

Mr. Dorman pushed a cigarette-box over to him.

This was a night of wonders. That first taste of decent tobacco! It had an almost intoxicating effect. He filled his lungs, expelling the fragrant smoke slowly.

"As I say, I intend to help you, Mr. ——" the speaker stopped.

"My name is Hanray—James Hanray."

"I intend to help you, Hanray," repeated the other; "but finish your cigarette before you trouble to answer the few questions it will be necessary for me to ask you."

Hanray was glad of the chance to study his host. He saw a man of perhaps sixty years of age—well dressed, having an air of culture which the lines of the clean-shaven face bore out. A man who had not been born socially high, perhaps, but who had worked his way up until now he was obviously able to command all his desires. That was his first impression.

His second was not so reassuring. No one, he thought, who was quite normal could possibly possess

such penetratingly vivid eyes. They seemed able to bore into his very soul, as though their owner was anxious to read every thought that he had.

No, he did not like those eyes. They were not only abnormal, but they possessed another uncanny quality to which he could not put a description. Whilst the rest of the man inspired confidence, these eyes bred, if not actual distrust, certainly apprehension. If he had not gone through the mill during the past few months, his sense of character-reading would not have become so acutely developed, perhaps, but as it was, he decided that there was something rather wrong about this Mr. Dorman. The man had a suggestion of the mysterious. There was that unaccountable collapse of his in the car. The man had pushed something in front of his face. He could not recall exactly what it was, but it might have been a handkerchief. Immediately after that he had lost consciousness—for the second time in his life; the first was when he got hit by that jagged piece of shrapnel outside Loos. Rather rummy, going off like that, now he came to think about it. Of course, he was practically starving at the time. Still, to flop out so quickly . . .

"I'm ready now, Mr. Dorman, to answer any questions," he said. It would be interesting to see what was in the other's mind

His host pressed the finger-tips of each hand together and looked over the top of the triangle thus made. He might have been an old-fashioned medical consultant.

"I should like to hear your history—very briefly," he replied. "Believe me, it is with no sense of idle curiosity that I ask it. I have a definite reason."

What harm could there be in giving the fellow a few facts? Perhaps, after all, he was doing the old boy

an injustice ; the staring eyes might be an affliction from which he suffered.

" I am thirty-four. So far as I can tell, my only assets are in the order named : (1) good health (when I can eat) and (2) a decent education. The latter, however, has proved a liability."

" You went to a public school ? "

" Repington. I left to join the Army. That was in September, 1914. My father, whom I had always been given to understand was a wealthy man, died in the following year. The war ruined his business—he was an importer—and the death of my mother killed him."

" My poor boy," murmured the listener.

" Not a very original story, I am afraid," continued Hanray ; " after the war, it became even less so. I should have entered my father's firm, I suppose, if he had lived and been able to pull the business together, but, as I have said, the war killed it. That left me high and dry."

" Your friends ? You must have had some."

" Oh, yes, I had friends—I suppose I can call them friends. They were acquaintances, at least ; men I had met in France. Some were even at school with me—but, listen, Mr. Dorman ; at least half of the men I knew were as badly off as I was myself, and as for the other half—well, I could neither sponge nor ask favours."

The other nodded.

" I appreciate your point of view, Mr. Hanray, even if I consider it somewhat quixotic. You tried to obtain some employment, of course ? "

The other glared. His hands became clenched, and he half-rose from his seat.

" Yes, I made certain tentative endeavours," he

replied with biting irony, sinking back into his chair ; " I have, for instance, been an emergency postman during the Christmas season ; I have addressed envelopes at thirty shillings a week, working twelve hours a day. I have washed dishes in a cheap Soho restaurant, the stench of which will go with me to the grave—and to-day I sought the opportunity at Covent Garden market to lift sacks of potatoes on to trucks. That was, perhaps, my greatest failure to date."

" Couldn't you lift the sacks ? " inquired his audience. He had the air of one searching innocently for knowledge.

" You damned fool !—I beg your pardon—I didn't get the chance ! I suppose they were afraid I should pinch the trucks."

" H'm ! Take another cigarette, my boy."

As he complied, Jimmy was conscious of undergoing a very severe scrutiny. Those eyes again ! They raked him from head to foot. And what a guy he must look !

Had he only known it, Hanray need not have possessed any qualms on that score. Shabby he certainly was, but evidence of the breed was still unmistakably present. This man had been born a gentleman—and remained one. The stamp of the world's finest type—the British public schoolboy—was on him : it showed in the shape of the shoulders, the slim, sinewy grace of the figure, the half-defiant, half-challenging way the head was set upon the shoulders. And yet, in this England of ours, he had been brought, through no fault of his own, down to the gutter.

" Do you speak any languages ? "

" French, German—a little Italian."

"Any good at figures?"

"I intended to be an accountant. Of course, the War put an end to any question of qualifying."

"Any war decorations?"

"The M.C.—but millions got that, of course."

Mr. Dorman straightened himself. He had evidently come to a decision.

"Well, I may have appeared to take a long time to make up my mind, Hanray, but perhaps you'll overlook that when I say that you have satisfied me on all points. You are just the type I have been looking for; if you will accept my offer, I have employment for you."

A great, unmanning lump rose in his throat, but he gulped it down.

"That's awfully decent of you—sir"—he stumbled on the word, but got it out—"you can scarcely realise what it will mean to me."

How much it really meant he scarcely liked to think. For it meant that his whole life would be changed; his entire outlook would be altered. It meant that some measure of his self-respect would be returned to him; it meant—— But the prospect was so overwhelming that he dared not trust himself to dwell upon it.

And now his future employer was speaking again.

"The work I shall expect you to do," Mr. Dorman said, "will be of a somewhat unusual character. My business—let me admit it at once—is not of the stereotyped kind. I myself do not follow any hard-and-fast rules, and I expect those who work under me to be equally unorthodox. But this I will say: given initiative—and you should have that—energy, loyalty, and courage, you ought soon to be earning £1,000 a year."

"A thousand a year?" The man must be playing some rotten joke.

But Mr. Dorman was gravity itself.

"I said a thousand a year, and I meant it."

"What class of work shall I be required to do? I may say I may be a bit rusty at figures."

"You need have no fear on that account, let me assure you. Your duties will be explained to you fully, and, I trust, satisfactorily, when the proper time comes. In the meantime, I hope you have no objection to staying here to-night?"

"I have no things."

"They will be provided. With your permission I will ring for my servant."

Wondering when the miracle would end, Hanray saw a man-servant, dressed in dark clothes, enter the room.

"Jacobs, take Mr. Hanray to his room."

"Yes, sir." The man held the door open.

"Good night, Mr. Hanray. I shall be seeing you in the morning. I hope you sleep well."

There was a faint, scarcely perceptible flavour of irony in Mr. Dorman's voice—or so it seemed to the listener. But, as an offset to this, the speaker's hand was outstretched.

He clasped it.

"Good night, Mr. Dorman, and thank you very much."

"This way, sir, please." Was it also his imagination that a mere wisp of a sardonic smile appeared on the servant's mask of a face?

It must have been a large house to which he had been brought in so strange a manner, and the bedroom allotted to him was so comfortable that after his privations of the past six months, he felt that un-nerving lump rise in his throat again.

"Can I do anything for you, sir?" the servant inquired.

"No—thank you, nothing." He felt confused at the man's presence—the fellow, after the manner of his class, must be viewing him with secret contempt—and he wished him gone.

"Thank you, sir. The bath-room is next door. Good night, sir."

"Good night."

Alone, he stared about him. It was so long since he had been in a decent bedroom, and the thing was still scarcely believable. There was a wash-basin fitted with hot and cold taps, a gas-fire glowed; on the turned-down bed was a suit of silk pyjamas, and behind the door hung a dressing-gown. No fictional Arabian Night could come up to this. . . .

Late as it was, the desire to steep himself in hot water was irresistible. For at least half an hour he soaked in the sunken porcelain bath and then, feeling wonderfully invigorated after the rough towelling, he put on the pyjamas and got into bed.

Before he switched off the light, a thought came. Stepping out of bed, he walked across to the door. There was no key on the inside, and he tried the handle. This moved—but the door would not open.

He was locked in.

CHAPTER III THE MYSTERY MISSION

HANRAY woke to find the servant who had conducted him to this room the night before standing by the side of the bed.

"Your bath is ready, sir," the man announced.

"Er—thanks." Rubbing the sleep out of his eyes, he tried to remember sufficient to be able to adjust himself to his present position.

"Breakfast is at nine, sir—it is now a quarter past eight."

"All right."

Dorman must be a person of considerable importance in his own world, Jimmy reflected as the man departed. This valet, for instance—he might have been part of a nobleman's establishment; as for his manners, they were a tremendous improvement upon those of the one nobleman he had been unfortunate enough to meet since the war. He had been pure, unadulterated hog.

He took his bath—cold this time—and returned to the bedroom to find a suit that did not belong to him being laid out by the servant. The suit was new, as were the underclothes which accompanied it.

"Mr. Dorman thinks that these will perhaps be more suitable for to-day, sir," explained the servant.

Jimmy hesitated for a moment, his face flushed. Then he smiled.

"Mr. Dorman is undoubtedly right," he replied. He didn't care about accepting too much charity, but if he were going to work for the man, he compromised with his pride by resolving to have the matter adjusted financially by some means; no doubt this could be done.

The new clothes fitted as though he had been measured for them. Of his own disreputable garments there was no trace; they had evidently been taken away and destroyed.

The thought brought a queer and yet vivid sense of stimulation: with the disappearance of the old clothes went, he hoped, the misery and despair of his former

existence. This new suit had a symbolic significance: it marked the beginning of a fresh era for him. It meant his luck had changed.

As he went downstairs he felt a different man.

His host was awaiting him in the well-furnished dining-room.

"Good morning, Hanray—clothes all right?"

"They might have been made for me—I am getting rather tired of saying it's damned decent of you, sir, but I mean it, all the same."

Mr. Dorman smiled.

"Suppose we take all that for granted from now on?" he replied; "and, with your permission, we won't do any more talking until breakfast is on the table. Here's a paper." He handed Hanray a copy of the *Daily Mail* and, going to the fire-place, rang the bell.

The meal was in every way worthy of the day which Jimmy, putting every other thought out of his mind, was forcing himself to believe was going to prove the turning-point in his life. Porridge, fish, eggs and bacon, toast, marmalade, steaming hot coffee—he paid tribute to them all.

It was a silent meal to begin with, for Jimmy respected his host's obvious desire to be quiet. Mr. Dorman ate with a copy of the *Daily Express* propped up in front of him.

He had reached the bacon stage when he looked across the table.

"I suppose it never occurred to you whilst you were undergoing your purgatory, Hanray, to embark upon a career of crime?"

The reply to this unexpected question was quickly given.

"If I had had the opportunity—which I didn't—I

might have given the question very serious consideration indeed ; there's plenty of excuse, in my opinion, for a man who is starving and can't get a chance to earn a living, to turn to crime." He spoke with the bitter memory of all he had gone through.

His host motioned towards the newspaper he had been reading.

"I really think that any man to-day, possessing initiative, brains and courage, could earn a good deal of money as a criminal," he said. "There is no doubt that the police system of this country requires drastic overhauling. Look at these recent mail-bag robberies, for instance ; why, they are the very height of impudence ! Did you read about them in the *Mail* ? "

Hanray nodded. The latest example of a series of mail-bag thefts, resulting in a loss of several thousands of pounds to the Post Office, had been distinguished by a singular daring. The newspaper had hinted that a "Napoleon of Crime" was responsible for the crime having been committed without a clue of any description being left behind.

"So even a man like yourself, 'an officer and a gentleman'—please believe me when I say I use that term in no offensive sense—has turned his mind to the thought of crime ? " The eyes which Jimmy had thought so uncannily alert the night before drilled into his soul.

He laid down his knife and fork.

"I don't want you to misunderstand me, Mr. Dorman," he replied. "I have never seriously considered doing anything against the law. What I meant to convey just now was that I sympathised with anyone, but more especially with a married man with responsibilities, who, finding himself absolutely desperate,

commits a criminal action. And that doesn't make me a Socialist," he added.

"Of course it doesn't." Mr. Dorman appeared to be pleased with the answer. But he kept silent throughout the rest of the meal.

When he had left the table and had lit a cigar, after passing his case to Hanray, the latter spoke what was in his mind.

"I owe so much to you, Mr. Dorman, that I am anxious to begin paying you back. When can I start work?"

"To-night."

"To-night?"

"That was what I said. And, look here, Hanray, I want to give you a warning whilst the subject is in my mind. I do things in my own way, and I hate to answer questions. Will you please remember that?"

"I'll try—of course."

"Let me assure you, it will be to your advantage if you succeed." There was a new note in Mr. Dorman's voice—a note that caused Jimmy to stare. He found himself resenting it; the man was speaking to him as though he were a menial. But he fought down the feeling.

"You will start working for me to-night," continued the mysterious Mr. Dorman. "Definite instructions will be given you some time this evening after dinner; in the meantime, you are on no account to leave this house. If you are fond of reading, you will find plenty to occupy you until I wish to speak to you again; if reading does not appeal, I will arrange for Jacobs to play billiards with you. That is all for the present."

Without troubling to wait for a reply, the speaker turned and left the room.

It was only after a fierce, if brief, fight with himself that Hanray was able to control the desire to rush to the door and disobey the new rule against which his strange employer had warned him. He didn't care for this air of mystery which increased instead of clearing. At the same time, he recognised that Dorman had a right to conduct his business, whatever that might be, in his own way and in his own time. Rather rummy notion, though, to start working at night. What could be the idea? Well, shrugging his shoulders, he was probably a fool to begin worrying yet. What he had to do was to concentrate on pleasing the man who had promised him a twenty pounds a week job if he made good. And, by God, he *would* make good . . .

"Listen carefully, Hanray, and do not interrupt until I have come to an end. You will go to the fancy dress masked ball which is being held at the Albert Hall to-night. Here is a ticket; you will find your costume in the room which you used last night. At a quarter to twelve—remember the time carefully, for it is of vital importance—you will proceed to Box number 22, outside the door of which you will wait. You will stand there, preventing anyone from going in until you are joined by a man wearing a friar's habit. He will hand you something which you are to keep safely until a third man dressed as a pierrot approaches you.

"If this man says to you: 'Corn is going down,' *but not otherwise*, you are to hand to him what the monk has given you. Once you have done that, you are to leave the building and return here in the same car as will take you."

"And suppose the third man doesn't come up to me?"

"Then, after waiting for half an hour, you will return here with what you have been handed."

"What is it I am to receive?"

"That can be no concern of yours. All you have to do is to see that what is handed to you is kept safely until either the man in the pierrot's costume approaches you and says 'Corn is going down,' or you have brought it here. Is everything quite clear?"

"Yes, but——"

"I am afraid I cannot answer any further questions. Remember my idiosyncrasy in that respect. And I may say that your future with my——"—there was a barely perceptible pause before the word "firm" was added—"will depend to a very great extent upon how you carry out your duties to-night."

For the second time that day, Hanray was left abruptly alone. He sat down to try to make some sense out of what appeared the wildest rigmarole. Why should there be this elaborate scheme at all? If the man dressed as a friar possessed something which had to be handed over to someone else, why couldn't he do it himself? And why do it at a masked ball? It seemed the stupidest form of childish nonsense.

However, these were his instructions, and he had to obey them. Going up to the bedroom, he found a picturesque costume which might have belonged to an Elizabethan courtier lying on the bed, complete with mask, and as the time was getting short he changed quickly. He had barely completed dressing when a knock sounded on the door.

"Come in," he called, and the man who had given him his instructions twenty minutes before entered.

"You make a picturesque figure, Hanray, and already I am congratulating myself upon my new recruit. If you are ready, the chauffeur is waiting."

They walked down the stairs side by side. The front door stood open. On the steps was a chauffeur wearing a dark-blue uniform.

"You haven't forgotten the phrase, Hanray, which the man wearing the pierrot's costume is to say to you?" whispered Dorman, drawing the younger man aside.

"'Corn is going down,' " was the reply.

"Good! I hope you spend an enjoyable evening." Patting his emissary on the back, the speaker dismissed him.

The scene was scintillating. Many times Jimmy had read descriptions of the wonderful masked balls given at the Albert Hall in aid of some fashionable charity, but he had never imagined that reality could come up to the picturesque pageant which flashed before him in such bewildering brilliancy.

Coming on the top of his former privations, he might well have lost his head. Bright eyes flashed him invitations, pretty lips smiled as their owners passed; the air was heavy with perfume. An atmosphere of intoxicating merriment was abroad. "Laugh," it said, "laugh and dance, for To-morrow——. But only fools think of To-morrow!"

Hanray followed the crowd. He danced and frivelled. Always, however, he felt something akin to Cinderella. At midnight, or rather at a quarter to midnight, he had a duty to perform.

Promptly to time he was waiting outside Box 22 on the first tier. The door was closed, but he could hear

a low murmur of voices. Couples sauntered past, the women garlanded with jewels and the men looking gallant, if somewhat self-conscious, in the silks and velvets of a bygone age.

No one paid him any attention, but he felt embarrassed all the same. Supposing anyone should attempt to enter the box? He had strict instructions to prevent them doing so. But how could he prevent them? He had no authority.

It was a damned silly business altogether. He was able to see that now. He had been made a fool of: that fellow Dorman was merely an elaborate practical joker. That must be the explanation. What a mug he had been to take in such a yarn.

He must have been waiting at least five minutes already. Stupid nonsense! A hot flush of anger rushed through him. A nice sort of joke to practise on an Embankment down-and-out.

So deep became the conviction that this affair was nothing but a practical joke that he half turned to go.

As he did so, however, a sound made him swerve swiftly.

A low cry of horror had come from the box—and it was a woman's voice that had uttered it.

Instantly Jimmy made up his mind.

No one had come out of that box—but he was going in!

CHAPTER IV THE GIRL WHO PLEADED

JIMMY did not stop to think. That woman's cry was sufficient. It tore at his already overwrought nerves and effectually banished every other consideration.

A couple of strides brought him to the door of the box. Quick action seemed to be needed. He used his shoulder, and his impetuosity was such that he was inside the box almost before he was aware of it.

A situation that would have caused any remaining doubts to vanish, confronted him : a man in a friar's habit was struggling with a girl, dressed as a shepherdess, who was putting up a desperate resistance.

He had barely time to notice that the girl was slim, young and noticeably attractive, before he joined in the affair. Catching hold of the monk by the shoulder, he endeavoured to separate him from the girl. The man, turning his head, seemed stricken by astonishment.

"Leave this lady alone!" Hanray ordered.

"You crazy fool!" was the heated answer. "Get outside."

That was the limit of his conversation. Swinging his right arm, Jimmy hit the other on his sneering mouth, and, with a crash, the friar collapsed on the floor of the box. All the nervous strength he possessed went into the blow, and Hanray did not begrudge an ounce of it. He liked the man's appearance (or as much as the mask the fellow wore permitted to be seen) as little as he liked the way he conducted himself.

"Oh!—thank you!"

The three words were breathlessly uttered, but even the strain through which she had just passed could not keep the music out of the girl's voice. She stood, shivering slightly, against the wall for support.

Hanray pulled himself together. He realised that he had been staring at her like an unmannered fool.

"I—I was passing outside, and I heard you cry

out," he said, wondering if the words sounded as lame to her as they did to himself. "Did that brute hurt you?"

The girl made a gesture as though she would like to put her hands in front of her eyes so that the horror of the recent scene might be shut out; but, conquering the inclination, she replied in a low, level tone: "He is a complete stranger. I had just finished a dance when he spoke to me. He said Valerie Kingdon, a girl who is a very great friend of mine, but who I understood was in Scotland, had arrived unexpectedly, and that she badly wanted to see me, in Box 22. I believed the story, and I walked here with him. From his talk, the man appeared to know all about Valerie. When I got here, he closed the door and—became offensive. I tried to push past him, but he snatched at my necklace"—she pointed to it—"and when I resisted, he was—brutal." She shuddered again.

"The man was evidently a crook."

"Yes—I suppose he was. At least, that is the only explanation I can think of. If you hadn't arrived he would have got the necklace, because I couldn't have resisted any longer. I am afraid——" She hesitated and swayed forward. If he had not caught her, she would have fallen.

Jimmy felt his heart beating tumultuously. The physical nearness of this girl was intoxicating. A waft of perfume made him dizzy. She must have fainted, for, with her head resting on his shoulder, she gave no sign of life, lying heavily in his arms.

Very carefully he placed her in a chair, and then wondered what he could possibly do. He ought to get some brandy, he supposed.

"It was very stupid of me to behave like that—I am afraid I almost fainted."

The girl, looking up, relieved his anxiety at the moment when it promised to be overwhelming.

"I was just wondering what I ought to do," Jimmy confessed. "I suppose the correct thing would have been to get some brandy."

"Dreadful stuff!" The words were accompanied by a smile. The beautiful Unknown was evidently recovering her spirits. "Would you mind doing me one more favour?"

"Of course." Circumstances had not permitted him to act as a squire of dames, more especially to those who were young and attractive and obviously rich, for many years past, but he felt that he would like to spend the rest of his life rendering this girl service. Ridiculous, of course, but the thought all the same was wonderfully stimulating.

"Then will you kindly see me to my car? It's silly, I suppose, but this experience has frightened me, and I want to go home."

"Do you not belong to a party?"

"No." Again a slight smile lit up her face, which, with its present pallor, seemed to take on such a flower-like beauty: "Daddy was against my coming here to-night, and I disobeyed him. The girl who was to have accompanied me disappointed in the end, and so I came alone. It was such fun until that man——"

"You needn't worry any more about him," she was assured.

As he left the box by the girl's side, Jimmy looked quickly to right and left. The brief affair with the monk had given him the desire for further battle. Perhaps partly because the experience was so novel, he found the new rôle he was playing extremely inspiring. That such a girl should be relying on

his aid, trusting herself to his care . . . it made her pulse quicken and a new sense of manhood come to him.

He kept jealous guard. It was not until the Rolls had glided up, and the chauffeur was standing at rigid attention holding open the door, that he relaxed.

Then came a further surprise.

"Are you keen on going back to dance?" The girl leaned forward in her seat as she asked the question.

"I am afraid I'm not," he said.

"Then, perhaps you will permit me to introduce you to daddy? You see, this necklace is supposed to be valuable and I'm sure he would like to thank you for what you did just now."

A flood of bitterness passed through him as he remembered the difference between their positions. This girl might be the daughter of a millionaire.

"I'm quite sure your father would not want to know me," he said grimly. "As for punching that brute, I was just lucky enough to be near, that's all. And you've already been too kind."

He was about to add the "good night" which would have cut him out of her life for ever, when the girl put a hand on his coat sleeve.

"I have a particular reason for wishing to introduce you to daddy," she persisted; "won't you finish your night's work by seeing me home?"

There was a wistful pleading in her voice which proved irresistible to the man she addressed. Feeling that the world was spinning round, Hanray got into the car and took a seat by her side. The door was closed by the chauffeur, and the Rolls glided away.

Throughout the short journey not a word was

spoken. Life was too wonderful to Jimmy just then to find any expression in words, and the girl, her cloak wrapped tightly round her, seemed to be thinking.

The journey was short—along Knightsbridge and across Hyde Park Corner the car sped, to stop before an imposing mansion in Park Lane.

"Here we are!" exclaimed the girl.

Jimmy began to have a fit of nerves. The man who lived in that house must be a millionaire, and a millionaire would have no possible use for him.

"I don't think I had better come in," he said.

She looked at him with the frankness which seemed so characteristic of her.

"You will hurt me very much if you don't, Mr.—"

"My name's Hanray," he supplied; "not that that's important." His tone was still bitter, as how else could it be? This girl was aloof and unattainable. She belonged to another world. He had met her once—and now he was about to be thrust into the utter darkness again. His rotten luck still held good.

"On the contrary, it's very important," the girl replied; "because now I shall be able to introduce you properly to my father. It would have seemed awkward to have gone into his room and merely said: 'Daddy, I want you to meet Mr.—I-don't-know-his-name'—now wouldn't it?"

She laughed, and her merriment proved so infectious that Jimmy had to join in.

"That's better—I was really beginning to wonder if you regretted seeing me home?" They were waiting on the broad steps of the mansion by this time, the car having departed to the garage, and she was so near that he could have kissed the beautiful lips without moving from where he stood. Was she provoking him? No, the crystal-clearness of her mind

was mirrored in her eyes. She was just a child—her age could not have been more than nineteen, he decided—happy because she had already forgotten the terror of half an hour before ; happy, too, because it pleased her to play the Good Samaritan, the Lady Bountiful. From her high position she was gracious enough to look down upon the poor devil who was himself. Oh, well, he would let her have her own way even if he was subsequently insulted by her father. Which reminded him. . . .

“ Won’t your father be in bed ? ” he asked.

“ No ; daddy is one of the hardest workers in London. I’m always telling him he will have a serious illness if he isn’t careful. Lord Glengarde, the physician, told him the same thing only yesterday. Daddy pretended to listen, but I know he won’t alter—he’s in his study now working away. Look ! ” She pointed to a room on the first floor through the window of which gleamed a light.

“ If he is working, he will not want to be interrupted.”

It sounded ungracious, but Jimmy felt the need—the urgent need—to be brutal. Far better would it be for his peace of mind, he knew, if he did not enter that house. Once he entered, he might wish to return—and how would that be possible ? The memory of this girl would be undying, it would remain with him always, but—

And then his speculations were cut short by the door opening. A butler, chillingly pompous, looked out upon them.

“ Good evening, Miss Delia—your father has been inquiring for you,” said this personage. As he uttered the veiled rebuke, the butler’s cold, fish-like eyes roamed over his young mistress’s companion.

"Oh, and what 'ave we 'ere?" the glance conveyed; "a nice thing for a young lady to arrive 'ome in the early hours of the mornin' with a scarecrow!"

"I have brought a friend home to see daddy, Brooks." Evidently the pontifical, almost inhuman, dignity of the butler had no terrors for the girl. "Come along, Mr. Hanray."

Delia . . . ! It suited her, was fitting. . . .

"Your hat and coat, sir?" said the butler coldly.

Jimmy was so bewildered that he surrendered both without a word. It was not until he stood divested of all that was normal and respectable about him that he realised what an object he must look.

The girl, as though entering into the spirit of a great joke, took hold of his arm.

"We'll give daddy the surprise of his life," she said gaily.

This was all very well. But Jimmy had doubts—extremely grave doubts. It might be a lark to the girl, but he anticipated parental thunder.

And when he was ushered into the great room, the walls of which were lined with books from floor to ceiling, a room which was obviously the workshop of a very important, as well as a very busy man, he knew that his prediction was correct.

CHAPTER V THE MAN OF MILLIONS

THE man who rose from a heavily-padded leather swivel chair placed behind an enormous desk, was an arresting figure. His grey hair and lined face belied the sturdy frame. His age, Hanray imagined, was anything between fifty-five and sixty. Beneath heavy

eyebrows, a pair of eyes glinted. The clothes the man wore were beautifully cut, but carelessly attended: cigar ash was on the waistcoat, and the lapels of the coat had gone awry. But the clothes were merely incidental; it was the man himself who forced attention and commanded respect. He showed in the one brief glance that Hanray was able to give him, that he was possessed of a driving force rare among men, and that his personality had a dynamic dominance.

The air of the room became tense. Mercifully for Jimmy's sake, this was shattered by a laugh. It was the girl who supplied the merriment.

"I suppose, daddy, you're thinking what a pair of stupid we look?"

Across the ruggedly stern face of the man addressed flitted a mere wraith of a smile.

"Such a thought did pass through my mind," he replied in a voice that matched the face; "of course there is an explanation?"

The tone chilled Jimmy, but it apparently had no effect upon the girl, who, swinging the mask she had worn at the ball in her left hand, stepped up to the speaker and said: "Daddy, I have brought Mr. Hanray home to introduce him to you. I want you to be very nice to him, because he deserves it."

"Why?"

The question was abrupt to the point of being rude.

"I had no wish to intrude, sir," said Jimmy. He was angry and embarrassed. The situation, from his point of view, was rapidly becoming intolerable.

The man looked at him as a mastiff might have regarded a yapping terrier.

"Go on, Delia," he said.

"Won't you sit down, daddy?" she pleaded;

"you're so awfully big and strong, you almost frighten me."

Then came the first sign that the man was human. His lips twitched as he consented to sit in the swivel-chair in which he had been working when the interruption came. His daughter perched herself on one arm of the chair, and something of Hanray's anger vanished as he noticed what a charming picture she made.

"First of all, daddy, I want to make a confession," she said.

"It is unnecessary. Facts speak for themselves. You disobeyed me by going to the Albert Hall to-night." He took a swift look at Hanray as he spoke.

"No—Mr. Hanray did not take me!" She made the *riposte* quickly; "but if it had not been for Mr. Hanray—oh, I hate to think of it!" Her mood changed from gay to grave; she shuddered, and placed her hands over her eyes.

Hanray thought it significant of the man that he should wait until his daughter had recovered herself.

"Mr. Hanray saved me from a dreadful man, daddy—a thief who first wanted to kiss me, and then tried to steal my necklace."

"Thank you," came from the swivel-chair, and Jimmy was made to feel that many others might have risked their lives without having received more of a reward. This man's words were valuable.

"And now I'll have the whole story," said her father, patting the girl's shoulder.

Thus encouraged, the shepherdess amplified the details she had already given.

At the end, the listener rose. He held out a hand.

"Young man," he stated, "I'm obliged."

Jimmy thrilled at the words as much as at the clasp which the other gave him.

"And now, what can I do for you?" he added.

"You've already been too kind, sir," was the stumbling answer. That handshake would have repaid him if the girl's manner had not already done so. Jimmy bowed to the girl: "Allow me to wish you good night, Miss——"

She interrupted with a swiftness which seemed so essential a part of her.

"Why, you don't even know my name!" she laughed, clapping her hands; "it's Miller. Daddy"—with a delightful effect of springing a surprise—"is Mr. Sebastian Miller."

If she expected astonishment—and no doubt she did—she was not disappointed. Sebastian Miller! The multi-millionaire—some said the richest man in London. That would have been surprising enough, although he had guessed that the father of this girl must be a very wealthy man. But what was far more dramatic was that the person who was regarding him with such a searching intentness was the most talked of man in the country at the present time. Sebastian Miller! . . . the man who dealt in millions daily, who had risen within the past few years to a position of such dizzy eminence in the financial world that his name had become a catchword. One heard it everywhere: that derelict schoolmaster with whom he had talked on the Embankment last night—how much had happened since then!—had even referred to it.

"And now I'm going to leave you and daddy alone for a few minutes," said Delia. Flashing a smile at the guest, she slipped away before Hanray had sufficiently recovered to open the door for her.

"You look a trifle bewildered—you had better have

a drink." Sebastian Miller pressed a bell by the side of the fire-place where he was now standing. "Do you smoke?" From an inside coat pocket came a crocodile cigar case.

Hanray took a cigar because he did not know what else to do.

"I ought to go, sir," he said. "I have no right to be staying here." Then, recollecting, he wondered where he should spend the night: he certainly couldn't return to the house of the mysterious Mr. Dorman—primarily, of course, because he did not know where it was. But even if he had possessed this knowledge, he would not have gone. He had finished with that sinister philanthropist. The man had intended to make a crook of him. Better the Embankment than that—after looking into Delia Miller's eyes. It was a case of a princess and a beggar-man—but, although she would pass out of his life after that night, her influence would remain. What was the help he had given her compared with what she had done for him? By this time he might have become a criminal—a more or less innocent one, but still a criminal.

"You are not smoking, Hanray," he was reminded.

"Sorry, sir. I was thinking."

"Of what strange circumstances make up Life?" suggested the man of millions.

"Yes, sir. You might have been looking into my mind." Something prompted him to go on. "If you can spare me five minutes, I'd like to tell you the *real* story of what happened to-night."

"The *real* story?"

"Yes, sir. I went to the Albert Hall to-night a prospective crook, and came out an honest man—it was your daughter who saved me."

"I am glad." That was all—nothing more. Yet

the words carried conviction : Jimmy knew them to be sincere.

" And now for the rest of the story," said Sebastian Miller.

When he had come to an end, the millionaire made an astonishing statement.

" You had better join forces with me, Hanray ; I think I can find room on my staff for you."

The young man sprang up.

" You'll give me a chance, sir—after—after what I've told you ? " he stammered. It seemed impossible to believe that it could be true.

" It's because you told me that I'm giving you the chance," commented the millionaire dryly.

The door opened, and Delia entered, carrying a dish of sandwiches.

" I expect you're starving," she said to Hanray. " Why, what has happened ? "

" I have asked Mr. Hanray to join my staff," replied her father.

" That's why I left you together," was the smiling retort.

CHAPTER VI

ENEMIES—AND A WIFE

It was half an hour later. The sandwiches which Delia had so kindly fetched, had been eaten ; the whisky-and-soda provided by the millionaire had been finished, and the new Corona cigar had an ash an inch long. The girl had wished Jimmy good night, and now he and her father were alone.

Sebastian Miller fixed upon the young man one of his penetrating stares, before he said : " The reason

I have decided to take a chance with you, Hanray, is because I believe your story. I believe you, too, to be honest. Few men would have possessed the courage to tell me the truth as you did to-night."

"I'm afraid it was courage born of despair, sir."

The millionaire shook his head.

"It is only the honest man who tells the truth when he is right up against things—that is my experience," he grunted; "but enough of compliments; facts are the only data that I bother about. Tell me again something about this fellow who called himself 'Dorman'—of course, that's not his right name, but no matter."

Hanray did as he was ordered.

"I'm afraid it's not a very good description, sir," he confessed.

"He's a crook, of course," came the reply; "and his intelligence service must be a valuable one. No one but my daughter herself knew she was going to be at the Albert Hall. How, then, can you account for the robbery having been planned so far ahead and in such detail?"

"I can't account for it, sir. But if ever I meet this philanthropist again, I'll see to it that I obtain some more definite information."

"It is doubtful if ever you will meet him again—face to face," was the reply. "But if you do, be certain of one thing: that your life will positively be in danger."

"Yes," admitted Hanray; "I dare say you are right. From Dorman's point of view, I'm a traitor, of course. I played the dirty."

"You stopped him from obtaining possession of a necklace which is worth at least £50,000," supplied the millionaire; "he is no doubt annoyed about it."

The necklace, although my daughter is not aware of the fact, once belonged to a very famous queen. Its historic value, apart altogether from its intrinsic worth, is enormous. There are many American collectors who would be prepared to give a great deal for the jewels. You have saved me £50,000, Hanray. I am not likely to forget the fact."

"What I can't understand is why Dorman should have used all that theatrical flummery."

"It may seem mere flummery to you, but the man has some purpose, you can depend upon it. I imagine it is not beyond possibility that he wished you to be discovered with the necklace in your possession. Of course, when you arrived at the police-station, the necklace would have vanished—one of Dorman's pick-pockets would have safely seen to that—but you would have become a suspected person as far as the police were concerned, and the hold which Dorman would have had over you on that account would have been considerable. Do you see?"

"I'm beginning to," rejoined Hanray between clenched teeth. The swine, the dirty, lying, scheming swine! And he had imagined that Dorman was a decent sort. . . .

"However," continued the man who sat facing him, "we can ignore that now. I want to tell you something about your duties whilst you work for me. Perhaps when I have finished enumerating them, you may decide that the job isn't worth the risk involved."

"The risk?" repeated Jimmy mechanically, for the other was using language which he could not quite understand.

"I said the risk, and I meant it," replied the millionaire; "your knowledge of the world should tell you that no man becomes very rich without making

enemies. I happen to have rather more than my share, that is all."

Jimmy leaned forward.

"Before you go any further, sir, I should like you to know that no fear of any danger—whatever that danger may be—is going to stop me taking this job if it's still open. Is that quite clear?"

"It is very lucid indeed," said Sebastian Miller, with one of his fugitive smiles. "That much is settled then. Now to continue: I have already told you that I have enemies. The chief amongst them is the only one I really fear; and I fear him because he has already proved himself to be entirely unscrupulous. His name for the moment does not matter, but this I will tell you: he is an American—at least, he has lived a good many years in New York and Chicago, and I always consider him an American—and he has brought his gun-man methods over with him."

"Is he a financier?"

"He is known as such to the world, but he is many things besides. He is an employer of crooks—no doubt Dorman was merely carrying out an order given by him; in fact, there is nothing to which this man will not stoop to gain his ends. He has sworn to ruin me, and," with a strengthening of the massive jaw muscles, "he is certainly wasting no time. To-night saw his first move—a move which, through you, I was fortunate enough to defeat—since his arrival in England from the East, where he has been on a so-called business trip. How he got to know that my daughter would be at the Albert Hall to-night is what I would like to discover." The speaker ground one fist into the palm of the other hand, and frowned.

There was a knock on the door. The sound roused the millionaire from his reverie.

"Who the devil's that?" he asked, more to himself than to the man to whom he was telling so strange a tale.

The first impression Jimmy had when the door was flung tempestuously open the next minute, was that it was the dramatic entry of this woman that had taken away his breath; but a second opinion was that it was the woman herself.

Certainly, at first glance, especially when she challenged the eye in this fashion, she was a woman to rob any man of his breath, if only momentarily. Her age he judged, was anything from thirty to thirty-five. She was beautiful, with a blonde transparency which belongs to a certain type of fashionable actress and Society leader, both here and in the States. It is a transparency which can only be obtained at an exorbitant price from beauty doctors and surgeons—and only from those if a woman is willing to spend the greater part of her life in exclusive devotion to her face and figure.

With her beauty went a hardness, and not only a hardness, but a recklessness. She looked like one who had tasted everything there was in Life and was still searching, because all that had gone before had proved unsatisfying.

She was in evening dress: over a gown of filmy-green that shimmered in the electric light, was a cloak of moleskin with a silvery-grey fox collar. Even to Jimmy's inexperienced eye, her clothes must have come from one of the most exclusive houses in the world. About her slim neck hung a heavy rope of pearls, and upon the third finger of her left hand gleamed a diamond so large that it only just escaped being a menace to good taste. But this woman, Jimmy thought, could wear anything and it would look the right thing.

Who could she be? Was she Miller's—mistress? So many rich men indulged themselves that way.

"You'll be dead before you know it—working these hours—why don't you go to bed?"

Hanray pulled himself together sufficiently to be able to realise that it was the woman speaking, and that her voice, although naturally attractive, rasped so badly that it tore at his nerves.

The millionaire rose.

"Hanray, allow me to present you to Mrs. Miller," he said.

So this astonishing woman was his—*wife*! The contrast between the two was so surprising that he could only gape and stare as the woman nodded. It was a cool, disdainful nod, charged heavily with contempt.

"You are strangely attired for a business conference," she remarked icily.

"I have been to the masked ball at the Albert Hall, madam," he replied.

Here the millionaire spoke.

"Delia is safely in bed, so you need have no further worry, Adele."

There was an undercurrent of irony in the remark which Hanray noticed immediately.

"Which means that you would prefer to be left to talk your eternal business—very well!"

Without saying good night to either, she turned and tore from the room, banging the door after her.

"We will resume where we left off," said Miller. Judging from his manner, he was quite indifferent to this exhibition from the woman who bore his name. "I was saying I would give a good deal to discover how this enemy of mine got to learn that my daughter was going to the ball to-night." He lapsed into intense

thought again, and Hanray had time to do some reflecting himself.

One fact was strikingly clear : that however successful he had been in the business world, this multi-millionaire had come a cropper over his marriage. His domestic life, judged by the brief example he had just seen, must be pure hell. It was a familiar enough story, no doubt—a rich man captured by a radiant Society beauty or a stage star—he rather inclined to the stage star in this instance—loading his much younger wife with every conceivable joy and luxury—and then, the woman, being true to her perfidious, worthless, horrible, vampire type, openly showing her contempt for the benefactor. He hoped if he stayed in this house, he would not see much of his employer's wife—but, then, why should he ? He would be working all day, and she would be flying about London, and perhaps the Continent, absorbed in her pursuit of what she fondly imagined was pleasure. Was Delia, that wonder-girl, this woman's child ? It was possible, but he found the contemplation unpleasant.

"To return to myself," resumed the millionaire, coming out of his frowning mood, "since you are to work for me, it is necessary that you should know something of your employer. Many stories are told of me, many more are printed in the newspapers. All are untrue, the reason being, perhaps, because I have few intimate friends, and I never, in any circumstances, grant interviews. But the salient facts, to which I will confine myself, are these : I was born with a gift for finance. This was early put to the test because at the age of twenty-two I was left entirely alone in the world. My father, who was a stockbroker, died leaving £8,000 in debts. By his death he saved himself from being 'hammered'—you know what that means.

"I had to make good that £8,000 to save my name from disgrace—and I had no money with which to make a start. However, I managed it, and from that day to this, I think I can say I have never really looked back. Of course, I have had my failures as well as my triumphs—it would have been abnormal otherwise. And in my upward climb, as I have already told you, I have made enemies.

"Now, to come to you. Your duties will be various. Officially, you will be an extra secretary ; actually you will be something far more important than that. You will undertake confidential work, the nature of which it is too late to enter into now. You will, of course, sleep here to-night. What about clothes ? "

"Everything I had in the world was given me by Dorman."

"A tailor will come early to-morrow morning. And now I will take you to your room. Brooks, my butler, would probably think it beneath his dignity to perform this office. Besides, I fancy he is already in bed."

The room to which his new employer conducted him was regal in its appointments. Everything which money could supply was here. A private bath-room led from it.

Going to a chest of drawers, Miller took out a suit of heavy silk pyjamas and a dressing-gown. These he placed on the bed.

"I hope you sleep well, Hanray," he said ; "you will be called at eight. Good night."

"Good night, sir—and thank you."

The man, who was already half-way to the door, turned.

"You may live to curse me," he replied ; "keep your thanks for the future. Good night."

"Good night, Mr. Miller."

The door closed upon this strange, enigmatic figure whose name held sway in the stock markets of the world.

Jimmy, wondering perplexedly if everything was merely an extraordinary dream, undressed slowly. He smiled as he pictured Dorman's face whilst listening to the report of his crooks. As he put on his host's pyjamas, he swore an oath: he would be loyal to this man's trust as long as he had breath in his body. Miller believed in him—and he would keep that faith bright and undimmed. A piece of luck that belonged to some fantastic story out of the Arabian Nights, had befallen him—he would spend the future in trying to be worthy of it. That was his vow.

A knock, soft and discreet, sounded. Someone was at the door. A servant, perhaps.

"One minute," he called, and slipped on the dark-blue dressing-gown.

Then he went to the door. As he opened it, a figure stepped into the room.

"Shut the door—quickly!" came a low, tense whisper.

He obeyed mechanically. It was not until he turned that he was able to see his visitor.

It was the wife of his employer.

"Mrs. Miller——" he started.

She held up a finger in warning.

"Don't be a fool," was the reply.

CHAPTER VII THE MIDNIGHT VISITOR

JIMMY looked at her confusedly. Embarrassment deprived him of speech. The woman appeared to be amused, for she smiled satirically.

The smile stung Hanray.

"I am sorry, madam, but if you intend to remain in this room, I must leave it." His employer's wife was seated by this time, and gave every indication of staying.

"Don't be a fool," she said again. The injunction was uttered in a tone of irritable impatience. His crassness appeared to annoy her.

But Jimmy, without answering, walked to the door.

"I will wait in the corridor," he said. Whatever object this woman had, he suspected it—just as he suspected the woman herself. She was a butterfly—and sometimes butterflies brought danger in their wings. Jimmy had gleaned sufficient experience of life to know that butterflies could carry ruin to others besides themselves. Undoubtedly this woman—for her type—was fascinating, but she had no appeal for him. She would not have had in any ordinary circumstances, let alone the present abnormal ones.

The wife of the man who had promised an hour before to set him on his feet, laughed lightly.

"I am really beginning to think you are a fool, after all," she said; "what absurd idea have you in your head? Do you think I have come here to try to seduce you?"

Jimmy flushed at the frankness which he considered intolerable. But the words had the effect the woman evidently wanted. He turned, and in a tone whose irony matched hers, he replied: "I am too conscious of my position to have entertained any such thought, madam."

He looked at her keenly, and their eyes met in a challenge.

The visitor reached for her bag, and withdrew a gold cigarette-case.

"Smoking?" she drawled.

"Not now—thank you." How could he get rid of this woman whose persistency was so amazing and so embarrassing?

Apparently entirely unperturbed, Mrs. Miller reached for the match-stand, which was on the mantelpiece, struck a match, lit her cigarette, and blew a cloud of smoke. She did this with a defiant gesture.

"You spoke just now of your position—I say, you look so awkward, standing; won't you sit down?"

"I prefer to stand."

If he spoke like a prig, he was glad. Perhaps she would soon become tired and go. He ought to fulfil his threat, he supposed, and wait in the corridor, leaving her to it—but curiosity kept him. This woman must have had an object in doing this audacious thing. Supposing—the thought flashed through his mind involuntarily—she was allied to her husband's enemies? Might he not get a clue if she talked long enough?

"You said something just now about your position," the woman continued; "may I inquire who you are and why you have come here?"

"Your husband has been kind enough to make me one of his secretaries." This was safe enough ground.

Mrs. Miller laughed.

"Secretary!" she scoffed. "What does he want with another secretary? Why, he is surrounded with secretaries as it is." She looked at him with calculation in her hard, brilliant eyes. "Have you been put into this house in order to spy?" she demanded.

He controlled the anger which threatened to choke him.

"I do not understand, madam," Jimmy said; "if you doubt the truth of what I've told you, I can

only suggest that you make inquiries of your husband. In any case"—walking to the door and opening it—"may I remind you very respectfully that it is not my duty to discuss his affairs without permission."

The hint was as plain as he could make it, and the visitor rose. She walked up to him. The beautiful face was forbidding.

"You might have found me a friend if you'd only been sensible," she said; and then, with a contemptuous shrug of the shapely shoulders, she was gone.

This time Jimmy did what he realised he should have done before—he locked the door. But the woman, trading on the element of surprise which had so startled him, would have entered all the same, he reflected a moment later. Her action that night had shown her to be without fear or scruple. And it had demonstrated something else—that there was an enemy within the house, and he had already incurred her hatred. It was not a pleasant thought, for it reminded him of all the atrocious luck that had come his way, flooding every hope . . .

He turned in the comfortable bed. That was sheer ingratitude. What did a woman's dislike count—even although she did happen to be the wife of his employer—compared with the good fortune of having met a girl like Delia Miller? How wonderful she had been that night! What a sportsman! It was a rotten shame that she should have to mix with and perhaps acknowledge the authority of a woman of her stepmother's type. However, that was not—and never could be—any concern of his. Chuckle-headed ass, he was presuming too much. Delia Miller was the daughter of one of the world's richest men. If she ever showed him any further friendship, it would not

have the slightest significance—no more than a smile or a pat on the head for one of her dogs !

CHAPTER VIII

THE NEXT MORNING

No doubt it was due to the excitement, but Jimmy could not sleep. So many thoughts were crowding his brain that he surrendered all attempt after he had heard the clock on his mantelpiece chime two. It must have been shortly afterwards, however, that he did lose consciousness, for this was the only way in which the vivid vision he had could be explained.

He dreamt that he was sitting bound in a chair in a room which looked like some scene from a film. A man whose face he could not see, because it was hidden by a black silk mask, was standing only a few feet away from him. In this man's right hand was a revolver.

The man was speaking.

"You will tell me all you know concerning the plans of your employer, or I shall kill you instantly."

Bound hand and foot, he was unable to put up any resistance. He was in this stranger's power. Yet there was no hesitation about his reply.

"I am paid to keep my employer's confidence," he said.

"Damn you, then, take the consequences!" The other blazed, and, raising the revolver, he fired.

So vivid and realistic had been this dream that when he first opened his eyes, Jimmy thought he must have been transplanted to another world. But the arm he pinched was solid flesh and blood ; it had feeling.

Then he wasn't dead . . .

But the revolver shot ?

There was a knock on the door. Rousing himself, he went to open it.

A servant entered, carrying a tray.

" Tea, sir ? "

Jimmy tried to pull himself together.

" Did a gong sound or a bell ring just now ? " he asked.

The servant shook his head.

" No, sir. Perhaps it was my first tap on the door which disturbed you. I'm sorry, sir."

" That's all right. Only I was in the midst of a particularly unpleasant dream—as a matter of fact, someone had just lifted a revolver to shoot me dead—when you knocked. Thank God, what I imagined must be my death-knell was nothing more alarming than an early cup of tea ! " He smiled, endeavouring to turn the affair into a joke as he took the tray from the man, who was looking at him curiously and, steady-nerved enough now, poured himself out a cup of fragrant-smelling Pekoe.

" Shall I prepare your bath, sir ? "

Jimmy had the utmost difficulty in keeping his face straight. Here was the whirligig of life gone mad : from a homeless tramp unable to afford a bed in even the cheapest lodging-house, he had changed into a personage who had a servant volunteering to run his morning bath.

" Where's the bath-room ? " he asked, forgetting.

The man pointed to a door at the end of the room.

" It leads off from this bedroom, sir ; forms part of a small suite."

Jimmy sipped his tea contentedly.

"Oh, yes, I remember." He tried to make his voice sound casual. "No, you needn't bother."

"Thank you, sir."

"You might tell me, however, what time is breakfast."

"Eight o'clock, sir. Mr. Miller is an early riser. He always begins work at six."

Hanray gasped.

"Then I ought to have been up long ago!" A glance at the silver clock on the mantelpiece showed five minutes past seven.

The servant smiled deferentially.

"I had instructions to tell you, sir, that Mr. Miller would not expect to see you until breakfast."

"Oh—er—that's all right, then."

"There will be nothing else, sir?" inquired the man, hovering in the middle distance after the manner of his kind.

"Nothing at all, thanks."

For the space of five minutes by the clock, Jimmy allowed himself the pleasure of a day-dream, luxurious beyond comparison. Although he pinched himself again, his luck still seemed inconceivable. Good fortune, like the dawn in Kipling's poem, had come to him in an almost awful majesty. And although his knowledge of life told him there must necessarily be snags—and no doubt plenty of them!—yet he resolved to cling on to this present job, which had come to him out of the skies, at all costs. He would devote the rest of his life to being faithful to Sebastian Miller—once again he swore it.

Bathed, shaved and dressed, he walked out into the wide corridor.

"Will you take the lift, sir?"

The house seemed crowded with servants. He

turned to see a man in dark livery standing outside a lift.

"It will save you walking, sir," suggested the latter.

Accepting the offer, Jimmy stepped into the lift, which although small, was in keeping with the other appointments of this wonderful house, and was sped swiftly downwards.

The first person he saw on getting out of the lift was Delia Miller. In the morning light she appeared even more radiant than the girl he had met for the first time the night before. In his eyes she was flawless.

The daughter of the multi-millionaire greeted him like a friend—almost like a comrade.

"Did you sleep well? Was everything comfortable? Do tell me!" she said, smiling up at him so that his head swam and his heart did a lot of stupid things.

"Everything was simply splendid," he replied, his voice unsteady; "but it is far too kind of you, Miss Miller, to make the inquiry."

"Rubbish!" she responded, with one of those lightning gestures which seemed so delightful a characteristic of hers; "aren't I responsible for you? Wasn't it through me that you came here? Until daddy absorbs you body and soul—as of course he will directly he gets you on your own—I regard you as my special charge."

Sheer childish prattling, of course, and nothing more, yet Hanray, who had been starved for so many years of even one kind word from a fellow-being, felt a lump come into his throat.

"I shall never forget your kindness, Miss Miller," he said.

"Nonsense! I haven't done a thing . . . it's you who should have all the votes of thanks!" She

smiled at him again. "But here am I keeping you from breakfast, and I expect you are absolutely starving. Ah! there's the gong," as a dull yet mellow roar sounded. "Come along; it will be a treat to have someone to talk to at breakfast."

Hanray, as he walked by the side of the girl, wondered how long it would be before his employer stepped in to prevent his daughter from making a friend of the derelict she had picked up out of the gutter. That the present state of affairs would not be tolerated was absolutely certain. Nor did he wish them to continue; Delia Miller's camaraderie, the dearest thing in the world as it was, placed him in a false position; it meant that he would be continually fighting a battle with himself. This girl represented a far greater danger to his peace of mind than the woman who had paid him that recklessly unconventional visit the night before. For she carried with her the essence of romance—and an argosy of dreams which gave him an intolerable pain in his heart.

"Good morning, daddy! And here is Mr. Hanray, as hungry as a wolf. Promise not to work him too hard to-day!"

The granite man of millions looked up from *The Times* he had been studying in a chair by the side of the fire-place.

"Good morning, Hanray," he said in a voice that seemed entirely toneless and impersonal.

"Good morning, Mr. Miller."

"Are you a gruff daddy this morning, or a nice kind daddy?" Delia, perched on an arm of the chair, wound an arm round the financier's neck.

Her father kissed the fresh young face that looked so like a beautiful English rose.

"None of your wheedling first thing in the morning,

young lady," he replied in a slightly more human tone than he had used in speaking to Hanray; "your mother won't be down—as usual—I suppose?"

It seemed to Jimmy that at the mention of the word "mother" a shadow crept into the room. Certainly the look of girlish joy which had been so noticeable in Delia Miller's face disappeared. When she spoke her voice was hushed—her delight in the morning might have been destroyed.

"Mother"—there was a suggestion that the word was said reluctantly—"wouldn't let me into her room. She said she didn't wish to see me. I know nothing more than that, daddy."

"Which means that your mother has another of her headaches, and that she will be taking breakfast by herself—well, we won't wait any longer. Delia, my dear, say grace."

Amidst the many remarkable events through which he was destined to pass during the next few weeks, Hanray, when he came to look back, decided that the most memorable of all was the sight of Delia Miller saying in her fresh, girlish voice, so full of natural beauty: "O God, for what we are about to receive please in Your Goodness make us truly thankful," whilst Sebastian Miller sat with bowed head. Like the average man of his generation, religious thoughts had entered very little into James Hanray's life, although he had his own clearly defined conception of what constituted the rights and wrongs of human conduct; but the picture of the man of millions waiting for his daughter to call upon God's blessing before he broke his fast, stirred him profoundly.

"Daddy always has me say grace," explained Delia, but Sebastian Miller made no remark.

It was a simple meal. The food was excellent but

very plain. The millionaire ate stewed prunes, a couple of pieces of toast, and drank one cup of coffee.

"I can work better on a light breakfast," he said, and until the end of the meal these were the only words he uttered. Jimmy gathered that something must have upset his employer, and he was afraid that the atmosphere, which seemed so oppressive to him, would similarly affect the third member of the breakfast table.

But either Delia was accustomed to these silent moods of her father or she was endeavouring to make things pleasant for the new secretary, for she talked away on the morning's news as printed in the *Daily Mail*, which she proudly announced she had already read from the fashion advertisements to the pictures on the back page.

Within half an hour the meal was over.

"You will come into the library, Hanray," said Sebastian Miller. "Good morning, young woman: take care of yourself and don't leave the house without my permission. Is that quite clear?"

"Oh, awfully stern parent, it is!" was the laughing reply; "thank goodness, I have plenty to do at home. Thank you, Mr. Hanray," as Jimmy stood by the door he had opened, "I hope you get on all right."

Once they were in the library, Sebastian Miller's manner became slightly more gracious.

"Sit down, Hanray," he said; "smoke if you like," passing a box of cigarettes over. "I always allow myself just ten minutes' relaxation after breakfast. I hope you had a good night? No disturbances?"

The latter was a curious question and, coming on the top of the man's moodiness at breakfast, Jimmy

wondered if the other was trying to trap him. He became embarrassed ; to tell Miller that his wife had visited him in his bedroom was clearly impossible, and yet . . .

The memory of the dream came to save him.

" I slept perfectly well, thank you, sir, but I had a rather rotten dream." He narrated it.

The millionaire smiled grimly.

" Coming events may be casting their shadows before, Hanray," was his comment. " You remember the enemy I told you about last evening ? "

" Perfectly, sir."

" Well, I had word this morning that he's in England. I'm not afraid of the man, but this will mean a change in my plans. I'm going to leave London for the country—principally for my girl's sake. If there's going to be a fight—and I fully expect one—I'll choose my own battle-pitch. Now listen attentively to what I'm going to say : I have some commissions for you to attend to in the City to-day. But, first of all, how much money do you owe ? "

" Beyond ten pounds or so to a tailor, I don't owe any money, sir."

The millionaire nodded over his cigar.

" Tailors are used to being owed. Debts are part of their life. But, referring back to the story I told you last night, my experience has taught me that there is nothing so conducive to a man keeping his self-respect as to have a clean bill of health financially—in other words, he must be able to look the world in the face and declare that he does not owe anyone a penny. Is it a London tailor, Hanray ? "

" Yes, sir. Farquhar, in Conduit Street."

" You will pay him this morning. Whilst you are there, you had better let him measure you for some

more clothes—that suit you have on happens to belong to the crook Dorman, I believe. When you have finished with your tailor, I want you to undertake various commissions for me. Now I require your full attention, please.”

The man of millions talked earnestly for several minutes.

CHAPTER IX

A SENSATION IN OXFORD STREET

DAVID FARQUHAR, the tailor of Conduit Street, greeted his old customer warmly.

“It’s delighted I am to see you, Mr. Hanray,” he exclaimed when the first shock of recognition had passed.

“I’ve been right up against things,” replied Jimmy, “or I should have looked in before. Now my luck seems to have changed, I’m glad to say.”

“To the average mind the idea might appeal as being far-fetched,” said the tailor, “but making clothes gives one a pretty good insight into human nature. I have learned to classify my customers’ accounts under two headings: the ‘Sometimes’ and the ‘Nevers.’ In other words, there are the men who will pay some time or other—that is when they have the money—and there are those who never intend to pay until I threaten them with County Court proceedings. I placed you amongst the former, Mr. Hanray.”

“But it must be five years since I ordered that last suit.”

“Never mind—I knew that one day, sooner or later, you would come in and say: ‘Let me have my

account, Farquhar'—and here you are! Permit me to congratulate you on your change of fortune."

The bill paid and another suit ordered—Jimmy felt he could not impose on the surprising generosity of his employer further than that—the two shook hands and Hanray left the shop. As he stepped into the car which Sebastian Miller had placed at his disposal that morning, he noticed, looking through the window at the back, a Mercury saloon glide away from the kerb and follow discreetly behind the limousine.

When the crush of traffic at Piccadilly Circus caused the chauffeur to stop, Jimmy picked up the speaking-tube.

"I want you to turn into Piccadilly, go through the Park and get to the City that way," he said, adding for the man's own private information, "I want to stop at Jackson's in Piccadilly and again at Selfridge's." The two calls had been the result of a sudden inspiration, but they would serve their purpose. He could buy some tobacco at Jackson's and some handkerchiefs, if nothing better suggested itself, at Selfridge's. The real purpose of this sudden change of plan—coming out of Farquhar's, he had instructed the chauffeur to drive straight to Moorgate Street—was to test a theory; he believed he was being tracked by the occupant of the saloon car behind.

He took another cautious look through the small window at the back of the car. The Mercury saloon was so close that the radiator was only a few feet away. A chauffeur in uniform was at the wheel, but the man's face was so stolidly impassive he was not able to gain anything from it. The occupant of the car he could not see.

Directly he was able to get clear, Hanray's chauffeur obeyed his instructions. The limousine stopped at

Jackson's in Piccadilly. When Jimmy asked for a pound tin of the tobacco he had once been accustomed to smoke, he noticed a powerfully-built man of swarthy complexion standing by his side.

"I want some of that China tea you advertise so much," the other said in a voice that held a faint American twang.

Jimmy picked up his tobacco and walked rapidly out of the shop. Had he not done so, he felt sure he would have betrayed himself. This was the strangest thing that had yet happened throughout his recent fantastic experiences.

As he expected, the Mercury saloon was drawn up behind the limousine. So he *was* being followed.

This fact, however, faded into insignificance compared with the circumstance which had caused him to turn so hurriedly on his heel a minute before. Seated in the car again, he tried to reason out this amazing business.

The truth was positively staggering.

Although he had never met that swarthy-complexioned man before, yet he knew him.

He was the man of the dream!

Jimmy tried to tell himself what a fool he was; he endeavoured, as any other normal-minded, sensible fellow would have done in the same circumstances, to convince himself that he must be the victim of some hallucination, but the preposterous fact persisted. The man who had stood by his side in the Piccadilly shop, and who was evidently intent on tracking him, was the same man who had threatened him in that disturbing, if bizarre, dream the night before.

Strangely enough, it was by his voice he had recognised him. Impossible as this would have sounded if he had told anyone, Jimmy knew he was not mistaken.

There was no shadow of a doubt in his mind: the voice which he had heard making that commonplace remark about the China tea back at Jackson's was the same voice which had threatened him with death in the dream! Incredible, of course—and yet he knew it to be true.

After the first bewilderment had passed, Jimmy felt a strange excitement. For an adversary to materialise into solid flesh and blood out of a dream was decidedly thrilling. Then another thought came: was this man the big enemy of Sebastian Miller?—the American of whom the millionaire had spoken the night before? Or was he merely an associate of the mysterious Dorman? The latter represented a very real danger, he was convinced: no crook, especially a criminal of Dorman's class, would be likely to forgive such a trick as had been played off on him. Now that he came to think about it, the piece of prestidigitation he had practised the night before must have startled Dorman considerably. In the future, he imagined, the other would give considerable thought before indulging in a similar spasm of philanthropy.

Dorman represented the future, however, and in the meantime . . .

Taking another look through the small window at the back of the limousine, he noticed that the Mercury car was still on his trail. What the devil was the fellow's game? What did he think he was doing? He repressed a very strong desire to get out of his own car, stop the other, and demand from Mr. Swarthy-face how long he intended to play this fool-game, and what he thought of gaining by it?

Caution made him stay his hand.

It would be time enough when he reached Selfridge's. As it happened, he was forestalled, for no sooner

had he set foot on the Oxford Street pavement than he discovered his tracker only a yard away.

He scowled at the man. Before he could master his temper sufficiently to speak, however, the other had addressed him.

"Mr. James Hanray, I believe?" he said.

"Well?" was the curt retort.

"If you would be kind enough to permit me, I should like to take up just two minutes of your time, Mr. Hanray," continued the other; "where do you suggest we shall talk?—in your car or in mine?"

"In neither," was the decisive answer. "If you want to talk we'll stay here—on the pavement. But before we go any farther, may I ask what the devil you mean by following me about this morning?"

The other's voice was still suave.

"I have already supplied an explanation, my dear Mr. Hanray—I wished to speak to you."

"You are a complete stranger to me."

"But you are not a complete stranger to me, Mr. Hanray." So far from being abashed by the frigid reception he had received, the man showed by his manner that he was supremely sure of himself. This confidence, whilst it irritated Hanray, at the same time impressed him. If this man was a crook, he was no ordinary one; the fellow had personality; a sense of power emanated from him.

"My time this morning is limited," now said Hanray.

The other smiled.

"Quite so. You are running various little errands for your employer, Mr. Sebastian Miller. You change your masters rather quickly, Mr. Hanray; in fact, your switches over are so protean in character as to be somewhat confusing. You follow me, no doubt?"

Hanray squared his shoulders.

"I follow you very clearly indeed—so clearly that you are running a very great risk, let me tell you, of having your jaw punched."

The other held up his hand.

"A somewhat fatuous threat to make, if I may say so," he commented. "Do you realise that I have only to hold up my hand to the policeman standing in the centre of the road to have you arrested on a charge of theft? Why, even the clothes you are wearing have been stolen."

His furious rage did not prevent Jimmy from realising the man was speaking the truth. On the face of things, he certainly was a thief. At any rate, if the other carried out his threat he would be placed in an exceedingly awkward position. Then he remembered the other side of the picture and smiled.

"What's a suit of clothes compared to a necklace worth £50,000?" he replied. "If you don't know the answer yourself, ask your friend Dorman. By the way, you might give me his address so that I can return these clothes. As you can see, they fit quite well, but I prefer not to be beholden to a crook."

"You might lower your voice, my friend," advised the other; "you seem to forget that we are in the midst of a London crowd. It was because I wished to discuss this matter privately that I suggested a more secluded spot."

"What else you have to say you can say here. And I can give you just another half a minute." He would have left the man but for the hope that the other might refer to Sebastian Miller in some way, and that he would be able to pass on the information to his employer.

"I wish to tell you this, Hanray," came the reply; "you have treated a certain gentleman who shall be

nameless very shabbily. He is prepared, however, to overlook this, on certain conditions."

"Go to hell with your conditions!" exploded Hanray so loudly that several people stopped to look at the speaker; "you can tell that crook from me that if ever I meet him again, I'll thrash him first and hand him over to the police afterwards."

"You are a fool," was the uncompromising reply; "you won't be allowed to live long enough to do that."

As he stared at the man who had made the sensational rejoinder, Jimmy saw red. Forgetting every element of caution in the heat of his anger, he crashed his right fist against the man's prominent jaw.

It was a peach of a punch, and the man dropped to the pavement with a rapidity that drew loud expressions of wondering awe from a small group of messenger-boys who, attracted by Hanray's belligerent attitude, had waited expectantly for developments.

Swiftly realising that, in the miraculous manner of a London crowd, a host had gathered, Hanray attempted to turn away. But he was hemmed in on every side by a dense mob.

"What's all this?"

Appearing suddenly from space, a policeman stood regarding the wreckage of what had once been an immaculately attired gentleman whose swarthy colouring gave him a somewhat foreign appearance. It was possibly this factor which made the crowd bestow their favouritism upon the knocker-down, who was so unmistakably British.

"Didn't you hear? What's all this?" Jimmy, looking up, realised that the constable was looking at him fixedly.

"This man insulted me, so I knocked him down."

The policeman, trained by the mentors at Scotland Yard to meet any emergency, frowned.

"But you can't hold prize-fights outside Selfridge's," he said, as one stating an incontestable fact.

By this time the stricken man was on his feet

"Officer," he said in a vicious tone, "I order you to arrest that man on a charge of theft."

"From whom?" inquired the officer.

"From a friend of mine named Dorman. Mr. Dorman found this man lying on a seat on the Embankment the night before last. He took him home, gave him food—and discovered later that he had gone off in the night with several pounds in his pocket and the suit of clothes that he is now wearing."

The officer, looking incredulous, turned to Hanray.

"Is that true?" he asked.

Jimmy shook his head.

"The man's mad," he said; "I suspected it directly he accosted me. He's been following me about for the past hour. To prove what a liar he is, I don't mind informing you that I am the private secretary of Mr. Sebastian Miller, the well-known financier. His chauffeur is here to prove it."

"Mr. Sebastian Miller." The policeman repeated the words as one uttering part of a reverential service. For here was a name with which to banish all doubts and misgivings. Was it likely that an honest-looking, well-dressed gentleman who held the post of private secretary to one of the richest men in London would be lying out like a tramp on a seat on the Embankment.

He turned to face the accuser.

"If I were you," he said caustically, "I should go straight 'ome, lie down and 'ave a nice 'ot cup of tea. You'll feel better then . . . move along there, please"

Hanray reached the limousine without any further incident.

At one o'clock he was back at the mansion in Park Lane.

In the hall he met Delia. He noticed with a feeling of acute dismay, which he knew was ridiculous presumption, that the girl's eyes were red. Had she been crying?

"Daddy wants to see you at once, Mr. Hanray."

"Certainly, Miss Miller."

"You know your way to the library?"

"Yes, thank you."

She walked a few steps with him apparently unconscious of the disapproving eyes of the fish-eyed butler.

"Mr. Hanray——"

"Yes, Miss Miller."

He looked at her. The girl seemed on the point of saying something—something which caused her so much embarrassment that it was evident she had had to summon considerable courage to the task. Then a door opened and Mrs. Miller stepped out from a room.

A tiny gasp came from the girl. Her face had gone ashen.

The woman looked at them both with an ugly sneer disfiguring her beautiful face.

Hanray was ignored, but addressing the girl, she said: "Haven't you anything better to do, child, than to stay loafing indoors on a beautiful day like this?"

Hanray saw the colour flood back into Delia's cheeks.

"I am not loafing—and I am staying in the house

by daddy's strict instructions. I should have loved to go out but I daren't."

Her stepmother laughed scornfully.

"But how absurd!" she replied. "Why should your father insist upon you staying in the house? Of what is he afraid?—that someone will want to run away with you?"

The girl met the challenge.

"Someone nearly did last night," she said. "If it had not been for Mr. Hanray——"

Again the woman gave a disagreeable laugh. This time she addressed Jimmy.

"So that is your rôle in this house—personal body-guard and general protector-in-chief! I was wondering what purpose you were supposed to serve." From being coldly contemptuous, she now changed to being blatantly rude. "I should have imagined a detective would have been a better choice—and a detective need not have lived in the house."

At the same instant as he bit his lip to keep back the angry retort, Jimmy felt his hand squeezed. Soft fingers gripped his.

A magical thrill raced through him, setting his nerves tingling. Delia Miller by that action had proclaimed herself his friend—and that pressure of the hand had been a warning not to be precipitant, a plea for him to keep cool and to guard his tongue. The woman had plainly wanted to provoke him; had he answered her as he wanted, no doubt she would have gone to her husband and asked for this new secretary to be dismissed. That was her malicious plan without a doubt. He had known her from the first moment of meeting as a potential enemy. What her object had been in coming to his room last night he could not determine, but his reception had been the means,

it was now evident, of alienating her completely. He had certainly made a powerful foe—but, if the girl had not sent him that warning, he would possibly have committed himself irretrievably. Certain facts in this household had become increasingly clear. The first was that Delia and her stepmother were antagonistic. There was no love bestowed by the woman upon the girl—of whom, perhaps, she was insensately jealous. There had probably been a fresh quarrel that morning—hence Delia's tear-inflamed eyes. The coming of this woman must have been a bitter blow to Delia—the second Mrs. Miller was no doubt an entirely different personality from her own mother. Out of love and respect for her father, however, she had endeavoured to conquer her feelings and had done her best to live at peace with the woman, who—

Jimmy had proceeded thus far with his reflections when he was sharply recalled to himself.

"Intolerable impudence! Get to your work—whatever it may be—at once! How dare you stand there?"

Hanray turned away before his feelings should overcome his discretion; and he then realised that Sebastian Miller had himself been a witness of this last outburst on the part of his wife.

CHAPTER X

STEEP HOLM

THE millionaire at once assumed control of the situation.

"Hanray," he said curtly, "I have been expecting you." Without a word to his wife, Miller turned on his heel.

When Jimmy had shut the library door behind him, he was greeted with an abrupt : " Well ? "

" You wish to have my report, sir ? "

" Of course. Please confine yourself to business—any other matter is not in your province."

" I am fully aware of that, sir." Flushing at the rebuke, which he could understand, although he felt he had not merited it, Hanray narrated the morning's happenings. He was listened to without comment until the end.

Then :

" Describe this man," came the order.

Jimmy gave an admirably concise description.

" The fellow was very swarthy in complexion, was powerfully built, weighing, I should imagine, at least fifteen stone, was five feet eleven inches or so in height, spoke with a slight American accent and had an air of importance. Something of a personality. His age might be forty-five. He was using a Mercury saloon car and was being driven by a chauffeur in blue uniform."

The financier came out of his brooding fit.

" That would be Scanlon," he said, speaking more to himself than to his companion.

There was a short silence.

" And you knocked him down, you say ? " Miller then asked.

" I did. He was so offensive that I couldn't help myself. I am sorry, however, if——"

" I don't know that there is any great need for you to be sorry about the occurrence. There is one fact to be borne in mind, nevertheless—by your action this morning you made an enemy of this man Scanlon ; but if you had remained loyal to me, this would have resulted in any case."

Jimmy took the opportunity to ease his mind and to make himself clear.

"I want you to know, Mr. Miller, that you need never question my loyalty."

The financier looked across at the speaker. There was an expression which Hanray could not quite fathom in his eyes.

"That is why I took you into my employ last night," he said briefly; and Hanray found himself feeling contented.

He waited for the millionaire to speak again.

"Your encounter with the man Scanlon this morning proves the accuracy of the reports I have received recently. It, moreover, has the effect of expediting my departure from London. I will take you into my confidence to a certain extent, Hanray—I leave for the country for two reasons. The first is because I wish to have peace and quiet to elaborate the final touches to the biggest financial scheme I have ever launched, and, secondly, because I wish to have my daughter under my own eye. Again——"

Hanray broke in.

"Pardon me, sir, but if there is any actual danger to Miss Miller——"

"You say 'if,' Hanray, after what happened last night!"

"What I intended to put to you, sir, was this: would your daughter be safer in the country than in London?"

"Yes," came the instant reply. "One cannot hope to keep a girl like Delia penned up in the house, and after what has occurred, I daren't let her loose in London."

"But the police——?"

The millionaire, to Hanray's astonishment, shook his head.

"This is purely a personal matter. Besides," as though uttering an after-thought, "if Delia knew she was under police protection, she would be frightened. But if needs be, I'll organise my own private guard—and place you in charge of it, Hanray."

Jimmy unconsciously squared his shoulders.

"You are very good, sir," He might have added that he was prepared to lose his life in that same service. "Do you mind explaining why, surrounded by enemies as you say you are, you are prepared to put such faith in a complete stranger?"

The millionaire glared in such a manner that he was afraid he had offended Miller beyond forgiveness. But the reply, when it came, satisfied him.

"I have made certain inquiries about you—you scarcely think I am the type to take anyone entirely on trust? And now we will have luncheon."

During the meal, which was eaten by them alone, the financier explained that whilst he was in the country—"you'll probably like Steep Holm; it's in the New Forest, not far from Beaulieu"—he would be assisted by only one secretary.

"Up till now, although I have referred to the work I intend for you to do as being of a secretarial nature, my real intention is for you to take on the duties as a protector for my girl. As you may believe, she is very dear to me . . . did you say anything?"

"No, sir."

"I thought I heard you make some exclamation."

As a matter of fact, Jimmy had stifled a gasp. The prospect which Miller was holding out to him was so full of intoxicating danger that if he had dared he would have made some protest. How could he be

constantly in the company of Delia without betraying himself?—and, having betrayed himself, what earthly power could prevent him being hurled neck and crop into the outer darkness again?

"I could hire a private detective, of course," continued the millionaire, "but that does not appeal to me." He waited as though expecting a reply.

"I can only say," replied Hanray, "that I am deeply appreciative of the honour, sir."

Miller curtly nodded, and then went on:

"Bray, my principal private secretary, is already on his way to Steep Holm. I telephoned him this morning. You and I and Delia will go down by car this afternoon. I know what you are asking yourself, Hanray"—looking into the other's face—"you are wondering if it will be safe?"

"To tell you the truth, I was," admitted Jimmy; "this enemy of yours must have a fairly good knowledge of what you are doing, judging by the way in which I was shadowed this morning and the remarks the fellow made."

The financier made an astonishing answer.

"The car in which we shall travel will be bullet-proof," he said; "and you and I will be armed with revolvers. What is more, we shall shoot on sight."

Once again Jimmy found himself asking what kind of man this was to whom he had pledged his service?

He made what seemed to him an obvious comment.

"Miss Miller might be frightened, sir."

"She will not be frightened if I am there," was the decisive answer. After that, there seemed nothing else to be said.

Miller, himself, added the final word.

"My wife will remain in London."

To Hanray the remark was singularly illuminating.

Through the pleasant ways of Hampshire, surely one of England's most delectable counties, the car sped swiftly. Then came the stretches of the New Forest, retaining after many hundreds of years the fair, virginal charm of early England. Autumn gave a golden beauty to the moorland over which the small, shaggy-coated ponies roamed, scampering away as they glanced up to see this juggernaut of man flash by.

Jimmy, as he kept a keen look-out, couldn't help wondering if this wondrous beauty of nature was merely a mask for devilry—danger might be lurking in those cool forest depths through which the car was now passing at a rapid pace.

It had been a silent ride all the way from London ; and, now that they were nearing their destination the tension to Jimmy, always sensitive to atmosphere, became almost oppressive. He would have given a great deal to have talked to the girl who sat between him and her father, but Delia had her eyes closed and appeared to be asleep. Sebastian Miller's expression did not encourage conversation.

Suddenly the millionaire picked up the speaking-tube and gave the chauffeur some instructions. The car had left the main road and had branched off into a narrow, winding track leading over moorland. Jimmy noticed that the driver—evidently at Miller's instruction—had put out the head-lights.

Twilight deepened into darkness, and in the gloom the impression that they were being surrounded by invisible forces of evil strengthened. Jimmy Hanray was not a coward, but he was relieved when the car

turned into a wide sweeping carriage-way after twenty minutes or so further travelling.

This drive, bordered on both sides by what looked like a tall yew hedge, was uncannily dark. Jimmy, speculating on what chance they would stand if attacked in such an inferno of gloom, was relieved to hear himself addressed by his employer.

"Here we are at Steep Holm," Miller said; "wake up, Delia."

The girl sat up just as the car glided up to an impressive entrance.

"Oh, I hated that drive," she said impulsively.

Her father, as though determined to banish any fears, answered cheerily: "Don't be silly, my dear. The Forest was looking wonderful, I thought. Anyway, here's Mrs. Matthews; she'll see that you are made comfortable."

Standing just inside the front door Jimmy observed a matronly woman smiling a welcome. Her comely, good-natured face was as inspiring as a lamp shining in a dark room. She looked the personification of goodwill and kindness.

"Mrs. Matthews with her husband are the caretakers here," explained Sebastian Miller; "she is the best antidote to bogies of any kind I know. Just looking at her gives me a fresh faith in life."

He led the way into the wide hall.

"I don't mind admitting that I am thankful we got here without any mishap," he said with a change of tone, "but now that we are at Steep Holm, we shall be safe!" He said the last few words with a conviction that rather puzzled the listener.

Some of this surprise went, however, when Jimmy came to be taken over part of the house by Miller before dinner. Steep Holm—hence its name, no

doubt—was built at the top of a rise of land and so commanded a view of many miles, with the sea on one side and the New Forest on the other.

"The house dates from the fourteenth century and forms part of what was once a castle," said Miller. "The walls are fifteen inches thick in places, and a great many of the windows are nothing much better than the original slits for the arrows to be shot from. Steep Holm has weathered many sieges, if history and tradition are to be relied upon—and, guns apart, it could stand another one."

"Do you expect anything of that kind, sir?" It struck Hanray momentarily that the speaker's sanity might be wavering. Worry and overwork—from both of which the financier was undoubtedly suffering—might have caused that splendid brain to become temporarily unbalanced.

The answer was swift and dramatic.

"With a man like Kurt Zweig to reckon with, anything is possible."

"Kurt Zweig—is that the name of the enemy you told me about, Mr. Miller?"

An expression of cold, terrible anger passed into the financier's roughly-hewn face.

"Yes," he replied. "Never allow that name to escape your memory if you have my interests at heart."

"It is scarcely likely to," was the response. "Scanlon and Dorman both work for him, you think?"

"Scanlon is an old associate of Zweig, and after what you have told me, there can be no doubt but what the man who called himself Dorman is also in Zweig's pay. They will prove a powerful combination."

"We have the laugh so far, anyway," said Hanray. The words seemed to give the financier courage, for he smiled.

CHAPTER XI THE SCREAM IN THE NIGHT

THE room which had been allotted to him was most comfortably appointed and, seated in a chair by the side of the fire, Jimmy smoked a final pipe before getting into the inviting-looking bed.

It had been a momentous day, and he had a great deal to think about. It did not matter, however, in whatever direction his mind wandered—whether it was to the swarthy-faced Scanlon, the bitterly hostile wife of his employer or Sebastian Miller himself, that human enigma—his thoughts always centred themselves finally on the person who most vitally concerned him—Delia Miller: the girl Fate had caused him to love at their first meeting.

He wished that Miller could have seen his way to have given him more confidence. At the present time he was more or less in the dark. So well as he could reason it out from what the financier had told him, the position was as follows: Sebastian Miller, a man who through his millions could have provided himself with a private army to protect his interests, had elected to retire to a lonely house in the New Forest because he had learned that an enemy of his had arrived in England. Although he could probably have had this man Zweig and his criminal associates arrested by communicating with the police, he had not done so. Instead, if the danger was a very real one—and this was conceivably true—he had done his best to encourage his enemy to attack by leaving London and retiring to the country. It seemed incomprehensible at first thought—almost as incomprehensible as the financier's action in taking into his

employ a man of whom, in spite of his assertion that he had made inquiries about him, he could know practically nothing.

Jimmy, knocking out his pipe, gave it up. There seemed to him no sense in the whole business. Was Miller —— ?

That was an idea. Could Sebastian Miller be entirely normal ? Had his life of desperate hard work, involving schemes of almost inconceivable magnitude, turned his brain ? The man certainly gave the impression of being sane to a degree that amounted to abnormality, but some of his actions were decidedly queer.

If he were unbalanced, what was his real purpose in bringing his daughter down to this place ? Madness often caused the sufferer to turn against the particular person he or she loved most, he remembered once to have read, and in that case . . .

Biting his lip as this disturbing thought swept through him, Jimmy took a step towards the door ; the impulse came to go in search of Delia immediately and warn her of this possible danger.

With the knowledge that it was past midnight and that he did not know her room, came a sense of caution. He reminded himself that he must proceed carefully ; if Miller was actually insane, he would possess the traditional madman's cunning. To act precipitatively as he had contemplated doing would be a fatal mistake. And there was another factor ; so far, Delia, he was positive, had no inkling that her father was anything but a perfectly sane man ; to betray that he had any other impression would serve first merely to frighten her terribly and secondly to cause her to turn from him in disgust and suspicion.

Once in bed, he endeavoured to switch his mind into

a less disturbing channel. Mention had been made at dinner of a golf course; he could conceive nothing more delightful than to play a round with Delia—although it had been some years since he had handled a club.

Aided by such a prospect, his imagination became lulled, and soon afterwards consciousness slipped away from him.

How long he had slept he did not know, but the room was in pitch darkness when he woke. Wondering what had disturbed him, he realised that he was trembling from head to foot; his whole body was reacting to some severe nervous excitement.

And, whilst he sat up, trying to penetrate the darkness, IT came—a cry dreadful beyond description, sounding so eerie and terrifying in that dead of night that he only just saved himself from calling out. A second later this first vocal horror was followed by a yet more terrifying scream, but whether this second signal of fear was drawn from the throat of human or animal, Jimmy could not decide.

All he knew was that from somewhere out in the grounds a hellish scene was being enacted and that he was going to inquire into it.

Without waiting to throw on anything but a dressing-gown, he flung open the door and rushed into the corridor. As he did so, he heard his name called twice—"Mr. Hanray! Mr. Hanray!"

He turned to find Delia Miller running towards him. She was in pyjamas and her feet were bare. So much he could not help seeing before the girl caught his arm.

"What was that? Tell me! It woke me up—oh, how dreadful . . .!" Her voice died away in a sob of terror.

He didn't realise that he was patting her shoulder.

"It was just an animal crying in the night," he replied, knowing now that he was lying. "Won't you go back to your room, Miss Miller?—everything is all right. After I have made inquiries, I'll send word. Please!—you'll catch cold."

He tried to make the words sound reassuring and believed he had succeeded when the girl, some colour now in her cheeks, smiled up at him.

"Yes, I'll go back to bed—it was silly of me, I suppose—but that scream! I shall never be able to forget it!" She put her hands over her ears as though expecting to hear it again.

"Thank you ever so much for not being angry, Mr. Hanray," she added; "I shall feel safe now that I know your room is near mine."

Jimmy waited until he had seen her disappear through a door on the right, and then rushed for the staircase. In the great hall he found Sebastian Miller, and noticed to his surprise that the financier was still in evening dress.

"Ah, it's you, Hanray," he said, looking up. He seemed about to add something, but waited—or so it struck Jimmy—for the other to say the obvious thing.

"That noise, sir—it sounded like a scream——"

He was interrupted.

"So you heard it, Hanray?"

"It woke me up, sir; I couldn't help hearing it." He was about to refer to his meeting with Delia, but decided not to mention the fact.

"And what impression did you happen to form? Tell me; I'm interested."

Jimmy's former fears that the man might be mad not only returned but became strengthened by Sebastian Miller's manner. The millionaire was evidently

under the stress of some vivid emotion. He showed this physically by rocking to and fro, and mentally by shining eyes and lips drawn back from strong, white teeth.

"Tell me, Hanray," he urged, "what was the impression you formed?"

"Do you want the truth?"

The strong teeth came together with a snap.

"Of course I want the truth."

"Well, that scream struck me as having been uttered by a man who was being murdered."

"So it was," said the millionaire.

"A man being murdered?" repeated Hanray, looking at him hard.

"'Suicide' would be perhaps the more correct term," was Miller's reply. "Sit down, Hanray, and have a cigarette. It will calm you and make your judgment clearer. You need not be afraid that the man is still suffering, because he is undoubtedly dead. Later on we may go and ascertain for ourselves. But in the meantime——" The speaker broke off to walk up to Hanray and bring a hand down heavily on his shoulder.

"You think me mad," he said, reading the other's thoughts as though they were printed in an opened book, "but you are mistaken; I am as sane as you. Get that idea out of your head at once and for ever."

The words had the effect the speaker obviously desired. Instantly Jimmy knew that he had been wrong in his surmise; instead of being deranged, his employer was perfectly sane. Yet, that being the case, how was he able to talk so dispassionately about the killing in cold blood of a fellow-being?

But he sat down, because the will of Miller was strong enough to compel him to obey.

"No doubt you have wondered why I should leave London and possibly expose myself to attacks which could be more readily made on me in this country house?" said the financier. "But the answer is simple; here, in the midst of solitude, I am able to take measures which would be impossible in London. For instance, Steep Holm becomes impregnable at any moment I may decide. It is surrounded by an invisible belt of electricity which means death to any intruder. Judging from the direction of that scream which so startled you a short while ago, this particular intruder attempted to climb the wall at the back. He will probably present a deplorable sight when found, for the current is particularly strong at that point. How the supply is worked will be shown to you to-morrow. I want you to be interested, because it will probably happen that you will be placed in charge of the defences of Steep Holm. The electric belt is extremely effective; I have seen to that." The speaker lit a cigar and now spoke more sharply. "You keep silent, Hanray! Don't you agree that a man should take precautions to safeguard his own property?"

"Certainly."

"But you think he should stop short at murder? Is that it?"

"Not in certain circumstances. For instance, if I had found a man attacking me in my room to-night and I was convinced that he intended to kill me, I should have shot him without hesitation."

"And if you had a daughter who was as dear to you as Delia is to me, and you knew that a man was coming to take her away from you and to use her abominably, would you also shoot that man?"

"By God, I would!" replied Hanray quickly.

The millionaire held out his hand for the younger man to shake.

But the only words he said were: "Slip on some clothes and we will go to find Zweig's creature."

When Jimmy returned to the hall ten minutes later, he asked the question which had been in his mind ever since he had comforted Delia Miller outside his room.

"What about the servants, sir?"

"They have been warned not to take any notice of any peculiar sound in the night. If I want them, I shall give a signal which could not be mistaken. Now we will go."

The night was dark with a velvety blackness that enveloped them in an impenetrable cloud. Jimmy, following the millionaire, who carried a storm lantern, felt that every bush they passed might harbour a possible enemy. He would have welcomed action of some sort, for this continual being at tension-point was wearing to the nerves—especially when the prize to be guarded was the girl he loved.

Sebastian Miller walked on as though every inch of the spacious grounds were familiar to him. Past what looked like a sunken rose-garden, past a hard tennis-court, through a vast patch of turf he went until a high wall loomed up in front.

"As I thought," he said, flashing his light.

At the foot of the wall a man's body was sprawled—and it was a horrible sight. Both hands were mere blackened stumps, and his clothes were ripped and torn in a hundred places. . . .

"Yes, he is undoubtedly dead," commented the financier. "I believe you can drive a car, Hanray?"

"Yes."

"I want you to drive me to the sea—now. This," pointing to the tortured corpse, "must be disposed of.

I am within my rights in defending my property, but I do not want the fools of police badgering me with questions. We will drive to Butler's Hard—it is a comparatively short distance—and there we will slip the body into the water. The mystery of how a man who must have died through electrocution was found immersed in water will probably never be discovered—but *Zweig will know*. He will be able to solve the riddle. As you said to-day, Hanray, so far we have the laugh. We will now get the car. We can bring it round to the back of the house—I will show you how—and then the body can be passed through a door in the wall. But first I must switch off the current."

For the next couple of hours Jimmy felt he was moving in a maze. He realised he was definitely going outside the law by his action that night, but he did not stop to consider this. Sebastian Miller was exercising a personal magnetism over him which he found impossible to withstand.

It was only when he got back into bed at 3 a.m. that full consciousness of what he had done that night swept over him in a flood.

Yet, when he thought of Delia Miller, sleeping he hoped peacefully only a few rooms away, a strange calm took the place of his previous unrest. He knew he would not hesitate to commit murder himself to save her from any hurt.

CHAPTER XII DELIA TELLS SECRETS

THAT October morning was like a vision from Heaven. Jimmy woke to the twittering of birds, and as he shaved, his eyes absorbed the magical pageant of

Nature. Autumn had repeated its annual miracle with the country-side; through the open window came the intoxicating scents of pine and heather, together with the far-borne salty tang of the sea. He went downstairs with a tremendous zest for life and an enormous appetite.

At breakfast he was introduced to Bray, the financial expert and principal secretary of Sebastian Miller—the man who was to assist the millionaire in the elaborating of that gigantic scheme with which the millionaire intended, when his plans were completed, to startle the world and to set the coping-stone on his marvellously-successful career. Horace Bray, a tall, thin, weedy-looking man of forty-five, with a pale complexion and a receding chin, had obviously no other interest in life but his work. He was as much a man of intense mental effort as Jimmy knew himself to be a man of action. Hanray felt immediately they would not clash. Bray quite evidently read nothing in the newspapers but the financial columns, and if the question of a murder was mentioned in his presence, he would only consider it in the light of how the death—not the manner of the death, but the death itself—would affect the stock market. After a loose handshake and a casual glance out of his thick-lensed spectacles, Bray ignored him. Which was very much to Hanray's satisfaction, since it left him free to devote himself to Delia Miller.

The girl had greeted him with even more than her usual cordiality. She looked none the worse for her anxiety of the night before.

"You did not send me any message last night, Mr. Hanray," she said in a low tone when they first met.

He recalled with something like dismay that he had promised to let her have a word of reassurance—in

the tumult of events he had clean forgotten it till now.

"I was afraid to disturb you," he replied, trying to make the lame excuse sound plausible. "And there was no cause for alarm," he added, feeling that the lie was not merely justified but imperative.

"Then it was——?"

"Merely one of the night things of the forest crying," he cut in quickly—"an owl, probably."

He was thankful, in spite of the expression of relief which came into the girl's face, when Miller approached them. The millionaire kissed his daughter and then the breakfast gong sounded.

Towards the end of the meal, during which the financier had concentrated on talking to Bray, Miller turned to Hanray.

"I shall be exceedingly busy for the best part of the day," he said. "I want you and Delia to look over the place and generally enjoy yourselves. There is a hard tennis-court and a few holes have been laid out in the grounds if you feel like golf." He turned again to Bray, and they soon left the table together.

"Daddy is always like that when he is planning out a new way of making money," said Delia. "Don't you think it is very silly when he already has so much? Why shouldn't he give up all this wretched scheming and start to enjoy life? There must be so many beautiful things to be seen in the world, so many perfectly wonderful things to do."

"Your father is not the type to be an idler. He will be working hard until the day of his death. Some men find their only enjoyment in tremendously hard work, you know," he went on to explain.

She shook her head.

"I think it is very silly—and rather selfish. But

men are selfish—even the best of them like Daddy. Yet I believe he works so hard because he wishes to forget."

Because he felt that the girl was beginning to touch on an essentially private matter, Jimmy endeavoured to change the subject.

But his reference to the delight of the morning was disregarded.

"My mother, his first wife, was the one Daddy loved," she continued. "When she died, he became a different person; he seemed—how can I hope to explain?—to go cold inside. Oh, why did he marry that woman?—I'm sure she hates him just as she hates me."

It was painfully embarrassing for Hanray, and his face showed it.

"You ought not to be telling me this, Miss Miller," he said, "and I ought not to be listening to it."

She looked at him with the trustfulness of a child.

"Why shouldn't I tell you?" she replied with a simplicity that went to his heart; "if I had a girl friend it would be different. But I haven't. I've been lonely ever—ever since my mother died. What do you think of that, Mr. Hanray?—the only daughter of London's richest man to be lonely!"

"I ought not to say this—but you shouldn't be," he said.

"But it is the truth, nevertheless. Daddy has never liked me to go out anywhere because he is afraid something dreadful will happen—that I shall be kidnapped, I think, although he never puts his fear into actual words. Why should he have that fear?"

"Because he is very fond of you."

Delia made a wry face.

"Other fathers are fond of their daughters but they

do not spend life imagining dreadful things like that are going to happen. That night I went to the Albert Hall I slipped away merely because I was desperate—and yet he is the dearest daddy and I love him more than I can say.” She half turned her head away but Jimmy could see the tears glistening in her eyes.

The tragic ironies of life ! Here was a girl with untold wealth at her disposal, and yet she was being kept a prisoner from all the delights with which her youth and beauty should have been surrounded. He knew he had no right to say anything—and even if he had, what could he say ? It was impossible to tell her that it was because of his fear she might fall into the hands of his enemies that her father exercised such precaution.

“ You needn’t stay indoors to-day, at any rate,” he said ; “ which shall it be—tennis or golf ? ”

“ I prefer golf if you don’t mind.”

“ So do I. To be perfectly honest, I haven’t any kit for tennis.” He hesitated a moment and then plunged on : “ You have been good enough to give me your confidence, Miss Miller. Now I should like to give you mine. Until your father took me into his employ, I was a hopeless failure—and had been for some years. I tell you this because——” He hesitated, not knowing how to proceed.

“ Because you are an honest man, Mr. Hanray,” the girl said, helping him out : “ I realised that from the beginning. I suppose,” she added, “ I must have some of daddy’s ability in reading character, but I knew instinctively that I could trust you. But your misfortune could not have been due to anything but sheer bad luck,” she went on confidently, “ and now that luck has changed. Still, I am pleased you should have told me, though there was really no need for you to do so.”

"I told your father the truth and I felt it only right that you should know, too." It was a lame and halting rejoinder, but he had the satisfaction of seeing a flush come into the listener's cheeks and a smile into her eyes.

"And now about this golf match," she said; "goodness knows what kind of clubs we shall find."

A passably good set were unearthed for Jimmy, and, feeling that his troubles had slipped away in miraculous fashion, he accompanied the girl into the grounds. In the morning sunshine it was almost impossible to believe that, a mere two hundred yards from where he now stood, a man had died in hideous torment only a few hours before. In order to banish the thought, he led the way to the first tee on the miniature course and placed a ball for his companion.

Delia's swing was the epitome of grace and the ball sailed down the fairway, coming finally to rest a good hundred and eighty yards from the tee.

"Nice ball!" exclaimed Jimmy and, manlike, being anxious to excel, he endeavoured to hit the cover off his own ball. The result was an appalling slice.

"Bad luck!—that's because you're out of practice," consoled Delia.

"It's because I'm a rotten bad player," replied Hanray. "I'm afraid it won't be much fun for you playing with me, Miss Miller."

"Don't be silly," protested the girl—and then stopped to watch a servant who was approaching rapidly.

"Yes?" she said, when the man had reached them.

"I have a message for Mr. Hanray, miss," replied the man.

"Is it important, Simmons?"

"I don't know, miss. The master told me to find Mr. Hanray and say that a police inspector had called and that, as he was too busy, would Mr. Hanray see him?"

CHAPTER XIII

THE CROSS-
EXAMINATION

A CRY came from Delia.

"A police inspector!" she repeated, her face reflecting alarm; "what does he want?"

The servant looked confused.

"I couldn't say, miss; I mean the master didn't say. My instructions were to find Mr. Hanray and ask him to see the inspector."

Delia gave no sign of having heard. She seemed unaware of the servant's presence.

"Then something *did* happen last night!" She looked across at Hanray and he saw reproach in her eyes. The memory that he had been obliged to tell her a lie was like a sword in his breast. Yet having started to deceive, he was forced to continue—to retreat now would be fatal.

"All right," he told the servant, "I'll come at once." As the man turned to walk back to the house, he said: "I'm sure there's absolutely nothing to worry about; if the matter was important, your father would not have relegated the task to such a nondescript person as myself!" In spite of the uneasiness he felt, he put so much light-heartedness into the words that the girl almost became convinced.

Yet——

"You would not deceive me, Mr. Hanray?" she asked.

He replied gravely.

"There is nothing I would not do, Miss Miller, to save you a moment's pain."

She hung her head.

"You are very kind," she murmured; "now go and see that dreadful police person and then come back and finish our game. I will stay here, sitting on the top of this bunker, and have a cigarette."

"I shan't be long," he promised.

The smile left his lips as he walked away. What did Miller mean by deputing this task to him? Was he afraid to face the man himself? It seemed an unworthy thought—after even his brief knowledge of the financier, the possibility of Sebastian Miller being a coward appeared ludicrous—and yet—

Well, the only thing to do was to face the fellow. And he must put the man off, of course. Although he had endeavoured to reassure Delia, the policeman had called about the finding of the dead man—what other object could he possibly have? Good Lord! It was a ghastly enough business; he hoped he would not give anything away. As he entered the room in which he was informed the inspector was waiting, he felt his heart beating rapidly.

"Great Scott! Hanray!" cried a voice.

Jimmy stared in astonishment. He had expected to see a man in uniform—but here was an old friend dressed in mufti! He had last met Dick Pudan during 1918 when the slim, exquisitely-dressed ex-airman, whose uniform had always looked as though it had been moulded on him, had been drafted to his battalion head-quarters for what was vaguely known in those days as "Light Duty."

Jimmy, as he shook hands, continued to stare.

"What in the name of Sam Hill are you doing

here ? ” he inquired. “ I was told a police inspector wanted to see me.”

Pudan burst into a laugh.

“ I’m the police inspector,” he replied.

“ You ? ”

“ No other. Only it happens I’m a detective-inspector, which accounts for my being in plain clothes instead of in uniform.”

“ But why the police ? I always understood that you were going into your father’s wine business after the war.”

“ So I was, old lad,” said Pudan, chuckling afresh ; “ only it happened that just as I was about to become O. C. Empty Bottles, the old man—don’t think I blame him—decided all of a sudden to marry again. It’s rather a habit, I believe, when a man gets to sixty-five. Anyway, I couldn’t stand step-ma, and, not caring for the bottle business from the beginning, I decided to clear out altogether. A pal I knew in the squadron was rather matey with the Chief Commissioner of Police and I managed to wangle being taken on at Scotland Yard.”

“ What on earth as ? ” ejaculated Hanray.

“ Hush ! ” said the other in an exaggerated manner, “ don’t let it go any further, but I’m a detective ! And an inspector at that. I made mention of the fact before, but you appear to have forgotten it.”

“ So you did,” rejoined his listener, “ but the truth is I’m so bewildered that I’m not quite my usual self. You, a detective ! ”

The other nodded, a grin on his face.

“ Not such a bad one, either,” he said with a delightful self-complacency that recalled the war days, “ so if you think of committing any crime, Hanray, my boy, don’t do it when I’m on the premises. I am

ruthless on the trail and"—with a grotesque imitation of an American stage detective, "I always get my man!"

The hand which took the cigarette from the speaker's proffered case shook a trifle. He had the idea that there was ice behind Pudan's smile, a grim purpose at the back of his ridiculous buffoonery. It had been a tradition, he recalled, in Pudan's squadron, that he rarely returned from a trip over the lines without bringing an enemy plane down.

"I always get my man." Surely there was some connection between Pudan's old record and the statement he had just made. Had this been meant as a covert threat in spite of the grotesquerie with which it had been clothed?

"All this is very interesting, and I need scarcely say how glad I am to see you again, Dick," he heard himself saying, "but exactly why have you called here this morning? Perhaps I'd better explain beforehand, however, that I've just taken on the job of private secretary to Mr. Sebastian Miller, the financier."

"My dear old bean, 'gratters!'" returned the other. Pudan's manner was cordiality personified, but Jimmy could not help noticing that his eyes were very bright and keen. His sense of uneasiness increased. He did not devote any further time to conjecturing why Pudan had achieved success in his unexpected job—the qualities he possessed for the work were written in his face and reflected in his manner. The man was alert, masterful, supremely confident.

"The job carries a good deal of responsibility—doesn't it?" the detective-inspector asked.

"A reasonable amount," replied Jimmy, feeling his way and wishing that the other would come to the point

"The reason I ask," went on Pudan, flicking the ash off his cigarette, "is because I had reliable information brought to me yesterday morning that an old army friend of mine, by name James Hanray, was observed knocking down in a most businesslike if somewhat unseemly manner, a person called Scanlon, whom we have very good reason to believe is an American crook of a rather high grade."

Hanray's patience burst.

"Look here, Pudan," he said angrily, "you may find it very amusing to come here and crack your jokes, but as my time happens to be pretty well taken up this morning, I should be very much obliged if you would come right down to brass tacks."

"Right! I will. In the first place, then, can you tell me why Mr. Miller refused to see me this morning?"

"I can. He is engaged on a tremendously important financial scheme and, knowing the man, I don't believe he'd give the Prime Minister himself any time. He at once sent word, however, to me."

"Are you in the position to answer any questions I think fit to put to you?"

"In your private or official capacity?"

"Official. In my most official and officious capacity," was the reply in something of the speaker's former jocular manner.

"Yes—I think so," said Hanray slowly. He was still probing his way, feeling very much in the dark.

"Good! Then will you tell me all you know about the man whose dead body was discovered early this morning in the water a few miles away from here?—at a place called Butler's Hard, to be exact. Butler's Hard, in case you don't know it, is where they used to build the ships," the speaker added.

The tone may have been one of inconsequence, but Jimmy was not deceived. Pudan's eyes were astonishingly keen; they seemed able to read everything in his mind. But he had known subconsciously all the time the real reason of the other's visit. It wasn't likely that a police officer, especially a man holding the rank of inspector, would come to a person's house unless he had a grave reason for doing so. Social calls weren't much in the police line.

"A man discovered in the water near here—do you mean a dead man?" he asked, exerting a strong hold over himself.

"That is exactly what I do mean—a dead man. And he died in a particularly horrible manner, too."

"How?" He must pretend to have the ordinary person's interest in the morbid.

"Well, the doctor says he must have been electrocuted."

Jimmy raised his voice.

"Electrocuted! But we haven't had a thunderstorm lately."

Pudan looked at him queerly.

"There are other ways of meeting one's death through electrocution than by standing beneath a tree when there's lightning playing about," he remarked. "I suppose you don't happen to know if there was an attempted burglary at this house last night?" he went on to inquire.

Hanray, although his nerves were twitching, affected fresh anger.

"And will you please tell me, Pudan, why you should associate a possible burglary at Steep Holm with the death of a man some miles away?"

"But was there any burglary here?" persisted the other; "either last night or the night before?"

"There certainly wasn't last night," was the answer. "We arrived just before dinner," he explained, "and if there had been anything of the sort the night before, the servants would have told Mr. Miller."

This new kind of detective-inspector nodded.

"That is certainly a decisive answer," he said. Then, tapping his knuckles on the table: "It seems rather strange that Mr. Miller should have declined to see me."

"Not after the explanation I have given you. For the last time, Pudan, what the devil are you getting at?"

"Getting at?" He repeated the words as though he did not understand.

"I am merely endeavouring to carry out my job—surely not too unreasonable a thing to do. I happened to be staying at a very attractive Guest House at Butler's Hard for a few days' rest, and when a dead body is thrown in my lap in a way of speaking, I naturally have to investigate the thing."

"That is understandable, of course," agreed Hanray, his discomfort increasing with the other's plausibility, "but why start here?"

Pudan smiled.

"I should like to believe that your mind is as innocent as you profess to be yourself," he said; "that is why I pass on the information that this house happens to be the subject of a good deal of interest locally."

"It being occupied by a man who is known to be a multi-millionaire—I don't see anything singular in that."

Again the visitor smiled—rather wryly this time.

"Quite so. But that is not entirely what I had in

my mind. Is it a fact that Steep Holm is—well fortified ? ”

“ Fortified ? ” Hanray pretended to roar with laughter.

“ Sounds comic, does it not ? ” declared the detective inspector, “ but, strange as it may appear, that is certainly my information. One moment before you reply, Hanray—I put it to you that, supposing this presumption to be correct, supposing that you employer for some private reason which we will leave for the moment, wished to keep any intruders—such as the man Scanlon, for instance—away, decided to have his outside wall electrified——”

“ Well ? ” commented Hanray when the speaker stopped.

The other’s lightness of manner dropped from him.

“ That is why I suggested there might have been a burglar here recently,” Pudan continued ; “ for a man trying to get over a wall, the top of which was heavily charged with electricity, would meet his death in much the same manner as this poor devil at Butler’s Hard.”

“ It seems to me that for a detective, you are apt to be too imaginative,” Jimmy rejoined ; “ this is the country house of a thoroughly respectable and responsible English gentleman ; you talk about it as though it were a mediæval fortress equipped with the appliances of a modern sensational film.”

The detective-inspector remained unruffled.

“ We live in a sensational age,” he said, “ and a millionaire is apt to have enemies.” He picked up his hat and stick. “ Should you decide to be frank—and believe me, it would be to your advantage—you can always write to me at Scotland Yard.”

“ I shall have nothing to send you, so you must prepare yourself for disappointment, I am afraid. ”

happen to be a secretary, not an adept in the black arts."

Pudan's smile was enigmatic.

"Nevertheless," he said, "you may care to look me up some time if only for old time's sake ; if you do, I shall always be delighted to see you. As I say, we live in somewhat sensational times.

"Good-bye, old chap," he added.

Jimmy accepted the outstretched hand, but for the life of him he did not know if the other was friend or enemy.

"What did he talk about ? "

Back in the grounds he was confronted by an anxious Delia.

During the short walk from the house he had elaborated some sort of explanation.

"He was an evasive sort of person," he said, smiling, "but from what I could make out, there has been an outbreak of burglaries in the district lately, and this policeman wanted to know if we had been troubled."

He was relieved to notice how readily the girl accepted the story, although to be forced to continue to lie to her in this manner was so repugnant that his mind revolted at it.

"Oh, that's all right, then. Of course, Steep Holm being one of the biggest houses in this part of the Forest, and daddy being such a rich man, it was perhaps only natural that the policeman should call. And now let's play golf."

The two proved poorly matched. Delia possessed a natural aptitude for the game, whilst Hanray was not only long out of practice but he was unable to concentrate his mind. And the man who does not concentrate at golf is a doomed soul.

After the girl had won six holes following, he cried enough.

"I'm afraid this is very poor fun for you," he said ; "later on I hope to be able to give you a better game, but this morning I am hopeless."

"It is because you haven't played for so long. Golf is a sport that wants constant practice. Brockenhurst and Lyndhurst both have good courses, I believe ; we must try to get daddy to give us permission to go over to them. This"—gesturing with her hand—"is all right to potter about on, but, of course, it isn't real golf."

She sat down on a grass bunker, smoothing her short tweed skirt over her knees.

"Do give me a cigarette !" she pleaded ; and when he had lit it : "What shall we talk about ?"

That conversation, as it happened, was destined not to be started, for the same servant appeared.

"Mr. Miller would like to see you in his study, sir," he said to Hanray.

"Bother !" exclaimed Delia ; "why isn't he content with his wonderful Mr. Bray ?"

Jimmy, as he excused himself, felt an odd sense of relief. He had been too perturbed by the recent interview with Detective-Inspector Pudan to be at ease with the daughter whose father he could not get out of his mind was a—murderer.

He found Sebastian Miller alone in the big room which had been turned into a study. The financier eyed him shrewdly as he entered.

"Got rid of the policeman ?" he asked.

"The man left of his own accord," was the reply.

"Tell me what happened."

When Jimmy had concluded, Miller patted him on the shoulder.

"You seem to have handled a difficult position with considerable discretion," he declared; "and you need have no fear that we shall hear anything more of the matter."

"I am not so sure of that, sir. Remember what I have told you of Pudan's reputation in the war. It was quite evident that he believed the man had died through trying to get into Steep Holm."

The financier snapped his fingers impatiently.

"Supposing he does think so? He has no direct proof—and the law of this country lays it down that a man is justified in taking adequate measures in protecting his own property. We will talk no more of it. There is a much more important question to be discussed."

Jimmy waited.

"The question of your salary, Hanray. No mention of this has been made up till now. I have decided to start you at £1,500 a year. If that is not sufficient, let me know."

Jimmy gulped back something in his throat.

"It's absurdly generous, sir. I shall never be able to feel I earn it."

Miller seemed pleased.

"We will leave that to the future to decide," he said; "in the meantime, I am very pleased with you."

As he turned away, Hanray's mind was a maelstrom of conflicting emotions. The man's offer, as he had said, was absurdly generous, but coming on the top of what had occurred the night before, he knew he would have refused it but for one factor.

Delia.

She was the controlling influence in his life—and always would be.

THE woman the world knew as Adele Miller took a long and searching look into the oval mirror over the dressing-table. What she saw made the hard lines round her painted mouth temporarily relax.

That look gave her reassurance. She was still lovely—very lovely: attractive enough, indeed, to turn the head of almost any man. Her blonde beauty retained that delicate transparency which had caused America's most critical judge of feminine appeal to stare the first time he saw her. That had been ten years before, when she first set out to conquer the world.

It had been a fairly easy struggle—after she had once found herself in the New York Follies—placed there by the great Florenz himself.

"Little one," he had said in his husky, attractive whisper, "you were born to be looked at. I can find something for you to do. Yes."

He had. For five years New York's richest men had found solace after their strenuous days in Wall Street in looking at Fayre Dawn, Florenz's new lovely lady. Whilst none of them actually offered her marriage, she had the choice of everything else. The daughter of the small Middle-West farmer, who prayed every night that his only daughter's soul might even yet be saved, had the ball at her pretty feet. She kicked it hard.

The sort of success she achieved was likely, of course, to go to any girl's head, and at the end of those five hectic years she became capricious. She made the fatal mistake of quarrelling with the man

who had placed her on the pinnacle, who had been the means of her achieving photographic fame in practically every high-class illustrated weekly in the world. You see, Fayre Dawn—her mentality can be gauged by the stage name she chose for herself—imagined that she was indispensable to the world's greatest beauty expert, but Florenz, smiling his wise smile, knew different. Oh, how different he knew! Five years is a long time to rule over New York, and there were many signs that Fayre Dawn had dangerous rivals. There is a continual supply of radiant and dazzling youth pouring into America's metropolis, and most of it goes to Florenz to be inspected. He had an endless choice. That was why he had smiled.

"Little girl," he replied, when his late star had said her say, "the world is wide; for myself I think that you should leave New York."

Storming out of the room, she had packed her trunks and, heralded by much publicity, had crossed to London. Because she was that much-boomed beauty, Fayre Dawn, a theatrical manager, who had formerly been in the sausage industry, gave her the leading part in a musical comedy he was producing.

The result was unhappy—distinctly so. On the New York stage Fayre Dawn had never been required to do anything more ambitious than to drape her really beautiful body in various exiguous costumes and to maintain a pose of pitiless contempt for the rest of the world. London was different, and more exacting. For example, it asked that a musical comedy star should have something of a singing voice. Fayre Dawn had nothing of a singing voice. Then, flint-hearted monster, London required that a leading lady in musical comedy should know the elements of acting. The star in "The Green Cheese" had never

troubled to acquire the elements of acting—it had been beneath her dignity to do so. A certain gentleman who commented on the Stage for a Sunday newspaper with a pen that dripped acid when he was in that mood, wrote so caustically concerning the Empress Theatre's imported leading lady that even the ex-sausage manufacturer, although he had to have certain words explained to him, gathered that something was wrong. Without troubling to worry his conscience with thought of the contract he had signed, he dismissed the woman he had formerly fawned upon, and brought in another girl to play the lead.

Result: The heavens opened and thunders and lightnings of an entirely unprecedented kind disturbed the always electric atmosphere of the Empress Theatre. First of all, Fayre Dawn, having been brought round from the swoon into which she had fallen immediately upon reading the letter of Mr. Raymond Delaporte (*né* Isaac Rosenbaum), went to call on that gentleman. She took with her a small revolver. Finding that, although the manager perspired freely, he would not retract, she sent a bullet through the fleshiest part of his nose—and thereupon made her final exit from the London stage. Whilst it is true that no class of men have harder hides than the type of theatrical manager to which Raymond Delaporte belonged, yet even this epidermis can be penetrated by a revolver bullet. Following on the fact that she had earned the derision of the cheaper parts of the house on the opening night, other managers, after the sending to hospital of Delaporte, became disinclined to offer an engagement to a woman who carried a revolver with her to business interviews, and, as already stated, Fayre Dawn became lost to the London stage.

The next that was heard of her was that she had married a very famous London financier at the Henrietta Street Registry Office. The financier's name was Sebastian Miller. After that, newspaper readers saw her no more. Sebastian Miller objected to publicity in any form, and his personality so dwarfed that of his second wife that what was printed concerning his household concerned himself and not the former Florenz Folly girl.

All things considered, Adele (she had been christened Maggie, but that is a detail) had done pretty well for herself. But the face which she saw reflected in the mirror was that of an extremely discontented woman.

Her marriage with Sebastian Miller from her point of view had been one purely of convenience. Accustomed to money, when the stage was closed to her, she had decided to marry a rich man. She had come to the conclusion that at twenty-eight, it was time she secured the stability of a wife. Only a millionaire would do, however.

Even from the beginning she had not liked Miller, let alone loved him. His masterful personality irked her. And when he discovered her real character—which he did very quickly—his attitude of cool contempt made her furious. There had been no open break—she was clever enough for that. Like a creature of the jungle, she had used cunning, and it had paid her.

Because, however, there must come a crisis to any such situation as existed in the Sebastian Miller household, Adele, as she rang for her maid, decided that the time had come to kick. That afternoon, before her husband had left for the country with that chit, Delia, there had been a scene.

The millionaire had been unusually incisive.

"As long as you do not give me any definite cause to divorce you, Adele, you shall live under my roof and have the protection of my name; having been the worst kind of fool, it is only right that I should pay for my folly. But if you pledge my credit in this way again"—extending a sheaf of bills—"I shall be under the necessity of advertising in the Press that I will not hold myself responsible for any further debts you may incur. I hope I make myself understood? You have a very handsome allowance; keep to it."

The memory made her bite her lip till the blood came. The hulking brute to dare to humiliate her like that! She, who by lifting a finger, could have any man she cared to choose! He was only waiting for the opportunity to start divorce proceedings—how he would welcome getting rid of her!—but the chance wouldn't be given him yet. Hate for the man made a look of devilish malice come into her face. She would never forget or forgive that insult—never; and there were many ways in which she could find revenge. One especially.

All through the long ceremony of arraying which followed—the pulling on the legs of gossamer stockings, the adjusting of diaphanous undergarments, the redressing of the blonde, shingled hair, then the final arranging of the theatre cloak—Adele was lost in her thoughts, only now and then breaking silence by making some bitter rebuke to her long-suffering dresser.

When the French maid was finally dismissed to order a taxi—Adele had her own reasons for not wishing to use one of her husband's cars that night—Celeste flung up her hands.

"What a hell-cat!" she said in her native tongue; "to-morrow I give her notice—yes, assuredly!"

The play had been boring, and, as she entered the Lotus Club, Adele was in the mood for excitement. Usually supremely self-possessed—her years in New York had taught her the value of keeping her head—she was ready to-night to play with fire. She was in a dangerous mood.

The Lotus, as the intelligent world knows, is one of the institutions of night-life in London's pleasure-seeking West End; it is *the* Dance and Supper Club. For here are some of its clientele: Minor royalty, actresses celebrated for their art and for other things, popular dramatists, leading ladies of the half-world and the principal blackmailers in the business. A mixed crowd, true, but all perfectly behaved.

There is never—or scarcely ever—a jarring note at the Lotus. Joseph, whose tact and poise are alike legendary, would not permit it. He would lift those slim, manicured hands of his in speechless protest—and peace would come. Occasionally, it is true, a man or woman has been known to drink too much champagne at the Lotus, but at the first sign of trouble the prospective offender is approached and requested to withdraw. Invariably the polite hint is taken. The team-work at the Lotus is very good.

Adele was a frequent visitor to the Lotus. Joseph, who knew his London far better than he knew his native Naples, paid her special attention. He was aware of the millions at her back. Adele liked the really wonderful sophistication of the place; it recalled a few of the more expensive night-haunts where she had reigned in New York. The food, of course,

was excellent, the service meticulous, and the dance orchestra the best in London. Joseph studied his clients.

The club was crammed as she passed the commissionaire. Autumn had brought the pleasure-seekers and those who prey on them back to the West End. There were sufficient people who matter present to delight the heart of any newspaper gossip-writer.

Joseph caught sight of the new-comer out of the corner of his eye and came forward to greet her.

"You honour me again, madam," he said with that inimitable suavity which had helped to turn a waiter into a rich *maitre d'hôtel*; "we are crowded to night, but I can get you, I think, your favourite table."

"Of course you can, Joseph," was the haughty reply. "Didn't I telephone?"

So it was that Adele soon found herself at a table on the balcony commanding a good view of the dancing floor below.

She supped lightly but elegantly and then, lighting a cigarette, took stock of her companions.

Quickly she caught the eye of a big-framed, immaculately-dressed man whose swarthy face showed up in such striking contrast against his gleaming shirt-front. A look of recognition came into this man's face—and before she quite realised that she had committed herself, Adele smiled.

The man rose immediately and walked to her table.

"Surely it's little Fayre Dawn?" he said.

Again Adele smiled—this time more radiantly. She felt pleased at the words; to-night she was in the mood to be remembered as the famous New York show-girl.

"That's years ago," she protested.

"Not too many for one of your most ardent admirers to forget, anyway," was the gallant rejoinder. "My! but it's wonderful to see you again, girlie—and not looking a day older, either."

The accent was New York American and so evidently was the man. Adele, although he was a complete stranger, warmed to the praise, crude as it was.

"And what are you doing in London, Mr.—?"

"Scanlon's my name. You won't remember me, perhaps?"

"I'm sorry, but I don't."

"Ah, well!" with a sigh, "that was more luck than I could hope to expect. Now tell me where have you been hiding all this time? I saw Eddie Florenz only a fortnight ago and he said he heard you were in Paris."

The blonde head was shaken.

"I'm an old married woman now and I never go to Paris—unless," with a meant-to-be provocative smile, "my husband is with me."

"You—married? Say, that's too bad!" declared the gallant Mr. Scanlon, who had a cut on his lower lip. "Who is the happy man?"

"Sebastian Miller."

A look of profound admiration was reflected on Mr. Scanlon's face.

"Not *the* Sebastian Miller—the millionaire financier, I mean?"

"None other," said Adele nonchalantly; "surely you must have read about it back home?"

The man put a hand to his chin.

"Not to my recollection," he replied; "but, still, that's nothing; the papers don't bother me much; it's folks I'm interested in."

"And once," purred Adele in the voice she had used

so successfully as Fayre Dawn, "you were interested in me, huh?"

"Sure thing!—and would be again if I had the millionth part of a chance." His eyes said more than his ready lips.

"Well," drawled Adele, "I'm looking for someone to fool around with to-night. Do you dance?"

It turned out that Mr. Scanlon, like many other big men, danced delightfully. After the third fox-trot, Adele decided that she was going to enjoy herself.

Something about this man set fire to her feeling of recklessness. She had started out to play the fool that night and Chance had sent her a partner whom she might have chosen for herself. The conversation about the old days in New York had brought back many memories—memories that were exceedingly pleasant. Those days when she had chased the rainbow had had a colourful tang which she knew she would never be able to recapture. Then she had been a creature of love and laughter, every man's desire; now she was the wife of a stupid, elderly fool who even refused to pay her bills. . . .

For one night at least she would endeavour to recapture the magic past. This man Scanlon was more than presentable; his figure was good, his clothes must have been fashioned by a Mayfair tailor, his manners could not be criticised, and he had none of the crudity of the average American when paying a compliment.

At four o'clock Scanlon made a suggestion.

"I've taken a flat in Dover Street," he said; "what about coming along to have a real American breakfast? My man can cook waffles that would make an archangel's mouth water."

Adele tossed her head.

"My dear man, do you imagine that I am in the habit of visiting strangers' flats at four o'clock in the morning?"

"Now I've offended you," replied her companion in a tone of deep contrition. "Say, I didn't mean to. Only you're lonely and I'm lonely, and——"

"Cut out the sob-stuff," rejoined the woman quickly; "I'll come along. I guess the old gang back in New York would laugh if they could hear us arguing."

"You bet they would. I remember what Old Man Guggenheimer once said about you, sweetie: 'That li'l' peach'll try anything once.'"

Adele gurgled with laughter.

"Let's go!" she cried.

During the short taxi-ride she suffered her fellow-countryman to hold her hand. This trifle Scanlon performed with an art that amounted to practically a gift. He was no bungling amateur.

The taxi stopped outside a tailor's shop.

"My rooms are above," explained Scanlon.

There was a lift, worked by hand, and so small that the two of them practically filled it.

"I'm sure struck on you, girlie," said Scanlon hoarsely. The tribute made Adele smile.

That smile lasted all the way to the luxuriously-furnished sitting-room, the door of which her companion flung open with a flourish.

Then it faded.

Scanlon had assured her there would be no one in the flat, but sitting in a chair was a man whose face as he stared made her flinch.

Something was wrong. She sensed it instinctively. Was Scanlon a blackmailer? Suddenly she realised

that as the wife of a multi-millionaire she would be a very promising subject.

But it was actual physical fear which made her turn towards the door. The seated man, who looked like a grotesque caricature of Beethoven, caused her to have a sensation of unaccountable dread.

"Sorry to disappoint you, girly, but you cannot go just yet," said Scanlon. The man was standing with his back to the door, and the former homage had given way to a heavy sarcasm. "My friend, Mr. Zweig, wishes to speak to you."

Conquering her fear, Adele turned.

"Who are you and what the devil do you mean by this?" she demanded.

"It won't do you any good to lose your temper," mumbled a heavy voice; "I've had you brought here because I think you will be useful to me."

"Me? Useful to you! Don't be a fool! I'm the wife of Sebastian Miller, the millionaire."

The saturnine lips of the man twisted themselves into a smile.

"I know," he replied; "that is *why* I think you will be useful to me."

CHAPTER XV

ZWEIG MAKES A STATEMENT

THERE was so much annihilating assurance in the speaker's manner that Adele for the moment was nonplussed. Then, her native courage reasserting itself, she unloosed a flood of invective. This was directed exclusively at the man who had threatened her; Scanlon she ignored as being the other's underling.

"You frozen-faced frog!" she shouted; "unless I am out of this place within five minutes I'll bring the police here. This isn't New York, you big stiff! Fancy trying a badger game like that—on me! I suppose Mr. Photographer will be popping in soon so that I can be snapped in the loving arms of this negroid mutt here. Think again, Mr. Cheese, or whatever your name is."

The man with the impressively massive face merely smiled at this tirade; it was as though he had expected something of the sort.

"I wouldn't have thought of interrupting you," he replied; "getting that out of your system will do you good. But now that you seem to have finished, I will tell you something in return: you are the wife of Sebastian Miller, you say—what about the man who called himself Julian Cordier?"

It was as though he had struck the woman. Her face blanched, the breath died in her throat, the hands which had been clenched fell to her sides. It seemed, indeed, as though all the life had gone out of her.

"Julian Cordier," she repeated in a mere mockery of a voice, "Julian Cordier—he's dead!"

Kurt Zweig laughed.

"He was drinking a fair amount of liquor for a dead man when I saw him in Philly two months ago," was the wheezy chuckle of a comment. "No, sister, Julian's very much alive—and I've only got to send a cable to bring him across here bright and early. Get that?"

The woman he addressed clung to the table for support. If this was true—and the man's manner was convincing—then she was in real danger—danger not only of losing her position as the wife of one of

England's richest men, but actually of losing her life. Julian Cordier alive . . .

"I imagined that would bring you to your senses," continued Zweig; "now sit down and listen to what I have to say to you. Scanlon, a chair for Mrs. Sebastian Miller."

When the chair was placed for her, she sat in it meekly.

And she listened very attentively indeed to what the man who looked like a caricature of Beethoven had to say.

"Remember, Hanray, I am trusting you. God help you if you let me down!"

"I shall try to live up to your trust, Mr. Miller—but you realise the responsibility you are placing on me?"

The millionaire nodded.

"All papers dealing with the scheme on which I am at present working will be placed by Bray each night in a safe which we both believe to be impregnable. The four men I have spoken of will come down from London to-night. They will be placed under your command—you can order them to do what you like. In any case I shall be back, I hope, within three days—perhaps two. I should not leave unless I felt the absolute necessity. You will look after my girl, Hanray?"

"I will make Miss Miller's safety my special care, sir."

"That's good enough—I trust you," was the reply. The financier pulled on his gloves. "Are you coming to see me off?"

"I should like to."

Then Delia came running into the room.

"Oh, daddy, are you really going?"

"Yes, my dear, I'm really going. I've just been speaking to Mr. Hanray about you—you are to do exactly what he tells you until I come back."

"Why, please?" asked the girl with a provocative glance at her embarrassed guardian.

"Because I have made him responsible for you."

"As though I couldn't look after myself! Daddy, when will you stop treating me exactly like a child?"

Her father appeared about to make some impulsive reply. Then, checking himself, he patted the inquirer's cheek.

"I want you to keep young, my dear," he said evasively. "Come with Mr. Hanray to see me off."

"That's the very reason I rushed downstairs." With the spontaneity of youth, Delia placed herself between the two men and linked arms with both. Hanray might have been her brother—or lover. The thought swept through his brain like fire.

A hundred yards from the house the flying machine which Miller had ordered from Croydon was waiting, the pilot filling in time by examining his controls. He took off his helmet as he saw the small group approaching.

"Splendid weather for flying, sir," he remarked.

"I'm glad to hear it," returned the millionaire; "I have a good many miles to travel during the next few days." Miller shook hands with Hanray, kissed his daughter and then climbed into his seat.

Jimmy's thoughts were grave as he watched the plane climb into the sky and finally disappear; he had the feeling that this sudden unexpected journey of Sebastian Miller's would mark a new stage in the drama.

The news had come with dramatic abruptness. At lunch that day the financier had announced that he found it imperative for the success of the scheme on which he was working that he should visit Paris, Berlin and Brussels. "Bray has already rung-up Croydon for a 'plane and I shall leave directly this arrives." That had been not much more than an hour before.

"So daddy has placed me in your charge?"

Jimmy dragged his thoughts away from the possibility of what might happen whilst Miller was away, to look into Delia's smiling face.

"Your father has done me that honour," he said gravely. His tone was serious because it was not until now that he realised to the full the almost unnerving responsibility that had fallen to him. If anything should happen——

"I suppose I mustn't complain, but I must say I am getting rather tired of being treated as though I was a precious stone wrapped in cotton-wool."

"I shall try not to thrust too much of my company on you, Miss Miller."

"Oh, I didn't mean that—you misunderstand me. Mr. Hanray, forgive me!" she added quickly.

"I was a brute to have made that remark," he told her.

"It's all due to daddy being absorbed in that wretched money-making," she went on; "how I wish he would finish with it and take me away somewhere where we could begin enjoying ourselves. At the present time I feel almost as though I were in a prison."

"It may not be for much longer," he answered; "when this scheme is successfully launched, your father may consider that his work is finished."

"Has he told you so?" she asked eagerly.

"No—he hasn't confided in me to that extent, but I gather that this scheme is to be the greatest work of his life."

Delia shook her head, looking very sad.

"He will go on until the end. Making money has become an obsession, a mania with him. He has been like this ever since my mother died ; I think he does it in order to try to forget."

Jimmy kept silent because he did not know what to say.

Not another word was spoken until they reached the house.

CHAPTER XVI A COLOSSUS OF FINANCE

MEANWHILE the man of whom Delia had been talking was racing through the air. He had forgotten everything connected with Steep Holm for the present, his mind being fully occupied with the sheafs of documents Bray had placed in his hand just before he left the study.

It was true what Delia had said : Sebastian Miller had become obsessed with money-making—not through the desire to hoard further wealth, but because the pulsating excitement of the life he had lived ever since his first wife had died could alone satisfy him. Nothing else was able to prevent him brooding on the past. Successful before, he had since reached a height to which few men in the financial history of his country had ever attained.

Sebastian Miller had started life as a boy in a London stockbroker's office. His father had been the stockbroker. A weak-minded man, over-fond of racing and

companion abstractions, he had allowed a once-prosperous business to decline and had then committed the criminal act of gambling with clients' money in the endeavour to bolster up his affairs. One morning he was found dead, "a glass which had contained poison" (to quote a newspaper report) on a small table by the side of the bed.

His son, as Miller himself had told Hanray on the night of Jimmy's arrival at the Park Lane mansion, had been left with a debt of £8,000 on his shoulders. Some men would have repudiated this, saying that he could not be held responsible for his father's misdoings, but the future millionaire did not belong to that craven class. The first thing Sebastian did was to issue a statement to the effect that, given time, he would pay off his father's liabilities in full.

Despite general incredulity, he accomplished this tremendous task—and within two years. It was during this time, in which he worked night and day without cessation, that the young financier laid the foundations for his future gigantic success. Within six months of Hilary Miller's suicide, the City grew to know that the son was of totally different calibre from his father: whereas the older Miller had been a weak-willed idler, the younger was working harder than almost any man engaged in selling stocks.

The City is shrewd, and the result was inevitable. Business began to pour in on Sebastian Miller. Within two years, as has been said, the debt which his father had left was cleared, and the name of Miller rose out of disgrace to honour.

After he had settled with his father's creditors, young Miller gave rein to the ambitions which had been animating him for some time: he developed from a stockbroker into a financier. Even in the

earliest days of his work in Broad Street, the wise-heads had prophesied a big future for him. They remarked upon his incisive way of dealing with any problem big or small—they said among themselves that young Miller might be right or wrong about a certain thing, but at least he had an opinion. Time was to prove that this opinion, rapidly formed though it might be, was very likely to be correct. Sebastian Miller's reputation grew rapidly.

He lived for his work alone at this time, occupying a poorly-furnished couple of rooms in a despised part of the Temple. By day and night he nursed a soaring and irrepressible ambition. This was to become one of the financial magnates of the world—the type of man who can exert his sway even over Governments.

Miller never quite realised what it was that supplied this inexorable driving force. For money as money he held no special desire—at this time he had no thought of marriage, let it be remembered—and vanity was absent from his make-up. Later on he realised that it must have been the scar in his soul left by his father's disgrace which urged him on to take place with the Pierpont Morgans and Rothschilds of the twentieth century.

Those who knew him in those early days speak of the Spartan life he lived—here was a youngster of twenty-six who had no thought for pleasure or even recreation, unless a six-mile walk through the deserted City streets every morning at six o'clock could come under this heading. But whilst others of his age were frittering their time away, he was preparing to reap a golden harvest. He was like a general planning a series of campaigns with, however, this difference: he was a lone hand pitting his wits against the whole of the rest of the world.

The audacity of the man was amazing, but he lived to see many of his most startling dreams come true.

His marriage, when it arrived, softened something of the ruthlessness which, like every other important financial force, he had been obliged to employ, but his ambition was more deeply-seated than ever. The girl who became his wife seemed to bring fresh luck to a man who already was supposed to possess a Midas-like touch.

Ten years filled to the brim with happiness and success was followed by a grief so devastating that his friends feared for a time that the mighty Sebastian Miller would lose his reason. For a fortnight after the news had been telephoned to him from Eastbourne that his beloved wife had been fatally injured in a motoring accident on the Seaford road, the financier shut himself up in his room, refusing to see anyone. Stocks tumbled, the financial markets of the world became chaotic, but he continued to nurse his grief. When he showed himself at the end of these fourteen days' agony, Sebastian Miller's hair had changed colour and he looked ten years older.

Thereafter he plunged into the only solace he knew—work. His schemes, startling enough before, now became staggering in their conception. Nothing seemed too big for him to tackle—and, as before, he worked entirely on his own, refusing any associates. This was one of the reasons—there were other even more potent ones which will be detailed later—why he had incurred the grim, relentless and terrible enmity of that man whose name, Kurt Zweig, many mentioned in a whisper whilst others cursed and reviled it.

It was literally true that after his first wife's death Sebastian Miller lost and won fortunes practically every day. He was like a man driven by Fate or

possessed by a merciless power that refused to give him any rest. Many said at this time that he had sold his soul to the devil in return for the uncanny luck which followed him—such stupidly imaginative fables will always be repeated about famous men.

The world knows what power he gained during the war while still a comparatively young man, but unlike some others, he kept his head instead of losing it in the tumultuous years which followed.

It was inevitable, of course, that Sebastian Miller should make enemies. He had beaten all rivals but one—this man, Kurt Zweig, who had recently crossed from America with the sworn determination to ruin him, no matter what means might be employed.

CHAPTER XVII

THE SPY

BEFORE dinner that night Jimmy interviewed the four men whom Sebastian Miller had announced, prior to his departure, would be coming down from London.

They were all typical ex-Service men of the N.C.O. class, hard-bitten but dependable-looking, and after asking a number of preliminary questions, Hanray felt they could be relied upon.

"I suppose you have an idea why you have been sent here?" he inquired of the man who had acted as spokesman.

"All we were told, sir, was that we were to come to a house called 'Steep Holm,' in the New Forest, and report for instructions to a Mr. Hanray—the same bein' you, sir, I take it."

"Yes—I'm Hanray. And that was all, eh?"

The other grinned.

"Too many questions aren't encouraged by the boss," was the reply. "But p'raps I ought to explain what I mean by that. Well, it's like this: The four of us works for a kind of agency which calls itself the Nemo Club. You aren't taken on unless you've had a good service record or been and done things in other ways—had some pretty tough experiences in various parts of the world, if you follow my meanin', sir."

"I do. To qualify for the Nemo one must be something of a scrapper."

The other—a former sergeant-major of a famous line regiment—grinned again.

"That's about it, sir. And you want to be pretty useful with your fists, I can tell you—we have queerish jobs to do at times! There are some people who don't much care for going to the police when they're in any trouble, and so they call in the Nemo Club instead. They know that their confidence will be respected and that not too many questions will be asked—so long, of course, as it isn't going absolutely against the law." The speaker stopped.

"You've made everything quite clear, sergeant-major," commented Hanray. "Now I'll tell you what you have to do. This is the residence of Mr. Sebastian Miller, the well-known millionaire financier. At present he is away on the Continent. There has been a number of burglaries in this neighbourhood lately, and Mr. Miller is anxious that the valuables he has in this house shall not be stolen. That's good enough for you, I take it?"

The other nodded.

"Anything's good enough for me, sir, provided I know beforehand exactly what my duties are." The look which accompanied the words showed that the ex-sergeant-major had taken Hanray's meaning.

"You shall know those right off," was the promise. Leading the way into the grounds, Jimmy discussed with the men's leader the best disposal of the small force, and went into dinner feeling more comfortable in his mind. What with the defensive devices inside the house, and the guard outside, he considered that Steep Holm would be reasonably secure against any force which Zweig, Scanlon and Company might dispatch that night.

At dinner Delia asked him the question he had been dreading.

"Who are those men you were talking with in the library, Mr. Hanray? I asked Mr. Bray, but he referred me to you."

Fortunately he had prepared an answer beforehand.

"Your father sent for them from London," he told her.

"Why?"

"He seems afraid of the house being burgled whilst he is away. You remember I told you the detective-inspector said there had been a number of burglaries in the district lately. Although he hasn't said so, I gather that the documents on which your father is now working in connection with this new scheme would be extremely valuable to a rival financier."

The girl crumbled a piece of bread.

"I hate it—all this air of mystery!" she exclaimed.

"Who are these men?"

"They are all ex-soldiers and can be trusted, I'm sure. Of course, I took the precaution of ringing up the agency from which they said they came. They will not interfere with you, Miss Miller, I can promise that. As a matter of fact, they won't enter the house at all except to sleep, and that will be in the daytime—they will be patrolling the grounds at night. Please do not let this upset you."

Her face brightened.

"All right, Mr. Hanray, I won't. That's a promise. If I break it, you'll have to make me pay a forfeit. And, anyway," with a smile that made Jimmy's heart leap, "these men will relieve you of the responsibility of looking after me, won't they?"

"No," he told her, "I shall still carry that particular anxiety—and very gladly. No one will be allowed to take that away from me."

The girl dropped her eyes. He wondered if he had gone too far. If he had only dared to tell a tenth of what he would have liked to say . . .

It was ten o'clock. Jimmy, sitting in the library, was thoughtfully smoking a pipe. Steep Holm was very still, and the very silence seemed to him to have a significance the secret of which so far eluded him.

He felt very much alone. Although there were four men within call in the grounds, the fact did nothing to mitigate that sense of isolation. The responsibility for the safety of Delia remained with him—and with him alone.

He would have liked company, but none was available. Bray, to whom he had made some advances, plainly preferred to remain a recluse (the man even took his meals alone), immersed in his work, whilst Delia had gone to bed early, pleading a headache. The girl was suffering—no doubt the abnormal existence she was forced to live was telling on her nerves—and the knowledge at once angered and depressed him. When Sebastian Miller returned, he must try to make some tactful reference to the subject.

Angry with himself, he rose and began to walk

up and down the room. Why he should have this impression of approaching trouble he could not quite understand. Whilst it was true that Kurt Zweig might be organising a raid, yet Steep Holm was fully prepared for such a contingency. There were four stalwart ex-service men armed with loaded sticks in the grounds, and the house itself contained many ingenious surprises. Why, even in that very room . . .

He grew more reassured. But a small doubt remained. The one thing to be guarded against was possible treachery inside the house. And yet even that seemed highly improbable. Of course, when dealing with a cunning foe, one never knew exactly where or how he would strike, but running through the few servants he could not believe that any of them would be disloyal to Sebastian Miller.

He stopped in his walk. Was that a ring? If so, who could have called at this time of night?

It must be a caller, for there were voices in the hall. The next moment the acting butler, Simmons, entered the room.

"Mrs. Miller is here, sir," he announced.

"Mrs. Miller——" and then, whilst Hanray was fumbling for further words, so startling was the surprise, the woman herself swept past the servant and into the room.

"All right, Simmons," he said peremptorily. The man withdrew.

The enemies—for such Fate had made them—regarded each other steadily.

Then :

"Mr. Miller is away," Hanray stated.

"I know——" She changed her tone quickly, as though conscious of having possibly committed a blunder. "He said something about it to me before

he left London," she added quickly. "He is on the Continent, I understand."

"I do not know exactly where he is at the moment." Hanray's reply was stiff and uncompromising. He guessed his employer's wife to be lying, and his former distrust of her increased. Why had she made this night journey from London?

Mrs. Miller burst into a low laugh.

"Don't look at me as though I were an ogre, man!" she said; "I was motoring through the Forest on the way to Bournemouth when I had a breakdown at Lyndhurst. After some difficulty I managed to obtain another car; and, as I was so near Steep Holm, I suddenly made up my mind to stay the night under my own roof instead of going on to Bournemouth. I trust you have no objection, Mr. Bodyguard?"

She was openly mocking him, trying with her taunt to provoke him into some sort of outburst, no doubt. He realised this and put a guard upon his tongue.

"I am not in the position to offer any objection, Mrs. Miller, and you are aware of the fact," he said; "I will have Mrs. Matthews informed that you are here." The woman, his common sense told him, had some purpose in mind in coming—that story of the car breaking down was palpably invention—and it would be his job to find out what it was.

Mrs. Miller lowered herself gracefully into a chair.

"That's very kind of you, Mr. Hanray," she said, her tone changing completely. "You must forgive me if I was sarcastic a moment ago, but really your expression was a study—especially to a woman entering her own house! Also, my nerves have been giving me a lot of trouble lately. I saw a tiresome Wimpole Street specialist this afternoon, and he told

me I must be very careful and go steady for the next six months. And then, within a few hours, I have a motor accident which nearly costs me my life!" She shuddered most realistically at the memory.

"It was unfortunate," he commented, not believing a word she said.

"I can see you are a proud and sensitive man, Mr. Hanray," she continued, "and if it will give you any satisfaction, I will make you an apology for the way in which I behaved to you on the night you came to Park Lane. As I have said, my nerves have been all to pieces lately, and I have scarcely known what to do with myself. Mine is not an easy life—there are things in it which I cannot discuss—but I had the idea that my husband had taken you into his employ in order to spy upon my movements."

"Your common sense should have told you how ridiculous that was," said Hanray. "Although you knew nothing about me, you must have been aware that Mr. Miller was not the type of man to employ spies on his wife."

The woman regarded him with an ironical expression in her eyes.

"You are very loyal, Mr. Hanray, aren't you? Perhaps—who knows?—you are *too* loyal. I have no doubt that through your loyalty you resent my presence at Steep Holm?"

"You appear once again to forget my position, madam. I have no power either to resent or to approve."

The appearance of the housekeeper put an end to the conversation.

"Good night, Mr. Hanray." With that same ironical expression in her eyes, the visitor turned to go

"Good night, Mrs. Miller." His tone was polite enough, but he wished the woman was a thousand miles away; she was likely to turn out a confounded nuisance. She was certain to distress Delia, for instance.

As time passed the more uneasy he became. Reviewing the woman's story, the conviction that the supposed motor accident was nothing but a somewhat crude invention increased. Mrs. Miller had come to Steep Holm with a purpose.

A spy! Yes, that must be it. No wonder she had smiled so ironically. It was because the word and idea were uppermost in her mind that she had used the expression concerning him.

It all fitted in. She was taking advantage of her husband being away—possibly if Sebastian Miller had been home he would not have given her admittance—to endeavour to inquire into his affairs. For what purpose? To make use of the information herself?—or to hand on the news to someone else? Whilst both were likely, the second seemed the more probable. And who could that someone else be—Dorman, Scanlon, Zweig?

He pulled himself up. His thoughts were running on too fast. He was allowing his prejudice against the wife of his employer to cloud his judgment. What he had been presuming was too absurd for serious consideration.

But was it?

From his own observation, and from what Delia had told him, he already knew enough of the relationship between Sebastian Miller and his second wife to be able to build up a sufficiently strong "case" against the night's unexpected visitor.

The evidence could be summed up as follows: She was obviously jealous of her stepdaughter, to whom she behaved badly; and her husband obviously regarded her not only with contempt but with a certain amount of distrust. Sebastian Miller's manner towards her certainly gave this impression, at all events. Add to these two facts the additional circumstance that she had arrived when the financier was away—hadn't she admitted knowledge of a fact which was supposed to be a secret?—and he considered that he had every reason to be suspicious.

Now that this had become firmly fixed in his mind, Jimmy lost no further time in speculation. He intended to let action take the place of thought. The place to be watched was the study in which his employer worked, and although Bray could be depended upon, he knew, to have taken every precaution, yet—well, he was going to spend the rest of the night keeping an eye on that door. Yes, and not only that particular night, but every other night that Miller was away and his wife was on the premises.

As he got out of bed and put on a dressing-gown, he heard from somewhere quite near a door being softly closed. In the deep stillness the sound was unmistakable.

Walking to the door of his own room, he waited tensely. Light footsteps sounded in the corridor outside. Then they stopped. He wondered why for a moment, and then understood: the handle of his door was being tried. Had he not locked the door on the inside, the curious investigator would probably have entered the room in order to see if he were safely asleep! After this, he had no doubt whose fingers were trying the door: they belonged to Mrs. Miller.

Waiting for the sound of the footsteps to disappear,

he softly unlocked the door and looked out cautiously.

There was no one in sight.

Looking at his wrist-watch, he saw that it was three o'clock. A nice hour for prowling! The woman had a nerve—he'd say that for her.

Slipping his right hand inside the pocket of his dressing-gown, where his fingers closed on the revolver which Miller had given him, he walked swiftly along the corridor and down the broad staircase. It was very dark, but he had familiarised himself with every inch of the way.

The study in which Sebastian Miller worked was a smaller room opening out from the large library. By the time he reached the room in which he had spent the evening smoking after Delia had gone to bed, he was able to see a dark shape standing by the study door. The light from a flash-lamp was playing on the lock.

Jimmy waited for a moment. He was finding a grim satisfaction in the situation. If he had done nothing else during the time he had been in Sebastian Miller's employ, he had discovered that the financier's wife was a traitor.

He would be able to catch her red-handed. Stepping across the room, he approached the figure.

"Mrs. Miller——!" he said sternly.

From somewhere behind him came the sound of a swift movement. He half turned, and in that second of time saw a masked man leaping at him.

He attempted to swerve, but was too late—the life-preserver which the man swung caught him a smashing blow on the head and he sagged forward finally crashing at his unknown opponent's feet.

THROUGH an enveloping blackness Jimmy returned to reality. He had never actually lost consciousness, he believed, but had existed for a few minutes in a kind of dreamland in which he fancied he heard first whisperings and then the sound of scuttling footsteps.

He was powerless to move himself and the agony of mind which this knowledge brought caused perspiration to pour down his forehead.

Then—he did not know how long after—came the miracle.

“ Mr. Hanray !—oh, Mr. Hanray ! ”

This was Delia’s voice. What was she doing there ?

The lights were on now and he could see her face—white and drawn with anxiety, and tortured by what he knew must be fear.

He felt every kind of a fool. This was effective guardianship !—lying prone on the floor whilst the girl who had been placed in his charge was risking all sorts of danger by leaving her room to attend to him !

“ Are you badly hurt ? Tell me ! ”

Her tone was imperative. Delia was very much the daughter of Sebastian Miller, master of men and maker of millions, just then.

It was a tense moment for Hanray. The girl he loved was kneeling by his side, looking at him. She had one arm round his neck, propping him up, and her face was so close that by reaching up he could have kissed her lips.

He rallied his returning faculties.

“ Of course not,” he replied ; “ I shall be as right

as rain in a minute. Where——?" And then he remembered that he must not frighten her. News of that night's traitorism had to be kept from the girl. It would be difficult, but——

"You want to know where the burglar is?" she supplied.

Burglar?

He did not grasp the allusion at first, but when he was able to do so, he realised that Delia's impression of what had happened gave him a way out of an extremely awkward situation.

"Yes—did you see him? The fellow was masked," he continued quickly. "He was standing near the study door there"—pointing—"when I came into the library. I should have held him up with the revolver I had, but I wanted to feel my hands on the fellow. I must have slipped, I suppose, for before I could get to grips with him, something hit me on the head—and down I went. A nice mess I've made of things, haven't I? Excuse me." He scrambled up and helped her to her feet.

"Did the man take anything?"

"It doesn't look like it. What he was after is contained in the study and he appears to have become so scared that he did a quick retreat. Did you see him yourself? And, by the way, what do you mean, Miss Miller, by leaving your room at this time of night? I may be a total failure as a watch-dog, but that doesn't prevent me giving you a reprimand for such reckless conduct." He tried to put a note of raillery into his voice although he was almost sick with anxiety. That masked man could only mean one thing: that Mrs. Miller had an accomplice inside the house.

Delia's explanation was made in rather confused fashion.

"Although I went to bed so early to-night, I could not sleep," she said. "I was worried by those men being in the grounds—not by the men themselves, I mean, but by the thought of why they had come to Steep Holm. At last, however, I managed to drop off, but I awoke suddenly, feeling frightened."

"What was the cause?"

She shivered.

"I had the idea that someone was in the room and that she——"

"She?" interrupted Hanray sharply.

"I couldn't tell you what gave me the idea that it was a woman who was bending over the bed, but I certainly had it."

"Wasn't your bedroom door locked?"

"No—I usually lock it, but to-night I found the key was gone."

"The key must be found," said Hanray sternly. This conspiracy went deeper than he had supposed; and this missing key was to his mind conclusive proof that the traitorous wife had an accomplice inside Steep Holm—an accomplice who had received his or her instructions before the arrival of the woman herself. Yet he dared not tell Delia that it was her own stepmother who had entered her room that night.

"I suppose I must have dreamt it," the girl continued, "because when I switched the light on there was no one in the room and the door was closed. But I didn't dream hearing the voices—they were real enough, and, besides, I was wideawake by that time."

"Voices?" queried her listener.

"Yes. They came from just outside the door—or appeared to. There were two people speaking—a man and a woman."

"Were you able to recognise either of the voices?"

"No—both spoke in only a whisper. At first I was frightened—I couldn't forget the dream—and then I remembered what you had told me about the chance of the house being burgled. I put on my dressing-gown and decided to follow them downstairs. I waited about ten minutes and then—well, when I got down into the library, I was too late."

"Too late?" Jimmy's maltreated brain did not seem capable for the present of accomplishing anything more ambitious than repeating words and making questions of them.

"Too late—because"—the voice faltered—"they had hurt you horribly!" Delia swayed a little—just sufficient for Jimmy to feel justified in putting an arm about the slim shoulders in order to steady her.

"On the contrary," he said, his voice exultant with excitement, "you arrived in the very nick of time! My life isn't worth much, I suppose—according to present-day values, anyhow—but you were the means of saving it. It was hearing you coming that prevented the kind-hearted gentleman-in-the-mask from finishing me off."

"Oh!" A shudder passed through the girl's body.

"What a brute I am!" said Jimmy reproachfully. The realisation that he had badly frightened the girl made him tighten his hold.

"That man must be found and handed over to the police," she said.

"I'll do better than that," he assured her; "when he's found—as found he will be, of course—I'll hand him over to the men outside. They will know what to do with him. And now, do you know what I am going to do with you, Del—Miss Miller?"

"What?"

"I'm going to take you to my room and lock you safely in there until this little mystery is solved. I'm sure it won't take much time. Either that, or we'll wake up Mrs. Matthews, the housekeeper, and ask if she has another key to your room. One thing is certain: you can't go back there until a key is found."

Delia smiled wanly at him.

"I'll go to your room and you shall lock me in safely," she said.

The first thing Jimmy did afterwards was to ring for the servant Simmons, who was acting as butler.

"There has been an attempted burglary here to-night, Simmons: please call Mr. Bray and say I want to see him at once in the library."

The man stared stupidly.

"Did you say there had been a burglary, sir?"

"I did. Don't stand there—call Mr. Bray."

"Yes, sir."

The man looked at him out of the corner of one eye as he left the room.

It was a very flustered-looking Bray who entered the room ten minutes later.

"I must say——" he started.

"Save your breath, Bray, until you've heard what I have to tell," cut in Hanray; "you needn't think I had you dragged out of bed at this time in the morning merely for amusement."

"I should think not indeed." The financial expert looked like a badly ruffled hen.

Jimmy came straight to the point without any further preamble.

"There has been an attempted burglary here to-night," he said; "although everything appears right

on the surface, I wish you'd make certain that nothing has been taken from the study."

Bray, staring at the speaker, adjusted his pince-nez with a shaking hand.

"A burglary?" he repeated; "are—are you sure?"

"This is pretty good evidence, I think," replied Hanray, turning round so that the other could see the wound in the back of his head.

"Good God!" exclaimed the secretary; "who did that?"

"At the moment," was the answer, "I haven't the slightest idea, but what I do know is that Friend the Burglar did it all right; beyond that I am unable to go."

"Is he still in the house?"

"I shouldn't imagine so. He appears to have become scared after he had laid me low . . . but excuse me, Bray, the rest of the story, interesting as it is, must wait until after you've made your own investigations. Have you got your keys?"

"The study door doesn't open by means of a key. It——"

"Wait a minute," he was warned. "This is vitally important, as you realise yourself, no doubt." The speaker walked to the door, looked out, and then returned.

"There's no one there just now," he told the secretary, "but we can't be too careful. Now open the door."

Bray took the recent admonition so seriously that he did not permit Hanray to see exactly how the study door was manipulated. And when it was open, he remarked; "I think you had better remain outside."

"I didn't propose to do anything else," he was

informed. What Jimmy did intend, however, was shown by the care with which he examined the revolver he pulled out of his dressing-gown pocket. The weapon had proved useless before, owing to the rapidity with which he had been attacked, but this time . . .

Within a few minutes Bray was back.

"Nothing has been touched," he announced; "no one has entered that room to-night. It would be impossible for them to do so."

The speaker rather gave the suggestion that he had been put to a great deal of trouble without adequate cause.

"That's all right, then," replied Jimmy, imperturbably; "but I thought it best to make sure. I happen to have been placed in charge of this house—oh, that doesn't include its financial secrets, Bray, so don't lose your dignity—and after what had happened, I wanted your expert reassurance. Now close that door again and sit down. I require your attention, please."

Looking as though he was still inclined to resent the other's manner, the secretary lowered himself gingerly into the big chair opposite the one Hanray occupied. Bray did not make either an engaging or an heroic figure; at this time in the morning he appeared even more wanly lugubrious than was customary. Altogether he was a type from whom Jimmy in the ordinary way would have fled. As it was, he felt that he must acquaint the other with what facts he knew.

"I take it," he started, "that details concerning the scheme on which Mr. Miller is now working would be considered of value by a rival financier? Is that correct?"

"Undoubtedly," agreed Bray.

"Thank you. Following out this line of thought, I take it it would be worth the while of a possible spy to try to get into that room?" He pointed to the study door.

"Yes. But you surely don't imagine for a moment that I should be so careless—so criminally careless—as to leave valuable papers about?"

"Of course not, my dear fellow! And please do not get the idea that I am trying to put you under any kind of cross-examination. My common sense would have told me that you would have acted with the utmost discretion even if Mr. Miller hadn't already given me the information that you always locked up everything in a safe after working in the study."

"That is so—but, excuse me, I don't quite see where all this is leading."

"It's leading to a burglar or rather burgless." The expression of astonishment which Jimmy had expected to see leapt instantly into Bray's face.

"Are you trying to pull—I mean, are you attempting to play off a joke on me?" he demanded. "A burgless!—what do you mean by a burgless?"

"A woman burglar—the female of the species and therefore more deadly than the male."

"A woman!" ejaculated Bray. "But surely you do not mean to insinuate that that wound on your head was inflicted by a woman? In fact," stammering in his increasing excitement, "just now you distinctly gave me to understand that it was a man who had dealt you the blow."

"Quite so," replied Hanray, who, being human, could not help enjoying the other's mental discomfiture, "I should have said that there were two burglars—one male and one female. The former stood on

guard with the loaded stick that induced this painful swelling," touching the injured spot tenderly, "whilst his female accomplice examined the mechanism of the study door with the aid of an electric torch."

"Did you see the woman's face?"

"No—but I recognised her back. After we have had our little chat, I intend to have her down here and ask for an explanation."

"Which one of the servants is it?"

It was then that Jimmy hurled his thunderbolt.

"The woman I saw examining the study door was not a servant, Bray—*she was Mrs. Miller!*"

"Mrs. Miller! You must be mad!" Looking like a scarecrow, the secretary jumped up from his chair, and, his dressing-gown flapping about his lean body, stood over Hanray.

"That's a natural conclusion for you to arrive at, no doubt," replied the latter, "but, nevertheless, I want you to listen to the facts. And sit down, man—you make me nervous."

When Bray had complied, Hanray briefly narrated the unexpected arrival of their employer's wife that evening.

"Her story of a motor breakdown was obviously an invention," he continued. "If you are in Mr. Miller's confidence—as no doubt you are—you must know that his second marriage has proved an unfortunate one. Even I'm aware that relations are strained between Mrs. Miller and her step-daughter. Above all, why should the woman be found standing outside that study door at three o'clock in the morning with a thug on hand to bash in the head of anyone who chanced along? Can you give any answer to that?"

"The whole story is beyond me," lamented Bray, "but all the same, I cannot possibly accept your

premise—that Mrs. Miller would stoop to such an act is unthinkable.”

“I expected that answer—and I don’t altogether blame you, Bray. What I have put up to you is, I admit, a pretty difficult proposition to believe—but all the same, knowing my facts to be correct, and being convinced also that my intuition isn’t at fault, I’m going on.”

“What actually do you intend to do?” inquired the gaping secretary.

“I’m going to ask Mrs. Miller if she will be good enough to come down into this room.”

“Now?”

“Now.”

“She’ll refuse, of course.”

“She may—but on the other hand she may not. I don’t know a great deal about the sex, but I have always been given to understand that you never can tell with a woman.”

“The whole thing is preposterous!” exclaimed Bray.

Jimmy rose and looked down at the bewildered secretary.

“You are loyal to your employer, I suppose, Bray?” he asked curtly.

“Of course I am. It’s an insult for you to have any other opinion,” the man choked.

“Very well. I shall expect you to back me up in this.”

Whilst the secretary fumed and fretted like a sick child, Jimmy walked to the door. He flung this open so violently that a man staggered forward, almost falling into his arms.

“I beg your pardon, sir,” said Simmons—for it was he—“I was just coming to inquire if you and

Mr. Bray would like anything—some coffee and sandwiches, perhaps ? ”

“ That’s not a bad idea, Simmons,” replied Hanray pleasantly, “ but before you do that, you might run up to Mrs. Miller’s room. Give your mistress my compliments and say that I should be glad if she would come down to the library as soon as possible as Mr. Bray and I wish to talk to her about a serious matter.”

“ But she will be asleep, sir ! ” expostulated the servant.

“ I dare say. But I am afraid that cannot be helped. Give Mrs. Miller my apologies, of course, for having to disturb her, but say that the matter is so serious it must be dealt with immediately.”

“ Very good, sir.”

“ The next half an hour should provide an interesting study in female psychology,” said Hanray when the man had gone.

“ It seems to me,” commented Bray, “ that you would be doing something far more practical if you concentrated on finding the man who knocked you on the head. He must have escaped by now.”

Hanray shook his head.

“ I don’t think so. On the contrary, I believe him to be still in the house.”

“ You do ? ”

Jimmy smiled.

“ I don’t claim to be much of a detective, but that is certainly my impression,” he said.

“ Then why don’t you have him arrested ? ”

The other’s answer was perplexing to the secretary.

“ All in good time. Ah ! If I am not mistaken, here is Mrs. Miller.”

A very indignant Mrs. Miller it turned out to be.

The wife of the financier made an arresting and engaging picture (even Jimmy had to admit that) as she swept into the room.

"Simmons says that you wish to see me," she started, looking at Hanray indignantly.

"That is true," Jimmy replied equably; "won't you sit down?"

The elaborately dressing-gowned figure sank into a chair.

"If there is anything in this world which annoys me, it is having my sleep disturbed," she complained.

"Believe me, Mrs. Miller," returned Hanray, with the same courteous tone he had used before, "only the sternest necessity caused me to be so inconsiderate."

"You are forgiven." A conciliatory smile followed the words. "The least you can do in the circumstances, I think, is to offer me a cigarette."

It was the ungainly Bray who hastened to oblige. Seizing a box of cigarettes, he hitched his dressing-gown more tightly round his gaunt figure and stammered: "I—I want you please to understand, Mrs. Miller, that it is not with my consent or sanction that Mr. Hanray is taking this action."

The eyes which had been smiling a moment before now became hard.

"All right, Mr. Bray, I shall remember that." With the lit cigarette at a defiant angle in her mouth, she turned once more to Jimmy.

"Now, Mr. Hanray, let me know what is in your mind."

He came straight to the point.

"There was an attempted burglary here to-night, Mrs. Miller."

She took the news with what seemed to her stern critic just the right display of emotion. She did not

rant or rave, but, sitting forward in her chair, said :
 " A burglary ! Here ? "

" Yes," he repeated, " a burglary—or, as I said before, an attempted burglary. Fortunately, the thieves were surprised before they could do any damage."

" Who surprised them ? "

" I did."

" That will mean promotion, Mr. Hanray, I have no doubt. My husband will be pleased." The sarcasm was hidden, but it was there.

" I'm not sure Mr. Miller *will* be pleased"—he paused—" when I tell him the truth."

" That sounds rather like a puzzle—and I never had the patience to try to solve puzzles. Why not stop being mysterious and speak straight out ? " The voice which had been smooth before now took on a harsher note.

" Very well, Mrs. Miller, I will. And, to begin with, I have a question to ask : What were you doing outside your husband's study door an hour ago ? "

The woman rose, shaking violently. She was convulsed with anger.

" Me ? " she shrilled.

" You."

" Is this a plot ? " She flung the cigarette to the carpet and stamped the heel of her slipper upon it.

" It's a question, Mrs. Miller, to which I must insist upon having an answer."

" How dare you ! Do you realise what you are saying ? You are accusing me—ME—of attempting to rob my own husband ! It is monstrous ! Mr. Bray," turning to the flustered financial expert, " are you going to stand there and hear me insulted ? "

" I have already assured you, Mrs. Miller——"

"I am doing this on my own responsibility," cut in Hanray sharply; "Mr. Bray is only here through courtesy, and as a witness. I repeat, Mrs. Miller, that when I came into this room shortly after three o'clock this morning, I saw you standing by that door which, as you know, opens on to your husband's study. You were examining the lock with an electric torch. You had an accomplice in the room. He attacked me before I could speak to you."

"You are mad!" the woman declared. "A woman in my position to associate with a thief! Perhaps you will tell me who this alleged accomplice is?"

The door opened and Simmons entered, carrying a tray.

"The sandwiches and coffee, sir," he said, addressing Hanray.

"Thank you, Simmons. Put the tray on the table, please . . . hang it, man, you might look to see what you're doing!"

The rebuke was justified, for the servant, in looking across at his mistress, had stumbled, with the result that the tray had gone crashing to the ground.

The man was profuse in his apologies.

"Shall I make some more coffee, sir?"

"No!" cried Mrs. Miller, "you want your rest like other people—clear off to bed, Simmons."

"Yes, madam. Thank you, madam."

Only a very intent listener could have detected the faint shade of irony which coloured the respectful words.

The man had reached the door when Jimmy spoke

"Oh, Simmons."

The servant turned.

"Sir?"

"If you should think of leaving the house, take my advice and don't."

The man looked surprised. But Hanray noticed with satisfaction that the fellow's lips had an uneasy twitch to them.

"I beg your pardon, sir?"

"You understood all right, Simmons. There are four ex-soldiers in the grounds, and they have instructions to handle anyone they see trying to get in or out of the house rather roughly. Oh, just one other thing: Don't forget to destroy the mask."

"Don't listen to the fool, Simmons—get off to bed. I'll deal with him." A flood of vituperation commenced to flow from the woman's lips as the servant, looking somewhat the worse for wear, left the room.

"I consider you are a liar and a fool!" was Mrs. Miller's comment when the door had closed. "I leave it to your imagination what my husband will say when he hears of this unforgivable insult."

Hanray was unmoved.

"I am not afraid of what my employer will say," he retorted; "may I remind you, Mrs. Miller, that you have not yet answered my question—what were you doing outside that study door at three o'clock this morning?"

The woman stamped her foot.

"I refuse to answer," she replied.

"Do you deny that you were there?"

"Yes—you damned fool!" With that she rushed from the room.

"You've ruined yourself, Hanray," said Bray. "Directly her husband returns, she'll tell him, and he'll never forgive you."

"We shall see," was the answer; "anyway, if I

had any doubt before about that woman, I haven't now—she's as guilty as hell."

"I can't believe it," protested Bray.

Jimmy concluded the argument tersely: "If your knowledge of human nature was as good as your knowledge of stocks, Bray, I might share your opinion," he said, "but, as it is, I prefer to trust my own."

The stolid-looking police sergeant endeavoured to appear as important as he no doubt felt.

"'Charged with stealing a valuable di'mond ring valued at two 'undred pounds,'" he mumbled, writing in his notebook with a stubby pencil. "I 'ave to warn you that anything you may say may be taken down and used in evidence against you."

Hanray laughed. It was a bitterly ironic laugh. The situation was absurdly farcical, ridiculously melodramatic, and yet—damnably serious.

"It's preposterous, of course," he said; "I know nothing about the ring. If it was found in my pocket, someone must have placed it there. I did not steal it."

"That is the answer I expected he would give," said Mrs. Miller. "Officer, I must ask you to do your duty and arrest this man."

"Certainly, m'm." To Hanray: "You had better come quietly. I have a constable outside."

Jimmy did some rapid reflecting. The woman had been too clever for him; she had turned the tables with a vengeance. No doubt she had come to Steep Holm with a double purpose—to steal, if possible, some of her husband's secrets and to remove the man Sebastian Miller had engaged as guard for his daughter. What she hoped to gain by having him arrested, when

her husband was expected home within a couple of days, he could not tell, unless——

"I must speak to Miss Miller before I leave," he said to the police sergeant; "I have a message to deliver to her."

The woman objected.

"I cannot allow my stepdaughter to be contaminated by seeing this man."

"I insist upon seeing Miss Miller."

Again the woman objected but the police sergeant did not support her.

"So long as I am in the room, I don't see why the gentleman should not see the young lady," he said.

Mrs. Miller tossed her head.

"Very well. I will send for Miss Miller."

She rang the bell—this scene was being enacted in the library at ten o'clock the following morning—and Simmons appeared.

This was an entirely different Simmons. Although he endeavoured to school his features, the man was obviously gloating over the situation. The smile on his unpleasant face as he looked at Hanray was malevolent.

"Ask Miss Miller to come to the library, Simmons," said his mistress.

The man sent another malicious smirk in the direction of Hanray before he left.

Directly the light footsteps could be heard outside Jimmy made for the door.

"'Ere!" admonished the police sergeant.

"Don't be afraid, sergeant, I'm not going to run away."

Then the door opened and Delia rushed almost into his arms.

"The police have come again, Mr. Hanray!" she

said in an agitated tone. "Simmons has just told me."

Behind the girl, with that gloating smile still on his face, could be seen the lurking figure of the servant Jimmy drew the girl into the room and shut the door.

"I can scarcely hope that you will have the decency to allow me to speak to Miss Miller in private," he said to the woman who had falsely accused him of the crime.

"Certainly not!" was the swift retort; "leave my stepdaughter alone with a criminal—it's unthinkable!"

Although the speaker was behaving like a stock character in a fifth-rate touring melodrama, the words caused Delia to gasp.

"A criminal—Mr. Hanray a criminal! But how absurd!" She caught sight of the police sergeant. "What are you doing here?" she asked in a change of tone.

The representative of the law drew himself up. Before he could reply, Jimmy had answered for him.

"This officer has come to Steep Holm to arrest me," he explained. "Of course, it is a false charge—need I tell you that? Mrs. Miller has arranged—with the co-operation of the servant Simmons, I should not be surprised—to have one of her diamond rings found in my coat. It was an infantile trick, but it has served her purpose. This police sergeant was called, and he has no option but to follow out the instructions he has received from your stepmother——"

"Thank God, she is not my mother!" broke involuntarily from the listener. "What could have made you behave so vilely?" she asked passionately.

The woman she addressed sighed.

"I am not surprised even if I am disappointed,"

she said in an aggrieved voice. "I expected you to take this attitude, Delia. If you were older and had more experience of the world, you would have seen through this worthless scoundrel before. What your father could have been thinking about to bring such a person into the house I cannot imagine. He will realise his foolishness, no doubt, when he hears the story—this creature from the gutter——"

"Stop!" cried Delia, "I don't believe a word you say; you are a wicked woman and I hate you—I have always hated you!"

"That is no news to me. But I must refuse to allow your dislike to have any influence on what I consider to be my duty. I must protect you in spite of yourself against this thief."

"Mr. Hanray——"

As though she felt she was unable to stand any more, the girl turned to the accused.

"Don't worry," he reassured her, "everything will be all right. I want to tell you this." Taking her arm, he drew her away from the police sergeant and her stepmother.

"This is a plot," he said in a tone so low that he knew the woman would be unable to overhear; "your stepmother wants to get me out of the house—away from you. I shall have to go, but directly your father returns, tell him that the whole thing has been arranged and that I am innocent. As for yourself, please be very careful. As you know, there are four men guarding the house at night. See the leader—McIntosh is his name—explain the position and tell him on no account to leave until your father, who engaged him and his companions, returns. Is that quite clear?"

"Perfectly. You can trust me, Mr. Hanray. And rest assured that that woman shall be punished."

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"Perfectly. You can trust me, Mr. Hanray. And rest assured that that woman shall be punished."

"You must excuse me," broke in Police-Sergeant Atkinson, "but if you've quite finished your talk Mr. Hanray, we must be getting along."

"Where is he taking you?" exclaimed Delia in distress.

"To prison—where he belongs!" said Mrs. Miller. "He came from the gutter and is returning to it."

Jimmy looked across at the speaker.

"You seem overfond of the word 'prison,' madam," he commented significantly. "I believe the authorities accommodate real thieves as well as merely suspected ones. I am ready, sergeant."

Of the two women who watched him leave, one was in tears and the other's eyes were shining with evil triumph.

As for Jimmy, he felt for the moment as though the end of the world had come.

CHAPTER XIX

ZWEIG PAYS A VISIT

KURT ZWEIG, that important visitor to London, was giving a dinner-party. It was a small but select gathering, there being only two guests. The name of one of these was Oscar Scanlon, whilst the other permitted himself to be known as Hubert Dorman. The place was Savoy Court, where Zweig had taken a suite.

The meal had reached the coffee and cigars stage. All three men had eaten well and drunk heavily. Their faces were flushed. Zweig, the host, sprawled in his chair, looked like some grotesque Eastern god as he puffed at a monstrous cigar.

"Up till now the tricks are even," he said. "Miller

got the laugh of us over Johnson—I can't help wondering why the police never moved in that affair, for it was undoubtedly murder," he branched off.

"It was murder all right," put in Scanlon; "that place, Steep Holm, is fortified like a mediæval castle. Johnson must have been caught by the belt of electricity which runs round the outside wall."

"Rather a neat idea, that, although entirely unoriginal," replied Zweig. "Pozanni, the Chicago Liquor King, used the same thing when he retired to his Miami fortress."

"What interests me is not what happened to Johnson—we know that—but what is going to happen to that fellow Hanray." The speaker was Dorman.

What would have been considered a smile in the case of a normal face flitted across Zweig's mouth.

"Our little friend Adele has seen to that," he told the inquirer; "she has contrived to have him arrested on a charge of theft. Short of snuffing the fellow out, that seemed a pretty good way of putting him out of action. He'll not only be discredited, but he'll get six months in jail. And by that time—well, Sebastian Miller won't be requiring his services."

"What about the girl?" asked Scanlon.

"Adele will be attending to her, too. I'm going to think out something specially nice for the girl. It will be due to happen just about the time that Miller returns to this country."

"And when will that be?" asked Dorman, who shared Scanlon's passion for information.

Zweig shrugged as though the matter was of no immediate importance.

"I shall be informed before the air liner or train leaves the station. At the present time Miller is in Berlin. To-morrow he is expected to visit Frankfurt

... but what does it matter? Let him make his plans—what he considers his invincible plans—I can checkmate him at any turn. Besides, there's always Schulze to fall back on. Perhaps," he added, "it would be best to send for Schulze straight away. I'll send him a wire." The heavy face glowed.

"There's no doubt about you hating Miller," remarked Scanlon.

"Yes, I hate him," admitted the other. "I hated him from the first, and I shall hate him until the end—and that won't be long now."

The two minor characters in this trio of modern freebooters looked at the speaker. That they served in their crooked capacities an abnormal personality they had both long been aware, but never until that moment had the real nature of Kurt Zweig revealed itself. The man looked the incarnation of malice.

Dorman bit a finger-nail on his right hand.

"I wish you had left Hanray to me," he said. "I would have dealt with the swine thoroughly—men have been known to get out of jail. Besides, he isn't in there yet."

"But he will be. Stealing a thousand-dollar diamond ring is a serious thing in this country. If Hanray is released under the First Offenders' Act, which isn't likely, different arrangements can be made—and you shall be placed in charge of them." Zweig spoke as though the subject had lost interest for him.

At that moment a manservant entered. He carried a card on a salver.

Zweig took one glance at the piece of pasteboard and rapped out an oath.

"What's the matter?" Scanlon dared to ask.

The man who looked like a caricature of Beethoven passed the card across.

"What the devil does that mean?" he blazed.
Scanlon read out the printed inscription:

*Detective-Inspector Richard Pudan
New Scotland Yard,*

and made an illuminating comment.

"I know this swine," he said thickly; "he's dangerous. Smiles all the time he's talking to you, but you can never tell what he's thinking. Got eyes like blue ice. If he's trailing you, Chief, look out!"

Dorman took another tone.

"If he's so dangerous as you say, Scanlon, I should like to have a good look at him. After all, why not? A distinguished New York financier is entertaining two friends to dinner in his suite—what is there wrong in that? Let him come up by all means." The speaker pulled at his cigar with a good deal of relish. For all his furtive manner and insignificant appearance, there was nothing wrong with Dorman's nerve. He would fight like a rat—if cornered.

"Have him up," bellowed Zweig in reply; "he doesn't want to come up—he's sent a message. It's written on the back of that card."

"Read it out, Scanlon," requested Dorman.

Scanlon read hoarsely:

I shall be glad if you will make it convenient to call on me within half an hour of receiving this.

"To get to Scotland Yard from here in a taxi won't take more than five minutes going along the Embankment," observed Dorman; "counting another five—to be on the safe side—for the card to be handed in, taken up and discussed—and you have another twenty before you need go."

The American blazed forth again.

"Do you imagine I am going to follow any blasted whipper-snapper of a London policeman about like a dog? If he wants to see me, let him come here."

"He has been here, Chief," corrected the other. "you wouldn't like me to go in your place, I suppose. I must say I've become very interested in this Pudan. Is he young?" he added, turning to Scanlon.

The latter scowled.

"Young enough—about thirty-two, I should say. One of those damned gentlemen. And as hard as nails. What in the hell can he be after? I don't like it, Chief." Scanlon did not add that he had caught sight of Detective-Inspector Pudan's interested face outside Selfridge's the morning he had had the fracas with Hanray. He was beginning to see a little daylight—and the sight was not pleasant.

"You are sure the card was sent in to you, Chief?" he inquired.

Zweig rang the bell.

"Who brought this?" he asked the man when he appeared.

"I was called down by the hall-porter, sir. He said there was a gentleman with a message for Mr. Zweig. When I got down to the hall, a youngish-looking man handed me this card.

"'Is your master, Mr. Zweig, in?' he asked, and when I said 'yes,' he said: 'Please let him have this card at once—there's no answer required.'"

"All right, Hamilton," growled Zweig.

"A pretty cool customer," commented Dorman with a sly chuckle. "I do wish you'd allow me to go in your place. 'Mr. Zweig's compliments, but he's laid up with a slight chill, but I shall be pleased to take any message.'"

The man to whom he spoke got out of his seat.

"I'm going myself," he exploded. "I'll teach this puppy manners. Wait here until I get back." Zweig hurried out of the room, and his two associates could hear him a moment later ordering his car.

"Amongst his other virtues," said Dorman, savouring the fragrance of his Corona, "your friend Pudan——"

"Damn him," interjected Scanlon, "he's no friend of mine."

"——possesses a rather remarkable knowledge of psychology," pursued Dorman. "If he had sent in his card in the usual way, Zweig would probably have refused to see him, but that almost insolent request that he should take the trouble to go to Scotland Yard did the trick. I wonder what the fellow's up to?"

"Hanray's in this," declared Scanlon; "I hope you've got a good alibi, Dorman."

The other waved a hand nonchalantly.

"My dear Scanlon," he replied, "I am never without a perfect alibi—I consider it the first essential of my business."

Kurt Zweig purposely did not look at the man until he had made an elaborate survey of the plainly-furnished room.

"You'll find me, I trust, much more interesting than my humble office," observed a voice that, in spite of its note of airy persiflage, sounded as cool as a mountain stream.

The American sat himself down in a deliberate manner.

"Is that so?" he drawled in real Manhattan; "well, I hope you'll prove as interesting as you've promised, Mr. ——"

"Pudan is my name—Detective-Inspector Pudan."

"Please to meet you, Inspector Pudan."

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Zweig," returned the man whose lithe, graceful figure was clad in evening kit.

"And now to business," said the visitor.

"Certainly, Mr. Zweig." The inspector's tone was cordial, but the caller found himself agreeing with Dorman's description of the other, whose eyes indeed closely resembled blue ice.

"This card," producing it, "belongs to you, inspector?"

"That is certainly my card, Mr. Zweig."

"And you called with it at my suite at Savoy Court just over half an hour ago?"

"That also is true, Mr. Zweig."

"And you wrote these words on the back: '*I shall be glad if you will make it convenient to call on me within half an hour of receiving this*'?"

"For the third time you are absolutely correct, Mr. Zweig." The smile which accompanied the words was amiability itself.

Kurt Zweig, the man who had a reputation not only in Wall Street but in the criminal haunts of the Bowery, pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and blew his nose.

"And the reason, inspector?" he asked quietly; "of course, there is a reason."

"Naturally. The name of the reason is James Hanray."

Used as he was to controlling his features, the American gave himself away.

"*Hanray!*" he exclaimed. "But I'm afraid I don't know anyone named Hanray," he quickly added.

"If you don't, one of your friends, a person named

Scanlon, does, Mr. Zweig. And if you desire further information, I suggest you go to another friend of yours, by name Dorman, this time. Have I said sufficient ? ”

“ I had always understood, inspector,” said the caller in an aggrieved tone, “ that the methods of the British police were above reproach.”

“ I should hate to think that your susceptibilities had been hurt in any way, Mr. Zweig. We are all fallible, you know. What is your particular grievance ? ”

“ Both the men whose names you have mentioned to me do not happen to be friends of mine. You are assuming too much, inspector.”

“ Well, well, I won't pursue the point, beyond pointing out that both Scanlon and Dorman are dining with you *en famille* to-night. Suppose we come back to Mr. Hanray ? ”

“ What Mr. Hanray ? ”

“ Why, the Mr. Hanray I referred to just now—the Mr. James Hanray you have recently caused to be arrested on a false charge of theft.”

If he had followed his violent inclination, Zweig would have jumped from his chair. As it was, he gave a masterly display of self-control.

“ You are playing off some joke on me, inspector,” he remarked blankly.

“ I never joke, Mr. Zweig—at least, not in office hours. Sometimes, however, I give advice. Would you be willing to accept a little advice from me, Mr. Zweig ? ”

“ I have lived long enough to know that advice from anyone is not to be disregarded, inspector. I am anxious to hear in what way you desire my future welfare.”

"Abandon the charge—the false charge—against my friend James Hanray," replied the detective inspector, rising.

"Assuming—merely assuming for the moment—that I know to what you refer, why should I follow this course?"

"Because," replied Pudan, and now his voice carried an impressive quality, "it will be distinctly for your good if you do. . . . I'm sorry to have to hurry away, but I must keep an appointment. If you would care to see the finger-print department, or anything interesting like that, I shall be pleased to have you shown round."

The visitor declined the invitation. He did so with a smothered snarl.

CHAPTER XX

DELIA'S WARNING

DELIA, as she watched Jimmy Hanray leave the room accompanied by the police sergeant, clenched her hands. It would have been so easy for her to have given way and to have yielded to the almost overwhelming desire to collapse, but she had her duty to do. Hanray had told her to carry on in his place, and she must not betray that trust.

Across the room she saw her stepmother regarding her intently.

"Perhaps now you will believe that I have tried to advise you for your good," Mrs. Miller said.

Delia could not speak. The words that rose up in her throat threatened to choke her. Instead, she walked past the woman and went to her room.

There she deliberated on the situation. What was

the first thing to do? After what had happened, it seemed essential that her stepmother should be watched. Her very presence in the house was a danger—wasn't there already sufficient proof of that? She must warn Mr. Bray.

Hurriedly leaving the room, she raced downstairs.

She found her father's financial secretary in a state bordering on nervous collapse.

"But this is terrible—terrible, Miss Delia," he said.

"I agree it is terrible, but Mr. Hanray is innocent, of course. It is impossible to believe that he is a thief."

Bray coughed.

"I should very much like to share your faith and optimism, Miss Delia. But the facts are so painfully clear that they speak for themselves. The ring was found in Mr. Hanray's possession and——"

"Of course it was a plot on the part of my stepmother."

"Miss Delia!"

"If you had as much sense about the ordinary affairs of life as you have about money matters, Mr. Bray, you would see for yourself that I am right. Didn't Mr. Hanray find my stepmother outside the study door in the middle of the night? What could she be doing there?"

"Really, Miss Delia!" exclaimed the secretary again.

She almost lost patience at the man's stupidity.

"You yourself said just now that facts speak for themselves," she reminded him. "If suspicious circumstances are against Mr. Hanray, don't they count also against my stepmother?"

"Miss Delia, you shock me when you speak like that. I cannot allow myself to forget that Mrs. Miller is the wife of my employer."

"But it's my father, Sebastian Miller, I want you to continue to think about, Mr. Bray. If my step-mother asks you for details about daddy's business affairs, you know nothing, of course."

"Am I to regard that as a reprimand, Miss Delia?"

If her heart had not been so sick, she would have laughed. The man was too ridiculously prim; he might have been a starched old spinster in a cathedral town.

"No, I don't mean it to be a reprimand, Mr. Bray—I want you to regard it as a warning. You are in daddy's confidence, naturally—far more so in regard to his business affairs, at least, than Mr. Hanray."

"I should hope I was, Miss Delia. I have been in your father's employ now for six years, and I have served him loyally during the whole of that time."

"I'm quite sure you have—because if you hadn't, daddy would have got rid of you long ago!"

"I beg your pardon!"

"Oh, don't get so ruffled, Mr. Bray; you know that I am only speaking the truth. It is because daddy has such confidence in you that you must be on your guard."

"On my guard, Miss Delia?"

"You heard what I said—on your guard. Daddy has powerful enemies—that is why he left London and came down here to Steep Holm. That is why he put these men in the grounds as guards. Now, although I'm not supposed to know anything about it, it's perfectly obvious to me that what these enemies are after is something to do with daddy's business affairs. Now that Mr. Hanray's gone"—her voice dropped as she said the words—"I wish you weren't quite the type you are, Mr. Bray."

"Not the type I am, Miss Delia—why, what type would you like me to be, pray?"

"More of a fighter. But, still"—as her listener's face mirrored the astonishment he felt—"it's too late to attempt to alter that now. But before I go, I want to impress one thing upon you very seriously. It's for daddy's sake I am doing it."

Bray seemed to recover something of his equanimity.

"I have not only the highest possible respect for your father, Miss Miller, but, although I may not be such a militant type of person as Mr. Hanray, I trust I have a strict regard for my duty. I have said this before, and I trust you will believe me."

"Of course. But once again: if my stepmother comes asking you questions, you know nothing. Will you give me your promise?"

"If you insist, Miss Delia. At the same time——"

"At the present time I am not prepared to listen to any excuses for her," the girl cut in crisply; "my stepmother has plotted abominably against an innocent man in order to get him out of the way. She thinks, perhaps, that the coast is now clear—that is why I am warning you. For the sake of daddy, I implore you to remember your promise."

She turned away, leaving Bray feeling stupefied.

CHAPTER XXI MRS. MILLER'S EVIDENCE

THE feeling Jimmy had experienced when leaving Steep Holm in the custody of Police-Sergeant Atkinson of the Hampshire Constabulary, that the end of the world had come, did not lessen as time went by. Many times during the journey to Wyndhurst, where he

understood he was to be tried for the crime which he had not committed, he was tempted to let drive at his warder and make his escape.

The urge was strong, but he fought it. He had to think of others, not of himself. Nothing would please that woman, his enemy, more than to know he was a hunted creature with the full force of the law directed against him—and that would be his position if he yielded to this desire to break away. To attempt to escape would not be the action of an innocent man—on the contrary, it would be the most convincing evidence of his guilt. Yet the hellishness of it—to feel that every step was taking him nearer to prison—yes prison. . . .

When that thought first came, he turned savagely on the police sergeant.

The latter returned the malignant look unruffled.

"I can picture some of the things you'd like to do to me, Mr. Hanray, but you'd be the worst kind of fool to attempt any of 'em, let me tell you."

"I did not steal that ring, sergeant—and your common sense must tell you that the whole thing's a plot."

"What my common sense tells me, Mr. Hanray, ain't neither 'ere nor there—what matters is that I have to see you safe and sound inside Wyndhurst police station. As for you being innocent, no doubt if you *are* innocent you'll be able to prove it when the case comes on to-morrow morning."

It was evidently useless—worse than useless indeed—to attempt to talk with the man. The realisation that he ought to have had more sense than to start it did not add to his peace of mind. By the time his lodging for the night was reached, Jimmy could have committed murder cheerfully. To have failed

Sebastian Miller after the trust that the latter had placed in him—God! To be forced to leave Delia to the mercy of that devil woman, her stepmother! He groaned at the thought.

"Come, come—it may not be as bad as all that, young feller."

Police-Sergeant Atkinson, moved to a crude pity, actually patted his prisoner on the back. Then, as though recollecting that this was very unprofessional conduct indeed, he cleared his throat noisily.

"Do you apply for bail?" inquired the superintendent who took charge of the proceedings directly the pair entered the police station. The question was asked after Hanray had been formally charged with the theft of a diamond ring valued at £200, the property of one Adele Miller, the wife of Sebastian Miller, employer of the accused. The tautological phraseology used seemed ridiculous.

"No," he snapped. There was no one to whom he could apply apart from Delia Miller—and he wanted to keep her out of this sordidness at all costs. To see her until he had cleared himself would be intolerable, even although she believed in his innocence. This was twisted reasoning, perhaps, but he could not see the situation in any other light.

He did not rest. That was not surprising for he had not expected to sleep. His mind was too chaotic for any peaceful ease to come. All through the weary night he wrestled with the problem: what was happening at Steep Holm? Had Mrs. Miller, with the assistance of the rascally Simmons, come out into the open and definitely declared herself on the side of her husband's enemies? It was useless to expect too much from Bray; the man was loyal enough to his employer,

but otherwise he was a weakling. A weakling, moreover, who had probably never been placed in such a responsible position before. How would he act? The fear that he would crumple beneath the strain was paralysing. If only Miller had not gone abroad just at that time! But it was useless to waste thought on this contingency—the present facts were the only ones which mattered.

The hours seemed so tormentingly long that he felt he would lose his reason long before the time arrived for him to stand in the dock on that false charge. Because, however, the healthy human frame is capable of enduring an unexpected amount of anguish, he was still sane when the policeman arrived at the door of the cell with his breakfast. This, consisting of plain but wholesome food, revolted him at first, but then, common sense taking the upper hand, he started to eat. The first mouthful he felt would choke him, but after that the food and drink took on a relish, and he made a hearty meal. Reason told him he would be glad of the strength that food would lend him before the morning was out.

Although he had known actual despair before, yet the position in which he found himself still seemed incredible. It was still difficult to believe that he, James Hanray, was presently to be haled before a bench of magistrates charged with a disgraceful crime. Presently he would wake and find that it was nothing worse than a bad dream. Strange that this idea should persist after so long, but there it was. Perhaps the reason was that to thieve had always seemed to him to be one of the most contemptible of acts.

And now the moment had come. He had been brought into the court from another room and hustled

into the dock. All around were staring eyes ; in some mysterious way the news that something sensational was going to take place at the Wyndhurst Police Court that morning must have gone the rounds of the neighbourhood, for the place was packed. A moment's reflection would have told him that there was nothing surprising in that, since the name of Sebastian Miller was one of the most famous in the country and that he was alleged to have stolen a ring from the wife of this well-known millionaire.

Hanray had never been in a police court before, and he looked round with wondering eyes. Opposite him was a raised dais on which two men were seated. One was of the fast disappearing country squire type, red-faced and bucolic, and the other was a thin, ascetic man who might have been a professor of physics. As a matter of fact, he was a noted beetle-collector who lived in the New Forest for the express purpose of gathering " bugs." He regarded the latter as being distinctly superior to the ordinary human being.

Before this dais was a desk at which sat a lantern-jawed man in a navy blue suit. Directly Hanray was in the dock, this official, who proved to be the clerk to the justices, leaned towards the Bench and conferred with the magistrates for some moments before reading from a paper before him.

" The charge," he said, " is one of stealing a diamond ring valued at £200, the property of Mrs. Adele Miller, wife of Mr. Sebastian Miller, of Steep Holm."

The chairman looked at the prisoner.

" Do you desire to be tried by a jury at the next Quarter Sessions, or will you consent to the charge being dealt with now ? "

" I want it dealt with now."

" Very well."

"Is Mrs. Miller here?" inquired the Justices' clerk.

"Yes, sir."

"Call her, please."

Jimmy felt the blood rushing to his head as the door opened and, amid a murmur from the crowded court, the woman who had made herself his enemy entered. Adele Miller was dressed with her usual charm. As she looked round with an expression of startled dismay which became her very well, but which Hanray knew was merely assumed, hushed exclamations of admiration could be heard from the spectators. She might have been a favourite actress making her appearance at a tense moment in a drama.

The Chairman of the Bench, catching her eye, made her a slight bow. His colleague, whose mind was elsewhere at the moment (he had been sent a somewhat rare "bug" from the wilds of Dartmoor that morning in a match-box), looked at her expressionless.

"Will you please go into the witness-box, Mrs. Miller?" said the chairman encouragingly.

The woman addressed gave a pretty start, as though further confused, but the sergeant came to her assistance, placing a hand on her arm, and helping her to mount the step. Then he whispered to her before picking up a Testament—and a card on which the words of the oath were printed.

The witness lifted the Testament, and, reading from the card, said: "I swear by Almighty God that the evidence I shall give shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth."

The preliminary oath having been taken, the chairman, obviously anxious to sun himself in the good graces of the wife of such a powerful financial magnate as Sebastian Miller, took charge of the proceedings.

"Please tell us all you know of this affair, Mrs. Miller. Take your time—there's no hurry."

The witness acknowledged the remark with a slight smile. She still appeared slightly confused.

"The prisoner—I should say Mr. Hanray, I suppose—was recently engaged by my husband."

"In what capacity, Mrs. Miller?" This from the Justices' clerk, who evidently did not intend to be left out of the hunt.

"Well, it is somewhat difficult to say. The prisoner—I should say Mr. Hanray—had no definite work to do. As a matter of fact, it was purely through charity that my husband brought him home; he had picked him up, I believe, on the Embankment."

"On the London Embankment?"

"Yes. He was absolutely down-and-out, sleeping on one of the seats."

This information was so startling that the whole court trained their eyes on the man in the dock. It seemed difficult to believe that this smartly-dressed, fit-looking, well-groomed man, who looked so sure of himself, could ever have been a social derelict.

"You are sure of that, Mrs. Miller?" This time it was the beetle-hunter who made the inquiry. He did so in the cold, emotionless manner of the scientific mind.

"I am quite sure of it," came the lie; "in fact, my husband gave me the information himself."

Once again all eyes turned in the direction of the dock.

Jimmy met the concentrated gaze with an outward composure that was in vivid contrast to the tumult which raged within him. She was a clever devil, this woman: she had already prejudiced the minds of those who were to judge him, by those opening words.

"Proceed, Mrs. Miller," encouraged the chairman.

"As I have already told you, the pris——Mr. Han-ray——"

"Please call him the defendant—that is the correct term," coldly remarked the second magistrate.

"Oh, I'm so sorry! You see, this is all very strange to me——"

"Of course it is, Mrs. Miller," said the chairman, wondering why the same Providence which sent beer, beef and foxes into the world could also produce such an outrageous specimen of humanity as the man who sat on his left.

"My husband often acts in an impulsive manner, and he did so, in my opinion, in the present case. I do not wish to say anything which is unfair to the—the defendant——"

"You must keep strictly to the facts relative to this charge, madam," said the Justices' clerk, thereby earning a look of animosity from the chairman.

"What am I doing?" The witness clasped her hands in the most charming confusion.

"Permit me to assist you, Mrs. Miller." The Chairman gallantly came to her help. "When did you first notice the theft of your ring?"

"Yesterday morning when I returned to my room after my bath."

"When you were not wearing it, where was it usually kept?"

"In my jewel-box."

"Was that always kept locked?"

The witness shook her head.

"I'm afraid it wasn't *always* locked. It was careless of me, but, you see, we had never had a thief in the house before."

"You mustn't say that, madam," said the second magistrate; "the defendant has not yet been convicted

of this charge. Please endeavour to give the remainder of your evidence in an impartial manner."

The rebuke had several effects. It caused the witness to flush, the chairman to turn in his chair and give the speaker a glare which would have annihilated the ordinary person, and the crowd to shuffle its feet.

"I am sorry if I have done wrong again——"

"You are giving your evidence in a perfectly satisfactory manner, Mrs. Miller," retorted the chairman. "Eh, what's that?" as the clerk endeavoured to attract his attention. Colonel Bolitho listened impatiently and then rasped: "Nonsense! All nonsense! Do you imagine I don't know my duties?"

The clerk, with a shrug of the shoulders, resumed his seat. If his face was any criterion, he had suffered under Colonel Bolitho before.

"You were saying that you did not always keep your jewel-case locked, Mrs. Miller," resumed the chairman, turning again towards the witness-box.

"Yes."

"What made you suspect the defendant?"

"Well, he was the only person at Steep Holm in whom I had not complete confidence. He was a stranger; everyone else had been with us for years."

"What about your maid?"

"I didn't bring a maid. I left her in London. I came down to Steep Holm unexpectedly."

"And the other servants?"

"There was only Simmons, the footman who always accompanies my husband to Steep Holm, and the man and woman who act as caretakers whilst we are in London. Unless we are entertaining, we always keep a very small staff at Steep Holm."

"Now please come to the point, madam," put in the second magistrate; "you say you missed the ring

in question when you returned to your room yesterday morning after taking your bath. What did you do ? ”

“ I didn’t do anything at first. You see, I began to wonder if by any chance I was mistaken—I thought perhaps I had left the ring at home. Then I remembered distinctly having worn it the night before when I arrived at Steep Holm.”

“ Having come to the conclusion that the ring was missing, what steps did you take, Mrs. Miller ? ”

“ I told Simmons, the acting-butler. I did so because he is a servant I have learned from experience I can fully trust.”

“ Quite so. He has been with you a number of years, no doubt.”

“ For at least seven. During the whole of that time I have proved him to be thoroughly reliable. I may say that my husband shares my opinion of him.”

“ Did Simmons make any suggestion ? ”

“ No. He was bewildered when I told him the news.”

“ Then who suggested that the defendant’s room should be searched ? ” put in the magistrates’ clerk.

“ I did. Much against my will, I was forced to the conclusion that there was a thief in the house. I told Simmons—the only fit person available for the purpose—to make a thorough search of all the bedrooms in use.”

“ Where was the ring actually found ? ” This from the beetle-collector.

“ Simmons will be able to tell you that himself.”

“ Is this man to be called as a witness ? ”

“ He is,” replied the magistrates’ clerk, who, picking up a ring which was on his desk and holding it up, went on : “ After examining this ring, Mrs. Miller, will you

kindly say if you are able or unable to identify it as being your property ? ”

The ring was handed to the woman by the court sergeant.

“ Yes, this ring is my property,” she said.

“ And you are able to swear that it is the same ring which you allege was stolen by defendant ? ”

“ Yes—I can.”

“ Then that is all ; we shall not require to trouble you any further, Mrs. Miller.” The chairman beamed somewhat fatuously.

As the woman was about to step down, the magistrates’ clerk, turning to the dock, put the usual question.

“ Have you any question to put to this witness ? ”

“ No. I have no questions. I did not steal the ring. If it was found in my coat, it must have been placed there by someone in her employ.”

“ Eh ? What’s that ? ” Colonel Bolitho, C.M.G., leaned forward.

“ Are you in her employ ? ”

Jimmy smiled.

“ No, certainly not—I am in her husband’s employ, which is quite a different matter.”

“ Well, it’s immaterial, anyway.” The chairman brushed the emendation aside.

“ William Simmons,” called the court sergeant.

The man Hanray had very good reason to believe was the accomplice of the woman who had just lied so glibly, stepped into the witness-box with an expression so primly virtuous on his unwholesome face that Jimmy felt inclined to leap from the dock and show up the fellow’s real nature by punching him on the jaw.

“ Your name is William Simmons ? ” asked the magistrates’ clerk. Now that Beauty in Distress had

gone, the chairman was content to leave the questioning to someone else.

"Yes, sir."

"You are a footman employed by the last witness, Mrs. Miller?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where did you find this ring?" The article in question, which had been handed back to the clerk, was passed across to the witness.

"In a coat in the dressing-chest in the defendant's—I mean Mr. Hanray's room."

"Was the chest locked?" The second magistrate had put the question.

"No, sir—unlocked."

"Unlocked. It seems a very incautious action for a supposed thief to leave a valuable ring in an unlocked place."

"There was no lock on this particular chest, sir," supplemented the witness.

"That is all the evidence," stated the clerk, as the footman stepped down.

"I think it is quite enough, too," remarked the chairman, in which he no doubt fondly imagined was a whisper. "Eh?" as the clerk leaned up to speak to him; "oh, yes, quite unnecessary though, to my way of thinking." He cleared his throat and then stared across at the defendant.

"What have you to say, Hanray, about this theft—alleged theft?"

"Nothing, sir, beyond the fact that I did not commit it."

"Did not commit it? Then who did commit it?"

"I am afraid that is beyond me, sir. Perhaps the ring was never stolen."

"Never stolen?" Colonel Bolitho looked as

though he could scarcely credit his hearing. "Then how could it have reached the drawer in your dressing-chest?"

"It is conceivable that it was placed there."

"What——?" And then, whilst the court buzzed with excitement, the Chairman's colleague touched him on the arm, and the two, with the assistance of the magistrates' clerk, held a consultation.

Jimmy watched them with a sense of baffled rage. He felt that the dice were loaded against him. The chairman of the Bench was obviously a firm believer in Mrs. Miller's story, and whilst the other magistrate was patently less credulous, it seemed impossible to hope that the charge against him would be dismissed. Conviction would mean prison. . . .

"Hallo, Hanray."

Turning round at the sound of his name, Jimmy stared in astonishment.

The man who had spoken was Dick Pudan—Detective-Inspector Richard Pudan of New Scotland Yard.

"Well?" said Hanray challengingly. The presence of this man in the court, he felt, could mean only one thing.

"I hope it will be well," was the enigmatic reply. The speaker walked towards the Bench.

CHAPTER XXII

THE SENTENCE

WHAT followed the arrival of Detective-Inspector Pudan at that consultation of justice was very remarkable. To begin with, the clerk to the magistrates stared at him incredulously after he had made a brief

statement, following which both members of the Bench could be seen leaning forward excitedly. There was a short conference, and then the detective-inspector walked out of the court, accompanied by a police officer. Subsequent to this there was another consultation of the Bench, and then the magistrates also retired.

During the ten minutes following the disappearance of the men in whose hands his future rested, Jimmy tried to keep his nerves steady. It was a difficult job. Pudan's unexpected appearance had merely strengthened his belief that he must be convicted and sent to prison. True, he was a first offender—how ironical the words sounded!—but with that blockhead chairman in command, there did not seem any chance of his being given the benefit of the doubt. It was merely circumstantial evidence against him—and weak circumstantial evidence at that; whilst she was about it, Adele Miller might have thought of something more ingenious, but it would be sufficiently damning. The second magistrate, whose face suggested cleverness and who quite evidently had no great liking for his fatuous colleague, had bluntly suggested that the discovery of the ring in his room bore every suspicion of being a "plant"; but this view was bound to be overruled by the chairman. He wondered how the justices' clerk acted in a case like this; when two magistrates were divided in opinion; did his personal opinion carry the day?

But he did not care what happened to himself—except in this respect: that if he were sent to prison, Delia would be uncared for. He had gone over all this in his mind before, he knew, but the subject was of such pressing importance that it returned and with greater force.

Should he have a word with Pudan about the girl ? The detective-inspector, although he might be a potential enemy to himself, was a decent enough fellow and, moreover, he represented what stood for Law and Order. He couldn't refuse an appeal of that sort, surely ? In fact, if—as no doubt was the case—the girl was in actual danger through the machinations of her father's enemies, it was Pudan's bounden duty to give her protection.

He'd speak to him. The man couldn't refuse ; after all, they had been pals of a sort in days gone by, and the fellow would be a cad not to listen now that he was right up against things.

Jimmy could not forget, however, that there was danger in speaking to Pudan. The man had an uncanny way of looking through you ; he had experienced that the day they had talked together at Steep Holm—shortly after . . .

That murdered man ! Good God ! in the excitement of discovering that Adele Miller was a spy, and the further hectic joyousness of being haled off to jail, that grisly horror had slipped entirely from his mind.

What had been pretty misty before now became dazzlingly clear : Pudan had been put on that job, by some yet higher authority, and he was still endeavouring to clear up what no doubt had appeared at first to be a mystery. The trail led to himself—that was why Pudan had come to Wyndhurst that morning. It was obvious.

In spite of his resolve to keep a firm grip, Jimmy shuddered. A charge of theft was one thing ; a charge of murder—for it could be nothing less than that—was vastly different. Why, it might even mean the gallows. . . .

All kinds of disordered fancies now began to crowd his mind. Was *that* the reason why Sebastian Miller had left England? Had the millionaire suddenly become panic-stricken at the thought of what had happened? Had his explanation of going abroad in order to round off a tremendous financial deal merely been an excuse to get out of danger's way? He could not credit it, and yet——

Well, he would soon know. The suspense would probably not last much longer.

But even if the worst happened—if he were arrested on a charge of being concerned in that mystery-man's death—the situation was not altered, except that the need for Delia to have adequate protection became intensified.

There seemed no alternative. His hand was being forced; he would be obliged to speak to Pudan. Delia could not be allowed to remain at the mercy of that tiger-woman, her stepmother, and that slimy swine, Simmons.

"Silence!" called the court sergeant.

The door leading to the justices' retiring-room had opened, and the two magistrates, accompanied by their clerk, appeared. Hanray looked eagerly for Pudan, but the detective-inspector from Scotland Yard could not be seen. He had evidently left, or had decided to take no further part in the proceedings.

All three men, Jimmy noticed, were looking bewildered. They might have had a severe shock, which had affected them in different ways. Colonel Bolitho, the chairman, was pursing his lips in what appeared to be indignation; the entomologist bore the manner of having recently been confronted with a beetle that even his expert knowledge could not classify, whilst

the justices' clerk looked as though someone had endeavoured successfully to take a rise out of him.

Amid a tense silence the defendant stood up to receive his sentence.

"James Hanray," said the chairman, "you—you——" Colonel Bolitho must still have been the prey to violent emotion, for his voice shook so that he was unable to continue.

"You will be remanded in custody," he finally spluttered, and then sat down suddenly.

"This way," said a voice on Jimmy's left. It was the policeman who stood by the entrance to the dock.

"I want to see Detective-Inspector Pudan," said Hanray when he reached the door of the court. The decision of the Court, unexpected as it had been, had confirmed instead of relieving his anxiety—the reason he was being remanded in custody, as the jargon had it, was because the police, through Pudan, had not yet completed their inquiries into the case of the murdered man. This was a favourite trick of the police, he remembered an old crook telling him one night when they had shared the same seat on the Embankment: a man suspected of a serious crime was arrested on a minor charge and then kept safely in prison until such time as the authorities were prepared to bring sufficient evidence to commit him on the major count.

"Detective-Inspector Pudan?" replied the constable.

Jimmy snapped his reply.

"Yes, Detective-Inspector Pudan from Scotland Yard. He was in the court a quarter of an hour ago."

The policeman continued to look bewildered and Hanray walked across to the court sergeant.

"This man does not seem to undersand what I say. I want to see Detective-Inspector Pudan."

"Why do you want to see the inspector?"

"That's my business. Understand this, sergeant—I make an application through you to see this police-officer and I expect to have my wish granted because it's a very serious matter."

The man looked at him steadily for a moment or so and then replied gruffly: "Come with me."

Within a few minutes Jimmy found himself in a room, the only other occupant of which was the man he sought.

"I've got something to say to you, Pudan," he started.

"One minute."

The detective-inspector went to the door, turned the key in the lock and then came back to his seat. The quizzical smile which had seemed an habitual feature of his face on the previous occasion they had met was now gone.

CHAPTER XXIII AN AMAZING PROPOSAL

"WELL?" he remarked crisply.

"You don't believe me, I suppose, when I say that I did not steal that ring?"

"Nothing in my life has the power to surprise me, Hanray. Suppose I say that I am willing to believe you—what then?"

"Then," was the earnest reply, "I am going to ask you to do something which is vitally important."

"What is it?"

"Look after Miss Miller while I am in prison."

God, Dick, I'm in the devil's own hole!" he burst out. "Listen a minute: I've simply got to tell you. Sebastian Miller picked me up out of the mud—no, it wasn't literally true that he found me on the Embankment, but I had been there the night before——"

"Why?" interjected the listener.

"It's too long a story—I'll tell you another time if you're still interested—but it's true what I'm saying; Sebastian Miller gave me a chance when I was absolutely down and out, when I didn't know where my next bob was coming from. For what purpose you may ask? It sounds fantastic, but I had to act as a personal bodyguard to his daughter."

"I thought you were a kind of secretary. Wasn't that what you told me at the house the other day?"

"I may have done—anyway, what I told you was the truth—the truth so far as I knew it. The first proposal Mr. Miller made to me was that I should take on a secretaryship. Then I found that I was to have practically no connection with his business affairs——"

"The fellow Bray covers that end, I take it?"

"Yes. He is in charge of all Mr. Miller's business affairs. Whether he'll be able to—but there's no time to go into that now," he broke off hurriedly; "what I want to try to convince you, Pudan, is that now that Miller is away abroad, his daughter is in actual danger—horrible danger, perhaps. She must have protection. If I hadn't been caught in this cursed trap I should never have left her. That was my job; I'm convinced of it now. The real purpose Miller had in putting me on his pay-roll was to see that his daughter came to no physical harm."

"Rather a tall order, wasn't it?"

"Tall! Looking back, it seems the action of a madman! I've done nothing ever since but ask

myself why, if he was threatened by enemies—as I'm certain he is—he didn't do what any normal man would have done—go direct to the police."

Pudan shook his head.

"Sebastian Miller is not a normal man, Hanray—no man who is worth twenty-five millions and who has made that amount entirely by his own efforts can be termed normal."

The Scotland Yard inspector took out his cigarette-case and passed it across to Hanray. The action was that of a friend.

"How much do you know about these enemies of Miller?" Pudan asked.

Hanray lit the cigarette which he had accepted, and blew out a great cloud of smoke luxuriously. He had been starving for tobacco.

"Very little," he said, "but what I do know is interesting. As I have told you, just before I met Sebastian Miller I had a flat on the Embankment—the third seat the Westminster side of Cleopatra's Needle. One night, not very long ago, a man got out of a Rolls and spoke. He intimated he was a philanthropist and that he was eager to help poor devils of outcasts. Well, he took me home in his car, gave me a meal and a bath, and fitted me out with clothes. That night, Pudan, I slept in a real bed—and was so overcome by the novelty that I could have cried. Perhaps I did. . . ."

After a brief pause, Hanray continued:

"I thought there must be a catch in it somewhere—and I was right. Dorman—that was the fellow's name——"

"Dorman," repeated the Scotland Yard man, smiling at the smoke which he blew towards the ceiling; "sorry to interrupt again; carry on."

"I was asked not to leave the house that first day. You would like to know where that house is, I suppose? Yes, and so should I. I'm sorry to say I haven't the foggiest idea where I was taken. I hadn't had any food for a couple of days and directly the car started I must have fainted, because I don't remember anything between sitting down in that wonderful Rolls and finding myself in a room which was entirely strange."

"Just a minute—would you mind describing the man Dorman?"

When Hanray had complied, Pudan nodded.

"Yes, that was Dorman—he has many other names, of course—right enough. What did he want you to do?"

"Something which made me think at first he must have lost his senses. I had to go to a fancy dress ball at the Albert Hall, dressed as an Elizabethan courtier. At a quarter to twelve I was to proceed to Box 22, outside of which I had to wait."

"Sounds intriguing," commented his listener.

"At the time it sounded the most terrible bunk to me. Shall I go on?"

"Please."

"Well, I was supposed to wait outside the door of that box, preventing anyone from going in, until a man wearing a friar's habit came out to join me. This joker was to hand me something which I was to keep safely until a third person—I say, Pudan, you don't think I am making this up and trying to pull your leg, do you?"

"Certainly not. Didn't I say just now that nothing had the power to surprise me? Carry on."

"I should recognise this third person by two things, I was told by Dorman. The first was that he would

be dressed as a pierrot and the second by the passwords which he would give me."

"Passwords, eh? This becomes more and more thrilling," remarked Pudan with a return of his old quizzical manner.

"I'm glad you think so." Hanray was not certain if the other man was about to laugh at him. "The passwords were: 'Corn is going down.' Sounds ridiculous, I dare say, but there may have been some sense at the back of it. Anyway, my instructions were that if these words were said to me by the fellow in the pierrot's costume, I was to hand to him what the monk had previously passed to me."

"And did you?"

"I did not," replied Jimmy decisively; "just as I was wondering what it all could mean, I heard a scream coming from Box 22. I dashed inside and found a girl struggling in the arms of a friar. I 'outed' the monk. The girl, who proved to be Delia Miller, permitted me to see her home. In Park Lane I was introduced to her father, who offered me a job. That's what I wanted to tell you by way of explanation. I suppose they will be coming for me very soon, and, as time is therefore valuable, I should like to have your promise, Pudan, to look after Miss Miller whilst I am in prison."

The detective-inspector's mobile lips puckered into a smile.

"I'll see that nothing happens to Miss Miller. By the way, Hanray, am I indiscreet in inquiring if you are in love with her?"

"You are offensively inquisitive, but——"

"The answer is in the affirmative! All right. Now I know where I am; the position is quite clear."

"Thanks," said Hanray briefly. "But there's

something else : how long am I to be kept in quod ? You must know."

Pudan lit another cigarette.

"In the strictest confidence, Hanray, you're not going to quod," he said astonishingly.

Jimmy stared.

"Does that mean that I am free to leave here ?"

"Hardly that, old man." The detective-inspector's tone was surprisingly friendly ; "it happens that I've pulled you out of this business because I've got a job of work for you."

"A job of work ?" repeated the bewildered Hanray ; "what the hell do you mean ?"

"Patience," smiled the inspector ; "all shall be explained. . . . Have another cigarette. And you need not look any longer at the door ; no one is coming for you, and we have plenty of time."

Deeply puzzled, Hanray accepted the second cigarette.

"Let's have it," he said.

Pudan plunged immediately into his tale.

"By one of the curious coincidences which happen so often in real life, it turns out that these mysterious enemies of Sebastian Miller are gentlemen very urgently 'wanted,' not only by us, but by the police of one or two other countries, including America. Why there should be this animosity between the two parties is not definitely clear—Miller and the chief thug in question, I mean—just as, like you, I fail to comprehend why Miller, when he knew that his life was possibly in danger, did not turn to the police instead of hiring a bodyguard of ex-service men. However, human nature is full of such idiosyncrasies, and, for the moment, we must leave it at that. What is more important to discuss is the work I wish you to do."

"But I have my own job at Steep Holm," returned Hanray. "Look here, Pudan, I'm awfully obliged to you, especially if I'm right in my guess that you've been able to fix things with these magistrates, but I must get back to the house."

Pudan shook his head.

"If you go to Steep Holm you won't be admitted. Directly she saw you, Mrs. Miller would ring up the police and you would be rushed back here."

"Why?"

"Because the order of the Court was that you should be remanded in custody. Which means that you are still a prisoner—technically."

"But I thought you said I wasn't going to prison."

"You won't if you only do what I want."

"I don't like this," declared Hanray. "It sounds rather too much like blackmail for me, Pudan."

"It is blackmail—of a sort," cheerfully admitted the detective-inspector. "I'll put my cards on the table," he continued.

"I think you'd better," was the reply; "I like to have things straight."

"You shall. Here, then, briefly, is the position: A gang of men, at whose head is a dangerous person rejoicing in the singularly unattractive name of Zweig, is in this country at the present time, bent on one thing—the ruination and perhaps the death of Sebastian Miller. For some reason which we don't know, Miller absolutely refuses to apply for police protection. But he is going to have that protection, all the same—and through you."

"Through me?" cried Hanray.

"Hear me out," returned the detective-inspector.

"I did a very unorthodox thing this morning," he continued; "indeed, it is quite possible that I ran

the risk of being arrested myself! Saying that there were very urgent reasons for it, I requested the local Bench to remand you. Now for the reason: You are anxious to serve Miss Miller, you say; well, I am going to show you a way in which you can do so far more effectively than by returning to Steep Holm."

"All right—tell me."

Pudan exploded another bombshell.

"I want you to enter the service of Kurt Zweig," he said.

Jimmy laughed.

"You must be mad," he said. "I'm a marked man in that quarter. Dorman, who is in with Zweig, would cut my throat for twopence for letting him down in that affair at the Albert Hall. The idea then was to steal the necklace which Delia Miller was wearing. He lost that necklace—forgive the boast!—through me. He's not likely to forget it. A pal of his reminded me of it the very next morning in Oxford Street."

"I know," agreed Pudan; "I was there. You hit the fellow flat, I believe."

"I did," admitted Hanray with a smile of satisfaction.

"With a punch that any of the so-called British heavy-weights would have envied. You need not think I propose pushing you into the lion's den entirely unarmed," the speaker continued.

"That's kind of you," was the slightly satirical comment. "But before we go any further, do you mind my saying that I don't think much of your scheme!"

Pudan refused to be daunted.

"Oh, but you will—you will, indeed, before I've finished," he replied; "you won't be at all the man

I think you are, Hanray, if you throw me down when I have outlined fully what I have in mind.

"Both for the Millers' sake—father and daughter, I mean, of course—and for our own, we want to know Zweig's plans for the future. So we send a spy—you."

"Damned nice of you! You're pretty optimistic if you think you are going to convince me that this is going to be a congenial job. Personally, I would much rather stay at Steep Holm and look after Delia Miller—now that I'm free to do so."

Pudan's face clouded, but only momentarily.

"But you're not free to do so—I thought I had already explained that. Technically, you're still a prisoner. I hate to keep on about this——"

Jimmy made a grimace.

"Don't mention it! I should esteem it a personal favour, Pudan, please, if you would drop me a post card every day for the rest of my life reminding me how narrowly I have escaped a convict's cell!"

"We're getting nowhere," said the detective-inspector sharply; "let's cut out the cackle and get down to brass tacks. If what you say is true, Zweig has his spy in the Miller household in Mrs. Miller——"

"And the servant Simmons."

"Quite likely. But Mrs. Miller is the principal traitor. Now I want to counter-attack by placing my own spy—it's an ugly word, but I can't think of another at the moment—with Zweig."

"I can follow your reasoning," conceded Hanray, "but why not 'plant' a trained detective there?"

"Because," retorted Pudan, "I prefer that you should work out your destiny in this way. You are likely to be keener at the work through personal interest than any policeman."

"You haven't answered my contention that I'm already known to at least two of Zweig's principals—Dorman and the fellow I punched on the jaw outside Selfridge's."

"You won't go there as yourself, you ass," declared Pudan—"you'll be disguised."

Hanray looked at him stonily.

"Excuse me asking," he said, "but you don't happen to have become suddenly light-headed?"

"No, I'm perfectly normal. Ever done any amateur theatricals, Hanray?"

Jimmy stared at him.

"As it happens, I have," he replied; "for a short time in my exceedingly chequered career I was on the stage—touring, in a terrible melodrama called 'The Serpent.'"

"Splendid!" Pudan beamed at the smoke-ring which was drifting towards the ceiling. "Does your list of accomplishments also include the speaking of German?"

"I speak German rather well—I picked it up during the War."

"Better and better! Now, then, here is my plan: Miller, you say, is in Germany?"

"I believe so. Anyway, he is somewhere on the Continent fixing up this gigantic financial deal which is supposed to be the biggest thing in his career. I dare say Bray, Miller's financial secretary, who is still at Steep Holm, would be able to give more exact information. He may be a bit stuffy about telling you, though. Fish-like person, Bray."

"Leave that to me," replied Pudan. "I'll make a point of going to Steep Holm later on, and when I see Bray I'll try to kill two birds with one stone. I'll get the exact whereabouts of Sebastian Miller at

the present time, and I'll also warn Bray of the consequences if he allows himself to be frightened into telling Zweig's crowd any of his employer's business. However, it's not so much Miller's financial secrets that this gang are after as the man himself. Once they had Miller in their power, they could bleed him for every penny he's got."

"Have you met Miller yourself?"

"No. Why do you ask?"

"Because if you had, you wouldn't have made that last statement. Miller is not the type to be intimidated into doing anything against his will, especially to oblige a man whom he hates like poison. You can take that from me."

The detective-inspector showed no signs of being convinced.

"There is a limit to what the human body can endure in the way of pain, Hanray—don't forget that."

"You mean that Zweig would torture him?" he asked.

"If my estimate of the man is correct, he'd kill him—by inches," was the uncompromising reply. "If you take this job on—and of course you will—watch your step; that devil will have no mercy if you betray yourself."

"For general cheerfulness you are hard to beat," Hanray commented.

"'Optimism' is my middle name," was the unruffled reply; "I was merely warning you."

Hanray decided to push on.

"You were saying something just now about my going about with a false nose and a complexion that would commence to peel directly it started to rain; let's hear the further details."

"I'm going to be serious," replied the detective-

inspector with a change of tone. "Information came to us from Berlin recently that a certain notorious German crook named Schulze—Zweig himself is of German origin, of course—was journeying to London. The natural inference was that he was coming to consult with Zweig over something. We had his description, and when he stepped off the boat he was quietly taken into custody."

"Why?"

"Why? Because we wished someone to take his place at the forthcoming conference with Zweig."

"And that someone, I presume, will be me disguised to represent Schulze—sorry, but I still don't think much of your scheme, Pudan."

"Never mind the criticisms for the present. I believe that Zweig sent for Schulze because he wishes the latter, who is the head of the biggest criminal organisation in Germany, to get hold of Miller on the Continent. Directly this was done, Zweig would himself cross to Germany. It is possible that he is afraid to go too far in England."

"Why don't you arrest the swine straightaway?"

"Because we haven't sufficient evidence against him."

"But you arrested this German, Schulze."

"That was a different matter—Schulze was deported three years ago as an undesirable character. It is a sign of the fear which Zweig inspires that he should have risked returning to England. I know what you have in your mind, Hanray—you are thinking that I have asked you to take on an impossible task. But consider the facts. We have Schulze's *dossier*. This will be given to you to soak up the facts concerning the man. In all probability Zweig hasn't seen Schulze for years. He will not be suspicious because we have

taken care that nothing concerning Schulze's arrest shall leak out. You can say that you are only able to stay one night because you are afraid of the police. Incidentally, you will be very effectively disguised by a man who is a past-master at the job. You'll do it?" the speaker concluded eagerly.

Jimmy felt a thrill pass through him.

"Yes, I'll do it," he replied.

"Good man!" declared the detective-inspector. "I knew you would."

CHAPTER XXIV SAM GRIEVE APPROVES

ONCE having gained Hanray's consent, Pudan lost no time. He hurried the other into a rakish closed car which was waiting outside the police court, and started for London at a pace that broke every speed limit in Hampshire. To Jimmy's request that he should stop at Steep Holm so that he might pack up his clothes, the detective-inspector turned a bland but deaf ear.

"We haven't the time," he replied cheerfully; "your togs shall be collected and sent on to you—don't worry. What you really want, I haven't the slightest doubt," he continued, "is to see Delia Miller. But that wouldn't do at all. Duty first, old chap."

Jimmy, feeling he would have liked to curse him until the end of time, did not trouble to reply. If he had once started to speak, he would never have stopped. . . .

London was reached in less than a couple of hours, for Pudan had gone at a nerve-tingling speed through-out. After his refusal to stop at Steep Holm, the

Scotland Yard man had kept silent, concentrating all his attention on driving. As for Hanray, his thoughts provided him with sufficient occupation. He had been living a mad existence lately, but this latest development surpassed everything else. It scarcely seemed credible. What was to be the outcome of this extraordinary adventure? It must mean one of two things, it seemed to him—either he would be successful in frustrating the enemy's campaign against his employer, or he would lose his life. There did not appear to be any middle course. Success or The End—it was bound to be one or the other.

The more he thought about it, the more hazardous the scheme appeared. Although he had done a little acting, it would require a far more experienced person than himself to be able to forget his own identity and to take on that of a complete stranger—and a foreigner at that. The task bristled with difficulties. It appeared impossible of fulfilment on the face of it. How could he hope to portray the habits and mentality of a man he had never seen?

And this business of disguising; it seemed ridiculous. It was one thing for an actor to make-up to play a part on the stage, but it was an entirely different proposition to tackle an undertaking of this sort. What a fool he would look if his property-beard came off at a crucial moment!

Then everything—elementary caution, doubts, fears, bewilderments—all these were swept aside when he remembered the prize that was at stake. If he succeeded in learning the opposition's plans, he would be rendering his employer the greatest service that perhaps the multi-millionaire had ever known. And, what was even more important . . .

But he dared not think of Delia. The memory of

the girl as he had last seen her was too unnerving. His impulse, as he recalled her dear face uplifted to his, her eyes shining with faith, was to leap from the car, although it was travelling at over fifty miles an hour.

He conquered the desire with the same resolution that he had had to call into service so many times before, and rigidly kept his thoughts away from Steep Holm.

It was not until Surbiton was reached that Pudan spoke again.

"We're going to Bloomsbury," he vouchsafed.

The announcement had no particular interest for Hanray—it would have been all the same to him if the Scotland Yard man had said they were bound for Wanstead Flats—but he murmured something non-committal and wondered afresh what further surprise might be waiting round the corner.

The car pulled up before a tall, narrow house in one of the more secretive streets of London's most interesting quarter. Some day a great novelist will write a great novel about Bloomsbury. He will tell of the multitude of queer scenes that are daily enacted within the old mansions whose former greatness has fallen so low that they have become refuges for many of the most sinister and dangerous characters living to-day. He will tell of bizarre crimes that never get into the newspapers, of plots and conspiracies that defy the police of the world. He will tell of chemists and other research devotees toiling not for the good of humanity, but for that vast and mighty horde who acknowledge Satan as their overlord. He will tell of many other impossible things which form part of the truth. Bloomsbury!—where the fantastic touches hands with reality and mystery casts its shadow as darkness

comes. There will be only one title to that tale: the author will call it "One Bloomsbury Night."

"Pull your hat down over your face—we can't be too careful." The gravity of Pudan's tone warned Jimmy that the Scotland Yard man was serious.

Pudan produced a key and unlocked the massive front door. He took Hanray's arm as they stood in the wide hall where once a London merchant prince had welcomed his guests, and started to climb the impressive staircase. Outside a door on the first floor he stopped and knocked.

"Come in," called a voice.

"You are going to meet one of the most remarkable men in London," stated Pudan; and, opening the door, stepped inside.

The room was large and impressive in its beauty. A race of builders who knew their craft had fashioned that room, so different in its noble proportions from the hen-coops of to-day.

A man wearing plus-fours rose as they entered.

"So you have brought him, Pudan," he remarked.

"Yes—here he is. What do you think?"

Jimmy found himself being subjected to a scrutiny so searching that it became after a while somewhat embarrassing. The scrutineer was a mere wisp of a man who looked as though he might have been a jockey at one time in his life; he had the bowed pipe-stem legs and the hard, wizened face which are characteristics of those who spend their days amongst horseflesh.

"Oh, he'll do right enough," he summed up.

"Good!" The detective-inspector seemed on the point of shaking hands with himself. "Then what I suggest is you get busy at once. We have no time to lose."

"All right."

"I suppose I had better introduce you, Hanray, remarked the Scotland Yard inspector. "This is Mr. Sam Grieve, who is about to change you from a reasonably honest man into a crook, and from James Hanray Englishman, into Hans Schulze, German. I may say that Mr. Grieve used to be dresser for the greatest character actor London has known for the past thirty years. When he died, Sam refused to work for anyone else and offered his services to us. How remarkable is his skill you will presently be able to discover for yourself. But before he starts, perhaps you would like to take a look at the man you are about to impersonate. Got those photographs, Sam?"

Grieve picked up a number of photographic prints and passed them over.

"This is Schulze," stated Pudan.

"These photographs were taken only this morning so that they can be said to be right up to date," he added.

"At Scotland Yard?"

"At Scotland Yard. We shall make a policeman of you yet, Hanray!—what do you say, Sam?"

"My job is to turn him first of all into Hans Schulze," replied Grieve.

"I won't waste any more of your time, Mr. Grieve but"—turning to Pudan—"there's just one fact should like cleared up."

"Go on," encouraged the inspector.

"You said just now, Pudan, that the arrest of Schulze had been kept so secret that no one in the Zweig crowd had any suspicion."

"Yes—so far as I know, that is so."

"But don't you think Zweig sent someone down to meet Schulze?"

"No. From letters which we found in his pockets, letters which had to be decoded before they became understandable, Schulze had arranged that no one should meet him. He was already taking a great risk in coming to England, and he did not want that risk increased by being welcomed by anyone known to the police as a crook. Friend Schulze has a very healthy respect for Scotland Yard. You needn't worry about that; so long as you keep the appointment for eight o'clock to-night at Dorman's house, 188, Norfolk-street, Mayfair, everything will be all right."

Jimmy turned to the changester.

"I'm ready," he told Sam Grieve

CHAPTER XXV

THE ATTACK

ADELE MILLER, satisfied with the work she had done, was smiling into her mirror when a knock sounded on the bedroom door.

"Come in," she called. "What do you want, Delia?"

Her stepdaughter entered the room. She walked slowly. All the buoyancy seemed to have left the girl. She looked like one crushed.

"What happened at Wyndhurst this morning?" she asked. "Tell me. I must know."

Mrs. Miller turned to look at her.

"Is that the way to speak to me, Delia? May I remind you that now your father is not here, I am the head of this house."

"What happened at Wyndhurst this morning?" repeated the girl, paying no attention to the woman's remonstrance.

Her stepmother's lips curled back from the small white teeth.

"The thief, Hanray, was remanded in custody," she said; "I understand the police have other and far more serious charges against him."

"That's a lie!" cried Delia. "You know it's a lie!"

Her stepmother rose from the chair at the dressing-table. She made no further attempt to disguise her feelings.

"If you dare to speak to me again, you impudent brat, I'll—I'll not be able to keep my hands off you!" she said between clenched teeth.

Delia stood her ground.

"How vile you are!" she countered; "how vile and utterly contemptible! That ring was placed in Mr. Hanray's coat so that you might get rid of him. You were afraid he would find out too much about you. . . . If only I knew where daddy was!" she concluded.

"I have thought for a long time that you were abnormal and not responsible for your actions, and now I am sure of it," she heard the woman say. "I think the best thing I can do is to have you examined by a doctor. Unless I am very much mistaken, he will agree with me that you are in an extremely hysterical condition, and that the wisest course is to have you taken away to a nursing home."

Delia shrank back. Terror, stark and horrible, chilled her blood. Her stepmother's hatred, it was now clear, had overridden and mastered every other emotion. The woman was a self-revealed criminal—desperate enough to risk anything to further her nefarious ends. Any former vagueness was now gone; the truth was pitilessly clear: this woman hated her

with a venomous hate, and was prepared to go to any extent to give vent to her rage.

Without any further warning her stepmother rushed at her. There was a hellish light in the woman's eyes. All the courage that Delia could summon to her assistance failed in its purpose. The dread of what would happen if the woman got the physical mastery of her left her limp and cowering. This became now not so much a physical fear as a mental dread. She remembered that should she be taken a prisoner, the only remaining link between James Hanray and her father would be snapped. What would happen then? It would mean that the machinations of her father's enemies would be advanced a definite stage forward. It would mean—but she dared not allow her thoughts to proceed further.

Indeed, this was no time for thought; instead, it was a time for definite action. This woman, who was her deadly enemy, was now so close that she could feel her breath on her cheek. From her dress Mrs. Miller drew with uncanny speed a small, evil-looking dagger. Did the woman intend to murder her?

Death! . . . So the other had decided that she was to die! It was not surprising in view of her stepmother's hatred. It was not surprising in view of the risk which the other was evidently prepared to run. Big stakes were being played in this drama—and one of those stakes was her own life and death.

The limpness left her. From some secret source she drew a mental and physical resistance which came like a gift from God. She was not going to die; she was determined upon that. For if she died, she would never see James Hanray again, and to look into that man's eyes was the dearest thing that she had ever known in life.

So she fought back—more like a furious creature of the wild than a cultured girl.

To any onlooker, this struggle of two desperate women would have been an unpleasant spectacle, but the centuries had rolled away; sophistication and civilisation had been stripped clean, and in this affair only the primal emotions held sway.

The frenzied hate of her stepmother was not proof against this new-found strength which had come to her. Decency and loyalty soon triumphed over the beastliness which had prompted Mrs. Miller to make this murderous assault. Of course, Delia had the advantage of youth, but it was something even more potent than youth which enabled her to force her stepmother slowly across the room until she had her pressed back against the opposite wall.

Here she held her a prisoner, not saying a word, but telling the woman through the expression in her eyes what she thought of her.

At this pulsating moment there came an unexpected interruption.

"Mrs. Miller! Mrs. Miller!"

Delia recognised the voice of Horace Bray, her father's financial secretary.

"Mrs. Miller, whatever is the matter?" the man bleated.

Releasing her hold upon the other's shoulders, Delia turned to face the interrupter.

But before she could give any explanation herself, her stepmother had rushed past her and faced the secretary.

"I want you, Bray, to ring up the police at once," the woman said. "Miss Miller, distressed, no doubt, at the continued absence of her father, has become unbalanced, and has just made a murderous attack on

me. In fact, if you had not arrived just at that moment, I do not know what would have happened. She might"—and here the woman's voice shook—"even have killed me. It is dangerous for her to be left alone; of that I am positive. Something must be done at once. Is there a doctor living near to whom we can telephone?"

During the whole of this extraordinary statement Bray expressed in his face the bewilderment which he must have felt. When the woman had come to an end, he turned to Delia as though expecting an explanation.

This came in a sensational manner.

"What Mrs. Miller has just told you, Mr. Bray, is a tissue of lies concocted to suit her own purpose. It was she who made the attack, not I! She is daddy's enemy, Mr. Bray—Mr. Hanray knew it and said so. That was why she brought the false charge of stealing against him. That is why"—she almost broke down, but conquered her emotion in time—"he is now in prison. You are the only person who can help me, Mr. Bray—will you please do so, for in helping me, you will help daddy."

"But—er——"

The secretary was still so bewildered that he could find no words in which to express his feelings. He looked from one to the other in such a puzzled manner that his natural lugubrious personality now became almost ludicrous.

Realising, as she had so often done in the past, what a broken reed this man was, apart from any matter appertaining to finance, Delia rushed across the room. Her intention was to leave the house and to go to the nearest police station. There she would state her story and demand the protection which she had been denied in her own home.

"Stop her, Bray," shouted Mrs. Miller. But the secretary remained in such a state of perplexity that he was unable to carry out the command.

With her stepmother rushing after her, Delia flung open the door, and raced down the wide hall. The big entrance door of Steep Holm was open. Through it came the sight of the beautiful outside world, drenched with sunshine, and made gay by the twittering of birds. Once she was there she felt she would be safe.

She was only a yard or so from the door when, as though in answer to her stepmother's frenzied shouts, a man appeared suddenly to the left. In the fresh fear which now possessed her, she was able to recognise Simmons, the butler, whose testimony had been so largely instrumental in sending James Hanray to a prison cell.

Like her stepmother, this man was her enemy—an enemy not only to herself but to her father. It was not surprising, therefore, that the man should obey his mistress's order. She felt herself gripped fiercely round the body. So sudden was the brutal assault that she was hurled off her feet. Then came a blankness in which the world seemed suddenly enveloped in an impenetrable gloom—and after that, complete oblivion in which everything was blotted out.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE CHANGELING

"Look at yourself!"

Pudan made the remark with a smile on his lips.

Had Hanray had any doubt as to the effectiveness of the transformation which the astonishing man to

whom he had been introduced barely an hour before was accomplishing, one look in the mirror would have effectively dispelled it.

The person whose reflection he saw was not the James Hanray he knew. It was not the James Hanray that anyone in this world, with the exception of the two men in that room, knew. He had changed from an athletic, moderately good-looking Englishman of the public school type, to a man at least fifty years of age, somewhat decrepit in appearance, and unmistakably German in all essentials.

An oval face had become round, a healthy complexion had changed into one of pallor, dark hair had become a flaxen tint, sound teeth now bore unmistakable signs of decay—in fact, the metamorphosis was so startling that at first he stared incredulously before breaking into a resounding laugh.

"Schulze to the life!" declared Pudan. "Grieve, this is about the most wonderful bit of work I have ever known you do." The changester, like all great artists, an essentially modest man, permitted himself a slight smile.

"Yes, I think it is not bad," he admitted, "but my work, you must remember, Inspector, is only half of the job. Mr. Hanray must remember that from this moment he has changed into a German, not only physically but mentally. It is essential that he should never lose sight of the fact that, instead of an Englishman of good character, he is now a German criminal whose evil ingenuity has made him notorious all over the world. He should remember also that he will be watched by men whose natural instinct it is to suspect everyone." The speaker turned to Hanray.

"Please address me in German, Mr. Hanray," he requested.

Jimmy complied in a few rapid sentences.

Grieve was evidently pleased.

"Yes, you might have been born in Berlin—I have never known an Englishman with a better accent. Where did you acquire it?"

"I have spoken German from a boy; and served for a time in the occupied areas after the War."

Having satisfied his mentor on this point, Jimmy thought it was time to ask one or two questions himself.

"Look here," he said, "it's all very well turning me into a high-class German crook, but what I want to know is this: if I am supposed to live for any length of time with this Zweig crowd, how in the devil am I going to maintain this disguise?"

Sam Grieve waved a paint-stained hand in non-committal fashion.

"Do not let that worry you, my boy. Ten minutes' instruction after we have finished this little confab will put you wise to all that you need remember. It is quite simple when you have the knack."

The information sounded reassuring, yet Jimmy still had his doubts.

"Oh, all right, you probably know best," he replied. But the assumption of cheerfulness was more assumed than real. He had very grave misgivings about the matter himself, but having embarked on this perilous expedition, he felt he must go through with it without raising any unnecessary quibbles. After all, he was in a far more favourable position, having the help of Pudan and the whole of Scotland Yard at the back of him, than he could have possibly possessed if playing a lone hand. There was one more question, however, that he had to ask.

"You say this Schulze fellow is a crook—to me he

looks more like a perfectly respectable middle-class German merchant suffering badly from dyspepsia."

Both the changester and Inspector Pudan laughed.

"If you knew more about crooks, German or otherwise," rejoined the latter, "you would be aware that the less crookish they appear, the more dangerous they are likely to be. No crook nowadays looks a crook—but if you see a very placid Church of England minister walking past the Savoy Hotel, be careful that he does not get sufficiently near you to be able to pick your pocket."

"And now I shall want those clothes," said Grieve. "It would never do for Hans Schulze to be wearing togs cut in Conduit Street."

Ten minutes later the transformation was complete. The new Hans Schulze was wearing the right clothes—clothes that obviously must have been made for him. To complete the miracle, they fitted! There was a tweed overcoat, with a black velvet collar, a dark suit of some greyish material, unlike anything Hanray had ever seen in England, foreign-looking boots with long pointed toecaps, and underwear which, as he ruefully admitted, he would hate to be found dead in.

"Now for a few particulars about yourself," said Pudan, after he had surveyed the final handiwork of Sam Grieve, and found it good. "Here is the *dossier* of friend Schulze. It will take you a few minutes to run through, so you might as well make yourself comfortable." He pointed to an easy chair, in which Jimmy was glad to subside.

However, what he learned from the papers which were passed to him was of considerable interest. Having compared the photograph of the original Schulze with the reflection that he saw in the full-length mirror, and having come to the conclusion that it would be an

exceedingly difficult task for anyone to tell the two apart, he read that the man he was about to impersonate had been born at Metz forty-seven years before, the son of a prosperous merchant; that he had been well educated and had been intended for the Law.

There must have been a curious streak in Hans Schulze, however, for instead of practising to preserve the laws of his country, he devoted all his energies, from the age of eighteen, to breaking them. Many and varied were the crimes laid to the discredit of this middle-class barrister turned crook. He had not looked indifferently at blackmail, neither had he scoffed at murder! In between he had practised assiduously as an organiser of house-breakers, and had often lent a hand to the White Slave traffic. Altogether, a gentleman of many criminal talents; and it said much for Kurt Zweig's mentality that he should have chosen such a man to go into conference with for the purpose of discussing his latest crime.

"Rather a beauty, isn't he?" inquired Pudan, when Jimmy had come to an end.

"Quite a choice bird," agreed Hanray. "I must say you do a fellow like me too much honour in expecting a realistic impersonation of such a character! I am not now a professional actor, remember."

Pudan waved his words on one side with an indifferent gesture.

"I am not a bit afraid about the result, old man," he said. "You have a motive at the back of all this—that is a sight better than any art-muck."

With the rapidity which seemed so characteristic of the man, Pudan's manner now completely changed.

"Time is getting short," he said, "and we must get down to business. You will leave here—by the back entrance—and register at the Midas Hotel. This is

the 'home from home' for Germans of all classes. There you will mix with your new kind and gain experience in talking German. You will also get something of the mentality of the man you are supposed to be. The cuisine at the Midas is a heavy and substantial one—are you by any chance a gross feeder, Hanray ? ”

Jimmy glared indignantly.

“ I have not noticed anything of the sort so far, but perhaps——”

He was not allowed to complete the sentence, for a burst of sudden laughter from the detective-inspector made him pause.

“ Don't get your hair off, old boy,” said Pudan. “ In the call of duty I am afraid you will have to be a gross feeder for a few days. It may go against the grain, but there you are ! ”

This thing had been well stage-managed ; Jimmy was lost in admiration as, emerging at the back entrance as Pudan had ordered, he found that a typical London taxi, which differed in no particular from any other London taxi he had ever seen, was waiting.

The driver saluted Pudan.

“ One of us,” vouchsafed the detective-inspector, as he hurriedly wished Hanray good-bye.

“ Best of luck, Jimmy,” he said in parting. “ If the pace becomes too thick, just send a message through to me to the Yard. But I would much rather you didn't, because I shall then know that you are getting the stuff.”

Jimmy had mixed feelings as he was driven the short distance to the Midas Hotel. The latter, as all the world knows, is a mere stone's throw from Trafalgar Square. It is a recognised rendezvous for many Continental visitors, but is especially favoured by Germans.

The taxi drew up before the imposing entrance of the hotel. The arrival of the vehicle was signalled by the portly commissioner walking swiftly towards it, hand to cap. Hanray felt like scowling at the fellow. Then he considered how a smile would meet the situation, and, finally, because he was supposed to be a German, frowned at the commissioner in a most portentous manner.

The commissioner met this expression of ill-grace with a disarming smile.

"Luggage, sir?" he inquired.

One of the many momentary doubts which had assailed him since he started on this mad masquerade now caused Hanray to fumble with a reply.

Luggage? Of course, he would be supposed to have luggage—there was no doubt about that. But where was it? He had not seen any luggage.

Then the taxi-driver appeared carrying a kit-bag of enormous size. It was hideous in colour, but extremely substantial in appearance. This, then, was the luggage in question: Pudan had forgotten nothing; the detective-inspector maintained his reputation as a master in stage settings.

The commissioner turned and with a lordly gesture beckoned to an underling, who took the bag, and marched with it into the entrance of the hotel.

At the moment the commissioner's back was turned, the taxi-driver drew near the bogus German and lightly tapped his arm.

"Good luck, sir," he said; and then, before Jimmy could make any reply, he had turned aside, mounted into the driver's seat again, and was off with a rattle and a roar.

For the space of five seconds Hanray remained on the pavement stationary. The great adventure had

started! This monstrous hotel, sprawling its impressive length along Northumberland Avenue, was ostensibly a place of comfort and security. And yet—what might it not be for him in reality? Instead of security, he might find it full of lurking dangers and unseen perils.

CHAPTER XXVII AT THE MIDAS HOTEL

LIKE a picture suddenly unrolled upon a cinema screen, he had a vision of what his future was to be. Now that he was away from the hypnotising presence of Dick Pudan, the whole thing seemed not only incredible but preposterous. He had been set an impossible task. He had been told to hunt down a gang of criminals whom he already knew from experience were capable of committing any crime—it seemed inconceivable that they were not already hunting him down in turn. If Schulze was expected—and of course he was—would not Zweig, through one of his many spies, have already gained the information that the German was in the hands of the police? And if he knew this . . . ?

Some memory of the old War days now returned to stir him into activity. He felt more of a fool than a hero, but, squaring his shoulders, he walked towards the entrance, conscious now that during the whole time he had been meditating, the curious gaze of the commissionaire must have been fixed full upon him.

Well, there could be no going back; far too much depended upon his attempting to carry this thing through. He had given his word, and there was an end of it. Like a ray of sunshine showing its glory in

a dust-strewn room, the memory of Delia flashed for a moment through his mind ; and then, ruthlessly conquering the momentary weakness which this vision caused, he went swiftly past the commissionaire, and up the wide steps into the entrance hall of the hotel.

As he walked, he repeated a formula.

" I am Hans Schulze, a German crook," were the words he muttered beneath his breath. " Hans Schulze, a German crook. Remember that, you fool ! "

He had very little time for preparation. The first test came soon. This he was forced to undergo as he went to the office to register. The clerk, a smooth-haired, smiling individual, looked at him with shrewd, penetrating eyes. Jimmy realised that this man's knowledge of human nature must be profound ; after all, he spent his life studying types.

" I want a room, with bath," he said in German.

The clerk answered instantly in the same language.

" Certainly, sir. On which floor ? "

" The first, if possible."

" Certainly, sir."

The fellow was genial, almost obsequious, but during the short time that this exchange of words took place, Jimmy was very conscious that those shrewd, if somewhat shifty eyes were taking toll of the minutest details in his appearance.

Sam Grieve, the changester, might be a miracle worker, but would his handiwork hold good at such short range ? The slightest flaw in his make-up, and the suspicions of this clerk, whose job it was to sift the wheat from the chaff, and the respectable man from the crook, would be aroused. He would be allowed to go to his room, no doubt, but the management would be informed, a visit would be paid, questions would be

asked—oh, the devil would be let loose, and what defence could he have?

All kinds of absurd and yet alarming questions perplexed his mind. Suppose the moustache, which had been affixed to his upper lip by spirit gum, should fall off? Suppose the pince-nez he wore were examined and found to be nothing more than plain glass? Suppose the pads in his cheeks, that had been placed there to introduce a false rotundity, were suspected? He was in excellent physical shape; but the thought of any one of these contingencies arising made the perspiration begin to bedew his forehead.

But this would not do. He was becoming funky—and sweat would destroy the effect of the make-up. In any case, what was he hanging about here for, torturing himself with prospects that might never arise?

He assumed a truculence that might have done credit to any Berliner.

"I am tired. I must go to my room at once," he barked in his best German.

The clerk made a bow that would not have disgraced a contortionist, and rang a bell at his elbow with great animation. A man in uniform appeared as though by magic.

"Room 127, first floor," ordered the reception clerk, and the next moment Jimmy was walking in the wake of the porter, profoundly thankful that he had passed his first test successfully. Now that he was away from those inquiring eyes, he was pretty certain that the man had entertained no suspicion.

The Midas is one of the largest hotels in the world, and the room to which Jimmy was taken was furnished with taste and comfort. At any other time he would have taken a delight in his surroundings. Now—

He pulled a watch from his waistcoat pocket—a

watch which, like everything else in his outfit, had been provided by the foresight of Pudan—and saw that it was twenty minutes to seven. The appointment at Dorman's house in Norfolk Street was for eight o'clock. He had an hour to himself, for a taxi could take him to his Mayfair destination from Northumberland Avenue in less than ten minutes.

The porter had placed that hideous-coloured leather kit-bag on the rest at the foot of the bed. Looking at it with a bilious eye, Jimmy wondered what on earth it could contain. More atrocities of clothes, he supposed.

In this surmise he was correct. Amongst other sartorial curios, he discovered an evening dress-suit which might have lent lustre to its wearer in Berlin, but certainly did not cut much ice in London. There the thing was, however, and he presumed it was his duty to get into it. Apparently, although Pudan had not mentioned the fact—perhaps because he did not consider it necessary—he was supposed to go to Dorman's house that night in evening kit.

The first smile he had allowed himself since getting into the taxi now disturbed his lips, as he laid the garments out on the bed and studied them.

Before he changed, however, he was determined to have some rest. Sleep had been a missing quantity of late, and prior to facing a fresh ordeal, he was determined to relax as thoroughly as was possible. He would need all his nerve before that night was out.

The chair into which he sank was certainly very comfortable, and, almost before he was aware of the fact, he had slipped away into a restful sleep. How long he remained unconscious he did not know, but he was awakened suddenly by a rapping on the door.

Instantly some of the many premonitions which had

besieged him before now returned. Who could it be? Had Zweig come to pay a call in person? Or was it Dorman, anxious to discover if the expected visitor had actually arrived in London?

He went to the door and held it open.

Outside was the porter who had brought him to the room, and standing by his side was a man dressed quietly and respectably in a grey overcoat and carrying a bowler hat.

"A gentleman to see you, Mr. Schulze," announced the porter.

The visitor was a complete stranger, but there was nothing in his appearance to provoke any undue alarm, and Jimmy decided that the best thing to do was to invite him into the room and ascertain his mission.

"Thank you," he said to the porter, and the man departed.

"Now, sir—will you come in?"

He spoke in English this time, and the man with an inclination of his head followed him into the room.

The first thing the caller did was to close the door carefully behind him. The action, in the circumstances, seemed significant, and Jimmy prepared himself for a possible attack. But the man made no suspicious move, and his manner of speech as he replied to his host's invitation to sit down was very civil.

"I am sorry to trouble you, Herr Schulze," he started, "but I have been asked by my Department—the Foreign Section of Scotland Yard—to call upon you."

"With what object?"

"For the purpose of examining your passport."

Hanray was sorely tempted to explode into violent speech. What was this fresh farce? Was he not

actually following out the wishes of Scotland Yard at this moment ?

Like a wise man, however, he did not yield to this temptation. In the lower right hand pocket of his waistcoat was a gaudy cigarette case. Pulling this out, and taking a German-made cigarette from it, he sought in tobacco—a pretty vile tobacco it proved to be—a refuge from his stormy thoughts.

“ Will you smoke, Mr.— ” ?

“ Lawson is my name,” replied the caller. “ No, I do not smoke, and I am also a teetotaller from birth.”

As the fellow said the words, Jimmy thought he detected the very faintest glint of humour in his eyes.

He was not certain, however, and so allowed the somewhat strange comment to pass in silence.

“ You were saying something about my passport, Mr. Lawson. Do you suspect there is anything wrong with it ? ”

“ We have to be on the safe side,” was the non-committal answer.

“ But it was examined at Harwich ! However,” pulling the document from a breast pocket, “ here it is. I have no desire to cause the authorities any annoyance.”

The man took the passport and examined it with grave deliberation.

Then he handed it back with a slow smile.

“ Detective-Inspector Pudan’s compliments, Mr. Hanray,” he said, “ we think now you will do splendidly.”

This time Jimmy did explode.

“ Have you got the gall to stand there and tell me your visit was a fake ? ” he demanded.

The man held up his hands in protest.

“ You are engaged on a very difficult and dangerous

job, Mr. Hanray," he answered; "and Detective-Inspector Pudan wished to be reassured. I trust you will not bear me any ill-will."

The man turned towards the door, and then held out his hand.

"Good luck," he said.

Hanray's ill-temper vanished.

"Tell Pudan to look out for a thick ear the next time I see him," he replied, but gave the extended hand a hearty shake.

The next moment he was alone again.

The man had left behind him a feeling of reassurance. Despondency and doubt gave way to a certain exhilaration. Jimmy consoled himself with the knowledge that he had passed through two investigations—both of them made by a person who might justifiably be termed an expert. Of course, the supreme test was yet to come, but he certainly felt more confidence now in his powers to impersonate the criminal Schulze than he would have believed possible an hour before.

It was surprising how completely his outlook had changed. It had only required the encouragement he had just received to beget in him an unsuspected thrill for the hunt, and a quick response to the zest of danger.

He told himself he would not be working for nothing. There would be a very real reward. Putting aside all thought of Delia—and he dared not give the girl lodgment in his mind until the whole affair was over—he knew he would be certain of the gratitude of Sebastian Miller.

Thought of the latter caused a momentary return to his former state. Why had not his employer communicated with him since being abroad? Even Bray had heard nothing—or if he had, the man had not

passed it on. Horace Bray, of course, was a queer fish—honest enough, no doubt, but still a man who had developed discretion to such an extent that it had practically become a vice. Still, even so, he was fairly certain that no message had come to Steep Holm from Miller since the time he left England.

What did this mean? Could it mean that the worst had happened, and that Zweig, through his associates on the Continent, had trapped the millionaire into a position of danger? Did it mean that Zweig had already wrought his vengeance? In this event the silence was doubly significant. Miller might already be dead—or, at the best, a prisoner.

The thought made him pace quickly up and down the room. If the man who had shown him such kindness was dead, he swore he would avenge him.

But, on further reflection, it seemed certain that Miller must still be alive—and still at liberty. Otherwise, why should Zweig have taken the trouble to summon Schulze from Berlin, and why should Schulze himself have risked so much by returning to a country from which, not many years before, he had been deported by order of the authorities?

The recent encounter with Pudan's emissary had quickened his mind, so that any thought of further rest was impossible. There was still half an hour left; and he would use this time to what he now realised would be to far greater advantage.

Remembering the closely written sheets of paper which Pudan had thrust into his hand just before they had left the house in Bloomsbury, he drew these from his pocket and began to read. How he could have been asinine enough to waste precious time in sleep he did not know, for what was written on these documents

he now realised might make the difference between success and failure, and life and death.

Neatly typed were full particulars of Hans Schulze's evil career during the last ten years—so far as the Secret Service agents in Germany had been able to ascertain. He was more or less familiar with these facts through reading the criminal's dossier, but he was glad of the chance to refresh his memory.

To have risked an encounter with Kurt Zweig without having all these details at his finger tips would have been absolutely fatal and, like a student swotting on the eve of an important examination, Jimmy bent his will to familiarising himself with the smallest detail.

In this way the thirty minutes that were left to him before he was due to set out passed quickly. Arrayed now in the borrowed evening clothes, which fitted him as well as the other garments, he left his room, took the lift to the ground floor, and walked to the entrance.

"Taxi, sir?" asked the commissionaire.

He nodded.

A shrill whistle, and the vehicle was at the door within a few seconds.

"188, Norfolk Street, Park Lane," was the instruction the driver received.

With characteristic nonchalance the man nodded curtly, lowered his flag, and set out.

At five minutes to eight exactly Hanray was ringing the bell at the house to which he had come on so strange a visit.

A suave-faced manservant, whose features were vaguely familiar—had he been one of the trio concerned in the Albert Hall business?—asked his name, and then, when the reply was given, ushered him into

the hall, which he was able to recognise. Thirty more seconds—and then the critical time had arrived.

He was shown into a room on the left of the hall, he heard the door close behind him, and then looked at the man who had risen from a chair to greet him.

One glance at that face which, as Dick Pudan had told him, was like a grotesque caricature of Beethoven, and he knew he would need all his nerve.

For this man was not Dorman. It was the great Zweig himself.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE TEST

ZWEIG !

The man who had filled his thoughts ever since he had entered Miller's service—first as a vague, mysterious, intangible force hovering somewhere behind the curtain of fact, and then as a living and terrible reality—was standing only three feet away.

So this was the man who had sworn to bring Sebastian Miller to ruin.

The first fact Jimmy realised was that the other was impressive. Impressive alike in build and in personality. Above hunched shoulders was a massive face which might have belonged to a great musician, or a great painter, but which was certainly abnormal. The eyes which stared at him were deeply sunk, yet glowed with a mysterious power which warned him never to relax his guard.

"So you managed to slip through?"

The voice was smooth, and yet it held a rasp.

Jimmy assumed an indifference he by no means felt.

"Yes, it was not difficult," he replied. "One manages such things."

Zweig acknowledged the remark with a curt smile.

"And the passport?" he questioned.

The visitor shook his padded shoulders.

"One manages that also."

Because he did not want much further questioning on these lines—at any moment a query might be put which would defeat his ingenuity—he made a demand himself.

"Although I managed it," he said, "I suppose that you had a very good reason for bringing me over here, Zweig?"

"The best of reasons—I have a job for you to do."

The tone was that of a master addressing a servant. There was a certain contempt in it, and a definite finality. It was the tone of a man who would permit no argument, and expect no denial.

The visitor nodded.

"I should be glad to hear as soon as possible what it is," he replied.

The appeal was ignored.

"Time enough for that after we have had dinner, my friend. Eight is a shockingly late hour at which to dine, and business must wait."

At that moment the two were joined by a third person who came into the room without knocking.

Zweig acted as introducer.

"You have not met Schulze, Dorman, have you?" he asked.

The other man replied with a denial.

"Pleased to meet you," he added. And to Zweig: "Scanlon has just arrived. He will join us at table."

Before Zweig could make any comment the sound of a gong reverberated gently through the house.

The door opened, and a servant made the announcement: "Dinner is served."

"You will be pleased to make a further acquaintance with English cooking, no doubt, Schulze," smiled Zweig.

"Yes, indeed."

It was the only reply he could think of at that short notice. If he were intended to make brilliant conversation he had so far been a sorry failure.

But that fact did not appear to weigh unduly with the two men. Both apparently were more interested in the prospective meal than in himself—a circumstance which afforded him considerable satisfaction.

As he followed the others from the room, he was unable to forget how ironical the whole situation was. This dinner party might have been the conventional meeting of a few friends to discuss an ordinary business matter; but he knew that the topic of conversation that would hold sway over the mahogany board of the man he had outwitted a few weeks before would be one of crime and death.

In the dining-room, that handsome apartment panelled in dark oak which he remembered so vividly, a fourth man awaited them. This was Scanlon, the fellow he had knocked down outside Selfridge's on the morning after the Albert Hall affair. Would Scanlon see farther than his two colleagues? So far, he believed he was safe; both Zweig and Dorman had evidently accepted him as the real Schulze. Scanlon, who had reason to hate him even more than the other two, might be able to penetrate his disguise. If this happened, his position would not bear contemplation. He would be one against three—and from none of the three could he expect to be shown the least mercy.

But Scanlon, when he was introduced, behaved in an entirely conventional manner, making a slight inclination of the head and then sitting down immediately.

The meal left no room for criticism. The food was excellent, and had been delightfully cooked. Expensive wines were served with each course, and the service of the manservant was admirable.

All three men were hungry and, encouraged by their interest in the food, Jimmy endeavoured to follow their example. For the moment everything was well—the future must take care of itself. If an emergency occurred, he must do his best to cope with it; at the moment, this *sole mornay* was delicious. So does a man on the brink of disaster mock at fate!

It was not until the fish course had been cleared that Zweig, who had demonstrated himself to be a very doughty trencherman, broke the silence.

"You are not such a talker as you used to be, Schulze," he flung in a half-taunt across the table.

Hanray was unable to decide by the man's voice—which seemingly always held a threat or a hidden snarl—whether Zweig was endeavouring to get at him or not. There was risk in his replying in kind. So he played safe.

"I have learned," he said, "that there are times when it is best to be silent. In any case, I am not here to speak; I came to listen."

For a moment he wondered if he had committed an irretrievable mistake. Zweig was looking at him very curiously. Perhaps the master-crook was trying to reconcile this new Schulze with the man he had known previously.

But Zweig made no disturbing comment.

"We will resume this conversation after our coffee," he said.

THE company retired after dinner to a handsomely-appointed smoking-room, where Zweig and his two associates arranged themselves at their ease in leather-covered chairs. Zweig continued to be the spokesman. The other two might have been merely automata, so little part did they take in the proceedings.

"You have not forgotten the service I once rendered you, Schulze?" asked Zweig in German.

There had been nothing in the particulars passed to him by Dick Pudan to link up his mind with this information.

In the circumstances he had to play safe once more.

"Am I likely to forget it?" he said.

Zweig acknowledged the remark by a nod.

"No, and you have proved it by coming to London at a certain risk to yourself." Then the man continued: "But that is not sufficient—I want you to repay your debt completely."

The bogus Schulze leaned forward in his chair. It was, Jimmy considered, time he did a little realistic acting in his assumed character. This, no doubt, was required. It would give verisimilitude to his new character.

"If I had not been prepared to pay that debt in full, Zweig, I should have remained in Berlin," he said, with an earnestness that he hoped would be convincing. "But I am tired of these subterfuges—these hints and veiled mysteries; isn't it time you came out into the open with me? Haven't I proved that I am worth your confidence?"

To his secret satisfaction the scowl which had been

on the heavy face since the conclusion of dinner lifted.

Zweig actually smiled.

"I cannot help remarking how changed you have become, Schulze."

The inward pleasure which Hanray had experienced only a few seconds before now changed to a feeling of gnawing dread. Silence filled the room, but the air seemed to throb as though a hidden electric wave were passing through it. The tension played on his already overwrought nerves, so that he had to grip the arms of his chair to keep himself steady.

Suppose Zweig had been playing with him all this time? It was like that devil to lead a man on and then finally, with a dynamic explosion at the end, to prove he had been mocking him.

He looked instinctively at the door, which was the only possible means of escape from the room. It might have been merely a coincidence, but he could not help noticing that Scanlon, who was nearest the door, seemed to be in the act of rising from his chair. If he attempted to escape, the man was ready to cut him off.

With some natures, the greater the danger, the more powerful the tension, the steadier the nerve after the first staggering shock. So it proved with Jimmy Hanray. He was in this thing up to his neck, and scarcely any position in which he found himself could have been worse than his present one.

But the full realisation, now that it had come, induced in him an almost cool contempt for this fresh danger. He could not understand it; he just knew it was so.

He was able to face Zweig calmly, giving him back look for look.

"You must not forget, Zweig, that I am older," he replied, and it astonished him to hear how steady his voice had become; "no doubt I have changed—everyone changes. Why, you have changed yourself, Zweig."

The other grunted.

"Yes, it's five years since we last met, Hans. Five years is a long time."

He made a gesture as though waving the point on one side, and then made another significant remark.

"There was a time when you called me 'Kurt,' Hans."

Once again the atmosphere seemed to throb. Once again the conviction stole over Hanray that Zweig was merely leading him on in the endeavour to force him into a position so false that there should be no chance of escape.

But again he met the thrust coolly.

"You are a bigger man now, Kurt—do you forget that? What is more, I am here merely as your servant, someone to do your bidding. I thought it best to call you by your surname."

The man rose. His intensely ugly, yet deeply impressive face was now wreathed in a smile. All his suspicions had apparently gone. He crossed the short space which separated him from his guest. Hanray, his hands still on the arms of the chair, prepared himself to spring. This pose of the other was possibly a cloak.

Zweig raised his right hand—

The next second Hanray had been hit a heavy blow on the back.

But it was a blow given by a friend and not by an enemy.

"It's all right, Hans—I was merely testing you,"

Zweig said, and there was a convincing sincerity in the tone. "We will have a drink—and drown all possible suspicion. As you have so indiscreetly told me, I am older. In years gone by I should not have been so fidgety. However, it's finished."

The bogus Schulze, rising to greet the speaker, took the extended hand and gave it a hearty grip. If there had not been so much at stake, it would have been a ridiculous scene. As it was, he felt relieved and thankful that, so far, he had been able to carry on the masquerade. If this new-found joviality of Zweig's was not real, the man was a master-actor. But he thought and believed that Zweig meant what he said.

A servant brought whisky, soda, and a huge box of Corona Corona cigars.

Zweig himself half filled a tumbler with spirit, added a little soda, and passed the glass to his guest.

"I will give you a toast," he said, turning to Dorman and Scanlon—"and the toast is that of my very good friend, Hans Schulze, the cleverest crook in Germany!"

The other two acknowledged the words by raising their glasses, and Jimmy was forced to smile across at them. Certainly the weather was improving, but he wondered if, before the night was out, there would not be a storm.

Zweig settled himself comfortably in his chair and looked across at the man to whom he had just paid such a resounding compliment.

"Now, to come to business. You know, Hans, the reason I'm in England?"

Jimmy decided on a bold move.

"Because of Sebastian Miller, I should say," he ventured.

At the mention of the millionaire's name Zweig's

face changed. The jaw stiffened, the deeply-sunk eyes glowed, the whole attitude of the man was transformed.

"You're right," he said in a rasping voice; "for ten years I have been working to get that man—and soon I'll have him where I want him! You're to help—that's why you're here now. Of course, I could get his daughter—did you know he had a daughter?—but I want the man himself first of all. After that, I can deal with the girl."

Jimmy wanted to fling himself at the man's thick throat. Whatever was the cause of the enmity between Zweig and his employer he did not at that moment care—but to use an innocent, defenceless girl as a pawn! God! It was sickening!

Yet, like an actor playing his part in a distasteful drama, he was forced to forget his real self.

"Miller has a wife as well as a daughter, hasn't he? What do you intend to do with the woman?"

He did not quite know why he asked this question, except that he hoped Zweig would give him some indication of the hold which he was convinced the man had upon the millionaire's wife.

But he received no satisfaction on this count.

Zweig dismissed the woman with a short, contemptuous oath.

"The wife doesn't count," he said curtly; "she's mine to do what I like with. We can leave her out of our calculations."

Something urged Jimmy to go on with his questioning.

"But doesn't Miller know you're after him? Won't he be on his guard?"

Zweig laughed coarsely; and, for the first time, Dorman and Scanlon joined in. Their merriment

was, however, like the yapping of puppies compared to the deep bass of a mastiff.

"Oh, yes, Miller knows right enough," replied Zweig. "He knows so well that he has left England. I should have got him had he stayed. If it suited my purpose, I could have him arrested by the English police on a charge of murder. One of my men, called Johnson, was found dead outside Miller's country home in the New Forest. Miller's nerves had cracked so badly that he had caused this house to be fortified. My man, in trying to get over the wall enclosing the grounds, was electrocuted."

"I can understand why you don't tell the police," was the comment.

"Of course you can understand," said Zweig in a burst of rage. "This is a matter that must be settled by me, and not by those damn fools at Scotland Yard. As a matter of fact, I have received what I suppose might be called a warning from one of their smart young alecks! To hell with that, however—nothing on God's earth shall prevent me getting Miller. He knew that right enough—and thought it best to slip over to the Continent."

Zweig paused to gulp down half a tumbler of practically raw spirit.

"Now, that's where *you* come in," he said. "Miller is in Germany now. It's going to be your job to get him and keep him until I come over. That won't be long, but I can't manage it yet because of other affairs."

"How am I going to get him?"

"That's soon told." Zweig brought his clenched fist down on the arm of his chair, and scowled as though a thousand devils were pounding away at his brain. "According to my latest information, Sebastian

Miller was in Berlin not later than this morning. His present intention, I understand, is to stay there a week. He is at the Adlon. You'll have plenty of time."

"What is your idea?"

"It should be simple enough. All I want you to do is to arrange for Miller to hire a taxicab, which has already been prepared for his reception. The driver, of course, will be known to you as a reliable man. This driver will have a special preparation of chloroform available which, directly Miller is in the cab, can be pumped into the compartment. All that's necessary otherwise is that the cab must have small windows, the curtains must be nailed down, and the handles removed from inside the doors. Escape will thus be impossible, and within a few moments the man will be drugged into insensibility. You will already have made your own plans as to where he shall be taken. Your common sense will tell you that it must be a house to which attention cannot possibly be drawn in any way. But," waving his hand, "why should I go into these minute details? You know, from what I have said, exactly what is required, and I leave the rest, with confidence, to you. All that I ask is that directly you have Miller safely under guard, you send me a telegram in code informing me of the fact. Then within a very short space of time, I shall be with you, because"—he spoke with slow emphasis—"I shall come by air."

"One or two comments," said the supposed Schulze, "just to have my mind perfectly clear," he added.

"Well?"

"The first thought that occurs to me is, why you should not have arranged for this to be done in London."

Zweig glared at him.

"Not afraid, are you?"

"Afraid! I don't know whether to take that as an insult or as a form of amusement. Good God, Zweig, have you ever known Hans Schulze afraid?"

Now that he had this information, Jimmy found himself more or less revelling in the part he had to play. He put such tremendous bluster into the last few words that his fire-eating tactics impressed the other three.

"If you want to know why I prefer for it to be done in Germany," replied Zweig in a different tone, "I don't mind telling you that it is I who am afraid. Please don't misunderstand me. I have some pretty big deals on in London at the moment, and I don't want anything to happen which might prejudice these. That's why I prefer for Miller to be dealt with in Berlin instead of London. If that reason is not satisfactory to you, you will get no other," he added, with a return of his old manner.

Jimmy yawned as though all interest had now gone out of the discussion.

"All right—I'm quite satisfied. I have no further questions to ask." He rose and, lifting his glass, finished the drink.

"Now I think I'll be off."

The next moment he became suspicious. The other three men had also risen. They were forming a ring round him—or so it seemed.

Would he be allowed to leave the room?

SLOWLY Delia opened her eyes. Curious how drowsy she remained, but why should she have been sleeping now?

The truth came in a flash of revelation. Something had happened to her. Something horrible. Her head was splitting, and her body ached all over.

She looked round. This was not her own room. Here, instead of comfort and luxury, were poverty and bareness! It was a mere attic—a garret she could not remember to have seen before.

She herself was lying on a small iron bedstead, whose only covering was a worn coverlet. What was she doing here? She must have been brought to this place by force, for she could not remember having come of her own free-will.

Her mind began to clear a little, and she shuddered as she remembered that dreadful scene in her step-mother's room. And then, of course, she had run from her, and Simmons had stopped her in the hall—but what had happened after that? She could not remember.

If only her father had not had to go away! Everything seemed to have gone wrong since then. When Jimmy had been taken away, a prisoner, on that wickedly false charge, and she had had that very unsatisfactory interview with Mr. Bray, she had gone in search of Mrs. Matthews, feeling, in her terrible loneliness, that she must have some friend in whom she could confide at least some of her troubles.

To her amazement, she had found that both Mr. and Mrs. Matthews had disappeared. On inquiring

of Simmons as to their whereabouts, she had been told that they had received a wire saying that their only son, who lived in Liverpool, was dying, and they had hurried away to his bedside.

Why, Delia wondered, had not the housekeeper come to bid her good-bye? In the light of recent events, she was inclined to think that this was some more of her stepmother's work. She had prevented the woman from approaching Delia. Perhaps, even, she herself had had the wire sent—a false one—to get the two away whom she knew would be faithful to Mr. Miller and his daughter.

Suddenly the door opened and her stepmother entered. She came and stood over the bed.

"You are going to be taught not to interfere with my plans," said Mrs. Miller. "In case you imagine there is any help for you from outside, let me say that I have dismissed the guards. You may as well reconcile yourself to the inevitable."

Although she hated this woman, she must know what the future held for her.

"What do you intend to do with me?" she asked.

Mrs. Miller turned to the door before replying. There was a faint click, and Delia knew that the key had been turned in the lock.

Her stepmother came towards the bed again. Instead of the knife, she now carried in her right hand a small revolver.

"That depends on how you behave yourself," was the answer, "and also on the message I shall receive from a certain gentleman."

Delia stared back at her.

"So what I imagined is true," she said; "you are working, not for daddy, but against him—you, his

wife!" All the contempt she felt was poured into the last three words, and she had the satisfaction of seeing the woman's hard face flinch.

Mrs. Miller made a quick retort.

"Since you want the truth, you shall have it," she replied. "I married your father because of his money. I hated him almost from the first day—but my loathing for Sebastian Miller was nothing to the hate I have always felt for you."

"Daddy has known that you have hated him," Delia responded; "you have not been clever enough to hide it. In fact, you have been a fool all along! What a fool you are is proved by the attitude you have now taken up. I should like to know why, with daddy still living, you have dared to come out into the open and side with his enemies?"

"Have I been foolish?" The speaker's voice was twisted into an inquisitive leer.

"You have been worse than foolish—what do you think would have happened to you if you had murdered me just now?"

Her bitter contempt for the woman gave her courage. Although the revolver in her stepmother's hand threatened her continuously, she was able to ignore it.

Adele Miller laughed. It was not the laugh of a normal person, for it spoke of things which were affrighting. Tensed as she was, Delia felt afraid—not so much of the woman herself as of the demons which possessed her. What had been merely a suspicion before now crystallised into a certainty; her stepmother was either a drunkard or a drug-fiend.

This explained much—it explained the hideous laugh, the fixed, staring eyes, the general demeanour of one who was mentally unsound.

She started to rise, but the woman, with a motion of the revolver-hand, kept her still. After all, she must be discreet ; this creature, passion-racked, torn by evil desire, would not hesitate to shoot if she were further taunted.

Her stepmother leaned towards her.

" I will tell you why I have come into the open, as you put it," she said. " One reason is this, you poor fool ; your father has come to the end of his tether. He has played with fire and now he is getting burnt ! His bitterest enemy—a man he wronged many years ago——"

A passionate denial came from the girl.

" That's a lie—daddy has never wronged anyone."

A shrill cackle of laughter, dreadful to the listener's ears, greeted the challenge.

" Of course you don't know the truth—your father has kept it from you. But he was forced to leave America because of his business tactics. That was many years ago, but the memory has lived after him. This man, who has now come to London to avenge the wrongs he suffered ten years ago, is determined to be merciless. He will punish as severely as he was made to suffer. Your father knows his time has arrived. He tried to escape by running away to the Continent, but his enemy, who is determined to have his revenge, is stretching out so long an arm that he will not be able to escape."

At any other time Delia might have laughed. The woman was frankly ridiculous—ridiculous, that is, if what she said could be believed. She waved an arm like a fifth-rate actress in a crude touring melodrama, and ranted like any barn-stormer.

But there was another side ; ridiculous she might be, but, at the same time, she was terribly real. She

looked mad—no doubt she was full of drugs at that moment—but her madness was dangerous.

Delia, after one glance, turned her attention from the speaker to what lay behind the words. Was this statement true? Could it be relied upon? The thought of her father having committed criminal acts in years gone by was nauseating, and yet—how could she forget that ever since she was a child her father had remained a mystery to her? His manner, until recently, had always been that of a stranger—an affectionate stranger, it was true, but still a stranger. Never once had she been invited into his real confidence; whenever she had asked questions, they had been left unanswered or merely parried.

There was momentary doubt. But her faith in her father returned. She could not forget that this woman, who should have guarded his name, was his enemy—this factor was so important that she must not overlook it. And from an enemy—and such an enemy—what could she expect but venom and malice?

Yet, the accusations the woman had made must be answered.

“If what you say is true—and I don’t believe a word of it—why have you stayed with daddy all these years?”

Again that shrill cackle of laughter filled her ears.

“Because I had to live, you fool—because your father was one of the world’s richest men. Isn’t that answer enough? What woman wouldn’t have lived with him?”

“Although hating him?”

The contempt of this innocent-minded girl cut through even her stepmother’s hardness.

"Stop talking like that or I'll kill you," she cried.

Some hidden force continued to give Delia courage.

"If you did that, you would be hanged," she replied.

There was a moment's silence.

"No doubt you would like me to be hanged," said her stepmother, "but there are worse deaths than hanging, let me tell you. Perhaps you will make that discovery for yourself before very much longer."

The words were sufficient to chill her blood and to make her heart threaten to stop beating, but she still looked resolutely at her stepmother.

"You can't frighten me," she said; "if you have come here to try to make me feel afraid, you have really wasted your time, let me tell you. Wherever I am, I shall get help sooner or later, and then you'll be punished."

It might have been the voice of a judge speaking from the Bench, so calm and assured was the tone.

A taunting challenge came.

"It would be interesting to hear the names of the prospective rescuers," Mrs. Miller sneered; "also the names of my punishers! Let me tell you this, you chit: that I intend taking you to a man who will have even less mercy on you than I should if you remained here. He is the man who has sworn to kill your father. . . . You have a fair intelligence—I don't think I need say any more."

In spite of herself, Delia cowered. The courage which had sustained her till now was ebbing—and ebbing rapidly. She had boasted of receiving help, but from where and from whom was this to come? The only friend she had was now in prison, eating out his heart, no doubt, but powerless to protect himself

against the treachery which had made a felon out of an innocent man.

There had been the guards whom her father had stationed in the grounds. But if her stepmother was to be believed—and in the circumstances there was every evidence she was speaking the truth—these men had now been dismissed.

There remained only Bray.

But what assistance could she hope to expect from such a poor inefficient as Horace Bray?

The woman spoke again.

"You have just half an hour," she said; "at the end of that time I shall come back. Then you will start on the journey I have told you about. If you contemplate putting up any resistance, let me tell you that I shall have means whereby any nonsense of that sort will be effectually stopped. I advise you not to be foolish."

With a sneer on her painted lips the woman turned to the door.

For a moment Delia considered the possibility of attempting a further struggle with her. In the previous one she had gained the mastery, but now, such effect had her stepmother's scarifying words upon her that she seemed powerless to move.

She heard the key click in the lock, saw her enemy pass through the doorway, heard the door clang to—and then sprang up.

But she was too late. The door had been locked on the outside.

She remained a prisoner.

CHAPTER XXXI THE BLOOD-STAINED HAND

HORACE BRAY was worried. Many things had happened to cause him anxiety. He was vexed with himself and with the world.

He wished that events would allow him to get on with his work. But during the last few days there had been so many disturbing things happen that he had not been able to concentrate on the many problems he was supposed to solve for his absent employer.

An honest man, Bray realised his limitations. He knew he was not fitted for this drama which throbbed all around him. He could deal with a panic on the Stock Exchange, but this continued threat of physical violence which hung over Steep Holm like a cloud, threatening to burst at any moment, was beyond him. Cowardice was a constitutional defect of his ; he had always been afraid of bodily violence. The reflection brought him acute misery, but he could not overcome it.

All this disturbance was due, no doubt, to the man Zweig. At least, he supposed so. Sebastian Miller had many times mentioned the name of Kurt Zweig to him, but always in one connection only. That was in the rivalry which existed between the two financiers in their endeavours to dominate the money markets of the world. Miller's confidence had never gone beyond this.

The news that he had been able to gather during the past few days—namely that Zweig was a deadly enemy in other directions than business rivalry—had fallen upon him like a thunderbolt. Was it through

actual fear of his enemy that Miller had gone abroad ? The financier had given him a very reasonable explanation of this hurried air-trip to the Continent—he was forced to see Baron Speidler—but so many disturbances had occurred since his employer's departure that Bray had had many doubts on the subject.

The prospect of actual bloodshed was alarmingly unnerving. From what he had been able to gather from Hanray, Miller had been so disturbed that he had called into assistance armed men from outside. So far as he knew, these guardians were still patrolling the grounds.

The whole situation was extremely perplexing.

That business of Hanray's, for instance.

Now, he liked Hanray. The fellow had many good qualities. He was honest, frank dealing, and possessed a virility which he, Bray, envied and found attractive. Many men in his position would have been jealous of this new-comer, he supposed, but, apart from a first momentary doubt, he had taken to Hanray from the start. That he had been careful to disguise an admiration for the other was only characteristic of his general methods ; he had never carried his heart upon his sleeve, nor disclosed any emotion which he considered was better hidden.

Sitting in his work-room that night, his thoughts went inevitably from Hanray to the wife of his employer.

A strange, unfathomable creature, Mrs. Miller—exotic as a bird of paradise, sensual, unless he was mistaken, and generally untrustworthy. What a master-mind like Miller could have seen in such a woman it was impossible to imagine. But there she was, installed in his employer's absence as the mistress of the house, and he was forced to obey her. Not that she had made much demand upon him in this respect so

far, but a clash of wills seemed imminent. For this reason: he was unable to free his mind from the suspicion which Hanray had planted in it. Hanray had made the astounding statement that Mrs. Miller had been discovered in a suspicious attitude outside the study door two nights before.

Although, when it came down to last issues, he would have been prepared to believe Hanray instead of the woman, it was exceedingly difficult to believe that Mrs. Miller was an actual spy in the house—in spite of the prejudice he had always felt for her. Still, the fact that she had made a complete *volte face* immediately after this accusation of Hanray's, and had charged the man with a theft which he did not believe for a moment the other had committed, lent colour to Hanray's remarkable statement.

Although Mrs. Miller was a fascinating, if morbid study—he was once again convinced that a clash of wills between them was not far distant—Bray now found himself switching his thoughts from the step-mother to the daughter.

Horace Bray had once been described, cruelly, if accurately, as a human fish. The description, from a cursory glance, at least, was not inapt. He looked a dried-up mummy of a man—the last person in the world to possess any human emotion.

But Bray, like many others, had two selves. He possessed feelings like ordinary men. He told himself now, for perhaps the thousandth time, that he was not in love with Delia Miller—such a presumption, of course, would have been the height of absurdity—but, nevertheless, he felt the blood quicken its beat through his veins as the mental picture of the girl, whom he had not seen that day, came to lighten the sombre atmosphere of the room.

He respected the father, but since the first day he had seen her, Bray had paid deep, if secret, homage to Miller's daughter. She was as far removed from him as the stars, of course. What right had he, a poor earth-worm, even to allow his thoughts to wander in that direction? But her very existence was a fragrant, if poignant, reminder of how wonderful life could be—to some men

No one, apart from Miller, paid any attention to him in that household, but he had eyes to see, and one fact had been obvious. Although he had kept himself well in hand, it was very plain that Hanray loved this girl. That was only natural. What man, coming into daily contact with Delia Miller, could help loving her?

Did she return his affection? It was difficult to say, but he had formed a certain conclusion from her manner: that was that the good-looking man whom Sebastian Miller had taken into his employ in such an extraordinary way was not completely indifferent to her.

But where were his thoughts drifting? What had this to do with him? The love affair, if any existed between Delia and Hanray, could never be any concern of his; it was purely a matter between the girl and the man—and, of course, Sebastian Miller. What the latter would say when he returned home to discover that his daughter had fallen in love with a man who was a mere nonentity, it was difficult to conjecture. He might dismiss all such ambitions with one curt word, or, on the other hand, seeing that he had already shown such marked partiality to this stranger, he might actually bestow his benison. With an erratic person like the multi-millionaire it was impossible to give any accurate preliminary forecast.

Bray leaned back in his chair, putting his hands behind his head and giving himself up to further reverie. He could not get on with any more work that evening; outside thoughts were breaking in and robbing his brain of the necessary concentration.

He came back to the old subject. This love affair, as he had already determined, had nothing to do with him—at the best, all he could hope to become was a mere interested spectator watching the romance from the outside. But all the same, he found it impossible to detach his thoughts from the subject.

It was not difficult to understand why Delia should have been attracted to Hanray. The man had so many likeable qualities. Not only was he physically appealing, but honesty of purpose and a general decency showed themselves in his very demeanour.

Such a man, now that he came to look back, could not possibly be a thief. He remembered the manner in which Hanray had borne himself on the morning of his arrest—how coldly contemptuous he had been to his accuser, how confident his general attitude that everything would come right and the truth prevail. This was not the attitude of a criminal.

Bray now found himself speculating how Delia Miller was taking the situation.

And then the full realisation came—there had been a purpose behind all these thoughts; his mind had become concentrated on the girl and Hanray because, now that the latter was out of the way and powerless, he was the natural protector of the girl. A poor one, without a doubt—but, being the only man left in the house, this duty automatically fell upon him.

There was some disturbing influence at work. Of this he now felt certain. Could this be traced to Mrs.

Miller? That was the immediate problem. Could the explanation of the recent scene be found in the fact that the woman had schemed to get Hanray out of the way so that she might have the girl to herself—alone and unprotected? That there was bad feeling on her part towards the girl he had known for quite a long time.

Bray recalled that he had not seen Delia at all that day. This was strange, unless the girl was ill—strange and upsetting. Had the evil work already begun?

He had half risen from his chair, determined to make some sort of inquiry, when the door opened and the woman of whom he had been thinking entered.

Ravaged by an excitement that changed her ordinary appearance, Mrs. Miller was an arresting visitor. She brought into that quiet room an electric disturbance. And there was a glint in the woman's eyes which gave Bray confirmation of all his fears.

Words formed themselves automatically in his brain, and he gave them utterance, scarcely knowing what he said.

"Mrs. Miller, what is the matter?"

The woman's reply was hard and metallic.

"Sit down, Bray, and listen carefully to what I have to say. I want the keys of the safe."

The demand followed so quickly upon the opening words that for a moment he was dazed. Then:

"I am afraid that is not possible," he replied.

There was so much unexpected resolution in the words that the woman looked startled.

"Are you in your right senses, Bray?"

He did not give an inch.

"I trust so, Mrs. Miller."

"You refuse me the right to go to my husband's safe?"

"I am afraid I must—without Mr. Miller's permission."

"Do you forget that I am your employer's wife?"

"No, madam; neither do I forget that I have been placed in a position of trust by Mr. Miller, and that I must fulfil my obligations."

"You still refuse?"

"I repeat, I am sorry—but I am compelled to refuse. As you know, I have been left in charge of Mr. Miller's affairs, and everything in that safe is of a highly confidential nature. I regret——"

The woman made a swift movement.

"Perhaps this will induce you to change your mind," she said sharply.

Amazing as it was, Bray found himself confronted with a revolver. He blinked through his glasses, saw a mist rise up before them, and lifted a hand with the intention of taking them off to clean the lens.

But the movement was arrested half-way.

"Keep your hands by your side," the woman ordered.

He stared for a moment, and then his voice rose on a high note with indignation.

"But this is monstrous," he declared. A sense of outraged personal dignity gave him unexpected courage. Horace Bray, financial secretary to one of the world's greatest financiers, to be held up in this ridiculous melodramatic fashion—it was beyond all belief.

Preposterous—yet true.

The woman was speaking again. Her voice was still harsh and metallic. It carried yet more deadly menace.

"Understand me, Bray, I am determined to take

no more nonsense from you. Pass me the keys of the safe immediately."

The man gripped the side of the desk by which he was standing.

This was such a terrible situation that he could never have conceived it would have happened to him. He felt the perspiration trickling down his forehead.

"You cannot realise what you are saying, Mrs. Miller. You ask me to be false to my trust to your husband and my employer. It is an impossible position—and I cannot tolerate it."

She glared at him.

"You dare to talk to me like that?"

"You force me to do so."

She stamped her foot.

"Haven't I told you that I'll take no more nonsense?"

He was in despair, but he was determined not to yield.

"There are documents in that safe which enemies of Mr. Miller would use against him if they were placed in their hands. Before I consent to open the safe, I must ask you, madam, what your intention is with regard to these papers."

"I refuse to tell you."

"Then I refuse to obey you."

She laughed scornfully.

"What interest do you think I have in any documents? It isn't papers I want—it's money. How much money is there in the safe?"

An overwhelming sense of relief made his voice steady. Money was a different matter. It was the papers which he had to guard. After all, this woman was his employer's wife and, consequently, she had a certain right to any money which might be in the

house. At least, he was not prepared to argue this point with her.

"Do you mean in cash?" he inquired.

"Yes, you fool."

"Well, Mrs. Miller, there is a little over £15,000 in notes and bearer bonds.

She received the information with a gratified smile.

"Not a great deal," she commented, "but still it will help. Give me the keys immediately."

Bray could not help smiling at the ignorance displayed by this woman of the world.

"I should have told you before, madam, that the safe cannot be opened by a key." The reply gave him a certain satisfaction.

This was soon dissipated, however, for the news merely served to infuriate the already angry woman.

"How does it open, then? By a combination?"

"Yes."

"Then what is it?" She pressed forward.

A gesture of impatience, and she had changed her tactics.

"But why should I bother? Open it yourself. I am sick of wasting time."

Bray shook his head.

"I still regret, Mrs. Miller, I cannot do that."

The change in the woman's manner had forced his previous suspicions back into his mind. He believed her to be a thief. She wanted this money for her own purpose. Although the documents in the safe were of more value, yet £15,000 was a small fortune—and Sebastian Miller expected him to be responsible for it.

"Open the safe, I tell you!" The woman's face was now livid.

Still Bray shook his head.

"I cannot do it," he repeated. "If I open that safe and allow you to take the money which is in it, I shall be false to my trust. Mr. Miller would be justified in dismissing me."

A snarl greeted this last statement.

"Cut out the goody-goody stuff—damn you!" the woman said with fresh fury. "For the last time, are you going to open that safe, or get a bullet in your body? You have just three seconds to decide."

Bray's face became contorted from the mental anguish he was undergoing. But, and this was the surprising part to himself, he remained firm. The dilemma in which he was placed had brought out a strength of purpose which he had never imagined he possessed. After all, he was a man, and he had to carry himself like a man. He had been a coward all his life—a coward over such little things, too: trifling things like toothache, the chance of being run down by a motor-car at a street corner, the possibility of dying each time he had a feverish cold or felt unwell. Now, on the one really important occasion of his life he had the chance to behave differently—to act like a man. Was he going to lose this opportunity? He had never been truly tested before. This was his great chance to rise above his inherent weakness. He experienced some gratification at the thought.

He leaned towards the woman and made a statement which would have amazed anyone accustomed to the Horace Bray of ordinary life.

"It is time this farce was ended, Mrs. Miller—I must ask you not to be foolish any longer. Put away that revolver."

She looked at him as though doubting her own hearing.

"What!"

"You heard what I said. Put away that revolver, stop acting the fool—and tell me what has become of Miss Miller."

She pretended not to understand.

"What do you mean?"

"I think my words are sufficiently clear—I have not seen Miss Miller to-day, and I am anxious to know what has become of her."

"I still don't understand what you mean."

But, it was evident, the woman *did* understand. Her attitude had lost its ferocity. This unexpected counter-attack had shaken her.

Now that he had started, Bray found relief to his overcharged feelings by saying all that was in his mind.

"I believe now," he said, "that Mr. Hanray was right. I believe that you are a spy here—sent, perhaps, by that man Zweig."

"Zweig?" She still pretended not to understand.

"Oh, I don't think that name is altogether strange to you, Mrs. Miller. If I had had sufficient intelligence before, I should have comprehended what Hanray was driving at yesterday morning when he told me that he had found you in a suspicious attitude outside the study door. At that time, I must confess, I imagined that he was suffering from an hallucination. But now I know differently."

Forgetting the weapon with which she still threatened him, he caught the woman by the arm, and added: "I must know at once what has happened to Miss Miller. She was left in my charge."

The woman defied him. She had evidently recovered from that first shock of surprise, and was now more mistress of herself.

"Take your hand away," she ordered. And when

Bray refused to do so, she turned into a veritable tiger-cat.

"What has happened to that girl is purely my affair," she said.

The words confirmed his worst fears.

He attempted to rush past—and in that second the tragedy occurred.

The room was filled with the reverberation of a revolver shot. The man who had been faithful to his employer staggered to the floor and lay perfectly still.

For a second the murderess stared down at him, scarcely realising perhaps what she had done. Then, laughing scornfully to bolster up her falling nerve, she stooped; she had to make sure the man was dead.

A white, over-manicured hand—the same hand which had dealt the death-shot—was placed over the secretary's heart. When it was withdrawn, it was stained with blood.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE MAN FROM

SHE stood motionless. The room was very still.

In those few seconds, the last ten years unrolled themselves.

They were ten years of vivid life which passed before her, beginning at the time when, as a girl of eighteen, she ran away from that dreadful hick town in the Middle West to try her fortune in New York. Like many another, she had been lured to the capital through reading the illustrated supplements of the

metropolitan journals. She was beautiful—how many had not told her so?—and what others had done, she imagined that she could also do.

It had been easy—once the first step was taken. From being a waitress at a Child's restaurant—how exciting that had seemed for the first week!—she had passed into the night life of the capital. It was inevitable, she supposed, that this should have happened—her temperament called for excitement, exotic and bizarre, and there was no resisting this appeal.

How vivid and tumultuous those ten years had been! She might have known that the end would come in just such a fashion as this—for this must be the end. That was, unless Zweig could shield and protect her. They hanged—she shuddered at the word—women who killed in England. . . .

Yes, such a moment as this had been inevitable from the beginning. She had never been content with the ordinary things of life—her temperament had called for danger and risk, and everything that went with these twins of disaster.

First, there had been the meeting with Beckford, whose proud boast it was that he turned beautiful unknowns into celebrities. He had introduced her to Florenz, whose theatre was a palace of youthful beauty, and as the star of the Follies chorus she had soon become the talk of New York.

Then, by some unlucky chance, she had encountered Julian Cordier.

Julian Cordier! The one man in the world of whom she was afraid—the man whose unspoken threat seemed to reach her from the other end of the world. Where was he now?

At that moment, as though Fate had decided to answer this question in the most dramatic manner

possible, a man stepped from behind a screen placed near the study door, and confronted her.

Julian Cordier !

For several moments, terror so gripped her that she could not speak.

Then, in a hoarse whisper, a few words escaped her parched throat.

" You !—my God !—*you* ! "

The man who smiled at her had the face of a youth, but a closer scrutiny would have told that the eyes were those of a man who had looked upon life in every mood. It was the face of a gambler—of one always willing to take such risks as would have appalled the ordinary person.

" My dear Adele," he drawled, in a voice whose silky caress made her shiver, " I was lonely in Philadelphia, and so I decided to come to England. You see, I heard you were in England—you, my lode-star, my charmer, my queen, and, don't forget, my *wife* ! "

The emphasis he put into the last word would have sufficed for the vilest epithet he could have uttered.

" Be careful I don't shoot you," she retorted, but the man merely shook his head.

" Your nerve has gone, my dear," he said ; " you expended it all with that one shot. Allow me," he added, and took the revolver from the woman's unresisting hand. So appalled was she at this totally unexpected apparition, that she was unable to make any physical protest.

Julian Cordier, after looking at the chambers of the revolver, put it in his pocket.

" So far as I have been able to ascertain," he said, " we need have little fear of interruption. And, after travelling four thousand miles, I feel that you owe

me a little time. As I said just now, I came to England, lured by the knowledge that you were awaiting me. True, you are the wife of another man—at least, this man imagines you are his wife—but that, as you may guess, only adds just a little more attraction to the project. In the smoking-room of the *Aquitania*, coming across, I heard some interesting conversation. This was to the effect that Kurt Zweig and the man you had bigamously married were at dagger's point, and that the future promised some exciting moments for those who stood on the fringe of this threatened dog-fight. I thereupon made my resolve to stand in and see what crumbs might be picked up.

"Landing at Southampton two days ago, I went to your London house. You were not in. That, of course, was a disappointment, but my grief was somewhat assuaged when news came from a totally unexpected quarter that you might be found in this pleasant retreat in the New Forest. I must say, Adele, that you have shown admirable taste—or perhaps it is your husband's choice? Anyway, you are to be complimented upon possessing such a charming abode."

She could stand no more.

"How did you get in?" she cried. "This house is well guarded."

The man received the information with a superior smile.

"You should know, Adele—who better?—that I am not above taking a certain risk in entering the abodes of the rich! Let it go that I found no difficulty in penetrating into this room, which, from words let drop by that poor devil there"—motioning to the dead man—"is rich in possibilities of spoil.

£15,000, I think he said—in American money, 75,000 dollars. Well, not so bad for ten days' travel——”

“You can't get it. It's in the safe.”

“I am willing to make a small wager, my dear Adele, that I *shall* get it—but that by the way. In the meantime, the question is, what am I to do with you? Of course, many men in my position would take your nice, slender throat and throttle the life out of you.”

In spite of the silky caress which still coloured his words, the speaker's attitude was so quietly menacing that she attempted to brush past him. The one man in the world of whom she was afraid—and here he was, only a few feet away!

“But why should I do that? Why should I let the world lose one of its most charming ornaments? My dear Adele, you need have no fear of me—you are free to do what you like. All I ask is that you remain a sensible woman for sufficient time for me to get away with that £15,000.”

She knew many Julian Cordiers, but she did not know this one. He had threatened to kill her. Then why this strange attitude? A wolf by nature, she could not understand this forgiving spirit. And, not understanding it, she suspected it the more.

“You are playing with me!”

He lifted his eyebrows in the manner of a certain famous screen star.

“I don't understand you, Adele—won't you believe me when I say that I am willing to forget the past? After all, with £15,000 in my pocket, I can overlook a lot. But for you, this windfall would not have come my way. A fair man, I cannot overlook that fact.”

But still she was afraid. Her one thought now was of flight. She turned to the door.

“I cannot permit that,” was the comment; “you

must remain here until I am through. It won't be long."

Julian Cordier then did what to many people would have seemed a strange thing. Taking a piece of sand-paper from his pocket, he commenced to rub it slightly across the finger-tips of both hands.

After a while blood showed, but he went on with his task. At the end of three minutes he appeared to be satisfied.

"Now we will see what sort of a combination this is," he said, and going to the safe, knelt before it.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE TRAP

JIMMY's first thought, as he saw the men closing round him, was one of counter-attack, not of defence. He was not going to back away; if Zweig had any thought of detaining him, he would get in the first blow.

He would call Zweig's bluff—force the man to show his hand. He was still undecided about this master-crook; still not sure whether Zweig had been attempting to fool him all the time.

But now the decisive moment had come.

"Good night, gentlemen," he said crisply, and walked forward.

He was prepared for anything—even death. On this point he was resolved: the first man to make a suspicious move, he would attack. He was not going to be taken; he would fight his way out at all costs.

To his surprise, however, nothing happened.

"You will cable me directly you are ready, Schulze."

It was Zweig speaking.

He turned to the man and nodded.

"Without fail, Zweig."

Astonishingly enough, he was allowed to go. Had he really played the part so well that all of them had been deceived? It seemed so.

A moment later he was in the street. He heard the door close behind him, and the sense of surprise was so great that he stood for a moment wondering what to do.

Subconsciously, of course, he had known what his first step would be ever since he had entered the house. He must get to Steep Holm. To the devil with Pudan—at least, until he had ascertained that Delia was safe. With his mind at rest on this point, he was prepared to go on with the masquerade.

He looked at his watch. It was twenty minutes past ten. The Mayfair street was deserted, except for a few passers-by.

He was a fool to be staying there. The chances were he was being watched from a window. The real Schulze would have left immediately, not lingered in the street.

He turned to the left and walked towards Piccadilly. Outside the Ritz he signalled a taxicab. Before he could get to Steep Holm there was a yet more pressing duty for him to do. This was to get into touch with Sebastian Miller immediately. If Miller was at the Adlon, in Berlin, he was in a dangerous position, and he must be placed upon his guard. It was unlikely that Zweig would depend solely upon Schulze, in spite of the elaborate scheme he had prepared for his enemy's destruction.

In any case, Miller must be informed.

He noticed the taxi-driver looking inquiringly at

him, and said without further hesitation: "General Post Office, St. Martin-le-Grand."

A telegram would not do. He must actually talk to the man, and so far as he was aware, the General Post Office was the only place from which he could speak in absolute safety.

During the comparatively short journey, thoughts crowded into his brain, with the result that his mind was in a jumble by the time he arrived at his destination.

It would not take long to get into touch with Pudan, he decided, and rang up the Yard.

In answer to his inquiry, a gruff-voiced individual informed him that the detective-inspector was not on the premises.

"Will you leave a message?" suggested the voice.

"No, thank you." He was not going to risk saying anything more on the telephone. "I will wait and see Mr. Pudan myself later on. Can you tell me when he might be back?"

"I'm afraid he has gone for the night."

"Can you give me his private address?"

"Against the regulations. We are not allowed to give private addresses of officials over the telephone—especially to strangers."

"But I am not a stranger to the detective-inspector."

"You are a stranger to me," came the retort, and the receiver was hung up.

The devil of it was he did not know Pudan's private address. Well, anyway, it was not so pressing as the other affair. He had done his duty to Pudan as far as he had been able, and there the matter must rest—at least, for the present.

Getting through to Berlin was astonishingly easy. He simply made his request to a responsible official,

and within five minutes the operator said: "Your call to the Adlon Hotel, Berlin, sir."

But here disappointment again met him.

In reply to his request to speak to Herr Sebastian Miller, the answer came that no gentleman of that name was at present staying in the hotel.

"Are you positive of that?"

"Quite," came the reply, "but I will make further inquiries."

At the end of a two minutes' wait, the same voice told him that the information previously given had been correct; no one of the name of Sebastian Miller was at present staying in the hotel, nor had been during the past week.

With that Jimmy had to be satisfied. It was possible, of course, that Miller had been astute enough to outwit Zweig. The thought was sustaining. On the other hand, he must send a message of some kind, in case Miller arrived at the hotel after the expected time. But that, again, must wait.

In fact, as he left the building, nothing in the world seemed to matter except to be able to see Delia once more, and to reassure himself that she was safe and happy. He would tell her once again the true story of her stepmother's plot, and then—well, what did anything else matter compared with the knowledge that the girl still believed in him?

There were also the guards to be interviewed and to be given fresh instructions. He would see Bray; and having done so much, would return to London and place himself again at the disposal of Pudan.

In the comparative gloom on the other side of the street was a waiting taxicab. He would engage this man, providing the fellow had sufficient petrol to make the journey into the New Forest.

He crossed the road and looked round for the driver. There was no one at the wheel, and he became impatient at the thought that he might have to wait for the man to return from his supper.

Should he go on farther into the city and get another cab? Whilst he was debating the point, he turned at the sound of hurrying footsteps, and then found himself confronted by an excited-looking individual, who asked if he had seen a man running away.

Hanray politely answered that he had not witnessed such a spectacle.

"I have been robbed!" exclaimed the other—"robbed!"

Whilst Jimmy was trying to find some suitable words of sympathy, the man, who had been gesticulating with his arms, suddenly thrust out both hands and caught Hanray by the throat.

Jimmy, thinking he must be dealing with a madman, started to struggle, but before he could free himself of that desperate grip, three other men emerged from the shadows, and he realised, with a sense of mortification that was overpowering, that he had been trapped.

So Zweig had had him shadowed after all.

CHAPTER XXXIV

A FURTHER SURPRISE

WHAT had happened in the meantime he could not recollect, but this room in which he now found himself was as strange to him as the faces of the men by whom he was surrounded.

"Welcome to London, Schulze," said the man who appeared to be the leader—a grinning ruffian, whose

swollen neck and discoloured eye bore testimony to the struggle which Hanray must have put up before being overpowered.

Jimmy did not reply to this taunt. Was the man mocking him? Did he really believe he was Schulze?

The other continued: "You may have slipped through the police, Schulze, but you could not slip through us. We have been trailing you, see, ever since you landed at Dorman's place to-night."

Jimmy thought it was time he made some comment.

"Schulze?" he said in a tone of assumed bewilderment; "who said my name was Schulze?"

The man laughed.

"You are too well known to us, Hans, my boy, for any mistake."

"Nevertheless, you have made the worst kind of mistake."

He had to put up some kind of bluff. But a moment later he realised that in doing so he had run himself into a fresh danger. For now he was between two fires. If these men, as he assumed, were additional creatures of Zweig's, there would be an even greater risk in his pretending to be anyone other than the man he was impersonating. For if he was not Schulze, who was he?

Another man now took up the tale.

"Come across," this second speaker said in a strong American accent. "We know you—what's the use of pulling that stuff? Have you forgotten that show-down at Cologne? Do you think we're likely to overlook that? Fifty thousand dollars gone west, Schulze—and through you!"

Something of the truth now dawned upon Jimmy. These men must be American gangsters. Why they should have come to London it was impossible to say,

of course, but their origin and their trade were plain to see.

This fact was additional evidence that he had fallen into hostile hands; had not Miller told him that Zweig employed American gangsters?

There must be no more attempting to bluff. His job was to remain as Schulze and learn all that was possible.

Still, it was difficult to keep silent.

"I suppose Zweig put you on to tracking me?" he asked; "a filthy trick!"

The listeners' faces changed. A look of astonishment so overpowering that it was bound to be real, took the place of their former belligerence.

The first man answered the question.

"Say, where does Zweig come into this?"

"You ought to know."

"Well, we don't know—see? You damned fool, we trailed you to-night because we knew you and Zweig were working together."

Jimmy digested the information—which was certainly surprising. This disclosure meant that these men, instead of being tools of Zweig's, were the German-American's enemies.

The mystery became more perplexing.

What was he to do? These men, being enemies of Zweig, might be used; and if he could use them, he was determined not to be too scrupulous. This was not a time for niceties. Any means he could employ to rout Zweig were, in the circumstances, perfectly legitimate.

Suddenly the strain which had been on him for so long lifted; with the reaction came an overwhelming desire to laugh. Throwing back his shoulders, he burst into a roar of merriment.

"Say, can that ha-ha stuff!" the leading gangster growled.

Jimmy continued to laugh until the fit of merriment had passed.

Then he gave his explanation.

"You must forgive me, boys, for being so rude," he said, "but—wait a minute."

Putting a hand up to his mouth, he tore off, suffering considerable pain in the process, the moustache which had been an integral part of the bogus Schulze.

An oath greeted the performance.

"So, you see," responded the changed man, "I am no more Hans Schulze than you are. But, for a purpose which I may explain later on, I pretended to be Schulze when I called upon Dorman and Zweig to-night in Norfolk Street."

"But what's the big idea?" was the next question.

"If I am willing to put my cards on the table, you must do the same. Is that agreed?"

The man turned to his companions. There was a whispered consultation for a few minutes.

Then he faced Jimmy.

"You are not one of Zweig's men?" he asked.

The reply was emphatic and completely explanatory.

"If I had the chance, I'd send Zweig to prison for life."

"Good enough! Now, Mr.——"

"Never mind the name," put in Jimmy. "The situation is this: I am employed by Sebastian Miller, the millionaire. Miller is at present on the Continent. Zweig sent for the real Hans Schulze from Berlin with the intention of getting him to waylay Miller in Berlin, and keep him a prisoner until Zweig crossed. But Schulze, as perhaps you know, was deported from England some time back, and, when he landed, was

looked after by the police here. So far as I know, he is still in custody. The police wanted me to impersonate Schulze so that Zweig's plans might be disclosed."

Noticing the look of consternation on the faces of his audience at the mention of the word "police," he endeavoured to pacify them by adding: "You needn't think I'm a police spy in the ordinary way; I merely did this to try to protect Miller. It happens that I have a friend who is a detective inspector, but that fact need not cause you any worry."

"That sounds like the straight goods," commented one gangster to the leader.

The latter nodded his head.

"Get on with the film story, bo," he adjured Hanray.

"I think I have said enough to satisfy any reasonable curiosity," Jimmy replied; "I should like now to hear something from you."

"That sounds reasonable. Well——"

The speaker was not destined to proceed any further. At that moment a man burst into the room, his face working in agitation.

"The 'bulls' are outside," he said tensely; "clear out, the whole lot of you. They've got enough on me already. Here, this way!"

Going to a book-case on the farther side of the room, he took out a volume, fidgeted with something at the back, and that portion of the wall swung outwards disclosing a flight of steps leading downwards.

The company did not wait upon the order of their going—they simply went. They went so precipitately that Jimmy, to whom life had become one staggering shock after another, was left behind in the rush. It was not until all his former companions had disappeared

down that secret exit, and the book-case had swung back into position, that he realised the real state of affairs.

The "bulls" ?

He was not very well up in the American's language, but he believed that "bulls" was a crook's term for detectives.

"Put 'em up—and be quick about it," ordered a voice from the doorway.

For the second time that night the comic side of life made Hanray roar with laughter. From a melodrama, existence had switched into a farce.

He was not given much time to end his merriment, however, for three men in plain clothes rushed at him and, whilst two held his arms, the third went through his pockets.

"Where are the others? Come, out with it."

"Others?" He was not going to give away his late companions, who had turned out to be not nearly so bad as might have been imagined. They had been sufficiently lucky to make their escape, and the ingenious secret of that book-case would be preserved.

"Don't waste time here," said the man who appeared to be in charge of the raiders; "we'll slip him across to the Yard—and see what the detective-inspector says."

Once again life became something stolen from a quickly-moving film. Jimmy was hurried down the stairs into a waiting motor-car, and then, almost before he could arrange his thoughts into any kind of order, the vehicle had stopped outside the great building on the Embankment, and he was hustled up the stairs into a small, plainly furnished room. The night's surprises were completed when he looked at the man who rose from a desk-chair.

"Pudan!" he exclaimed.

"Good God! Hanray! Now, what the——?"

CHAPTER XXXV

SIMMONS DISCLOSES
HIMSELF

ADELE MILLER watched with fascinated interest whilst Cordier worked with his skilled fingers on the safe.

It took ten minutes—an incredibly short time—for him to achieve his purpose. Then, to a brief laugh of satisfaction from the man, the door of the safe swung open.

Even in this moment of triumph Cordier remained cool.

"Just two more minutes, my dear," he said, turning to the woman; "just two more minutes, and then you shall be as free as a bird."

Within the stipulated time he had found the money and had placed it in various pockets so evenly that none of them noticeably bulged.

"There are some important-looking papers here," he went on: "but I am a generous-minded man, Adele—as you should know—and you can have the papers whilst I get away with the dough."

He stood up, straightened himself and stepped towards her.

"If we never meet again, Adele, remember that I saved your life." A short laugh followed the words.

But the woman was not satisfied. There was some hidden purpose behind that apparent parting statement of forgiveness. What it was she could not tell; all that she knew was that the threat which had been hanging over her for so long had strengthened instead of disappeared. Julian Cordier was still a danger in her

life. The man meant to strike again. Of that she was sure.

Yet, to the casual eye, the cracksman might have been wishing a close personal friend an affectionate farewell.

"Good-bye, my sweet."

He would have taken her hand and raised it to his lips had she not shrank back.

"I ask for just another ten minutes—after that, you can do as you like," were his final words.

She watched him pass through the door, swaggering slightly as he walked. Her mind went back to the days when she played in Florenz's musical shows. That room was the stage. The villain had just made an exit. But before the play had wound to its close he would reappear.

The sense of terror slackened after he had gone, however. Zweig would help her in this, as in other directions. If Cordier tried any nonsense he could be easily crushed.

But she must leave that house—and she must take the girl with her. It was surprising that Zweig had not thought of it before, but Delia would be a valuable hostage in his hands. She must get the girl to him immediately.

So clamant was this desire that she was able to ignore the presence of the Dread Thing on the floor. Within two minutes of leaving the study she was back in that attic-room, where she had kept her step-daughter a prisoner.

No sound greeted her as she entered. For a moment it seemed likely, judging by the motionless form on the bed, that the girl had taken her life in despair; but a closer examination proved that overwrought nature had merely demanded its toll; Delia was unconscious.

The woman did not stand on ceremony. The girl had to be aroused. A sharp smack on either cheek, followed by a vigorous shaking, caused Delia to open her eyes.

It was some consolation to Adele, after what she had passed through during the past half an hour, to notice the expression of horror with which the girl regarded her. There was at least one person she could make afraid. The consciousness brought satisfaction.

How to get the girl out of the house and into a car—that was the immediate problem. She would have to have help.

There was only one on whom she could rely—Simmons. The man might be in bed by this time, but that could not be helped ; she would have to rouse him.

She was just considering whether it would be advisable to leave the girl alone again, when there came a tap on the door.

Who could it be ?

Her relief when the very servant of whom she had been thinking stepped into the room was tremendous.

" I beg your pardon for intruding, madam," said Simmons, " but I wondered if you required anything more for the night ? "

As he spoke the man's shifty eyes wandered from his mistress to the girl on the bed.

" No, nothing more to-night, Simmons."

" Thank you, madam."

He seemed reluctant to go, and she remembered that it was necessary to get this man's aid.

" Oh, Simmons——"

" Yes, madam ? "

How far could she trust him ? That was the question. That he was not a faithful servant to

Miller she knew. She knew, moreover, that it was his hand which had struck down Hanray at the moment the latter had discovered her outside the study door. Therefore it was fairly correct to assume that Simmons would be willing to ally himself with her. In any case, she had to put this conjecture to the test. There was no alternative.

"I want your help, Simmons—I am willing to pay you well."

"Yes, madam." The man was looking at her fixedly. Perhaps he already knew what was coming.

"I have to take Miss Delia back to London. She has been in bad health here. The air does not seem to suit her. Moreover, she has complained of being depressed—of finding this house and the neighbourhood too lonely."

"I quite understand, madam." The words were significant. Without betraying himself further, Simmons had made it clear that he was willing to fall in with her scheme.

Then he came out into the open himself.

"It's too lonely for me, madam—I have finished myself; at least, I shall before the night is out."

He took a step forward and whispered a name in her ear.

The name was "Zweig."

"You work for him?" she gasped, for, in spite of her premonitions, the revelation had come as a surprise.

The man smiled.

"For Dorman," he said; "and that's the same thing."

It was all she required. Explanations could come later. Sufficient was it now that this man was a paid emissary of the man she was forced herself to serve.

"I need not say anything more, then?"

"No, nothing more is required," was the reply.

A feverish activity now seized her.

"Whilst I get the girl ready, order the car, Simmons."

"Yes, madam. But——" He looked across at the girl.

"You can leave her to me—there won't be any trouble."

Acknowledging this with a nod, the man turned away and walked out of the room.

Adele faced her stepdaughter.

"I want to warn you against any nonsense," she said; "dress yourself quickly."

To Delia the words were like a message of hope. It was true that her enemy could have no good purpose in allowing her to leave that room; but, on the other hand, she felt certain that once she was out of that prison she could make her escape. And, once free, she could return to London and get assistance from a good many sources.

There was old Mr. Benstead, for instance. He was a solicitor friend of her father. To him she could tell the story of Jimmy Hanray and how he was sent, falsely accused, to prison. Mr. Benstead would be sure to help her; perhaps he might even be able to get Hanray out of jail.

It was dangerous for her to show any jubilation. She realised that. And so, assuming a crushed demeanour, which was entirely false, she obeyed her stepmother without protest and began to dress.

Only one question she permitted herself.

"Where are we going?" she asked.

"To London."

London! She could have cried for joy!

Still wearing that look of utter dejection, however,

she accompanied her stepmother downstairs. In the hall, Simmons—that objectionable butler she had never trusted—was waiting.

Her stepmother addressed him.

"Simmons, please take Miss Delia to the car—I will be out immediately."

"Yes, madam."

Now was her chance—a desperate one, it was true—if she liked to attempt it. But as soon as the thought came into her head she rejected the proposition; it would be far better for her to wait until they arrived in London. Then she would take the first opportunity to get away. In London she could obtain help; here she knew no one.

So it was that, with an outward appearance of obedience, she walked by Simmons's side to the waiting Rolls which was already at the entrance.

Although she could have struck the man, she allowed him to wrap a fur rug about her knees. This office performed, he stood by the door of the car with the obvious intention of keeping her there until her stepmother appeared.

Time passed. She was frantic with impatience. Would the woman never appear? Who was to drive them to London? Her stepmother? It seemed so. She herself had never been allowed to drive a car on account of her father's anxiety. How she wished now that she had fought against this order.

After another long wait, Simmons began to show signs of impatience.

"You must excuse me."

With that, he turned away abruptly and walked into the house.

But for her determination to reach London at all costs, she would have left the car and started to run.

But what would have been the use? It was nearly midnight, and if she had told her story to a stranger, who would possibly have given it credence? It would have sounded like the ravings of a lunatic.

Simmons, approaching the study, heard the sound of a woman's cry. He walked into the room without knocking, and witnessed a strange spectacle: Mrs. Miller was standing over the body of a man—a man whom he knew to be dead. He recognised him at once as Horace Bray, the financial secretary.

To such a man as Simmons all knowledge is power.

"Who did this?" he asked curtly.

"Simmons!—I didn't hear you come in."

"The time has gone by when I knock at doors in this house," was the rejoinder; "tell me—who did it?"

During the short interval she had been able to pull herself together. She now pretended to be surprised.

"I don't know—how should I know? I came in a moment ago to fetch my bag, and found the room like this—the safe burgled and Bray dead on the floor. He must have committed suicide, I presume—though why he should have done so I cannot imagine."

"Who burgled the safe?"

"Really, Simmons!"—she attempted to frown—"you don't suspect me, I hope?"

He gave her a wolf's smile.

"I wouldn't put it above you," he said coarsely; "but, damn it, I was going to blow that safe out with nitro-glycerine to-night—that was why I waited."

Flinging himself across the room, he knelt down before the open safe.

"There's no money here," he announced; "but

the papers may be worth a bit to Zweig. I'll take them."

Then, standing up, he asked an important question :

"What's going to happen to—*this* ? " He motioned to the dead man.

"Can't you dispose of it in some way, Simmons ? "

"If I don't, suspicion will fall on both of us—you realise that ? "

"Why should I be suspected of killing my husband's secretary ? "

"Once the police got on to it, they would soon find out things," was the brusque rejoinder. "Where's the gun he did it with ? "

Adele felt it imperative to lie.

"I don't know," she said ; "I haven't seen any weapon."

The man sneered.

"There must have been a revolver, and if he shot himself, it's bound to be quite near. A suicide couldn't throw a gun away after doing himself in."

Simmons looked across at her, and Adele felt the butler was in possession of her secret. This meant there were two men who could hold a terrible threat over her head.

That was in the future, however, and it was the present which concerned her now. She must get away. So long as she remained in Steep Holm fear would hold her fast.

"I don't intend to waste time here, Simmons, arguing about something which I do not understand," she said ; "I don't see that it concerns either of us how Bray was killed. What matters is that he is dead, and that it would be better if his body was safely disposed of. And it ought to be done quickly. Isn't there a disused cellar ? "

"I think I can manage it," was the reply, after the man had paused to reflect; "but you realise the risk if it is found in the house—someone will be suspected of murder."

Adele tossed her head.

"There are so many unsolved murders now that one more is scarcely likely to make any difference. Besides,"—quickly recollecting—"who is to prove that the fool was murdered? To my mind, it's perfectly clear what happened."

"I should like to hear," said the butler in an insinuating tone.

"Can't you figure it out for yourself, Simmons? Bray, who had been working late, no doubt, had just left for bed, when he imagined he heard a noise in the study. Going down as he was—he hadn't had time to begin undressing—he found a burglar working on the safe. He started to raise the alarm, and the burglar, frightened, shot him. It's perfectly clear. You say yourself that the safe has been burgled."

"Someone opened it, I agree," the man amended.

"Whoever opened it got away with £15,000 in cash and bearer bonds. Bray told me yesterday when I asked him how much money there was in the safe, that it contained that amount. But what are you wasting time for?" she asked impatiently.

There was insolence in the man's answer.

"I shall want help in getting that out of here. Are you too squeamish to touch it? If you're not, take hold of his legs."

She shuddered.

"I couldn't. Do it yourself."

"I tell you, I can't manage it alone—unless you help, it will have to be left here."

"And to-morrow the newspapers would be full of it!" She shrank back.

"Pick up the legs," ordered the man brutally.

After a second's further struggle with herself, the woman obeyed.

CHAPTER XXXVI

IN THE ENEMY'S
HANDS

It was Simmons who drove the Rolls to London, Delia discovered. After what seemed another endless wait, the butler came out to the car, dressed as though for a journey. By his side was her stepmother. Then, what she had imagined all along was true—these two were fellow-conspirators, working together against her father.

The pair didn't speak. No doubt they had made all their plans beforehand. Their demeanour showed that a complete understanding existed between them. But she noticed that it was Simmons, and not her stepmother, who appeared to be in command.

The butler made a sign to the woman, and the latter got into the car by Delia's side.

"We are going now, my dear," remarked Adele Miller.

The words were pleasant enough, but underlying them was a venomous suggestion. "Sorry to have kept you waiting," continued the woman as she did not get a reply.

"It's all right," answered Delia.

She put more weariness into her voice than she really felt, so that the words appeared to plumb the very depths of despair.

The woman laughed.

"You're more polite than you used to be," she commented. "I'm glad you're learning manners. I must inform your father—when I see him."

Delia knew the woman was taunting her, and she made no reply.

The car, starting off at a rapid pace, engaged her complete attention. The consolation was that every minute brought her nearer to London.

But, as the journey proceeded, the hope with which she had been buoyed up after leaving that attic-prison began to disappear. She realised that her step-mother must have laid careful plans of her own. She was being taken away from Steep Holm to suit this woman's purpose. There would be little chance for her to escape once she arrived in the metropolis. Her enemies would see to that.

Before the car had started, the blinds on either side had been drawn, so that the Rolls was in complete darkness except for the headlights.

This fact now assumed a significance which had not appeared before. The reason was obvious: her step-mother did not want her to be seen by any passing traffic.

At this alarming thought she started to her feet.

"What are you doing?" demanded Adele Miller.

Delia did not pay any attention. Her right hand went out to seize the handle of the door. It was immovable!

A low laugh greeted the failure.

"You surely didn't think me such a fool as to risk you attempting suicide?" asked the woman.

Utterly exhausted, totally bereft of hope now, the girl sank back into her seat.

The rest of the journey, long as it was, passed like

an uneasy dream. Locked in that quickly-moving car, she was as much a prisoner as at Steep Holm.

Presently she must have slept, for she did not realise anything more until she found herself confronted by a man with the most extraordinary face she had ever seen.

Although this man was a complete stranger to her, she knew she hated him—and coupled with this instinctive hate was an appalling fear.

She looked round quickly. She was in a handsomely appointed room that might have served for a library. Besides the man who was regarding her so intently, there were present Simmons and her stepmother.

Now the man was speaking.

"I had hoped to receive your father, Miss Miller, but that is, I trust, merely a pleasure deferred. In the meantime, let me offer you a very warm welcome. My name is Zweig—perhaps your father has mentioned it to you?"

Although the name was unknown to her, yet Delia knew the truth: the speaker was an enemy of her father. That was why she had been brought here, of course.

Darting quickly to one side, she rushed to the door. She was in a worse plight than formerly. The premonitory fears she had experienced before, now took on greater activity. If there had been any doubt, a glance at her stepmother's face would have confirmed all her suspicions.

It was Simmons who prevented her reaching the door. The man who, up till that night, had always shown her deference, caught hold of her arms in a brutal fashion and flung her back into the centre of the room.

So brutal were his methods, indeed, that Zweig himself made some kind of protest.

"Quietly, my man," he said; "remember that Miss Miller is my guest."

Then, approaching the girl, the speaker touched her lightly on the shoulder.

"Won't you sit down, Miss Miller?—or, perhaps, after your long journey, you would like some refreshments?"

She shook her head. Anything taken in that house, and in that company, would have choked her.

"That is rather foolish of you," came the comment; "for I have a story to tell, and I am afraid I must ask you to listen."

Delia sat down in the chair indicated and endeavoured to compose herself sufficiently to face this fresh ordeal. For ordeal she knew it to be. What purpose this man with the extraordinary face could have in mind it was difficult to conjecture. But it was quite sufficient that he had insinuated himself to be an enemy of her father.

"I dare say you may wonder, Miss Miller, why you have been brought here?" The story had started. "To make this explanation entirely satisfactory, I must go back some twenty years. At that time your father and I were both in love with the same woman—the lady who afterwards became your mother.

"Your father had advantages over me. To begin with, he had already started on that career which the newspapers are so pleased to describe as 'fabulously successful.' He had already shown that touch of genius which, in later years, was destined to make him many millions of money.

"I"—the speaker shrugged his shoulders—"had as many handicaps as he possessed advantages. For one thing, your father was a very handsome man; I——" Here he shrugged his shoulders again, as

though commenting on a self-evident fact. "In the ordinary way, your father would have won out, as we say in America. He would have been successful by the employment merely of decent, straightforward methods. But, not content with his natural advantages, he stooped to underhanded tricks."

Delia sat upright and stared back at the man.

"So you, like my stepmother, are inventing lies about my father," she said.

"I am telling you the truth," was the reply.

"I don't believe it."

"If your father were here, I don't think he would be able to deny what I have already said. However, whether you believe it or not, I want to finish this story.

"For twenty years I have never allowed the memory of what your father did to me to fade from my mind. It was the thought one day of having my revenge that made me work hard and become a rich man. Twenty years is a long time to wait—but at last I think I am on the way to victory. With that parting remark, I will now leave you."

Even if the man were lying—as she was compelled to think—there was so much quiet, but deadly, hostility in his words that she felt utterly sick at heart.

Zweig now gave an order.

"Take her away," he said to Simmons, "to the house by the river. It will be dangerous to keep her here in London."

With the girl gone, Zweig turned to Adele Miller.

"Why did you bring her here?" he asked. "I could have put hands on her at any moment I liked."

"I know that," was the reply, "but—something happened at Steep Holm to-night. I was compelled

to leave—and I could not let the girl stay there. She would have learnt—too much.”

Zweig took from an upper waistcoat pocket a thick, black cigar.

“What happened?” he inquired, biting one end and thrusting it into his long, cruel mouth.

How much should she tell him? Knowing that, with his spies, he was bound to learn the whole truth sooner or later, Adele determined on a bold stroke. She would confess everything.

“I want your aid, Zweig,” she started; “you are the only one who can help me. That is why I came here to-night. You know why you sent me down to Steep Holm?”

“I sent you down there to see if you could find out exactly where Miller had gone—and you haven’t.”

“You also sent me down there, don’t forget, to get possession of certain papers dealing with his financial affairs,” was the reply. “Well, those papers have been secured.”

“By you?”

“Indirectly. Simmons brought them away, and they are still in his possession. He would have told you about them himself had you given him a chance.”

“How did he get them?”

“Through me. It was like this,” she continued, speaking more rapidly as excitement gripped her nerves; “I thought it advisable to keep the girl more or less a prisoner. Bray, the secretary, whom I had always considered to be nothing but a fool, when I saw him late last night, wanted to know where Delia was. He talked some preposterous rubbish about the girl having been left in his charge. He became extremely difficult, and I”—she stopped for a moment

—"was forced to kill him. In self-defence, you understand," she added quickly.

Nothing could disturb this man.

"What happened to the body?" he asked.

"We left it in an old cellar which hadn't been used for years, and which is never likely to be used again. I didn't know of the place myself, but Simmons did—he has been invaluable, that man."

"Which is the reason Dorman got him into the house, of course," was the acquiescing reply. "Well, now that you have told me, what is it you want me to do?"

She shivered slightly.

"To see that I am kept safe," she said. "You are the one man in the world to do this."

But, even as she spoke, the taunting face of Julian Cordier rose up to mock her.

CHAPTER XXXVII

~~~~~ POLICEMAN

JIMMY's amazement quickly turned to anger.

"What the devil does this mean?" he demanded; "when I rang up an hour ago, they told me you had left the Yard, and were not expected back to-night."

Pudan gave the soft answer which is supposed to turn away wrath.

"When I have quite recovered from the shock, Hanray, I will explain this unexpected reappearance of mine. A police officer, as you might imagine, is liable to be called out of bed any hour. Does that satisfy you?"

"For the moment. But that, in any case, is not

so important as my being lugged here by a gang of your fellows. After doing you that favour, I think I should be given an explanation."

Pudan leaned back in his chair, and tapped on the desk in front of him with a pencil. There was a cryptical smile on his face

"You and I, Hanray, are going to have a most interesting talk later on ; I am dying to ask you what has become of the moustache and the other distinguishing features of our friend Schulze."

"That must wait. Let me have the explanation first."

"Very well—I will call in the sergeant-in-charge of the raid to-night."

In answer to a bell, a constable appeared, took the message, and within a minute, the police-officer in plain clothes whom Jimmy was able to recognise as the chief of the raiding party, stepped into the room.

"Tell me exactly what happened to-night, Haskins," said Pudan.

The narrative was short and very much to the point. From the police-sergeant's official statement, Jimmy gleaned that the flat to which he had been taken had been under suspicion for some time as the supposed head-quarters of a dangerous gang of jewel thieves. At the head of this gang was a cunning crook whom the police very anxiously wanted to arrest. In spite of their activities, however, this man had so far evaded capture. That night, the crook had been observed by a detective on duty outside, to enter the flat in Harpur Street, Theobald's Road, and shortly afterwards, word had been sent to the Yard.

"So you see how it was," wound up Pudan, after

the detective-sergeant had completed his story. "We wanted this man, and as many of his associates as possible. Unfortunately, the only person we were able to capture was yourself—and now"—with a sardonic grin—"perhaps you will be good enough to tell me what the hell you were doing in that galley?"

At the thought of all that he had gone through, Jimmy's anger blazed out afresh.

"I'm glad you didn't get those men," he said crisply.

"Glad?"

"Yes—glad. That's plain enough, isn't it?"

"Somewhat too plain," commented the detective-inspector, who, however, was keeping his temper admirably under control.

"You'd better sit down, Jimmy, and have a smoke. It will soothe your ruffled nerves."

Pudan pulled open a drawer in his desk and handed across a box of cigars.

"Pipe for me—thanks."

Still unruffled, Pudan pitched over his tobacco pouch.

With the first puff of smoke Jimmy felt himself becoming tranquillised. Tobacco—that marvellous gift of God to man—was working its customary magic.

"Now for the story, old boy," encouraged Pudan.

Instead of glaring at the speaker, Jimmy found himself smiling.

In short, crisp sentences he told the astonishing events of that night.

Then Pudan began his questioning.

"You're quite certain Zweig was on the level?"

"At first I doubted it—but, later on, I believed he thought I was the real Schulze. By the way, where's that blighter now?"

"Oh, safely under lock and key," was the easy reply; "we can't afford to let him out yet awhile. You say you think Zweig was convinced?"

"Yes—because if he hadn't been, why should he have allowed me to go? To be perfectly frank, when I got up to leave, I thought there was going to be a scrap—but nothing happened."

"And the people at the Adlon said that Miller was not there, and hadn't been there?"

"Yes—that was what I was told. What I think is that Miller must have got wind in some way of Zweig's plans, and kept carefully away from Berlin. But why the deuce he still remains low, without sending a word, I cannot imagine. I'm completely fed up with the whole business."

"I can imagine you are, old man," sympathised the detective-inspector; "but we are not out of the wood yet. There's still a lot to do before friend Zweig and his pals are put away in a place where they won't do any more harm."

"Well, there's one thing certain," replied Jimmy; "and that is: I have finished with being Schulze. For the rest of the play I am going to be myself—and, as myself, I hope to be in at the death."

"Quite an admirable ambition," commented Pudan, "but there doesn't seem to be much more to do to-night. I'm sorry you've been troubled in this way, Hanray, but really, in the circumstances, you can't blame the police. There you were, on suspected premises, and associating with people of a very undesirable character."

"Those fellows may be jewel thieves, but they are likely to be useful to us all the same."

Pudan's face reflected his astonishment.

"Useful to us? What do you mean?"

"It may sound fantastic, but I repeat that those men may be useful to us. In this respect: they are enemies of Zweig. Why, I don't know; but directly I mentioned Zweig's name, they intimated that if they ran across the man, life wouldn't be too healthy for him."

"H'm! Surprising information, but it's too late to discuss its possible developments to-night. You'd better come back to my rooms in the Adelphi. Tomorrow we can look out some place for you to pitch your tent."

"I'm not going back with you, Pudan. I've got a job to do first. I'm going down to Steep Holm. By the way," leaning over the desk and fixing the inspector with an ominous look, "I suppose you haven't forgotten your promise to me to keep an eye on Miss Miller down at Steep Holm?"

"My dear fellow," replied the detective-inspector; "do you think I go back upon my word once it is given? I meant to go down myself, but have been so confoundedly busy. But I have had a man outside Miller's house ever since we came to our little arrangement. I telephoned instructions to the Wyndhurst police immediately."

"Only one man!"

"Well, I suppose the guards you spoke about are still there. You mustn't get the wind up so badly in that direction. It's Miller himself Zweig is after. After all, if he had wanted the girl, he could have got her before this."

"Don't forget, he made one attempt through Dorman," was the reply. "You may think me ridiculous, Pudan—I don't care if you do—but I shall not be satisfied until I see Miss Miller myself, and made sure that she is quite safe."

He stood up and reached for his hat.

"In the circumstances," he continued, "I think the least you can do is to send me down there in a fast police car."

"I'll do more than that," was the unexpected reply; "I'll come with you myself."

The team work at Scotland Yard is good. Otherwise, it would not be the efficient organisation that the world knows and admires. Within five minutes, Hanray was seated by Pudan's side in a car whose speed did not detract from its comfort.

"Half-past two," commented Pudan, stepping out of the car; "a nice time to be paying a call!"

Jimmy made no reply. He was not in the mood for speech. During the whole of that night ride from London he had been ravaged by anxiety. It was simple enough for Pudan to attempt to laugh away his fears, but it was mere common sense to him to fear that Zweig, thwarted in his principal objective, would seek revenge in another quarter. This could mean only one thing: he would attempt to seize the daughter of his enemy.

Steep Holm was just a blur amidst the surrounding gloom. Not a light showed in the great mansion. It might have been a house of the dead. Then he realised that, of course, everyone would be in bed, and felt something of his former overwhelming fear lessen.

Behind him he heard Pudan muttering to himself.

"What's the matter?" he asked, turning.

The question was met by silence. The detective-inspector was too busily occupied. With the aid of a powerful electric torch, he was regarding some shapeless mass lying inert at the foot of the high wall.

Pudan's attitude made Jimmy walk towards the spot. As he did so, the detective-inspector rasped out an oath.

"Do you see that?" he said curtly.

Jimmy looked more intently. The light from the torch showed a man's body. It wore a police constable's uniform.

"That's the man who was on duty outside here," explained Pudan; "poor devil, I sent him to his death!"

"Death?"

"I hope I may be wrong," said the detective-inspector, walking forward. "But I'm afraid I'm not."

He stooped and examined the body.

"Probably been dead for some hours," he said; "look at the head—bashed in! God! how sickening!"

Terrible as that sight was, Jimmy's thoughts were elsewhere. They were not with this unfortunate policeman who had been murdered, but were concentrated on a young, helpless girl in the house, situated some three hundred yards away.

Without thinking of the possible consequences, he started to clamber up the high wall. It was only when he reached the top, and cut his hands badly on the barbed wire, that he remembered the electrification scheme which Sebastian Miller had installed in order to keep Steep Holm impregnable.

Something must have gone wrong inside the house. The current had been switched off.

The thought goaded him like a wound, and without hesitation he jumped into space.

Landing with a thud that seemed to jar every bone in his body, he started to run towards the house

Behind came the sound of footsteps, and he swung round to ward off a possible attack.

"Don't be a fool, Hanray," said the voice of Pudan ; "it's only I."

Together they proceeded towards the house. Ringing the bell, they waited impatiently until the front door was opened.

"Who is it ? " asked a voice.

"Is that you, Mrs. Matthews ? " replied Jimmy.

The woman gave a startled exclamation, but Jimmy pushed by her and entered the house. He was closely followed by Pudan.

The two of them interviewed the housekeeper in the library which opened on to Sebastian Miller's study.

"Now, Mrs. Matthews," started Jimmy, "I want you to answer a few questions."

"Yes, sir. Certainly sir." She still seemed confused. "But it's rather late to be answering questions, Mr. Hanray."

"I know all about that," was the impatient rejoinder ; "but the matter is important. In the first place, how is Miss Delia ? "

The woman hesitated.

"Well, to tell you the truth, sir, I don't know much about Miss Delia. The fact is, my husband and I have been away for a couple of days. We received a wire saying our son in Liverpool was dying, and we hurried off to him. Mrs. Miller said everything would be quite all right, and you can guess how upset we were. The funny thing was, when we got to Liverpool, there had been a mistake——"

But Jimmy interrupted impatiently. Here was some more of Mrs. Miller's work ; his fears again took possession of him.

"Will you kindly go to Miss Delia's room and say that I want to see her?"

"Certainly, sir," and she hurried away.

Pudan moved towards the study.

"Whilst we're here, Hanray, I should like to have a look round," he said, with a hand on the door.

"This is the study, isn't it?"

"Yes. I'll come with you."

Directly Hanray entered the room, he knew intuitively that something was wrong. There was an unsettling influence in the air. It would have been quite impossible for him to have put this impression into words, but it was definite enough to cause him serious alarm.

A few minutes later Pudan had supplied substantial confirmation of this fear.

"I say," exclaimed the detective-inspector, "look at this!" He was pointing to a stain on the carpet. Stooping immediately, Pudan examined the discoloration through a lens.

"Blood!" he announced with unconscious dramatic effect, looking up at his companion.

"We shall have to see Bray," replied Hanray.

"If Bray is in a position to be seen," was the grave comment.

Jimmy caught the inspector's arm.

"Good God!" he exclaimed; "do you——?"

But all that Pudan would reply at the moment was: "Hanray, I am glad we have come."

It was not long before he arrived at the safe.

"This has been opened by some means recently," he said, "and the thief didn't trouble even to close the door."

Hanray joined him, and together they examined the interior of the safe. It was evident that the

repository had been rifled ; papers were scattered in all directions.

" It's the woman," stated Jimmy. " I'll bet you a fiver it's the woman."

" Miller's wife ? "

" Yes. She's a hell-cat. And Delia——"

When the thought came, he was tempted to rush from the room, and was only prevented by hearing the door of the library open.

" Now we shall know," he said ; " here's the house-keeper back."

The first sight of Mrs. Matthews was disturbing. The housekeeper was in a painful state of agitation.

" I have been to Miss Delia's room, sir," she announced, " and it's empty. The bed hasn't been slept in."

Whilst Hanray struggled for words, Pudan, more cool-headed, took up the cross-examination.

" Have you seen Miss Miller since you returned, Mrs. Matthews ? "

" No, sir, I haven't. We did not get back till late. I saw Mrs. Miller, but understood that Miss Delia was out motoring."

" What other servants are in the house ? "

" Simmons should be here, sir."

" That's the butler ? "

" Yes, sir."

" Any others ? "

" There's Feltham, the girl who helps me. Only a very small staff is kept here, sir, unless Mrs. Miller is entertaining."

" Call her immediately, please."

During the five minutes that elapsed, Jimmy was like a man possessed. Nothing could content him but that he must go to Bray's room.

The presentiment that something terrible had happened in the study that night was strengthened by the state of the undisturbed bed. The secretary's belongings were apparently in perfect order—there was even some loose silver lying on the dressing-table—but the man himself was not to be seen. What connection did that blood-stain on the study carpet have with Bray's absence?

Back in the library, a bewildered maid, freshly aroused from sleep, gave some startling information.

"To tell you the truth, sir," she said, looking at Hanray as though he were a ghost; "both Miss Miller and Mrs. Miller left the house to-night. That's the truth, gentlemen," she repeated in a bewildered manner. "And not only that, but Simmons went with them."

Pudan pressed the girl further.

"How do you know that?" he asked.

"It was like this, sir," she replied; "after dinner I went off to a dance at Wyndhurst. Mrs. Miller had given me permission. I didn't get home until after midnight, and just as I turned into the drive, I saw the Rolls car waiting. Wondering what could be up, I stopped in the shadow of the drive, curious like."

"That's understandable, Feltham," said Pudan, with an encouraging smile; "carry on with your story."

"Well, sir, it surprised me to think that the mistress should be going for a drive at that time of night. But it surprised me still more to see Simmons sitting in the driver's seat. I didn't know he could do a chauffeur's job."

"You are sure Miss Miller was in the car?" now put in Hanray.

"Quite sure, sir. I saw her sitting there, looking white and done-up, like."

Hanray made an impatient gesture to Pudan.

"Don't worry yourself, old chap; we're getting hold of it by degrees."

The detective-inspector turned again to the maid.

"You waited until the car went off?"

"Yes, sir."

"What time was this—roughly?"

"Oh, something a little after twelve, sir."

"Then you went to your room, I take it?"

"Yes, sir—that's right, sir."

"Did you say anything to Mrs. Matthews?"

"Oh no, sir"—shaking her head; "after all, it was no business of mine. And, besides, the housekeeper had gone to bed."

"I understand—thank you, Feltham. That's all."

The maid dismissed, the two men made a systematic search of the house. But beyond the opened safe and the bloodstain on the study carpet, no more evidence was forthcoming.

But these facts, coupled with the mysterious disappearance of Horace Bray, and the strange night-ride which Delia had apparently been forced to take in the company of two persons who Hanray knew were enemies, were sufficient to send him into a fever of unrest.

At the end of a couple of hours' anxiety, he turned to Pudan and said: "There's no doubt about it. That woman has taken Delia to London—to Zweig."

"You may be right," replied the other; "anyway, we will put the theory to the test. I can get a search

warrant to go through Dorman's house and Zweig's flat in Savoy Court, but I have doubts whether we shall find her in either place."

"But we must get back to London," said Jimmy impatiently.

Pudan stopped the car at the end of Waterloo Bridge.

"Here are my keys, old man," he said, handing a key-ring to Hanray; "you slip along to my rooms and lie low until I come. It wouldn't do for either Zweig or Dorman to see you with me. I'll go straight to the Yard and get the necessary warrants, and—keep your pecker up, old boy."

Hanray watched the car disappear in a stream of traffic, and turned to the left.

He wanted action, but the more experienced Pudan had vetoed this.

"It's no good going up to a man like Zweig and threatening to knock his block off unless he comes through with the truth," Pudan had said; "we shall have to match cunning with cunning. I haven't the least doubt now but what Zweig has had Bray killed and Miss Miller kidnapped. But before the law can do anything definite, we must have proof. Suspicion is not nearly good enough."

This was wise enough counsel, if unsatisfactory to hear; and Hanray knew he would be well advised to let the initiative remain in the hands of his friend—for such Pudan had proved himself to be.

Arrived at Adelphi Terrace, Jimmy let himself into the first floor flat at Number 56 and took off hat and overcoat. Within a few minutes a middle-aged woman, whom from Pudan's description he knew to be the

inspector's housekeeper, was receiving his orders for breakfast.

The anxiety of the night had given him a tremendous appetite, and when the eggs and bacon and delicious coffee arrived, he did justice to the meal.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE MESSAGE

BREAKFAST over, Jimmy picked up the copy of the *Daily Express* which had been left on the table by the housekeeper, and glanced at the head-lines. But that excellently edited newspaper, crammed to bursting-point with exciting news from the far corners of the earth, left him indifferent. Those recorded events seemed remote and intangible ; how could they compare with the drama through which he was himself living ?

After an hour, the forced inaction became intolerable. What the devil was Pudan doing ? Why didn't he send ?

Tossing the paper on one side, he walked across the spacious room and looked out of the window. Before him stretched one of the most enchanting views of London ; but this, together with the glory of the morning, seemed merely a mockery. It held no interest. His thoughts were still centred on that lonely house in the New Forest, where dark and terrible deeds had recently been enacted.

He was in the act of turning away, when he noticed a taxicab pulling up outside the entrance to the block of flats. From the vehicle emerged a police constable.

The sight was so unusual that at first he did not realise the significance it might have for him.

Indeed, it was not until the housekeeper came into the room with a message, that he connected the incident with himself.

"There's a policeman just called, sir, with a message from the master."

"Do you mean Mr. Pudan?"

"Yes, sir. Shall I ask the officer in?"

"Of course. Thank you."

The man who entered appeared a typical specimen of the London constabulary—tall, well-proportioned, stolid, matter-of-fact.

"Mr. 'Anray, sir?"

"Yes—I'm Hanray. I understand you have come from Detective-Inspector Pudan?"

The man took off his helmet and withdrew from it an envelope.

"That's right, sir. I'm from the Yard. This is a note from Detective-Inspector Pudan."

Jimmy tore the envelope impatiently, and read as follows:

Dear Hanray,

I have got on the track of Miss Miller. This message has been telephoned to the Yard, and will be passed on to you by an officer. Directly you receive it, go with this policeman. It will mean a drive of some distance, but I know you won't mind that.

Buck up—the net is closing round those devils.

Yours,

Pudan.

All the words, including the signature, were type-written, but that did not make any difference, because he had never seen any specimen of Pudan's handwriting.

He turned to the policeman.

"When did this message come, officer?"

"Just now, sir. Barely ten minutes ago. I was sent straight along with it."

"I see. Well, thanks very much. Do you know what is in the note?"

"It was read out to me at the Yard, sir."

"Do you know where to take me?"

"A place near Teddington, I understand, sir."

"Teddington?—that's near the river, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir."

The river!

The two words, usually associated with scenes of jollity and amusement, now assumed a significance which made him reach for his hat and coat.

"We'll get straight away, officer—and tell your man to drive as fast as he can."

"Very good, sir."

Giving the housekeeper some words of thanks as he passed out of the flat, Hanray followed the policeman out and down the main staircase.

The officer opened the door of the cab, and Hanray stepped within. The policeman took his place by the side of the driver, and they were off.

It seemed to Hanray as though he were floating through space. It was the most extraordinary feeling he had ever experienced. His head appeared to be leaving his body.

Something very alarming was happening to him—had already happened to him, and he was powerless to prevent it; that was the singular fact. Reaching out for the nearest door-handle, he endeavoured to turn it, but the thing remained immovable.

Swiftly came the horrific knowledge that he had left it too late ; strength had gone from him in a sudden tremendous ebb. He was now spent and useless. Whatever means had been used to render him helpless, it had possessed a potency which had enabled it to do its work in a very rapid manner.

The car tore on, through mean, crowded streets. So much he was able to see before everything became blurred and oblivion intervened.

He had passed from one nightmare to another. For the face which confronted him was a thing of evil.

Zweig !

" I am afraid, Hanray, that you are not so clever as your friend, Detective-Inspector Pudan, of Scotland Yard, fancied you. Otherwise, you would surely have imagined I might employ the same means to bring you to me as I had outlined in the case of Sebastian Miller ! But I will certainly pay you this tribute : you played the part of Schulze quite well last night. It is true that I had not seen the man for nearly five years, but I frankly admit that I was deceived. To carry such an action through called for courage—and courage in a man is a quality I have always admired. I admire it so much that I prefer to have you safely here rather than working against me outside. As for your friend Pudan, his case is also receiving attention. One by one the flies are walking into my parlour. First the girl ; then your good self ; later that ornament of the London police, Detective-Inspector Pudan ; and last of all, your former employer."

The speaker's tone changed. His voice, from being insinuatingly self-satisfied, now became harsh and brusque.

"Take him away," he ordered.

Rough hands were laid on the prisoner and, wishing that he were dead, Hanray was hustled out of the room.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE CODE

THIS matter dealt with, Zweig turned his attention once again to the papers on the wide desk.

So far as Kurt Zweig could be said to look pleasant, his face now bore an amiable expression.

The cards were falling well for him. That had been a good move of Dorman to send the man Simmons into Miller's house. For here before him was a very practical result.

He took up a small morocco-bound notebook, on which was stamped, in gold lettering, one significant word—"Secret."

Although the multitude of papers which Simmons had brought away from Sebastian Miller's safe at Steep Holm represented considerable prospective value—with them he might be able to frustrate many of his enemy's future financial plans—yet that small book was worth, to him, many times the value of all those littered documents put together.

For this book contained Sebastian Miller's private cabling code. No wonder it was marked "Secret"!

Zweig rang a bell on the desk.

A woman appeared quickly in answer to the summons.

It was Adele Miller.

"You want me?" she asked.

Twenty-four hours' stay in Zweig's house by the river had changed this woman. Her former high-handedness had gone—replaced by a surprising humility. For the protection of Zweig she had been forced to pay a heavy price.

"Sit down." His tone was brusque to the point of brutality.

Yet she complied without protest.

"I want you to tell me how fond Miller is of his daughter?"

The question provoked her to an unpleasant smile.

"How fond?" she repeated; "why, I think he would give his life for her!"

"He may have to," was the comment; "but answer my question in more detail. If he knew that this girl of his was in danger, would he take any risk in trying to come to her help?"

"I am sure he would," was the prompt reply. "May I ask what is in your mind?"

Zweig became expansive.

"You see this," he said, holding up the morocco-bound book; "it is a prize worth having. Simmons found it in the safe with all these papers. In it is your husband's"—he laughed harshly; "it seems damned funny to me that you should be Miller's wife, Adele—private cabling code. You can see for yourself it's marked 'Secret.' All we financiers use such a code. Now what I intend is this: I am going to flood the German newspapers with a personal advertisement, using this code. Miller is bound to see it, and when he reads it he will get the shock of his life. For in the advertisement I shall tell him that the girl is in my power, and that unless he is willing to come to my terms, she will have only a few more hours to live

Sounds melodramatic, perhaps—but I like melodrama," he continued ; " it's the flesh and blood of life."

The woman made the comment which was obviously expected of her.

" I am sure that will draw him," she said.

Zweig swung round in his chair.

" Women have never interested me," he remarked, " but, tell me, Adele, why do you hate this man so ? There is a satisfactory reason in my case, but—Judas ! you have sat at his table, and slept in his bed. What's the secret ? "

The woman made her answer :

" From the beginning—from the second day of our marriage—he treated me with contempt. That, and the other fact that he loved the girl as much as he disliked me, is what made me hate him."

" Well, you will have satisfaction very soon now, I think," replied the schemer ; " I am just about to draft that advertisement. I am pretty certain, with you, that it will bring him back to England. Why he has remained on the Continent so long I cannot imagine, unless—here is an idea which has just occurred to me ; it may be that he wanted me to follow him to Germany. But I was not falling into that trap. I don't know if you are aware, Adele, that Miller has a charge of murder hanging over his head. This thing occurred many years ago, and the evidence was never very satisfactory ; otherwise the English police, I believe, would have taken some action. However, it has been sufficient reason for Miller keeping away from Scotland Yard. Get off now," he concluded brutally ; " I am going to be busy."

At his sign the woman rose and, without any complaint, left the room.

Zweig drew pen and paper towards him and began his task.

CHAPTER XL

A SCENE AT A FAMOUS
RESTAURANT

THE famous Emperor Restaurant at Munich was ablaze with light. Philippe, the world-renowned *maitre d'hôtel*, was bowing continuously to small groups of distinguished visitors. For this was the dinner hour, and to dine at the Emperor, Munich, with Philippe personally supervising, is an Event. Kings have talked about it.

The restaurant afforded a fascinating spectacle. Some of the prettiest women in Europe were present this night, accompanied by men whose clothes could only have been fashioned in one city in the world—London.

A small, but very celebrated string orchestra played in a musicians' gallery set high above the square dining-room,

The air was gay with chatter, as two men entered to pick their way through the crowded floor to a reserved table in a corner.

Both were impressive figures. The foremost had the shoulders of an athlete and the face of a scientist.

That he was a well-known habitué was proved by the whispers that went round.

"Isn't that Baron Speidler?" asked a girl of her companion, as the men passed.

"Yes," was the reply, "but who is the other? I have seen his face somewhere—he must be a celebrity to be with Otto Speidler."

"I know," said the girl, softly clapping her hands; "it's Sebastian Miller, the English millionaire! His photograph has been in all the papers—I saw it this morning in the *Berliner Tageblatt*."

"By Jove!" exclaimed her companion, who, like so many post-war Germans, prided himself upon his knowledge of English idioms. "You're right, Sophy—it is Miller. They say he is worth twenty millions. He must be completing some gigantic deal with Speidler."

The man under discussion took his seat at the reserved table as though accustomed to public scrutiny. The attention which he and his companion were receiving left him apparently unconcerned.

Scarcely had the two men settled themselves, when Philippe approached.

"Good evening, Philippe," said Baron Speidler affably.

The *maitre d'hôtel* bowed ceremoniously.

"Good evening, Herr Baron. It is a great pleasure to see you again."

The German magnate looked at his companion.

"Philippe, my friend is Mr. Sebastian Miller, the English millionaire. I have told him of the excellences of your restaurant. I trust you will not fail us to-night."

The *maitre d'hôtel* bowed once again.

"We will do our best, Herr Baron."

The important ceremony of ordering being concluded, Speidler turned to the Englishman.

"My friend," he said in a pleasant tone, "this is a meal of celebration—is it not? To-morrow we conclude our negotiations. You have driven a hard bargain with me, Miller, and I, Otto Speidler, pride myself on not being an easy man to convince—but

I am completely satisfied with the way things have gone. Unless ill-luck comes, we shall soon be masters of the better part of Europe."

Miller nodded in an abstracted way. His thoughts seemed to be elsewhere.

"If you will excuse me a moment," he said.

Picking up the evening paper he had bought outside the restaurant, he scanned the front page.

Meanwhile, Speidler lit a cigarette and composed himself to wait in patience. This Englishman, with whom he had been in daily touch for the past three weeks, and who had crossed to Germany especially to see him, was a peculiar person: he never seemed content unless perusing newspapers. But, peculiar as he had proved himself to be in this respect, Speidler was not prepared for the astonishing thing which immediately followed.

Something which Miller had read in the evening journal had evidently upset him considerably.

"I am very sorry, Baron, but I must leave for England immediately," he announced.

Speidler stared at him. Had the man gone mad? To-morrow they were to sign the agreement in which fifty millions of money were at stake. And Miller talked of leaving immediately. It was incredible!

"You leave for England now?" he ejaculated. "Have you had bad news?" For the Englishman's face was white and strained; he looked as though he had received a terrible shock.

"Yes, I must go to-night. Nothing else matters. Send me a copy of the agreement and I will sign it in London. Nothing shall interfere with our plans—I promise you that. But this is personal—urgent—and it will not wait. Please excuse me."

Before Speidler could make any further attempt to

restrain him, Miller had signalled for a waiter to bring his hat and coat. A minute later, to the amazement of Philippe, who had been telling distinguished clients of the honour his restaurant had received that night, the Englishman had hurriedly left the dining-room.

It was not until he was in a taxicab speeding towards the station that Miller dared to read again the advertisement which had given him such a staggering shock.

This advertisement had been inserted in the Personal column—what used to be called in England the "Agony" column—and his own private cabling code had been used. He had been able to decipher the jumble of words immediately.

Translated, they had read :

"To Sebastian Miller, travelling somewhere in Germany. I have your daughter. Come and fetch her. Zweig."

"Oh, God!" groaned the financier.

CHAPTER XLI

A GLIMPSE OF HELL

JIMMY choked back a groan. His agony was almost beyond endurance. But he would not give this swine any satisfaction.

Scanlon, smiling maliciously, sat on the side of the bed and blew a cloud of cigarette smoke straight into his prisoner's eyes.

"Zweig has given me permission to deal with you, Hanray," the man said. "Naturally, I would have preferred the girl job, but I cannot forget that business

in Oxford Street. I promised myself I'd get you for it, and now I'm going to.

"Before I pack you off, however, I thought you would be interested to know what is going to happen in this house to-night. I will tell you: Zweig sent a message to Miller, who is now back in London, to the effect that if he did not turn up here by ten o'clock, he would kill his girl. A car is being sent to fetch Miller from somewhere in the suburbs. Miller may think that he will be able to bluff Zweig into giving him back the girl, but all that Zweig wants is to get them both here. Zweig himself is sailing from Southampton to-morrow in the *Berengaria*. He will have finished what he wants to do by then. For both Miller and the girl will be dead. As for yourself, haven't I told you that Zweig has left the job to me?"

Except for the fact that the speaker was not wearing a mask, Jimmy realised that this scene was an actual materialisation of the dream he had had on the first night he spent in Sebastian Miller's Park Lane mansion. Somehow or other, he had always believed that this materialisation would take place, but he had hoped that he would be in a better position to defend himself.

His position now was absolutely hopeless. Tied down to a truckle-bed, with bonds that he could not budge, he was unable to move hand or foot. He was completely at Scanlon's mercy. He had struggled until his arms had been rubbed raw, but the ropes had not given an inch.

"How long would you like to live, Hanray?" now asked Scanlon. "I don't mind a few minutes either way. You can have five, or ten, or even a quarter of an hour! But you mustn't bank on any extension beyond that."

He leaned forward and blew more cigarette smoke into the helpless man's eyes.

"Perhaps at the end of that quarter of an hour you will be glad to die.

"And it won't be an easy death," he continued ; "I can promise you that. You have given Zweig too much trouble to be disposed of quickly."

Just at the moment that Jimmy imagined he must go mad, a noise from outside attracted Scanlon's attention.

"That's the car bringing Miller," he announced. "I'll just go down and see the fun, and then pop up again. I'll be back in a few minutes. I hope you won't be too lonely."

With a jeering laugh he got up and walked out of the room.

CHAPTER XLII

METAMORPHOSIS

THE quiet suburban street was practically deserted except for the man waiting on the corner beneath the electric standard.

This man was restless. He displayed his anxiety in many ways, but chiefly by lighting cigarette after cigarette, and then throwing it away almost immediately.

Sebastian Miller had many reasons for being anxious. The life of his daughter hinged on what would happen that night. At the thought of Delia being in the power of Zweig a temporary madness seized him, so that it was difficult to maintain any kind of control.

At last !

A car with closed windows came swiftly along the

street and stopped at the corner. Instantly two men got out and ranged themselves one on either side of Miller. After a quick look, the one who appeared to be the leader passed his hands rapidly over the outside of the multimillionaire's clothes, as though feeling for a weapon, and then said curtly: "O.K. Inside, please."

Miller, who had received minute instructions concerning his behaviour that night, obeyed the order without quibble or protest. Walking towards the car, he stepped through the door which was being held open, and sat down inside. A familiar enough scene, this, in Chicago, where members of rival liquor gangs are "taken for a ride," but in ultra-respectable Balham . . .!

The car sped on. The miles were eaten up. Soon the metropolis had been left behind, and the party were scorching through the quiet country-side.

After another half an hour's travelling, the car stopped. There was a whispered talk between the men; and then the captive, over whose eyes a large silk handkerchief had been placed, was hustled out of the car and marched up to the side door of a large, gloomy-looking house. As he walked, the prisoner could hear from the near distance the sound of gently flowing water.

The foremost guard tapped three times on the door. This, evidently, was a prearranged signal, for two long raps were followed by a short, peremptory knock.

The door swung open.

"Inside," came the curt command.

With a guard on either side of him and another one bringing up the rear, the millionaire was taken through a back-yard and into a long corridor, from which doors opened out on either side.

Outside the end door on the left, the first warder stopped, knocked, and was told to enter.

In spite of the iron resolution which the millionaire had summoned up, a feeling of acute apprehension passed through him as he recognised the voice of the unseen person.

"Inside," ordered his guards again—and five seconds later he was looking into the face of his enemy.

Kurt Zweig had changed little since the last time they had met, except that his hair had become a trifle more grey. But there was the same evil glint in the man's eyes, there was the same diabolical smile lurking round the cruel mouth.

His enemy evidently considered himself master of the situation. This was proved by his opening words.

"I said I would get you sooner or later, Miller," he taunted. "I didn't imagine, however, that you would have the nerve to return to England—but here you are, and I need scarcely say how glad I am to see you!"

The man who was being mocked maintained a surprisingly cool demeanour.

"No more glad than I am to see you, Zweig. We both have accounts to settle—and I intend to settle mine to-night."

Zweig's caricature of a face twisted itself into devilish mirth.

"That's a bluff, Miller! And soon you'll see how I'll call it. Why, you damned fool, you haven't a chance in a million of ever getting away from here. I have made all my plans. When I am through, this house and all it contains will be just a sackful of ashes. Down in the cellar there is a pretty good-sized bomb which, before much longer, is going to blow you and everything in this house to hell!"

The words were fearsome enough, but Miller's face showed no perceptible change.

"Bluff as much as you like, Zweig—but you might at least offer me a chair," he said coolly.

Zweig, somewhat taken aback, made a sign to a man standing near the door, and a chair was pushed forward. Miller sat down with an audible sigh of satisfaction.

"That's better," he said; "now you can talk as much as you like. You always were a good talker, Zweig."

The other ripped out a tremendous oath.

"There will be more than talk to-night," he replied. "Scanlon," turning to the man by the door, "just tell Miss Miller her father has called and would like to see her."

It was then that Miller had to call upon all his mental resources. There was so much evil satisfaction in Zweig's tone that to remain seated seemed an impossibility. Indeed, he half rose from his chair; and then, knowing that any action on his part would merely precipitate the tragedy which his enemy had threatened, he sank back with a groan.

Zweig continued to talk.

"Your daughter has been my guest now for a couple of days, Miller. I thought you might be interested to hear this news. I had intended to leave her alone, but your stay in Germany—by the way, how did the negotiations with Speidler go?—was so protracted that I had to force matters somewhat. I can't stay in this damned England of yours any longer; affairs are calling me back to the States. But, of course, I could not think of returning to America until I had seen to you. You are getting much too important a person to be allowed liberty."

Miller remained silent, because once he opened his

mouth he must have followed up speech by physical action. And this, as he had realised before, would not only have been futile, but senseless at the present juncture.

And he had this consolation: Delia, thank God, was still alive. Soon he would see her. . . .

The door opened, and the man Scanlon re-entered. This was the heavily-built thug whom Hanray had knocked down outside Selfridge's in Oxford Street a few weeks back. . . . Hanray; he would have to recompense Hanray; the chap had been through a lot, was suffering even now, perhaps.

Following the man came a woman. One look at Miller, and she burst into hysterical laughter. Then, turning quickly, Adele Miller turned back and left the room.

There was a wait of another few seconds and she reappeared, leading a girl by the arm.

Miller jumped up.

"Delia!" he cried. He started to rush forward, but Scanlon and another man who had kept close to him caught hold of both his arms. He would have struggled had not his daughter started to walk towards him.

"Daddy!" she said, "have you come to take me away from this dreadful place?"

He did not answer her for a moment. Uneasiness racked him. Those devils had done something to her. Delia, although speaking rationally, appeared to be in some kind of trance—it was as though she had been given a drug.

"Yes, dear, I have come to take you away—we shall be going in a very few minutes now. Don't worry."

Once again the woman who had been so faithless to

him burst into hideous mirth, and this time she was joined by Zweig.

"Of course your father has come to take you away, my dear," he mocked, turning to the girl; "you will leave so quickly that you won't realise you have gone!"

Miller saw Delia shudder.

"You are a devil!" she cried; and the voice was not that of a grown woman, but of a child stricken with terror.

This was unsupportable. His fears that Delia had been ill-treated in some outrageous fashion returned with greater force.

Wrenching one arm free, he struck out at the nearest man and sent him staggering away.

A scene of pandemonium ensued.

First came the roar of Zweig's voice ordering the men to keep Miller quiet, and this was followed by a man rushing into the room, crying out at the top of his voice: "Hanray's escaped! He's not in the house!"

The first comment came from Delia.

It was as though the words had banished the fog about her brain. She seemed to become normal again.

"Jimmy!" she said, clasping her hands.

Then, as though in answer to an unspoken prayer, the man who loved her burst into the room.

Hanray was a strange, dynamic figure; he took one swift look round the room, a look which embraced both Delia and her father, and then turned berserker.

"You damned swine!" he screamed at the top of his voice, and, selecting Scanlon as his first adversary, he flung himself on the man.

Freshly escaped from a physical and mental hell, Jimmy quickly gained a grasp on the man's throat.

At his first desperate lunge, the memory of the torture he had received at this fiend's hands was like a hot iron burning in his brain.

He was going to kill Scanlon. He was going to kill him and lay the body at Zweig's feet. After that, he would deal with Zweig himself. This was England: Scanlon and Zweig could not be tolerated in England. They were only fit to live in cities like Chicago, where murder, and lust, and anarchy held sway. Here, it was necessary that they should be exterminated. He was not going to wait for the police. What in the name of thunder was the use in waiting for the police, anyway? He would do the job himself.

It was not difficult. Already this first killing was half-way through. Scanlon's breath was coming in stertorous gasps. The man's eyes held a sickening fear. He knew he was going to die.

Jimmy's fingers sought a deeper, firmer grip—and held on.

"You're—going—to—die, scum," he said slowly, a pause between each word; "within the next minute, too! This kind of death is too good for you, but——"

It was then that the silence which had been maintained ever since his dramatic entrance was shattered.

A curse from Zweig preceded two men flinging themselves on Hanray from the back. Whilst one grappled for his legs, the other got hold of his throat.

This counter-attack, however, was the means of releasing Sebastian Miller, who, with an energy that was surprising in a man of his age, attempted to join in the battle.

He had barely taken a step forward, however, when a command from Zweig forced him to halt.

"Stay where you are, Miller, or your daughter will suffer," were the words which held him transfixed.

He looked across the room. The sight was terrifying. He himself was being menaced by a revolver held in Zweig's right hand, whilst Delia was threatened, in similar fashion, by the woman he had once called "wife."

Meanwhile, Hanray was slowly, but surely, being overpowered. Helped by that maddening rage, he had been putting up a superhuman fight, but now, like a wounded lion, he was gradually being overcome.

Zweig pulled a whistle from his waistcoat pocket, put it to his lips, and blew shrilly.

"I am going to clean up this job quickly," he said to Miller; "now you are all three here, there is no need to waste any further time. The men I am sending for now have the arrangements in hand. They need only my final instructions."

He had scarcely finished speaking, when the door opened and three men stepped into the room. At their entrance, Zweig lowered his revolver.

It was a fatal lapse.

"Drop that gun," ordered a voice—a voice which smote upon Hanray's rapidly-failing consciousness, and made him shout.

"*Pudan!*" he cried, and then again: "*Pudan, by God!*"

Having said so much, he slipped back on the floor, but the oblivion into which he passed was pleasant and to be tolerated.

As for Zweig, he was like a man suddenly turned mad. Instead of the satellite he had expected, he saw confronting him that coolly-smiling Scotland Yard detective-inspector, whose blue eyes gave him back an icy, ironical stare.

" Scarcely expected me, Zweig, perhaps ? " remarked Pudan ; " but I trust I am welcome, all the same. You see, what happened was this : Your late pal, Dorman, thinking it wise to turn rat, came to us with a pretty little story. We wanted Dorman—not nearly as badly as we wanted you, Zweig—but we wanted him, all the same. Dorman knew this, and thought he would get out while the getting out was good——"

" Dorman ! He hasn't squealed ! "

Another ironical stare from those light-blue eyes greeted the disclaimer.

" Your psychology has been proved all wrong, Zweig. Dorman is a true squealer type. He stuck to you as long as he thought it profitable, but, knowing that your time was drawing near, he left the boat. It was Dorman who told me of the nice little scheme you had hatched for bringing Mr. Miller here. All we had to do was to substitute ourselves for your men driving the car, and—here we are ! Ready, boys ? "

" O.K. here, sir," came the answer.

" Then take them away."

A procession formed and marched to the door. First came Zweig, escorted by Detective-Inspector Pudan ; then followed Scanlon, looking very much the worse for wear ; and after him, two other men.

As for Adele Miller, she was lying collapsed on the floor.

At the threshold of the door, Pudan spoke once again to the chief prisoner.

" You have forgotten your manners, Zweig," he remarked ; " otherwise, surely you would have extended the hand of friendship to Mr. Hirtzmann here. You will be interested to know, I feel sure, that Mr. Hirtzmann, who is not too proud to call himself a gangster, has travelled all the way from Chicago

to have a little talk with you. Apparently, you have done him one or two rather nasty tricks in the past, and he badly wanted to see you about these matters. Quite by chance, I made his acquaintance, and was successful in convincing him that we could do business much better in collaboration. That, of course, has saved him the painful necessity of killing you with the revolver he brought with him. Well, Hirtzmann, having once seen you safely in jail, will now be able to return to his charming city with an easy conscience. He goes with my blessing."

CHAPTER XLIII

MILLER EXPLAINS

"WELL, it panned out all right," said Pudan, "but tell me, Hanray, how did they manage to get hold of you?"

Jimmy drew luxuriantly at his pipe.

"They forged a note, supposed to have been sent by you from the Yard. That seemed authentic enough, and I fell for it. What I didn't count on, however, was getting into a specially-prepared taxi. They pumped chloroform into this, and I simply went flooie."

Delia gave a cry

"Jimmy! If they had killed you!"

Ignoring the two men, she took his hand and raised it to her lips.

Hanray flushed crimson.

"Miss Miller——!" he said confusedly.

"My dear," she replied, "there is no longer any need for you to call me 'Miss Miller.' I am 'Delia' to you, as you are 'Jimmy' to me."

Whilst Hanray was trying to focus his thoughts, Pudan made an interruption.

"Excuse me breaking in upon the idyllic scene," the detective-inspector remarked with a smile, "but my thirst for knowledge refuses to go unsatisfied. What happened after the chloroform stunt?"

"Well, I was taken to some place, and shoved in front of pal Zweig. He was not particularly matey, and I was escorted to some dismal garret, where a few of his thugs bound me to the worst bed I have ever seen. I imagined I should never be able to get free, and this feeling was not lessened when Scanlon came up and told me of the fate Zweig had so kindly prepared. After Scanlon had blown sufficient cigarette smoke into my eyes to send me almost mad, he stated that I had just fifteen minutes left to live. But I managed to get free. The ropes gave unexpectedly—as the result of my previous efforts in that direction, I suppose—and Scanlon, leaving the door open when he went down to 'see the fun,' as he put it, enabled me to be in at the death."

The speaker felt his hand squeezed again, and turned to the girl.

"I should not have told you this—I'm sorry."

Sebastian Miller now took up the talk.

"As Pudan says, everything has worked out all right. So you need not apologise, Hanray. It is I who should do the apologising, and I intend to do it very shortly. But let us get one thing settled first. I am going to ask you a straight question, Hanray. Do you love my daughter?"

Jimmy hesitated for just so long as to endeavour to keep his voice steady.

"I have loved her from the first moment I saw her, sir. But——"

L. K. W.

"There need be no 'buts' in this case, my boy," said the multi-millionaire kindly. "I had always promised myself that when my girl found a man to love, unless there was some very radical reason against it, I would allow her to marry him. In your case, I owe you much more than I shall ever be able to repay."

Jimmy sprang up, and took the outstretched hand.

"How can I hope to thank you, sir?"

"We will take that for granted, my boy—let Delia repay you. She seems anxious to do so."

Whilst the detective-inspector from Scotland Yard beamed, and Delia Miller hid her flushed face on her lover's shoulder, the millionaire continued to talk.

"As I said just now," he remarked, "there are certain matters that require explanation from me. In the first place"—turning to Pudan—"no doubt you wondered why, when I knew my safety, and the safety of my girl, to be threatened by Kurt Zweig, I did not call in the assistance of the police? Well, the truth was, that I didn't want my affairs to be inquired into too closely by you people. A few years back, a business rival chose my office as a fitting place in which to commit suicide."

"I remember the circumstances," broke in the detective-inspector.

"The devil you do!" came the retort; "you can understand, then, why I preferred to stick to my own methods. I didn't want that sordid scandal raked up again for the sake of Delia. At the time, there were some nasty rumours going about that I had killed the man."

"Had those been substantiated, Mr. Miller," said Pudan, "the authorities would have been obliged to have taken action. A word to me, and I would have eased your mind on that point."

"Well," summed up the millionaire, "let's forget it. I acted foolishly, no doubt—but the man who doesn't act foolishly at some time or other in his life has yet to be born.

"That matter is of comparative insignificance, however, compared to my intention towards Zweig. Apart from completing the biggest financial deal of my career, I went to Germany with the express purpose of endeavouring to get Zweig to follow me.

"The cause of enmity between that man and myself was the rivalry between us for the hand of my first wife. This animosity increased with the years. I would have been willing, on my part, to forget, but he fostered his venomous hate until it became the guiding principle of his life. I knew there would be no happiness, either for Delia or myself, so long as he lived.

"That made me desperate—almost a madman. One of us, it seemed to me, had to die. Uttered in cold blood, it may seem a preposterous statement. But, believe me, Pudan, I saw no other way out. In defence of my daughter, I was even prepared to kill the man. But I wanted the final scene to be played out in another country but England. From Germany I sent Zweig a challenge, saying I would meet him in a revolver duel, but he would not risk that. With all his bluff, I think he was really a coward at heart.

"All the time I was abroad, the two of us were playing a hide-and-seek game. I was laying false trails for his spies—for instance, when he imagined I was at the Adlon, Berlin, I was actually at Munich."

"Where is Dorman now?" asked Hanray, turning to the detective-inspector.

"He has sought a pleasant resting-place in Italy—

he was really an Italian, you know," was the reply; "in return for his information we had to let him go scot-free. Certain phases of police work are not too pleasant, but we have to countenance them in cases of necessity."

CHAPTER XLIV PARADISE AND . . .

MILLER had made a sign, and Pudan had silently acknowledged it; the two men left the room together.

"The peace," said Delia; "the blessed peace! I can scarcely realise it is all over—all the horror and misery and worry!"

"There will be nothing but happiness for you now," the Cavalier of Chance told her.

"For you, as well as me," she said.

His voice was unsteady.

"I have no right," he replied; "no possible right. You are the daughter of a multi-millionaire. I am a nonentity—a nobody."

Delia, being a woman, had the last word.

"You are the finest man in the world," she said; "and I love you. Isn't that sufficient?"

Jimmy's action the next moment showed that it was.

At that moment a woman got out of a taxi-cab, and stepped on to the pavement, looking at the Park Lane mansion which had been her home.

For some reason she could not understand, the police had not laid a charge against her. Perhaps they did not consider her important enough now that Zweig and the rest were in custody. She had

come that night to take a last look at the home which she had fooled away. The next morning she was leaving Southampton for America.

London was no longer possible for her—she feared a greater danger than the police. Julian Cordier had written saying he would return for her, and she knew he would keep his word.

As she turned to re-enter the taxi, a man stepped out of the shadows.

"Hallo, Adele," said that suave but venomous voice; "I thought I might find you here . . ."

THE END

