

*Copyright, 1929, by Sydney Horler*  
*All rights reserved*

*First published*        -        -    1930  
*Fifth Edition*        -        -    1934

MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN FOR HODDER AND STOUGHTON, LTD.,  
BY MILLING AND BOWS LTD., GUILDFORD AND ISHER

TO  
E. N. SANDERS  
MY FRIEND

E 07980

## Mystery Romances by **SYDNEY HORLER**

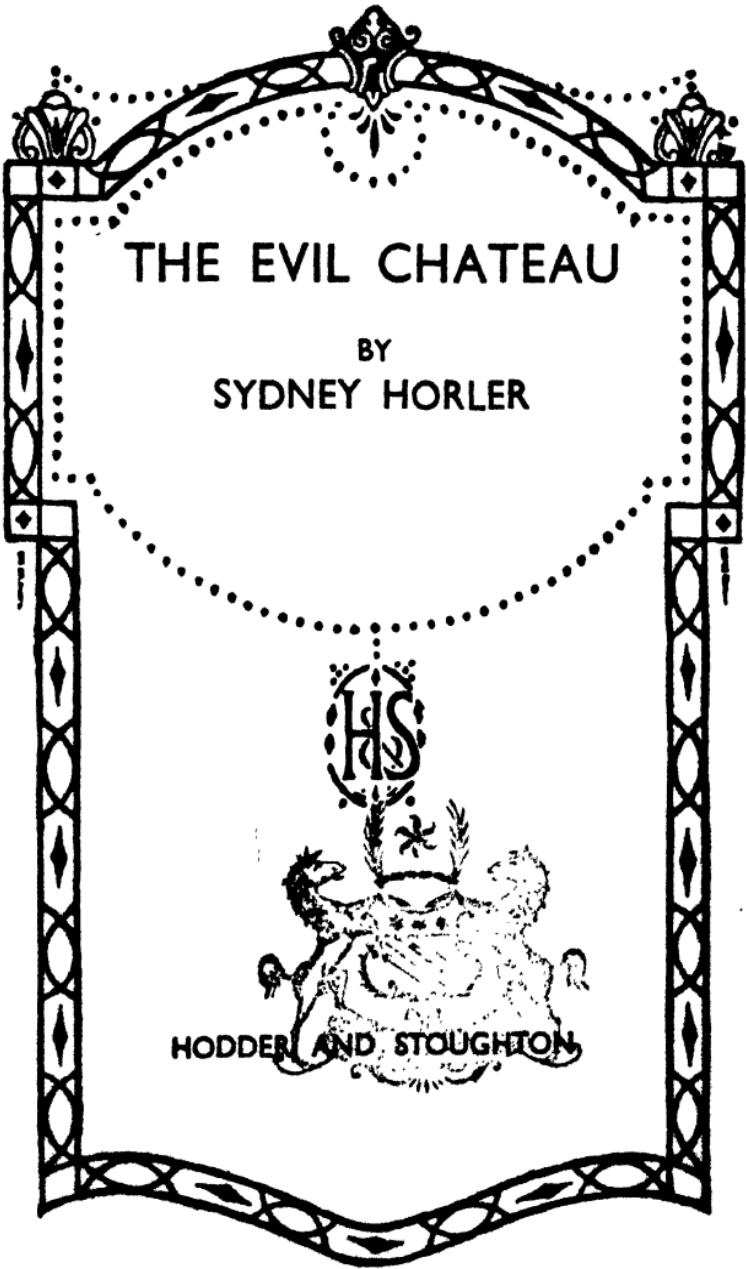
*Huntress of Death* (4th edition)  
*Adventure Calling*  
*Princess After Dark* (3rd edition)  
*Vivanti Returns* (4th edition)  
*Horror's Head* (3rd edition)  
*The Spy* (4th edition)  
*Checkmate* (6th edition)  
*Danger's Bright Eyes* (6th edition)  
*Cavalier of Chance* (5th edition)  
*The Evil Chateau* (5th edition)  
*The Screaming Skull* (4th edition)  
*Lady of the Night* (5th edition)  
*The Secret Service Man* (7th edition)  
*Mystery of No. 1* (13th edition)  
*False-Face* (9th edition)  
*The House of Secrets* (9th edition)  
*Vivanti* (9th edition)  
*The Black Heart* (8th edition)  
*In the Dark* (7th edition)  
*Miss Mystery* (8th edition)  
*The Curse of Doone* (9th edition)  
*Chipsstead of the Lone Hand* (7th edition)  
*Heart Cut Diamond* (6th edition)  
*The Worst Man in the World* (7th edition)  
*Mystery Mission* (3rd edition)  
*Prince of Plunder*

### FOOTBALL NOVELS :

*Love, the Sportsman* (2nd edition)  
*A Legend of the League* (2nd edition)



**HODDER & STOUGHTON Ltd**  
WARWICK SQUARE  
LONDON :: E.C.4



THE EVIL CHATEAU

BY  
SYDNEY HORLER



HODDER AND STOUGHTON



## *CONTENTS*

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE POISONED PARADISE - -	9
II. DRAMA IN THE DARK - -	21
III. FORTUNATUS' PURSE - -	34
IV. THE MYSTERY ENVELOPE - -	42
V. BILL MATCHAM ARRIVES - -	54
VI. FELICITY—MEANING ADVENTURE - -	64
VII. LE COMTE DE LA SIAGNE - -	74
VIII. FELICITY ACTS - -	85
IX. THE COCKTAIL BAR - -	92
X. THE GIRL OF SECRETS - -	103
XI. THE EVIL SPINNERS - -	115
XII. BILL PUTS SOME QUESTIONS - -	126
XIII. DEATH SENDS A MESSAGE - -	137
XIV. A JOURNEY IS STARTED - -	154
XV. THE REVOLVER SHOT - -	173
XVI. THE WATCHER - -	185
XVII. KRANG - -	198
XVIII. INTO THE UNKNOWN - -	209
XIX. THE JACKALS - -	218
XX. THE INN IN THE FOREST - -	221
XXI. DELILAH - -	233
XXII. THE MONSTROUS MUMMER - -	238
XXIII. BILL GOES TO BED - -	244

CHAPTER	PAGE
XXIV. SZULC MAKES AN OFFER - - -	252
XXV. THE COUNT GIVES WELCOME - - -	259
XXVI. THE NIGHT THING - - -	268
XXVII. THE COMTESSE CACKLES - - -	273
XXVIII. THE SENTENCE - - -	281
XXIX. "THE LITTLE LOVER" - - -	291
XXX. THE MAN WITH THE BEARD - - -	297
XXXI. THE KILLER - - -	300
XXXII. XANDRA HELPS - - -	304
XXXIII. JOY IN THE MORNING - - -	313

LIFE. . . .

Lounging in the seat, Stephen Heritage surveyed the glittering pageant with hot, scorning eyes.

The supreme mockery of it ! Just behind him was the Paris Hotel, one of the most gilded *caravanserais* on the whole of the glittering Riviera. By turning his head he could see the wealth of the pleasure-seeking universe pouring in through the elaborate swing doors. Theatrical managers, who, by putting on some worthless trash to catch the fancy of the mediocre-minded mob, had found themselves temporarily in funds, American millionaires, Bengal merchants, cheap-clothing magnates from the North of England, cross-breeds whose activities would not bear too strict an examination—all these rubbing shoulders with swell mobsmen and the most daring, and therefore famous, courtesans known to this civilised age. Money, money, money ! The greater part of it vulgar, but still money. All these people represented it ; they all possessed it ; the women carried on their bodies.

One of the notorious Marnay sisters, who was staying at the Paris, he had read in *La Saison*

*de Cannes* the day before, could be seen wearing a diamond ring worth £95,000, which she had purchased at one of the jewellers' establishments along the Croisette out of her baccarat winnings at the Casino.

And he had left exactly one hundred francs. . . .

Of course, it was his own fault. Yes, entirely his own fault. Another time he might have vigorously disputed this statement, but now, with the end so close in sight, he accepted it. He ought not to have come to the cursed place.

One hundred francs. Not quite seventeen shillings. Just enough for one decent meal, but useless for anything else. Quite useless, for instance, to take into the Casino, where he had lost the one hundred pounds which was to have been turned into the little fortune. . . .

The air seemed tainted, but he remained where he was. The seat, he remembered sardonically, was a public one—one of the few amenities the municipality of Cannes, surely one of the slackest in the world, provided without a charge. Staying there would cost him nothing. He had time to spare: he need not go back to the hotel for at least another hour. And he was tired. God! how tired he was. . . .

It was the sunset hour at Cannes, and, although Heritage remained indifferent to it, Nature was performing her nightly miracle. Over

the Esterels the day was dying in unimaginable glory : purples and blues merged themselves into a background of scarlet splendour, with a flaming heart of deepest gold. The sky elsewhere had become a deep amethyst, matching the Mediterranean lapping lazily at the rocks beneath the dust-strewn, paper-littered Croisette. Even this, in spite of being called by the subsidised local Press one of the finest promenades in the world, looked almost beautiful in the fading light.

Away to the right, past the luxury shops in which all the famous Paris dressmakers displayed their enticing wares, was that great yellow-coloured mass around which the entire life of this pleasure town centred. From where he sat Heritage could see the great bow window of the Baccarat Room—that luxurious chamber of chance in which Hope had leaped to life so many times for him during the past week, only finally to die. Already lights were appearing behind the wonderful curtains which shielded the proceedings from the common gaze.

The whole town now commenced to glow—along the Croisette, in the shops and hotels, while back behind among the hills it seemed as though a fairy lamplighter had turned on with one touch of his long pole a whole realm of magic. A rare and wondrous beauty commenced to shine like a pageant out of some enchanting story-book. One had stepped back, it seemed, to the age of

romance. That was how it had appeared a week before to the man of twenty-eight humped in the corner of the public seat. He recalled the fact with a bitterness which exceeded any other memory. Cannes had been a rose-garden to him a bare seven days before ; now it was a poisoned Paradise.

Apart from his own misfortune, he had seen sufficient to hate the place. He knew it as a town accursed. Intrigue, licence, vice, crime—they all flourished behind the shuttered windows of the great villas and the drawn curtains of the splendid hotels. Hidden by the beauty, lurked evil.

He should have left. Cannes was not for him. It did not want his type or class.

But now the money to take him away had gone. He would have to stay. And, staying, he would be forced to become either a crook—a phase of existence with which he had had no previous experience—or . . . Looking at the great blackness before him, he supposed it would not take long. . . . The average person would hold him in contempt, no doubt, for even allowing that thought to enter his mind, but when a fellow was utterly sick, utterly fed up, utterly without hope. . . . And he could do what he liked with himself, he supposed ?

His head had drooped, but now some intuitive warning, some prompting of the subconscious, caused him to look up.

A yard away from him a girl was walking along the Croisette in the direction of the town. Her face was half turned, and, the light from a standard falling upon it, he recognised her instantly.

It seemed as though she was likely to smile, but he turned deliberately away. He didn't want her pity—and pity it would be. If she spoke it would be to console him upon his losses. Besides, he was broke ; what association could a penniless failure have with a girl who gambled nightly—and generally with success—at the Cannes Baccarat Club ?

She passed on. Although he knew himself to be a fool, Heritage turned in the seat. What a vital, radiant creature she was ! How well she walked—simply, as a woman should walk, with a natural grace, not with the professional provocation of a *cocotte* or a *couturière's* model.

Simply dressed, too ; just a plain, grey tailor-made with a fur stole to match. Nothing elaborate, nothing ostentatious ; nothing to call attention. It was the same in the evening : this girl who had sat opposite to him many times at the five-louis table in the Baccarat Room had invariably been the simplest dressed of all the women—the simplest, and yet, to him, the most beautiful.

Not that he had allowed himself to dwell on that ; women did not enter into his life. Women

—certainly those at the Casino—were merely the pampered pets of cosmopolitan wealthy idlers—mistresses mainly, no doubt. Even if he had presumed, they would have scorned him. Why, one ring from their finger would have kept him for a year.

The attitude of the girl who had just passed had been puzzling. In spite of her environment and occupation—after all, quite decent women gambled—she seemed entirely removed from the typical hectic-minded, extravagantly dressed, over-jewelled habitué of the Baccarat Room. He had often thought of her as a rose flowering in an orchid-house. She must have money, of course ; perhaps she was so rich that she could afford to be indifferent to whatever wealth might buy. That thought had vaguely troubled him, but he had been at a complete loss to gauge the reason.

Yet, in spite of everything, the girl had seemed willing to be friendly. He was convinced that had he spoken she would not have snubbed him. This impression was not induced through any conceit ; Heaven knew, he had little reason to think well of himself.

It was mainly due to this fact that he had made no advances, although a strain of old-fashioned reserve had also been an influence. The unconventional became the conventional at the tables, and in that atmosphere of Bohemianism all ranks were grouped in a common class. Persons who

would not have exchanged even a glance outside became almost familiar when they surrendered themselves to the spell of the cards.

He felt it could not have been merely chance that had caused the girl to sit at the same table as himself night after night. Fate must have had a hand in it. But, in any case, the coincidence could have no significance : the girl, even if he wished to know her, was as far above him as the stars. Even when life had been at its best, he could never have entered her world.

Yet, now that he knew he would never step into the Cannes Baccarat Room again, he found himself thinking of the girl who had just passed as the one fragrant memory of those nerve-tossed, excitement-crazed nights.

Had he been ungracious? Perhaps he had. But it were better so. He was no use to himself, let alone to a girl of charm and obvious wealth.

Suddenly he felt cold. The icy, treacherous mistral from the Maritime Alps was blowing shrewdly now that the sun was gone. He was without an overcoat ; it would be a fitting, final irony if pneumonia, the plague of the Riviera season, finished him before he could finish himself.

He toyed with the suggestion of suicide as even a thoroughly desperate man will dally with the most awful of deeds as he turned up the Rue Saint-Honore on the way back to his hotel. After

all, no one would worry ; he did not possess a single living relative, and the few friends he had left behind in London would soon forget. A man of deeply impressionable nature, he had not found it easy to make many friends. In years past he had tried, but the disappointments had been so many that, finally, he had given up the attempt in disgust. There was only Bill Matcham who really counted. When he read the few lines about the body of an Englishman named Heritage being washed upon the Mediterranean rocks, old Bill would grieve, no doubt, but that couldn't be helped. And, at least, Matcham would understand.

Yet the thought of dying seemed absurd in such a setting. Long bonnetted luxury cars glided by noiselessly ; the shops he passed were filled with artistic delights over the fashioning of which the world's greatest craftsmen had competed ; there was no escaping the evidences of wealth so prodigally displayed.

Into the noise-racked street opposite the railway station, Heritage walked, and, although the din was harrowing to anyone with sensitive nerves, the contrast this workaday thoroughfare with its humble cafés and long line of taxi-drivers waiting for a job made to the Rue Saint-Honore, brought some solace. The sight of these men reminded him that, now the worst had come, he could perhaps earn a living as a chauffeur.

Not here. Not in this place which had become accursed for him. He must leave Cannes at once ; so long as he remained he felt he would stay the wastrel he had become. Such was the pernicious atmosphere.

As he crossed the bridge over the railway, a train screeched in from the Italian frontier. It was a P.L.M. express bound for Calais. All through the night it would roar its way through the monotonously flat stretches of France, and the next day its passengers would see the white horses in the Channel. To watch the chalk cliffs of Dover growing nearer and nearer, to see a matter-of-fact English policeman again, to savour the unmistakable smell which belongs only to the dreaming fields of the English countryside. . . . As he leaned over the rail, looking down at the train which could have carried him back to these things, Heritage felt his heart thump in his breast.

He threw back his shoulders as he turned away. Die like a craven when, thirty hours away was England ! The thought of his native land, of his own kind, had restored his sense of manhood.

But how to get home ? There were his own kind, at least his own race, in the Chester, a hotel whose *clientele* was British to the core, but as he walked up the gravelled path he knew he could not mention the very serious plight he was in to any of them. Some might offer to help ; others, he was convinced, would put on the freezing ex-

pression suitable to such a questionable person who confessed he had lost so much money at the Casino that he hadn't sufficient to meet that week's hotel bill.

Yet that bill, which would amount to perhaps nine hundred francs, *had* to be met. Otherwise——? He wondered how Riviera hotel-proprietors behaved to guests who were unable to pay. He must get some information on the point. At Monte Carlo, he believed, the Casino authorities had once been in the habit of paying the return railway fare of the fleeced. Did the same benevolent practice prevail at Cannes? He wished now that he had sounded that pouch-eyed bar-tender at the Sporting Club on the subject. The man professed to know so much. The Monte Carlo people stipulated, he understood, that the recipient of their largesse should go and never return; such a one was placed for all time on their black-list. Well, that was all right; his own only wish was to get away. And once he stepped into the train he would take care he would never be such a fool again. £100—what couldn't he have done with it if he had only had sense!

The smiling, pleasant-featured hall-porter, seeing Heritage mounting the steps, opened the door for him to pass through. It was the one feature of Cannes which Heritage felt he would always recall with pleasure—this unfailing courtesy of the staff

at the Hotel Chester. From the *concierge* down to the *valet de chambre*, the service rendered to him during his few days' stay had been faultless. And everything had been done with a happy smile.

M. Caron, the hotel manager, greeted Heritage with his usual welcoming smile. Here was an hotel-keeper who was also a gentleman. The good will and *bonhomie* he displayed, Stephen had felt from the beginning, sprang from his heart and not from his ledgers.

"You have found the enjoyment this afternoon, M'sieur Heritage?" he asked. His English was faultless in accent, and his rather quaint phraseology made his speech delightful.

Heritage forced himself to smile. M. Caron believed in Cannes, as he believed in his excellently run hotel. He knew that evils existed, and he did not shut his eyes to them, but he maintained that the sun and the beauty of Nature should keep people sufficiently interested. "And there are always those who will play with the fire."

"I have been watching the Peep Show," he replied.

The eyebrows of the manager ascended.

"The Peep Show?" he repeated. The expression evidently was not familiar to him.

"Watching the people go into the Paris was as good as being at a theatre."

"Ah! The Paris." This admirable Swiss,

whose adopted home was Cannes, humped his shoulders and gesticulated with his hands. "The rich take their folly to the Paris," he commented, "but money does not always mean happiness, M'sieur—and certainly not at the Paris. A lady came here this afternoon. She has been staying at the Paris. It cost her about twenty-five of your English pounds a week—and when she complained that her morning tea was cold, they pretended not to hear. One can be happy with little money—oh, so little—if one has only the temperament. Excuse me!" The philosopher hastened away to answer a long-distance telephone call.

As he turned to walk through the lounge on his way to his room, which was on the garden level, Heritage wondered if M. Caron's views would change if he knew that the entire wealth of the guest to whom he had just been delivering this advice consisted of one hundred-franc note and a few pieces of small change?

“ D’YE feel like a bit of bridge, Heritage ? ”

The elderly medical man who played such an astonishingly good game of tennis had crossed from his usual corner to ask the question. The lounge of the Hotel Chester was never so British as during the after-dinner hour. With utter disregard for any newcomers’ convenience, the old-stagers reserved the best easy-chairs by placing books, knitting, or other impedimenta on them prior to entering the adjacent dining-room. That evening, in a malicious mood, Heritage had ruffled the feathers of a particularly objectionable retired Colonel by removing the magazine with which this obnoxious person had staked out a new claim, and appropriating the chair himself. Result : scowls and rumblings under which barrage Stephen had remained outwardly calm.

Even with this diversion he was feeling bored, however—the evenings drag infernally on the Riviera unless you are a millionaire and can afford to spend money every minute of the time—and it was a relief, therefore, to receive the invitation. As in most hotels, the company was composed of : (1) Certain people, the ex-Colonel included, to whom he would have liked very dearly to be extremely rude ; (2) a larger group who interested him not at all ; and (3) a select few with whom he

had struck up a superficial friendship. This short list included Dr. Thoms and his wife. Both were most agreeable people, who played an excellent game of bridge.

"Thanks very much, doctor—I shall be delighted."

"Good! Mrs. Crosfield," indicating an elderly specimen of the travelling Englishwoman, "will make the fourth. But we can't play in this dreadful row—let's go into the reading-room."

Leaving an ebullient clergyman's wife and her group of incessant chatterers in possession, they fixed themselves up in the reading-room next door. With three keen and determined bridge players in association, Stephen had little time for introspection, but when, after a couple of hours' play, the party broke up ("If I don't get to bed early in this place, I'm absolutely done"—Mrs. Crosfield), Heritage recommenced to wonder moodily what he should do with himself for the rest of the evening. The night was still absurdly young—it was only a little after ten—it was useless to go to bed, and——

His brooding was interrupted by a hand being placed on his arm.

"You mustn't mind my saying so, young man, but you look a little under the weather. The ordinary fellow wants to take plenty of exercise here if he is to keep fit. That's why I go up to

tennis every morning. What about coming along to-morrow?"

"It's very good of you, doctor. I——"

He did not know what else to add. He knew very well what he would have liked to say; he would have liked to have drawn this kindly faced, elderly sportsman, who was the best type of Englishman in the hotel—the sort who came to play games and to enjoy the sunshine—into a quiet corner and confided in him. But that would mean a loan, for Thoms would make an instant offer, he felt certain. And to accept that loan with no prospect of being able to repay it was beyond his courage. Even though the opportunity was now thrust at him he could not summon the necessary nerve.

"How are you finding things here? Happy, comfortable—any worries?"

No, hell, he simply couldn't do it! Pulling himself together sufficiently to look the inquirer in the face, he replied: "Oh, everything's top-hole, doctor—of course!"

"That's good," answered Thoms in the tone of a man who means "That's bad."

Then, his wife calling "Harry," the would-be Good Samaritan turned away. It was really none of his business, of course, but he was sure that that very likeable young fellow had something on his mind. He seemed up against things. Gambling, he supposed. That cursed Casino

again. Dr. Harry Thoms went thoughtfully to bed.

The man of whom he had been thinking returned to the lounge. Apart from one party of bridge players, this was deserted; the Chester was an early-to-bed Riviera hotel, except on the nights when small dances were held.

Heritage endeavoured to become interested in the three-weeks-old *Tatler* which he had brought along from the reading-room, but the remarkable plainness of the women photographed in its pages was distressing. He flung the paper aside and lit a cigarette—the last in his case.

The proper thing for him to do was to go to bed. Either that or get a book and read until such time as he should become reasonably tired.

Both appalled him. He knew it would be impossible to sleep, whilst what book could hope to hold his attention? The events of the past week were quite enough for him; he did not require any futile fictional excitement.

Finishing the cigarette, he walked across the room in the direction of the short winding stairway which led down to his room. His mind was made up; he would put on hat and coat and go for a walk. The choice was extremely limited; there was only the Croisette, of which he was heartily sick, but at least it extended for some distance, and the sea air might induce a sufficient drowsiness to insure some sleep when he returned.

That was what he wanted—forgetfulness, if only for a few hours. In the morning he would have to tackle Caron. Possibly the amiable Swiss would be willing to accept his luggage in lieu of payment. Possibly he wouldn't. In that case . . . but what was the good of speculating?

He was tired of seeing people, and so, after putting on hat and coat, he left the hotel by means of the window which opened out on to the grounds. Two minutes later he was in the steep Rue Saint-Nicolas, walking towards the sea-front.

Skirting the railway station, where there was the usual activity, down the steps, on through the narrow Rue J. de Riouffe, across the cobbled Rue d'Antibes, and he found himself facing the Casino. A cold wind blew from the sea, and he turned up the collar of his overcoat.

Standing on the pavement outside the offices of one of the big tourist companies, he waited for a few moments. At this time, half-past ten, the rest of the town seemed dead, but, although it wanted another hour and a half before the real gamblers arrived, a constant stream of cars was drawing up before the Casino. Men and women in evening dress were converging on foot bound for the same destination. For the last six nights he had been a member of that throng himself. To-night——

The hundred-franc note in his right-hand waist-coat pocket seemed to burn his fingers as he

touched it. Giving a short, bitter laugh, he started to cross the road. What were a hundred francs in this town of millionaires?

He despised himself as he turned in through the big swing doors. So much for his resolution. So much for his will. He had started out to go for a long walk, and yet here he was back at the place which had already ruined him. Well, what about it? They couldn't get much more out of him; and to all intents and purposes he was as penniless now as if that note had gone the way of all the rest.

He was saved the five francs admittance, for his Baccarat Club ticket had still a week to run. The Baccarat Room itself was out of the question, of course, but the Boule tables to the right of the big central hall were open to such impoverished people as himself, and he passed through.

Boule, a very modified form of roulette, is a stupid game with the odds always against the backer, but to those who cannot afford to sit at the baccarat tables it provides a form of gambling at which the losses need not be very heavy, considering that the maximum stake even on either of the two series of numbers is limited by the cautious Casino authorities to three hundred francs.

Heritage knew that the only method to extract any amusement out of the game was to have a

brief, brisk gamble. Fooling about with small bets led merely to boredom.

Although the scene had become so familiar by this time, he ignored the approach of the red-faced, black-moustached *changeur*, one of the six patrolling the room eager to do service, and stood watching the players.

He recognised two people. One was the wizened, witch-like wife of the ex-Colonel at the Chester, with whom he had had a silent passage-at-arms over the corner easy-chair after dinner. In spite—or perhaps because of—his belligerent attitude to the rest of humanity, the retired military man was very subservient to the wishes of this hag-like creature who by some unfathomable means had snared him into matrimony. Every evening after dinner she extended her hand for her husband to kiss, which he dutifully did, and then left him to his own resources whilst she hastened to the Boule Room at the Casino, there to hover over the table like some human vulture whilst watching the fate of the solitary franc she staked at every *coup*.

Stephen had disliked the woman on sight. She was unmistakably "foreign," and to his mind there was something sinister and unhealthy about her. Now, as she gathered in her small winnings, there was a cruel light in her eyes. He looked away, feeling disgusted.

The next moment he felt his breath being cut

short ; he had a feeling of being momentarily stifled. Directly opposite him was the girl who had passed him at dusk that evening when he had been sitting on the Croisette. The Girl of the Baccarat Room, as he had mentally called her.

As always, she was simply if perfectly dressed. She wore no jewels except a small string of pearls about her graceful neck. Her beautiful hands and still more beautiful arms had no adornment. In contrast with every other woman there, she looked like a visitor from another world.

An insane thought came to Heritage as he looked at her. He wanted to catch her up in his arms and carry her away from this contamination. She had no right to be in this atmosphere tainted by evil.

This passionate if absurd wish must have flashed some subconscious message to the girl, for she looked up. Her eyes gave him recognition and greeting. Stephen felt the blood mount to his face. He was conscious that the hard, reptilian eyes of Colonel Monassey's wife were upon him in a calculating stare. To cover his confusion he moved away and beckoned a *changeur*, who, from the black leather satchel he wore round his waist, changed the hundred-franc note into a number of different-coloured counters.

A minute later Heritage sat down at another table to play.



*" Mesdames et messieurs, faites vos jeux. . . ."*

The metallic-voiced official in charge of the wheel sent the rubber ball on its last journey—the last so far as Stephen Heritage was concerned. He had exactly ten francs left, and he placed the counter on '5.'

The ball came finally to rest.

*" Deux!"* sounded the drone.

It was the end. He had lost every cent he possessed. At shortly after eleven he had been winning over a thousand francs. If he had stopped then he would have achieved the object that had been in his mind: he would have been able to pay his hotel bill. Now he was penniless—not practically, but absolutely. He hadn't even a franc left to tip the cloakroom attendant who would help him on with his coat.

He gave no thought to anyone as he rose from his seat; and, apart from the bored-looking official with the receding chin who sat on the right of the man at the wheel, and whose sleepy eyes noticed everything, no one took a second glance at him. Being cleaned out—whether the process took a hundred or a million francs—was such a commonplace that those watching would have remained indifferent even had they known.

He was out in the fresh air at last—away from the mincing-mannered officials whose smiles were as false as their dyed hair, and who did not seem

so much men as mechanical figures wound up to last until dawn.

Strangely enough, Stephen did not feel a fool ; he had got past that stage. He just felt that he had come really to the Finish. His ill-luck was completed ; it had described a full circle and spent itself.

Disregarding the taxi-drivers who came clamouring, he turned to the left and sat on a seat in that tree-lined space which has the high-sounding title of *Allées de la Liberté*. Barely a week before he had joined in the carnival held here.

He felt in his pocket, pulled out his cigarette-case—and found it empty.

Inevitably his mind travelled back to the scene in the London office, just ten days previous.

“ I’m sorry, Heritage, but, with business as it is, we have no alternative but to cut down our outside staff. We shall pay you a month’s money, of course. . . . ”

Although he had been prepared for several weeks for something of the sort, the shock was not lessened. Once again his damnable destiny had run true to form. He had ability, everyone admitted that, but he never seemed to be able to find his right niche. He did not wish to make any excuses, but he had proved the unquestionable truth that one wanted a factor infinitely more vital than mere ability in order to succeed in life.

That factor was LUCK—with each letter a pital. Without it you were doomed.

Take his own case. His father had died during s second year at Oxford. Contrary to general lief, the Guv'nor had died a poor instead of a man ; he had lived on credit instead of gilt-edged securities. This meant that he had to leave the University immediately. Untrained for any special profession—"uneducated," one cynical devil to whom he had applied for a job had put it—he had been forced to drift into whatever he could get. He had been many things altogether, but nothing for long. In the beginning, he might have made good as a sporting journalist—he knew many games, having played them—but for having as a chief a human devil who, from the gutter himself—he had once sold newspapers in Fleet Street—delighted in humiliating "this — toff." One night, exasperated beyond all self-control, he avenged a vile insult by hitting Randolph. Once having started, he went on hitting him, the sensation was so enjoyable. When he had finished, the entertainment having been thoroughly enjoyed, incidentally, by all who witnessed it, the Sporting Editor looked what all his intimates knew him to be : scum.

But that night's frolic cost Stephen Heritage his job. Two or three other offices were open to him had he but known it, but he turned his back upon Fleet Street ; he decided that a profession which

bred Randolphs must have something rotten about it. Of course, he was wrong—he had to travel further before he realised that there are Herbert Randolphs in every walk of life.

Another truth he realised: to go down was easier than to go up. Five very bitter years followed his leaving the *Morning* office. And at the end, after being discharged from a dreadful job trying to sell a new make of typewriter, he found himself once again “upon the street.”

That night, in a fit of recklessness, he had made the resolution: The month's salary due the following morning would take him to the Riviera and cover his expenses for a week. Once there—Cannes, Nice, Monte Carlo, he didn't care which—he would give the hundred pounds he had saved with such laborious care a “run.” He might make a fortune; it was time his luck changed. . . .

That huge waste, the sea, not blue now as in the daytime, but a deep, deep black, beckoned Heritage. He rose, responding to the call, passed the Casino where now that great wing, the Ambassadors Restaurant, was all a-glitter, and passed on down the jetée Albert Edouard. This wall of the harbour extended for perhaps a quarter of a mile. Anyway, it would be deep enough at the end. . . .

The place was deserted except for a man who

ran swiftly across to where the yachts were moored on the other side of the roadway, got into a big motor-car and drove rapidly away. Why this man should choose to behave in this fashion was no concern of his and he paid no attention. It was not until a couple of minutes later that he recalled the circumstance.

With his head up like one who goes to a rendezvous, as indeed he was, Stephen was walking swiftly on when his foot caught in an obstacle. Looking down, he saw it was a body—the body of a man—the feet projecting from beneath a seat. It was very still.

Stooping, the thought that the man must be dead became intensified. Unbuttoning the overcoat, Heritage put his hand over the other's heart. He could feel no beat.

As he withdrew his hand he found it wet—wet with a horrible stickiness.

Blood.

Then the man had been murdered.

And the fellow he had seen running across the road must have been the assassin.

Stephen straightened himself. He had never been in such a position. This, in fact, was the first time he had come into contact with actual crime. It was one thing reading about a murder in the newspapers ; it was a very different experience coming across it like this. And the event had a special significance for him ; if he had not

stumbled over this corpse he would have been surrendering himself to death by this time.

It was while he was debating what to do—whether he should allow this tragedy to interfere in his resolve—that he noticed a small oblong object lying on the pavement. Stooping again, he saw that it was a pocket-book.

Some power which he did not stop to question forced him to open it.

The next minute he felt his heart would burst.

In his hands he held a fortune ! The pocket-book was crammed with one-thousand-franc notes.

The realisation induced a feeling of guilt. If he were found near the body, with that pocket-book in his hand . . .

He looked up nervously. There was someone watching him from the shadow of the quay-wall.

### CHAPTER III

### FORTUNATUS' PURSE

THE revelation was so stunning that Heritage felt rooted to the spot ; movement of any kind was impossible.

But if his body remained still his mind became intensely active. A dozen questions clamoured to

be answered. Who was this man? Why had he been murdered? What ought he to do himself? These were the first three.

His nerves abnormally sensitive, he became conscious of being watched even before he turned his head. He saw again that figure—whether of a man or woman he could not tell from that distance—lurking by the quay-wall. Hurriedly, and without thinking what he was doing, he thrust the bloodstained wallet into his pocket and stood up. Here was danger.

He had only one thought—that was to get away. He dared not be found there; this man had been murdered and anyone discovered near the body would be suspected of the crime. And what followed would be done secretly—that was how the police on the Riviera worked: there was no publicity—the newspapers were allowed to publish only guarded paragraphs, but the suspected person vanished. He had heard too many stories of this kind since arriving at Cannes.

It was imperative he should get away. It would be the final straw if he were arrested on suspicion of having killed this man. The circumstantial evidence would be overwhelming: the Casino officials, no doubt, would be called to state that he had been losing steadily; it would be found that he was absolutely penniless, that his hotel bill had not been paid—the net would close about him so that it would be impossible to escape.

The immediate risk was that watching figure, lurking in the shadows of the quay-wall.

As he stared the figure moved. He could see now it was a woman. She was walking quickly in the direction of the Casino. By her graceful carriage he was able to recognise her—and the knowledge gave him a shock.

It was the Girl of the Baccarat Room.

He wasted no further time ; the most pressing problem of all that now faced him was to escape without being questioned. Avoiding the rank of taxis waiting outside the Casino, he plunged across the road and within ten minutes was walking rapidly up the Rue Saint-Nicolas towards the Chester Hotel.

He had one palpitating moment. From the narrow lane which divided the hotel grounds from the Convent of the Sacred Heart, the tinny bell of which had broken in upon his sleep so many nights, a cloaked figure swiftly stepped. At first glance Stephen imagined it was a gendarme, and he prepared for a possible scene. At whatever cost, he told himself he would avoid arrest ; he would not allow the fellow to lay a hand on him.

The cloak proved to be black, not dark blue, however, and the owner merely an ordinary Cannois returning home later than usual.

" *Bon soir, Monsieur!*" he said politely, raising his hat. " Good-night," replied Heritage, mis-

laying his French. His voice was not quite steady ; the man's unexpected appearance had been a shock.

The other's greeting had been friendly enough, but it was not until he had watched the man disappear in the distance that Heritage turned into the hotel grounds through the imposing iron gates.

The hotel was in complete darkness. Walking up the gravelled drive, Stephen reached his room by climbing in through the window. It was quite simply done.

Once safely inside, he made himself as secure as possible by locking and bolting the door and fastening the heavy window shutters. Then, throwing himself into a chair, he surrendered his mind to thought.

The room seemed abominably hot, however, and he rose to take off his overcoat. As he flung the garment on the bed something fell to the floor. Stooping, he saw that it was the wallet he had found on the body of the murdered man.

The shock was so great that he almost cried out. Incredible as it now appeared, he had completely forgotten about this wallet. He realised, of course, that no other hand but his own could have placed the thing in his overcoat pocket ; but the surprise at finding he had possession of it was so overwhelming that he was dazed. Then further

reflection brought enlightenment. He understood then that the sense of horror at the risk of being arrested for a crime he had not committed had driven every other consideration temporarily out of his mind.

This brought back a remembrance which was particularly distasteful. It was the Girl of the Baccarat Room undoubtedly who had watched him from the shadow of the quay-wall. Was she a spy employed by the Casino? If the stories he had listened to in the lounge of the Chester Hotel could be believed, nothing was too fantastic in this connection. The Casino, into whose rapacious maw he had thrown every penny he possessed, was a world of its own. It made its own laws and gave subservience to none. It employed many besides floor officials, croupiers, and *chefs de partie*. Some of these people had mystery-jobs. There were amongst them, he had been assured, many spies. No one, except the habitués, knew that these women—for a good percentage were women—acted as paid watchers. They dressed well, had a cosmopolitan manner, and gambled at the tables like the ordinary patrons. But all this was so much make-believe: their real purpose was to watch those about whom the Casino officials might be suspicious.

If he were correct—and, although the truth was bitter, he felt he had at last made an accurate guess—this girl, whom he had thought so different

from the rest, had been merely plying a hateful trade : there was only one worse.

He had heard—and here seemed the proof of it—that everyone who became a regular visitor to the Baccarat Room as he had done during the past week—was spied upon in an extraordinarily astute but efficient manner. The Casino officials' curiosity was omniverous—the hotel at which the man or woman in question was staying, how much they paid for their rooms, where they banked, the extent of their balance, the social position they held in their own country. All these details were noted.

No doubt he had attracted the notice of the officials and they had set this girl to watch him. That smile she had flashed him that afternoon as he had sat on the Croisette . . . He was glad now he had ignored it. A spy ! Well, it fitted in with the loathsome place. He would get out of it—away from all the beastliness.

But here reason cried out. It was easy enough to say what he would do, but it was another thing to put his resolve into practice. For a start he was penniless ; he could not even pay his hotel bill, let alone plank down several pounds to be taken back the thousand miles to London.

At this point Heritage's glance fell on the wallet again. During the time he had been threshing out the problem of the girl, he had ignored it. But now his hands were drawn to this piece of blood-

streaked brown leather which, less than an hour before, had cost a man his life.

That first quick look he had taken as he bent over the murdered man's body had told him that the pocket-book contained a fortune—but how big this was he did not know until, after looking quickly round, for the fear of prying eyes was still weighing heavily on him, he took out the thick wad of notes and counted them.

It was a large wallet, and it was thickly stuffed ; when he had finished counting the total came to nearly half a million francs. There was nothing but the money in the pocket-book—no clue to the owner whatsoever.

Five hundred thousand francs ! — over four thousand pounds ! What didn't it mean to him ?

That was his first thought. With this money he could become completely changed. He could command the world ; he could be a conqueror instead of feeling vanquished. With this at the back of him he could make a new start with every chance of success.

And Fate had done it ! That same Fate which he had been so busy reviling only a few hours before had guided him to the spot where this purse of Fortunatus was waiting for him to pick up.

*You can't steal !*

It was the voice of conscience speaking. He turned on it with fierce anger, arguing : " Can't

I? You'll see! Haven't I had every penny stolen—for what else can you call it? Those Casino hawks got it, anyway, but now I've got some of theirs. This money undoubtedly came out of the Casino—perhaps some of these mille notes even belonged to me. That was why the man was murdered. A crook must have watched him winning, followed him out of the Baccarat Room, and then stabbed him, with the intention of picking his pockets clean. When he saw someone approaching, the thief developed a sudden panic and, afraid of being caught, left his spoils.

*All the same, you must play the game.* Again the voice of conscience was speaking.

Play the game! Hadn't he tried to play the game—and miserably failed? Hadn't the cards been marked against him time after time? Had he had a single stroke of luck before this? Besides, the decision had been made for him: he dared not go to the police in the morning. He would be suspected of having committed the murder . . . he might even be sent to that pet inferno of theirs, Devil's Island. . . . No, he must be off—and quickly—by the first train. If he couldn't get a seat at Cook's, he would stand the whole thirty hours. He felt himself poisoned. . . .

With that he undressed and got into bed. But no sleep would come; every time the shutters rattled he imagined a strong detachment of the

local *gendarmerie* were waiting in the grounds, and every time a board creaked in the corridor outside it was, to his excited fancy, the manager of the hotel come to inform him that he was sorry, but he could no longer stay in the Chester as he was under grave suspicion of being a desperate criminal.

Even when half-past seven brought the *garçon* with the customary coffee and rolls he studied the waiter carefully before allowing him to enter the room.

#### CHAPTER IV

#### THE MYSTERY ENVELOPE

THE *garçon* had opened the shutters, letting in the glorious sunshine. Sitting up in bed, Stephen bathed in it as he ate the crisp rolls and fresh butter and drank the delicious coffee. Daylight had brought its reassurance; the fears of the night before had vanished to a great extent. Was he going to allow undersized French policemen to monkey with him? Not likely! He was clearing off that day.

The thought of getting back to well-remembered scenes—the snuggerly in that little hotel in the Adelphi, the pub in St. Martin's Lane where you could get such an astonishingly good lunch for a couple of bob, the walk along the Bayswater

Road at night, the cinema in Shaftesbury Avenue which showed really intelligent films. . . . He was insular, no doubt, but give him England every time ! Rather than continue to live here he'd prefer to starve in London—which he'd been the worst kind of fool ever to leave.

He finished the coffee with relish.

" *Entrez*, please ! "

The pleasant voice of M. Caron, the hotel manager, called the invitation. He was sitting in his usual place in his spacious office.

" Ah, Monsieur Heritage ! I wish I see you well this morning ? But need I ask ? You English have the looks of the—what you say ?—roboost. "

" Oh, I'm not so bad, Mr. Caron, thanks. " A slight pause. " I've come to say that I must leave to-day. "

A pair of expressive hands were raised.

" That is not very good news, Monsieur Heritage. No, I like it not so much. You have no complaint to find, I trust ? "

Heritage laughed.

" Don't worry about that. I think the Chester is about the best hotel I have ever stayed in. I congratulate you. No, I'm not going anywhere else ; the fact is I have to go back to England. "

" No doubt your business calls for you. " M. Caron made the remark in a tone of sympathetic understanding.

"Yes—er—in a way. . . . Well, thanks for making me so comfortable, M. Caron ; if ever I come to Cannes again I shall certainly pop along to the Chester. Do you mind letting me have my account?"

"Mademoiselle will see to that immediately. Monsieur Heritage is unfortunately leaving us to-day," he announced to his attractive secretary, who now entered.

Mademoiselle's most charming gesture called upon an unjust Heaven to witness her despair. Although he had been quite unconscious of the fact, Stephen had been the subject of a considerable amount of secret interest to the owner of the white hands which now busied themselves with a huge ledger.

Suddenly Mademoiselle stopped her industry.

"But what am I thinking of?" she exclaimed, springing up. "There is a note for Monsieur!"

"For me?" Fear attacked him quickly.

"For you, Monsieur Heritage." The eyes of the speaker twinkled mischievously. She turned to a shelf behind her and took down an envelope.

He took it mechanically. Yes, it had his name—typewritten :

STEPHEN HERITAGE, ESQ.,  
THE CHESTER HOTEL,  
CANNES.

"Esq." That was an English form of address. But perhaps the local police—from whom else could it have come?—desired to pay him this compliment before becoming offensive.

He had to end the suspense.

"Permit me, Monsieur," said M. Caron, and extended a paper-knife.

Heritage slit the top of the plain, foreign, cheap-looking envelope, and pulled out some crumpled pink pieces of paper.

"Someone has been repaying a debt, Monsieur," remarked Caron.

Heritage did not reply. He was staring at the five notes of one thousand francs each which he held in his hand. Placing them on the office table, he re-examined the envelope. But there was no note inside.

The bewildered recipient turned to the secretary.

"Do you mind telling me who brought this, Mademoiselle?"

"I will call the *concierge*—he will know," was the quick reply.

The hall-porter, a young, good-looking Italian, needed to take only one look at the envelope.

"A young lady brought it, Monsieur," he said.

"Could you describe her?"

"But, yes, Monsieur. She was very smart, young, pretty—yes, very good looking—and was

dressed quite simply ; just a grey costume with a fur to match. English, I think."

The Girl of the Baccarat Room. . . . It was a perfect, an unmistakable description of her ; there could be no possible error.

He could not remain there with Caron and his secretary staring at him. He had to get away—to be alone. His mind was in chaos at the moment ; he was completely befogged—and no doubt looked it. Caron would begin wondering if he did not pull himself together.

He made an effort.

"Thank you very much, *conciierge*," he said ; and to the other two : "It's all right. I'll be back in a few minutes."

He walked out of the hotel and into the grounds. On the left near the now deserted tennis-court there was a seat which nobody ever used because a large palm-tree protected it from the sun-rays ; it is not fashionable to hide from the sun on the Riviera !

Knowing that he was safely screened from any prying eyes, Stephen examined first the envelope and then each thousand-franc note separately. There was not the slightest indication anywhere of a clue ; the person who had sent him the money evidently preferred to remain anonymous.

But why had the girl sent it ? What could have been her object ? The mystery in which he had become involved grew more baffling.

A step on the gravelled path made him look up. It was the *concierge*.

"Excuse me, Monsieur—but you are wanted on the telephone."

Telephone! Who in Cannes, where he was a stranger, could want to ring him up?

"Do you know who it is, Benito?" The *concierge* had the honour of possessing the same Christian name as his great compatriot.

"The lady would not give her name, Monsieur."

"A lady?" Then he raced across to the hotel, leaving the *concierge* to stare after him.

"Yes? Hallo! I am so frightfully sorry to have kept you waiting." He was breathless through another cause than his haste.

"Is that Mr. Stephen Heritage?" It was a feminine voice—cool, detached, and yet with a hint of excitement in it which was singularly attractive.

"Yes, I am Heritage," he replied. "Tell me——"

"Mr. Stephen Heritage?"

"Yes, Stephen Heritage. I say, I wish you would——"

"Please, Mr. Heritage, listen to what I have to say—it is very important."

"Just one question, and I *must* ask this: Who are you?"

There was a moment's silence.

"You have no idea?" then came the reply.

"Yes, I have an idea—but let me say that I cannot possibly accept your kindness."

"You received the money?"

"The manager has just given me the envelope. But I couldn't possibly——"

"Mr. Heritage, you can regard that money as a loan if you like. But you must accept it because it is imperative that you should leave Cannes."

"Why?"

"I cannot tell you over the telephone—it would not be safe."

"Cannot we meet, then?"

"No; that, again, would be too dangerous. But the longer you stay in Cannes, the greater the risk to yourself. Believe me——" Then, to the listener's bewilderment, the voice suddenly ceased.

"Hello! Hello! Hello!" he shouted.

But there was no reply. The silence became intolerable. After waiting for another full minute he hung up the receiver and hurried out into the hall.

"Benito, I want you to get on to the Exchange and find out from where that call came."

"Certainly, Monsieur."

Heritage used up the time by pacing restlessly up and down the long corridor that led into the

lounge. If Caron and his secretary saw him, he did not care ; the only thing he troubled about was the inexplicability of the break in that telephone message.

The *concierger*, looking worried, was by his side as he made another turn.

"The Exchange says that it is unable to trace the call in question, Monsieur. Of course——"

"It's a lie," supplied Heritage. "There's some dirty work going on, and I'm going to find out what it is !" Then, conscious of the look of astonishment on the man's face, he added quickly : "All right, Benito—and don't say anything about this, you understand?"

"I understand, Monsieur." He would not have been the *concierger* of a Riviera hotel without understanding a good many things which would have puzzled the ordinary person.

Heritage, dismissing him, walked to the office.

Mademoiselle greeted him with her customary smile.

"Oh, Mademoiselle, I'll have my bill—but I find I shan't be leaving, after all."

"That is very good news, Monsieur ; we should have missed you."

"You're too kind, Mademoiselle." He pulled out two one-thousand-franc notes and placed them on the table. "You can let me have the change some other time ; I'm going out now."

"Certainly, Monsieur."

When, five minutes later, Heritage turned to go down the hill into the town, he did not walk to the Rue du Maréchal Foch where Cook's offices were situated. He had changed his plans; he was going to stay in Cannes. Whatever the risk to himself might be, he had to remain—the girl who had acted the Good Samaritan in such an amazing way was in some sort of danger; he was convinced of that—and, hopeless as the task seemed, he had to find her.

He came to this decision whilst sitting outside the café that faced the broad but somewhat unkempt promenade named since the war the Allées de la Liberté. To his right was the Hôtel de Ville, the police headquarters—and the place to which he would assuredly be taken if any connection could be traced between him and the crime that had been committed not twelve hours previously at a spot scarcely three hundred yards away.

It was not bravado that had led him to this place which, in the circumstances, might well have been considered a danger-zone. After buying a *Continental Daily Mail* at Hatchette's in the Rue d'Antibes, he had felt the urgent need for a quiet spot to read the paper, smoke his pipe, and do some steady thinking. The round tables outside the café had been in the direct line of his walk and he had sat down.

A few yards away a group of Frenchmen were holding a fevered discussion. But from a word

here and there that he was able to catch, the subject under debate appeared to be the universal politics and not crime. The residents of Cannes, he remembered, never discussed local deeds of violence ; that was left to the visitors. He felt easier at the reflection.

His mind soon switched back to its original subject—the mystery-girl who had helped him in such an inexplicable manner. Then she was a friend—and not an enemy.

A friend . . .

He found comfort in the thought—comfort and a strange, exulting joy. This girl was as remote as the stars ; he could never hope to claim equality with her, but, nevertheless, the truth was now forced home to him with devastating force.

He was in love with her ! Bizarre and ridiculous as the fact was, he knew it to be true. Ever since he had first seen this girl she had possessed for him a potent charm. He had thrust the idea away as being too absurd for serious contemplation—for one thing she moved in an entirely different world to his—but it had always lurked at the back of his mind. Since the barrier between love and hate is so thin, his bitterness at the thought that she was possibly a Casino spy had become intensified.

Love.

It had never come his way—no woman, apart from his mother, now dead, had ever to his know-

ledge expended a second thought on him. His life had been too hard and too busy to allow any time for dalliance. And that sort of thing, so absorbing to many men, had never appealed to him, anyway. Not that he was either a puritan or a prig, but—— Well, he had his own view.

Living in London rooms, with no acquaintances except the men he mixed with in his job, he had been cut off from any decent feminine society. He had had his opportunities for adventure, especially during his short stay in Fleet Street, but he had passed them by. So it came down to this: no woman had ever entered his life—no woman had even knocked at the door.

Until now. Strange that close upon the heels of tragedy this fiercely throbbing, bitter-sweet joy should come. But it meant that all his elaborately conceived plans of the night before were smashed. Although the girl had refused to allow him to see her, she must still be in Cannes, and he was going to find her.

By this time he had finished his coffee and was considering whether he should order another when he noticed two men threading their way between the tables from the Allées. They were coming straight towards him.

The day-dream was shattered instantly. Apprehension took the place of delightful speculation. He was seized by a dread which set his heart racing.

He half rose in his chair ; if these men—plain-clothes police, no doubt—were out to arrest him they would have to put up a fight ; he would not go without a struggle.

Then suddenly he sat down again. Apparently he had made a mistake ; the men had taken possession of a table some distance away. His nerves must have played him a trick.

But he remained on the alert ; and it was because he was still not entirely satisfied that the glances which the men looking in his direction sent him from time to time reawakened his first suspicions.

The thought of being under surveillance was intolerable. He called the waiter, paid the small charge, and then started to saunter off slowly in the direction of the harbour. If his fear had any real foundation, the men would follow.

Avoiding looking back, he reached the harbour, and then passed on to the one decent level walk in Cannes, the sea-front leading to La Napoule.

He had passed the open-air physical culture school, and had reached a deserted spot, when he heard quick footsteps behind him.

Turning, he faced the two men he had half expected to meet.

It did not occur to him to think how foolish he had been to allow these possible enemies to track him to such an isolated spot ; the anger which started to blaze was his one emotion.

“What the devil do you think you’re up to?” he demanded in English.

There was no reply in words. But the answer was swift enough in another sense.

Separating, both men flung themselves on him in a fierce attack.

## CHAPTER V

## BILL MATCHAM ARRIVES

THE onslaught, although in a sense anticipated, was so ferocious that Stephen had not time to prepare himself before the two were at grips with him. One of the assailants, who had sidled round to the right, gripped his throat from behind, whilst the other commenced making a punch-ball of his stomach. The pain was agonising, and he was comparatively powerless because each second the fingers clutching his gullet tightened their grip.

His hands were useless ; owing to his position he was not able to reach the brute maltreating his stomach, and it was impossible to turn. His feet remained, but, when he essayed to kick, the earth slipped from under him and he crashed to the ground.

The punch-ball artiste, who appeared the leader, made an exclamation of satisfaction.

Stephen's French was indifferent, but he made sense of the words which followed.

"Quickly!—through his pockets!"

Judging by the deftness with which the other obeyed the order, he might have been a professional pickpocket. Before leaving the hotel, Stephen had gone to his room and had locked away to of the remaining thousand-franc notes which had come in the mystery-envelope that morning. The other he had changed at Hatchedette's when he paid for the morning paper. The cost of the coffee, with the tip, had been trifling—a couple of francs—so that he had no less a sum than nine hundred and ninety-seven francs on him.

Yet this was disregarded; the crooks were evidently after bigger game.

"It is not on him," the searcher said when he had finished his job.

The stream of oaths forming the other's comment were not completed. He had started well, but halfway through his collar was seized from behind and an unmistakably English voice demanded: "What the hell's going on here?"

A scene of considerable confusion followed immediately. Heritage, who had been keeping quiet during the search, now assumed activity again. Taking advantage of the pickpocket having his mind diverted, he wriggled round and rammed that inquisitive individual violently in the abdomen

with his head. His own stomach was still very sore with the pummelling he had received, and he did the job wholeheartedly.

The man crumpled before roaring an oath, but by the time he had recovered Stephen was on his feet. Assistance had come out of the skies and he must play up to Providence by helping himself. A good straight right caught the crook on the point of his spiky jaw and he went to earth with a flop. It was heartening to see him clawing at the gravel with his finger-nails.

"Well hit, sir!" commended a voice—and Heritage, swinging round, gaped.

"Bill Matcham!" he cried.

"Just a moment—this blighter's asking for a bit more, I fancy." The speaker turned to deliver a resounding clip on the ear of the opponent he had done battle with, and accompanied the blow with a few choice exhortations illustrated by extravagant gestures.

"Now, if you don't want your lights put out, hop it—d'ye hear, hop it, you swivel-eyed son of a flop-eared dago! Hop it now, or I'll fill you so full of pop-corns"—producing a revolver that shone in the sunlight—"that there won't be a square inch of you not worm-eaten! Sling your hook, and don't wait to say 'Ta! Ta!' Start right away and keep going."

The man threatened in this extraordinary manner growled deep down in his throat; but at

another alarming gesture from the big-framed holder of the revolver, he signed to his companion and the two sidled off, muttering quickly to each other. As for the intervener, he pocketed his fearsome toy and held out both hands: "Stevo, by all that's marvellous!" he cried; "what the Sam Hill are you doing here, my old war-horse?"

"I might just as well ask you that," was the more sober reply. He had met Bill Matcham during his experience on the *Morning* sporting staff, the latter being a clerk in the commercial department of the paper. They had encountered each other several times at a Lyons' teashop at the top of Bouverie Street; and Matcham, a natural "character," slovenly in appearance, large framed, shambling, rather common, but gifted with a shrewd Cockney sense of humour, had appeared to single him out with the object of making pals; and, finding early on that the clerk was a likeable type, because of an extraordinary kind-heartedness, the two had spent a good deal of time together. After leaving the *Morning*, however, they had more or less drifted apart. It was Stephen's fault. He had kept to himself and avoided the other as much as possible. This was not because he had tired of Matcham's company—the clerk was one of the most entertaining fellows he had ever met—but because his continued ill-luck had made him abnormally sensitive. Bill Matcham wasn't a Cræsus, but he did earn

a fiver a week—and a steady fiver in the days of his blank despair following his leaving the newspaper office had seemed riches beyond dreams. Rather than allow Matcham to spend money on him—as he knew the clerk would readily have done—he preferred to keep out of his way.

Matcham caught the other's arm.

"I've got roughly five million questions to put to you, old son, but I don't fancy myself asking them all standing here. I want to hie somewhere. Where can we hie?"

Twenty minutes later the two were seated in a corner of a cosy tea-room run by an Englishwoman, overlooking the sea not far from the Sands Gymnasium. Stephen had learned a good deal during the walk, but the big surprise was to come.

"Yes, old son, I'm a reg'lar Rockefeller now—worth forty thousand quid, less the infernal income-tax. Left me by an old geezer of an aunt I never knew existed. What do you think of that for luck?"

"Wonderful! I must find an uncle whom I never knew existed."

"I hope you do, old son. Anyway, I'm a gentleman—well, I wouldn't try to kid anyone by calling myself that, but I've plenty of leisure and I'm travelling abroad for pleasure. After that blasted grind in the *Morning* office I can do with it, let me tell you."

"I congratulate you, Bill," commented Stephen. Forty thousand pounds! And he was penniless!

"Don't waste it all on me, old son. I'm going to make you a reasonable proposition, and if you don't say 'Yes' I'll brain you with this sugar basin. My hat," he broke off suddenly, "that's damned good coffee—best I've tasted since I last went into our old Lyons' in Fleet Street. Let's have another.

"You haven't played the game with me, Stevo, old boy," Matcham continued, when he was halfway through this second coffee. "Here we were, the best of pals, when you suddenly dropped me like a red-hot brick. Did I smell or something?"

Heritage leaned across the small table and lowered his voice.

"After I left the *Morning*, Bill, I was damned poor. That's the reason."

"A hell of a fine reason!" snorted the other. "God knows I couldn't run to a Rolls, but what I had you were welcome to share—just as you are now," he added quickly. "Yes, I mean it."

"Don't be an ass!"

"Ass yourself," was the emphatic reply. "Can you understand straight talk, or can't you? This is my proposition: I don't know how you're fixed, but if you are still hard up, so much the better. I have no next-of-skin, as my poor old

landlady used to say, which means that there isn't a soul in the world who cares a damn about me, and I want a pal. Someone to travel about with, share my wonderful luck, and have a whale of a good time. There's only one bloke I should have picked myself—and that's you, Stevo, old corkscrew. What about it?"

It was extraordinarily tempting, yet Heritage shook his head.

"I'd like nothing better, Bill," he said, "but, hang it, I've got a little self-respect left. I should be nothing but a sponger."

"And now," declared Matcham, with an emphasis that caused an elderly Belgian lady on the other side of the room to twitch her moustached upper lip indignantly, "you're just nothing but a damned fool! However, let's hear your story. What are you doing in this gilded resort, where only millionaires and their attendant daughters of Joy are supposed to foregather?"

Stephen hesitated only momentarily; then, feeling an irresistible desire to talk freely to this old friend, he told Matcham the whole story.

As he proceeded the mouth of the ex-clerk opened wider and wider.

"Jiminy Christmas!" he declared when the other had come to an end, "that's a peach of a yarn. Why not write it out and send it to the *Morning*? They're publishing short stories now instead of serials."

"But it's true!" protested Heritage.

"True?"

"Of course. Did you think I was making it up?"

Matcham signalled the proprietress.

"Two more coffees, please."

When the cups were brought he produced a flask.

"Real old brandy," he explained; "absolutely pre-war. I've got a cask at home."

"Not for me, especially at this time in the morning," said Heritage. "What's the idea?"

"That yarn of yours is a corker; I must celebrate it." With the words this erstwhile pillar of newspaper commerce poured a liberal quantity of the spirit into the coffee and sipped the libation with every evidence of satisfaction. "Do you mean to say that things like you've just told me about actually happen here?" he went on to demand.

"Well, they have happened to me."

Matcham drained his potent beverage and leaned across the table.

"Fate, or something precious like it, must have sent me out to run across you like this, old son," he said impressively; "here you are with a suspected murder and a theft of four thousand quid on your hands, not to mention the World's Most Beautiful Damsel to be rescued from perils unknown but undoubtedly dire, and

you think you can go galumphing along on your own. Let me tell you that you can't ! It's against all the rules. And here's another thing : Will your pride allow you to live off the charity of a woman ? Perish the thought ! Here's five thousand francs"—producing a bulging pocket-book—"and now all you have to do is to find this mysterious and lovely charmer of yours and hand her back her money. Anyway, that's the first thing. It seems to me that if we hang on here any length of time a number of other trifling jobs will also have to be attended to, but they can wait for the moment. Take it, you ass !" pushing the notes into Heritage's unwilling hand.

"As a loan."

"As a contribution to the Joint Fund of Disabled Babies and Illegitimate Soldiers, if you like. And now"—standing up—"no more hankypoo or peddlididdlum ; you want a pal, someone to stand by and hold the towel and sponge, and I propose to supply the missing article. Any to the contrary ? Carried unan., *nem. con.*, *ipso facto*, and all the rest of it."

It was impossible to resist the infectiousness of the fellow's spirits, and Heritage laughed. By laughing he knew he had committed himself—but he was glad rather than sorry. Bill Matcham, now that he had transformed himself into a gilded idler, might bear a strong resemblance to a certain famous music-hall comedian, but Stephen

knew the other's qualities. Bill was perfectly sincere in what he had said ; he had the heart of a lion and the stanchness of a lurcher dog. Heaven knew, he needed a pal, and here, ready to hand, was the very one he would have fashioned himself had it been left to him.

" I shall never be able to pay you back, Bill—but I'm damned glad to see you, all the same," he said.

Matcham grinned, the grin which had given him the nickname of " Smiler " in the commercial office of the *Morning*.

" Who asked you to pay me back ?" he replied. " What do you take me for, a three brass balls merchant ? I tell you what, old son," he went on to confide, " I never felt so happy in all my young life ! Apart from a fortnight at South-end, I've never been out of England before—and foreign travel seems to agree. It's the stuff to give this particular section of the troops. Now tell me—did you put a chalk-mark where that body was found ?"

IT had been said of Felicity Howard—and that by no less an authority than her own godfather—that she combined the best qualities of both sexes. Although essentially the finest type of girl, she had the sportsmanship, the spirit and courage of a man. Which is about the highest praise that can be bestowed—but she deserved it.

For even a modern girl, to be pronouncedly “unusual,” and yet to remain distinctively feminine, is a difficult task ; but Felicity performed the miracle with consummate ease. Born and moving—when in England—in a circle so exalted and nerve-frayed that the women, verbally speaking, fell upon each other like wolves, she remained outside of criticism. She stood alone : she was Felicity Howard. It was sufficient.

Whilst practically every other woman of her set took to lovers, gambling, or drugs, Felicity kept herself unsullied. Physical fitness was a fetish with her ; it had been so ever since she could remember. But, then, her father had been a leader of cavalry and her mother a hunting woman. She herself was one of the finest riders to hounds in the country—when she could spare the time.

A unique type. Whilst her life story even up to date—and she was only twenty-four—would have

made startling reading, she gained no newspaper publicity. No piffling gossip-writer filled his space with references to Felicity Howard. As for the fashionable photographers, she never went near them.

Many influences had combined to make Felicity what she was. Her father had commanded a division in the war. He died, as he had lived, on the back of a horse: a bullet with his name on it had winged through the blue, and when his charger returned to headquarters it was as though General Howard had merely fallen asleep. . . .

It was a horse also that had carried her mother to death. Nothing could ease the dread which was in Molly Howard's breast those days but furious riding over Leicestershire country. One frosty morning, in taking a difficult jump, the horse fell. . . . For those who believe in coincidences it may be added that comparisons later proved that the General and the wife who adored him died within an hour of each other.

Felicity's father being a British General, her godfather inevitably was a person of like character. Sir Godfrey Barringer soldiered behind the lines, but he soldiered all the same. His base was a smallish room in Whitehall, and his troops a number of men and women whom he despatched on various errands, many of them mysterious, all of them dangerous. Prominent

among his staff—prominent, that is, in the estimation Barringer held of her services—was Felicity Howard.

For everyone possessing personality life holds some spice, some secret zest. To Felicity the bright eyes of danger always beckoned. She had no desire to go tramping through foetid African jungles with native bearers as her only companions, but in another way she had many times risked her life. This is no empty phrase. Volunteering for every dangerous job which offered—and the peace which has followed the war that was to end war contains many such for those who work for Britain's Intelligence Departments—she had come through tremendous odds time after time. Asked why she did it—she, a girl blessed with money, position, and all its appurtenances—Felicity would probably have smiled and said nothing. She had never analysed the position for herself; she only knew that two influences were at work: she liked the excitement, and she felt that she would be wasting her life if she did not do something for her country. The latter was not a mere mawkish sentiment; it was part of herself.

Three weeks before she had been called by telephone to Sir Godfrey Barringer's office.

"I've booked a wagon-lit on the Blue Train, my dear," he said without preamble.

The girl, who was so inconspicuously and con-

sequently so beautifully tailored, replied quietly :  
“When do I go?”

“To-morrow—if you can manage it.” She smiled at the corollary. “You will stay at the Mont Fleury, Cannes—it’s a good hotel. I know it from personal experience.”

“And the job?”

“There’s big trouble of some sort brewing there. Lord Dalrymple thought his son, Westover, would quickly get the hang of things, but apparently the other side got the hang of *him*. Anyway, he’s vanished.”

“Vanished?” ejaculated the girl. She had been dancing with the promising young F.O. official only a few weeks before at the Embassy, and the thought which Barringer’s words conjured up was disturbing.

“Well, if ‘vanished’ isn’t the term, I don’t know what other to use. Neither Dalrymple nor I have had a word from Westover for over a fortnight and—look at this. I’ve just decoded it. Patten is one of our best men, you know that. But he’s stumped now. That’s why I’m sending him to Vienna on another job and handing this over to you.” The speaker handed a typewritten sheet of paper to the girl, who read :

*“Mystery concerning Westover’s disappearance deepens. No trace here. Proceeding Italy.”*

“PATTEN.”

"But this is sent from Monte Carlo," remarked the girl.

"Quite so, but Westover's favourite town on the coast was Cannes, and I have a presentiment that that will be your best base."

"Is there anything else apart from the Westover business?"

The chief of Z 1 smiled wryly.

"I rather fancy you will find that affair quite sufficient, young lady. But there is also a great deal of useful information to be picked up; if you keep your ears open you are bound to hear some of it. The storm-clouds are gathering again and the plotters are looking at the blue sea and enjoying the Riviera sunshine, I haven't the slightest doubt. Discover what has happened to Westover, and the rest should be easy. Good hunting and good luck, my dear," Sir Godfrey concluded, bending to kiss her cheek.

So Felicity had travelled on the Blue Train. In spite of a remarkable ability to take very good care of herself, she did not allow either of the two Englishmen or the three Frenchmen who showed their interest openly to pay her even tentative addresses. Her mind was too busy on the work which lay ahead. Although she had not been in love—that dangerous passion had so far passed her by—with Gerald Westover, she had liked him tremendously as a man friend, and the thought that he might now be dead was depressing. There

had been no need for Sir Godfrey Barringer to say that the Riviera at this time of the year was a network of intrigue ; experience had already taught her that. Now that the season was at its height, adventurers of all sorts would be gathered in force. There was no crime in the calendar for which arrangements could not be made—murder included.

The Mediterranean sun induces a freedom of thought and action, and very quickly Felicity was, to all outward appearances, a very different person from the girl whom one met in London. Although never once losing her grip, she allowed herself to be included amongst the racy habitués of the Baccarat Club and played quite a lot in the room. There were many others of presumably the same type—well-bred, moneyed young women of leisure, impeccably dressed, immaculately groomed, and noticeable for a certain cool defiance of convention. If a man spoke to them at the tables or in *Les Ambassadeurs*, they weighed him up before replying. But they were perfectly willing to reply—to those who passed the test. Even in such company Felicity Howard had a distinctive quality.

Barringer had said she would hear a great deal, and so she had. Her experience enabled her to sift the wheat from the chaff. She learned, for instance, that the trouble between France and

Italy was by no means over ; she caught murmurs of fresh disturbances in the still-seething Balkans, and once she imagined she had got on the track of some reliable news concerning Gerald West-over.

That was the night she had dined at Les Ambassadeurs, the famous restaurant which forms part of the Cannes Casino, with Tommy Laxendale, the American tennis "crack," who had come on from Monte Carlo to play in the Cannes Club Tournament. Tommy was human enough to admire a pretty girl, but lawn tennis was sweetheart, wife, and child to him. Felicity, who had known him a good many years, knew that she was safe from any foolishness.

"See that fellow over there who looks like a second edition of the Grand Duke Nicholas?" her companion asked midway through the meal. "Heard a rather rummy story about him this morning." Through long residence in England, Tommy spoke like a native-born Britisher.

"Wait a minute while I satisfy my devouring curiosity," rejoined Felicity. "Can I glance across without appearing rude?"

"Of course—especially as the joker in question has just put his monocle up to have a better look at you."

"Well, in that case——" And, smiling, she turned her head.

She saw a face so distinguished that it imme-

diately arrested her attention. The man, indeed, bore a remarkably close resemblance to the late Grand Duke Nicholas of Russia. The face was long and narrow, with clean-cut nose and lips and a clipped iron-grey moustache and beard. The monocle, worn with effortless grace, was regarding her intently. Used as she was to such attention, she felt somehow flattered.

"A most distinguished-looking person, Tommy. What is the 'rummy story' you heard about him? Something scandalous?"

The tennis player chuckled.

"If keeping a lodging-house is scandalous for such a dignified don—yes. One hears all sorts of yarns, I know, out here nowadays, but when a man bearing the title of *Le Comte de la Siagne* starts to take in paying guests it strikes me as being the limit."

Felicity had a feeling of disappointment. What might have been impressive had become merely ridiculous.

"I think it's a rotten story, Tommy," she said, taking a peach. "The very idea of a man with such a face and such a name running a boarding-house! I imagined you were going to tell me something really interesting."

"You don't give a fellow a chance, old girl," came the protest. "This boarding-house of *le Comte's* is really a *château*."

"Now you're becoming sensible. A château ! Well, of course . . ."

"Yes, but half a mo'. You pay to go there—and the fellow has touts out."

"Really, Tommy ! Do you mean they come up to you in the Rue d'Antibes and thrust a bill into your hand ?"

"Scoff away, my child. You're a precious innocent—I wonder you have the cheek to come out without a chaperone—but you can't even guess at some of the rummy things which go on here, especially at this time of the year. This Comte joker, for instance. I was tipped the wink pretty broadly up at the Cannes Club this morning that he was a wrong 'un."

"Was he up at the Club ?"

"Yes"—a note of reluctant admiration creeping into his voice—"and playing a jolly good game of tennis, too. But the tip I had was from a man who generally knows what he's talking about. He told me something which seemed rather fishy."

"Your friend appears a remarkably communicative person. What is he ? A private detective ?" It amused Felicity that Tommy Laxendale should have the idea she was too young and inexperienced to be able to look after herself. At the moment she classified the information he was imparting under the heading of "Riviera Scandal—probably unlikely."

A few moments later, however, she was compelled to revise this opinion.

"There was a chap out here a few weeks ago called Westover. He played a fairish game of tennis—quite in the second best class." The speaker paused to pull out a silver case.

"Virginia or Turkish?"

"Thanks," said Felicity, taking a cigarette, "but do get on, Tommy!"

"You *will* rush a bloke so," was the complaint as he struck a match. "Well, as I was going to say, this chap Westover, the son of Lord Dalrymple, I believe, is supposed to have gone on a visit to this fellow, de la Siagne, at his Château of the White Wolf—and that's the last that's been seen of him."

Felicity controlled her excitement.

"Who told you this? The same communicative gentleman as before?"

"Yes—and you needn't laugh, old girl," retorted Laxendale, who appeared aggrieved.

"I wasn't laughing, Tommy. Tell me, where can this friend of yours be found? I'd rather like to hear a few more of his stories. They're too good to be missed. Would you introduce me?"

"I'd be delighted, Fel, but the fact is the chap's gone on to Bordigheria."

"Pity. Still, here's le Comte himself, looking as though he does not require an introduction."

"Felicity!" cried Laxendale, aghast. "You wouldn't let a man like that speak to you?"

"Of course I would," was the reply. "The Count has been most interested in me all the evening. It would be ungracious to refuse."

"Well, I'm damned!" declared the thoroughly startled Laxendale. And then a third voice—cool, suave, cultured—broke in.

"May I be permitted to introduce myself?" it said.

## CHAPTER VII

## LE COMTE DE LA SIAGNE

BEFORE Laxendale could reply, Felicity, to his disgust, had smiled up at the speaker.

"But, of course," she said; "we should be delighted." Beneath the table her shoe touched her companion's shin in warning. Poor old Tommy! It was extremely unkind to have given him such a shock. Still, he had to be prevented from being openly rude.

But this was exactly what Laxendale threatened to be. He had the average American's distrust for foreigners, and the more stagily picturesque these were, the stronger became his objection. And then for a girl like Felicity

Howard to show this coming-on disposition to a man against whom he had seriously warned her only a minute before—it was amazing.

“Let the fact that on occasion I believe unconventionality to be a most delightful quality excuse my seeming rudeness,” said the man who had accepted the chair which a watchful waiter had produced from apparently nowhere. “I am the Count de la Siagne. Mr. Laxendale, I watched your play at the tennis club this morning with the utmost interest. I should imagine you would give even Cochet a hard match when you are in form. . . . But, pardon—please introduce me.”

It was a command more than a request.

Laxendale complied, but his voice was ungracious.

“Miss Felicity Howard—the Count de la Siagne.”

The Count rose, took the girl's hand and lifted it to his lips. She felt a faint shudder pass involuntarily through her. It was as though an invisible friend had whispered a warning. Relying upon an intuition which had rarely let her down, she knew her first impression had been accurate. The Count de la Siagne traded in evil. And, if the story which Tommy Laxendale had passed on was true, it was this man who had seen Gerald Westover in those few days before he vanished. . . .

“‘Felicity’—of all names the most charming !

Does it not mean 'happiness'?" inquired the Count.

"Hundreds of years ago, perhaps—but what real happiness can there be now for anyone?" She scarcely knew why she made the cynically pessimistic comment, except that the wickedness of the world as represented in that great room filled with avid pleasure-seekers suddenly struck her with irresistible force.

"This is not a place in which to be sad, Miss Howard," replied the Count de la Siagne quickly. He turned to Laxendale. "You will permit me to order some wine in which we may drink to our better acquaintance?"

But for a quick glance from Felicity, which he was at a complete loss to comprehend, the tennis player might have been icy in his response. As it was, he murmured a polite perfunctory: "Er? Oh, yes—delighted," and let it go at that. He couldn't tumble to Felicity's game at all—why, she had always appealed to him as being rather a simple sort, although an absolute sportsman, of course—but she evidently had something in mind, and it was up to him to help her out. But if she contemplated accepting any invitation which this fellow might be slinging about—then: well, then, he'd put his foot down good and hearty. There were limits. Anyone would have thought after what he had just been telling her that—but one could never tell with girls; the worse a joker's

reputation, the more interested they seemed to become in him. Still, he was damned surprised at Felicity. . . .

Had Laxendale not suffered from a lawn-tennis complex, he might have become furiously jealous. The atmosphere in the great restaurant was an excitement to the senses: it would have been easy for the average man to have lost his head in such a setting—especially when his dining companion was Felicity Howard. All around scenes of restrained licence were being enacted; men with famous names, some of them illustrious figures in European and American contemporary history, were whispering into the ears of women whose beauty, whether natural or acquired, enabled them to decorate the room with the essential feminine lure.

Pommery of a hallowed year soon frothed in the glasses. A gigantic Nubian in picturesque Arab robes, waiting to serve coffee, was ordered away.

“Not yet. You permit, Mademoiselle? I have to drink to your eyes, whose sparkle puts even this wine to shame!”

Whilst Laxendale glowered at the compliment, which he considered in the worst possible taste, Felicity Howard, to his further horror, acknowledged the remark with a responsive smile.

After that, to use his own term, he “left them to it.” He was clearly not wanted, and after

offering to drive Felicity back to the Mont Fleury, and having the invitation declined, he rose, trying as cleverly as was possible to simulate a yawn.

"Sure you will be all right, old thing?" he inquired, his eyes entreating her to stop making a fool of herself while there was yet time, and come away with him.

"Let me assure you, Monsieur Laxendale, that I will make myself directly responsible for Mademoiselle's further comfort if she will so far honour me."

"Thank you, Count." Then, with a smile at Tommy: "Mr. Laxendale is thinking of his tennis to-morrow. He has to play in two doubles as well as a single. It is natural that he does not wish to keep late hours. And this atmosphere must be bad for anyone who breathes so much fresh air as he does. Good-night, Tommy, dear, and thank you for a most delightful evening."

Trusting he did not look quite such a fool as he felt, Laxendale shook hands, bowed and departed. Until he left the Casino he pondered deeply on the following problem: When a girl one admires and respects plainly tells you to clear off, even though she herself is left in the company of a wrong 'un, what is one to do? Well, anyway, he finally compromised with his conscience, it wasn't as though she hadn't received due warning. Thank God, playing tennis was less complicated than trying to fathom the mind of a woman.

He departed in haste, a huff and a taxi-cab.

The Count de la Siagne turned to the companion whom even his ultra-sophisticated eye considered inexpressibly charming.

"It is not often that an American is so discreet—and considerate," he remarked. "But this passion for playing games is so absorbing to Mr. Laxendale, I understand; it is the better part of his life. For myself, I like tennis—but there are so many other things which go to make up existence. Is it not so, Mademoiselle?"

"Oh, of course." She made herself appear in agreement with him. "When I winter at home, for instance, I am extremely fond of hunting, but that does not prevent me enjoying the Riviera."

"It is a delightful coast, Mademoiselle—I must get you to honour me when our acquaintanceship is further advanced by a visit to my château."

She affected surprise.

"You have a château here, Count? How delightful! I have always found romance in the very word 'château.' Our English 'castle' isn't at all the same; it sounds cold and chilling, whereas 'château' suggests to me white towers glistening in the sun."

"Yes," the man said; "it is as I imagined; you have a poetic soul. But perhaps you will consider my house, which is a little way beyond

Vence on the way to Gourdon, more English than Provencal. For it is called 'The Château of the White Wolf.' "

" 'The Château of the White Wolf,' " she repeated in her character of the romantic girl she was supposed to be. "I don't think anything could be more thrilling. Vence. That is not far, it is? I could motor up one day and have tea."

"When you come you must stay to dinner. Then I will motor you back to your hotel in the moonlight."

"Count!" she cried softly, clapping her hands, "you are almost romantic."

"Romance is the breath of life—without it some of us would die! And now," with a change of tone, "I have talked enough about myself, have trespassed upon your kindness too long. You play, I suppose? Shall we stroll into the Baccarat Room?"

For an hour she played. She was indifferent to the ebb and flow of fortune; what she was acutely conscious of was the concentrated gaze of the onlookers. Was this due to the fact that the Count de la Siagne stood behind her chair all the time she punted at the ten-louis table?

A wave of repulsion made her feel suddenly tired. It had been rather a trying night for her. The surroundings in that room became suddenly

hateful. She could not stay in it any longer. She would have half an hour at the innocuous Boule in the big hall to rest her nerves and then go home.

She made her last wager and rose.

"So soon?" whispered the Count; "if you require any money I shall be honoured to become your banker."

Felicity looked him straight in the eyes.

"I remain my own banker at baccarat, Count," she said; "and now I must wish you good-night."

He appeared slightly taken aback, but recovered himself immediately.

"Is it permitted for me to see you home?"

"Not to-night, thank you. I shall be quite all right. It is only a short journey to the Mont Fleury and there are plenty of taxis."

She knew he would seize on the name of her hotel.

"The Mont Fleury. . . . I will telephone. Mademoiselle, you have given me two hours' enchantment. I am grateful, and shall not forget your generosity. We shall soon meet again."

"But, of course," she replied with a little laugh; "aren't I looking forward to seeing your picturesquely named château?"

A minute later she had passed through the heavy revolving doors of the room to receive greetings from the trio of *physionomistes*, whose

duty it is to recall the features of everyone who passes in and out. The dark-haired janitor with the cynical eyes, standing nearest the door, bowed.

"Mademoiselle is leaving early," he remarked.

"Yes, I feel merciful," she answered quickly, and the man, whose face told that he had watched this pageant of so-called pleasure until he knew now nothing but disillusion, smiled.

"Mademoiselle is chivalrous — *bon soir*, Mademoiselle."

Drawing her cloak round her, Felicity walked past the *vestiaire*, crowded with men, leaving their coats and hats, and passed on into the large hall. This, the "kitchen" of the Cannes Casino, was crowded to the point of suffocation with a very mixed throng. The air was so stale as to be almost unbearable.

Keeping to her resolve to have a few minutes' quiet relaxation at one of the boule tables before leaving, Felicity showed her Baccarat Club ticket to the officials at the one-franc entrance to the room on the left. They allowed their masks of faces to slip into a smile.

She had scarcely sat down before she noticed someone staring at her from the other side of the table. It was the man whose personality had so interested her during the last few days. She had seen him many times during the past week in the Baccarat Room, and on each occasion she had

been tempted to speak. In such a place the action would have been scarcely unconventional.

At the first glance she had decided that he belonged to that class who should never have passed through that heavy revolving door, watched by the *physionomistes*. He was poor and, therefore, desperate. His history was written in his face ; he had scraped together a hundred pounds, perhaps, and had come a thousand miles to try to turn it into a fortune. How pitiable !

He was a gentleman—at least, he had come from good stock. Breeding was there ; if the luck had not been against him he would have been staying at the Carlton, the Mont Fleury, or the Californie, not considering each five-franc note before he spent it.

She really would like to speak to him. Strange that this shabby clerk—she decided that, back in England, he must be a clerk or a commercial traveller, but, whatever it was, he hated it with all the strength of his being—should hold her interest in a place where the famous and the picturesque jostled one on every hand.

Felicity played mechanically. Boule is a stupid game, in any case, and she had something very much more absorbing to occupy her mind than wagering sums which, even if she had a run of good fortune, would scarcely have paid a week's hotel bill.

After a while she left her seat and joined the

crowd that was watching the play at the adjoining table. The man at whom she had flashed a look of recognition—he had looked so unutterably lonesome sitting outside the Paris that afternoon, that the gesture had been more or less involuntary—was still unlucky, it seemed. His face had the unmistakable drawn, grim expression of the gambler who is losing money which he cannot afford.

Finally, with a snatch of white teeth against the lower lip, he rose and walked unsteadily away.

Felicity, again acting on an impulse, followed. She had seen other men leave the gambling-rooms with that same lurching movement—and the next day there had been whispers in the Baccarat Room and the hotels. . . . Bodies found in the harbour, on lonely roads outside the town, in motor-cars the engines of which had been silent for many hours. . . . She was going to prevent *this* threatened tragedy if possible.

Although Stephen Heritage did not know, she was close behind him as he walked along the harbour wall on his way to the sea which he had intended should be his grave ; she had glided into a shadow as he stopped, his attention drawn to the murderer's victim. And after Heritage had gone, she, too, had walked across to the body.

One look, and she had felt her heart bounding. The dead man was Gerald Westover.

EVEN in the uncertain light of the quay-lamp there could be no mistake. The body stretched out in that horrible sprawl was that of Gerald Westover, the man she had come to Cannes to find. A brief examination showed that he had been murdered through a knife stab in the heart.

Poor old Gerry ! Her mind went back to the night he had danced with her at the Embassy in Bond Street barely a month ago. He had looked so attractive, so buoyant, so much alive that night that if he had attempted to kiss her in the car going home, she . . .

And now he was dead. She rose, pulling her cloak closely about her shoulders. The police must be informed ; the body could not be left there. After that there were other things to see to—the British Consul would have to be interviewed, Sir Godfrey Barringer cabled. Lord Dalrymple would come out, no doubt, to take the body home.

A man sauntered past, looking at her curiously. He was of the night-hawk type, but the fact gave her no misgiving.

“ A man has been killed. Will you please fetch a gendarme ? ” she said. “ I will wait here until he comes.”

As though recognising the quality of the speaker, the man courteously raised his hat.

"It is an honour to serve Mademoiselle," he replied, and went off into the darkness.

It was four o'clock before Felicity got to her room that morning.

And when at last she was in bed sleep would not come. The tragic surprise of that night had upset her nerve. For a man of Gerry Westover's virility and charm to be cut off—brutally murdered—at the age of twenty-nine; the thought filled her with ghastliness.

That other man—the ruined gambler who, she was firmly convinced, had left the Casino with the intention of committing suicide. She had a duty to perform to him. He must be warned. Although she was convinced he had had nothing to do with the crime, yet the Cannes police, from what she had overheard at the Hôtel de Ville that morning, had formed a suspicion that this Stephen Heritage might be, not merely an accessory, but the actual murderer. Apparently someone had seen him bending over the body.

"But I myself bent over the body, Monsieur le Commissaire," she said. "What else was there to do in the circumstances?"

The official shrugged his shoulders in tempestuous fashion. He had been forced to rise from a comfortable bed, and he had not re-

covered the suavity upon which he delighted to pride himself.

"Mademoiselle is pleased to quibble," he said. "If this Monsieur Heritage was entirely innocent of this dastardly crime, why did he not save you, Mademoiselle, the trouble of informing the police? To slink off in the manner he did—was it not the action of a guilty person?"

"Not necessarily. Mr. Heritage might have been afraid that he would be accused of the crime. What do you think, Mr. Carslake?"

The British Consul, who was mentally cursing his ill-fortune in having been brought into the affair at all—the people at home always expected a fellow to work miracles, whereas his actual influence and power were very small indeed—straightened his tie.

"Englishmen don't commit crimes of this character, in any case," he said; "a knife is not a British weapon, Monsieur le Commissaire."

The Chief of Police rapped sharply on the table.

"With a gambler—and we know that Monsieur Heritage has been playing in the Baccarat Room and losing—anything can happen. If he did not actually deliver the knife-thrust which brought death, he may have robbed the body—who is to tell? It is enough. I, Tarantot, will investigate; no brick will be left unturned. We know where this Monsieur Heritage is staying. He is at the Hôtel Chester. To-morrow——" The rest was

unspoken, but the threat was obvious. "And now, if you will excuse me——" That hint, also, was plain; as soon as a taxi could be obtained, she and Carslake left the building.

"This man Heritage should be warned," she had told the Consul during the drive.

The answer came impatiently.

"I can't be wet-nurse to every down-and-out who comes out here thinking he's going to make a fortune at the Casino. The fellow—especially if he is innocent——"

"He certainly is innocent," she had broken in. "I feel positive of that."

"It must be splendid to have such faith in human nature, Miss Howard," was the blatantly cynical comment her companion made before continuing: "As I was saying, the man, if he is innocent, may possibly resent my interference. On the other hand, if he really gets into any trouble with the police he can be relied upon to hunt me up at the earliest possible opportunity. If he doesn't he's unlike all the rest. It's a dog's life, mine."

Felicity's good-night as the taxi stopped to allow the Consul to alight at his flat in the Rue des Etats-Unis was not cordial. The man was a jelly-fish, typical of his class. If Stephen Heritage was to be warned—and he must be—she would have to do it herself.



"So this is where you hang out." Bill Matcham surveyed the sloping grounds dotted with palm-trees, the sweeping carriage drive leading to the imposing entrance of the Chester Hotel, and walked forward. "Lead me to it," he added.

In the office M. Caron greeted the ex-clerk with the same courtesy he would have extended to a reigning prince. Bill was very impressed.

"I must say the more I do this touring abroad stunt, the better I like it," he said five minutes later when sitting on Stephen's bed; "everybody is so absolutely matey. Now, back in England if you go into a hotel and ask for a bed they look at you as though they aren't sure whether you think of pinching the sheets. And this sun . . . Steve, old corkscrew, this positively is the life!"

"I've been hating it!"

"Hating—*this*! Well, well, well! You've been a little peevish and missed your Uncle Bill. But all that's finished now. You can sit back and smile; William will see you through. Oh, by the way, where's that bag of gold? You've got it stowed away here somewhere, didn't you say?"

"Yes." Going to the door, Heritage turned the key in the lock and then crossed to the window. Closing the shutters, he returned to the centre of the room and stooped to pull from beneath the bed a battered suit-case.

"It's in here," he explained. Unlocking the bag, he extracted the wallet and passed it over for examination.

"What's this stain on it?" asked Matcham.

"That's the poor devil's blood. When I picked it up it was wet."

The words had a sobering effect upon the exuberant Matcham.

"You must get rid of this, Stevo," he said; "it's too darned dangerous to keep hold of. The police being out of the question, I suggest bunging it in the bank. Then, if ever it comes out who the chap was, you can switch it over to the relatives. How much did you say was here?"

"Four thousand pounds."

Bill whistled.

"It's damned tempting—but it can't be done. Into a bank you go, my little beauties." He started to replace the notes in the wallet, which he had been carefully examining. "Hullo," he suddenly exclaimed, "here's some sort of clue—the poor devil's initials, anyway."

"Initials?"

"Yes. Beneath this flap. Twig 'em? 'G. D. W.'"

Looking over the other's shoulder, Heritage saw the three initials Matcham had mentioned.

"That doesn't help us much," he concluded; "the only thing, as you say, is to pitch the beastly thing into a bank and await developments."

If the man's identity crops up, I can hand it over. Come on ; let's see about it."

"There's something else I'd suggest, old man," proffered Matcham, "and that is, you destroy this wallet. Don't forget it was picked up from the body of a man who's been murdered. Taking four thousand quid into a bank is one thing, but taking 'em in in this wallet is another. Does leather burn? If not, I'd cut this into pieces and fling them into the sea."

"All right," nodded Heritage. "We can remember the initials, and it's the money that counts. What I can't understand is why the man who did the knifing didn't pinch this fortune."

His companion considered the point.

"If you wait a minute I'll make what may be a pretty shrewd remark," he said. "Up till now your idea has been that this poor devil was killed because the assassin thought he had made a 'killing' in the Casino. Is that right?"

"Yes—in spite of the fact that this money was left. But the explanation of that, it seems to me, was that he got funky when he saw he was being watched and buzzed off without the wallet."

"Most unlikely," commented the listener. "What is nearer the mark, according to my idea, is that it wasn't the money at all which the murderer was after. What this something was, of course, we haven't the least notion, but that

the fellow expected to find it in this wallet is pretty certain. No doubt, when he had found it he was quite content——”

“To leave half a million francs?”

“Well, take it or leave it, that’s *my* idea,” reiterated the other. “Cast your alleged mind back to this morning. If those thugs had been just common or garden crooks they would have bolted with the thousand francs you say you had on you. But one of ’em said, according to your story: ‘It is not on him.’ Doesn’t that convey anything? But you may be right, after all: the fellow who did the murder may have got funky when he saw you and sloped off without bothering about this.”

Heritage, holding the wallet, pondered.

“In any case,” he said, “the sooner the thing is destroyed and the money placed in the bank, the better I shall be pleased.”

## CHAPTER IX

## THE COCKTAIL BAR

THE bank manager received them affably. He came from Croydon himself, he explained, and was always pleased to see a Londoner.

When he heard the amount which Heritage

wished to place on deposit, he beamed his congratulations.

"Had a 'killing' at the Baccarat Room, perhaps?" he suggested. And, because this was an easy get-out, Stephen smiled. The other could take this as confirmation if he liked.

"Now the incriminating evidence is safely bunged away," said Matcham, as they stepped out into the busy street, "I propose a lime-kiln quencher, otherwise a drink. This heat is stifling. Take me somewhere interesting, old man, and let's gaze upon life while we're young."

"Well, if you want that sort of thing, we haven't very far to go," was the reply. Heritage led the way across the road and held open a swing door opening straight on to the street.

"Nicolai's famous cocktail bar," he announced in a low tone, and Matcham grinned appreciatively.

"I'd give a quid to see a real live flash Riviera crook," he said, and grinned again upon being informed that this was the rendezvous for those chevaliers of industry who bestirred themselves before lunch.

It was a large room of oblong shape in which they found themselves. At the upper end was an elaborately fitted bar, everything in the equipment gleaming brightly. Behind this, immaculate in white coat, was a man—the great Nicolai himself. He greeted them with a respectful "Good-

morning" and a smile that looked as false as his dyed hair.

Although the room could accommodate, perhaps, a couple of hundred people, it was practically filled. For this was the fashionable cocktail hour in Cannes. Whilst Heritage was looking round for a couple of seats, a page-boy touched his arm.

"This way, sir." Walking with an impressiveness which caused Matcham to chuckle, the boy piloted them to a corner table, the former occupants of which had just risen; and, producing a pad and pencil, said, with the aplomb of a famous *maitre d'hôtel*: "What can I get you, please?"

"Are you English?" asked Matcham.

"I come from Prague," was the reply, without a trace of accent.

"Well, I'm damned!" declared Bill. "I'd have bet my spare shirt you were from Birmingham. Bring us a couple of your best cocktails—real eye-openers."

"Two Giant's Breaths," said this remarkable lad, without so much as a blink. Scribbling on his pad, he hurried away.

The immediate question of drinks settled, the two friends had leisure to look round. On any count it was an interesting scene. There was no discordant note; everyone was elegant enough to tone in with the artistically luxurious setting. The

company was not confined to men ; there were many elegantly dressed women present. Each group appeared—superficially, at least—to be interested only in their own affairs. The conversation was hushed, and when relieved by laughter this was restrained and cultured.

The refinement seemed to appal Bill Matcham, who moved impatiently in his seat.

“I thought you said——” he started, when Heritage caught him by the arm.

“Don’t make yourself conspicuous,” he whispered. “You may not think it, but we are being watched.”

Had Stephen been pressed on the point, he might have admitted that he was enlarging on the truth somewhat. But Bill wanted polished crook atmosphere, and it seemed a pity not to give it him. And, unless that writing fellow he had run across a few days before had been pulling his leg, Nicolai’s was the recognised meeting-place for this class of gentry.

What Matcham would have said if his attention had not been drawn elsewhere Stephen could only conjecture ; but through the swing door now came a striking-looking couple. The man, whose bold, searching eyes seemed to take in everyone in the room in one quick, comprehensive glance, was a cripple. He had only one leg, and he walked on crutches. His companion, a girl of remarkable yet somewhat forbidding beauty, re-

plied to Nicolai's greeting and then, her hand on the man's arm, started to cross the floor. It happened that two chairs were vacant on Bill Matcham's left.

"My hat! What a girl!" breathed the ex-clerk.

Stephen did some quick thinking. He remembered the words the local journalist had said to him in that room only a few mornings before.

"Be careful," was the warning he gave his companion; "they're card crooks."

Matcham's mouth opened so suddenly that the cigarette smoke he had intended to expel went down his throat. He coughed violently. Before he had recovered, the girl who accompanied the cripple had addressed him: "Will these crutches be in your way?"

Bill's reply was swift: he not only sprang to his feet, but gave the cripple a helping hand into his chair.

Conversation between the three started from the man tendering thanks in a cultured voice.

Beyond giving Matcham a nudge, which he intended should act as a warning for the other to be on his guard—that appeal to his chivalry had been a clever touch—Heritage made no move. It would be time enough to do that if and when things developed.

The door opened again. A tall, bearded man, whose appearance was so distinguished that it

arrested instant attention, was waiting for someone to pass him. It was a woman, and, when he saw who it was, Stephen gripped the small table before him with both hands.

It was the Girl of the Baccarat Room—the girl whose voice he had heard only a few hours before, the girl who had sent him five thousand francs, the girl the thought of whom being in danger had caused him to remain in Cannes.

The shock was violent. What could she be doing in this meeting-place of crooks?

As she and her companion seated themselves he looked across, hoping to catch her eye. He did so, but she gave no sign of recognition. He might have been a complete stranger.

Heritage felt furious. What the devil was at the back of all this mystery? One thing he resolved upon: when she left he would follow her, find out where she was staying, and press his company upon her sufficiently long to repay the five thousand francs and give expression to his thanks. If there were still time he would ask for an explanation.

In the meanwhile her presence there was disturbing. It brought back his former misgivings. Even considering the general freedom of the Riviera, no woman, if she were careful of her reputation, entered Nicolai's—unless, of course, she belonged to the ultra-daring type who rejoiced to throw a high-heeled shoe at convention.

And the man? Who was he? His appearance was striking enough for him to be anybody. He bore a remarkable resemblance to the portraits published of the late Grand Duke Nicholas of Russia.

An intriguing companion as well as a personality, it seemed. The girl was obviously fascinated by his talk. She laughed continuously, showing perfect teeth. As he watched the pair Stephen had a curious sensation; he felt his heart was being squeezed by a giant hand. It was as though all the air was being pumped from his lungs. For a few minutes everything swam before his eyes; he was like someone in a dream. Then, as if the pressure had been suddenly withdrawn, his heart commenced pounding furiously.

A solution came quickly. He was obsessed by a jealousy that was as unbridled as it was ridiculous. He hated this elderly *flâneur* so intensely that he could have killed him.

A sense of overwhelming bitterness followed. What right had he, a penniless failure, to aspire so high? Jealous! The idea was cynically ludicrous. He had no claim to be jealous of a road-sweeper, let alone of a man who, judging by his appearance, had the command of both wealth and position. Fool!

As for the girl, no earth-bound mortal looking wistfully up at the stars was farther away than he. . . .

Matcham's voice broke in on his lugubrious broodings.

"I shall have something to tell you when we get out of here," Bill whispered. And then, in a louder tone: "This gentleman wants to know if you will have another cocktail, Steve." A poke in the ribs accompanied the words.

Bill, surprisingly enough, seemed to be playing a game on his own, and it was, perhaps, wise to humour him.

"Thank you," he answered, leaning forward and nodding at the cripple.

The latter and his companion smiled in markedly friendly fashion.

Bill spoke again.

"Our friend here was kindly offering to show us round"—nudge—"after I said we were strangers to the town."

Stephen felt like invoking the wrath of Heaven to descend upon the speaker, and was only prevented from making some totally incongruous reply by another sharp nudge.

"That's very decent of you——" he said, instead.

"My name's Hewitt," supplied the cripple. "This is Miss Ransome, my cousin."

"My name's Patchway, and my pal owns up to Simpkins. Now we all know each other and can be matey," returned Matcham. Another nudge.

Because his thoughts were still centred on the opposite side of the room, Heritage could only pay perfunctory homage to the girl, whose eyes sent him an invitation from the chair on the other side of the cripple. He did contrive an answering smile, however, because, for some obscure reason, Bill still appeared to be working out a private scheme.

That smile proved sufficient. Glancing across, he noticed that the Girl of the Baccarat Room was looking straight at him now—and *frowning*. Was it a warning she intended to send? Did she know the cripple and his self-styled cousin to be crooks?

The cocktails came, the cripple paying for them with a thousand-franc note which he took from a thick roll of similar value.

"To our next merry meeting," the dispenser of hospitality proposed, raising his glass.

In spite of the potency of the Giant's Breath, Heritage lowered his drink at a gulp. There had been a significant movement on the other side of the room: the mystery girl had risen.

"Doing anything to-night, you two?"

He heard the words, but they had no meaning for him. He was beyond the paltry scheming of the speaker—if scheming it was.

"As a matter of fact, we haven't." Matcham's answer accompanied the hardest nudge yet.

"Well, in that case, what about a spot of dinner up at my villa? Er—oh, I say—going?"

Heritage, who had risen, turned swiftly.

"I'll leave it to my pal to fix," he said. "Yes, sorry, I must go." A second later he was striding across the room; a hand caught the brass bar of the swing door, flung it open—and he was outside.

"Funny cove, your friend—what?" commented the cripple.

"He's usually quite sane," replied Matcham.

"It's the girl he's after," put in the cripple's companion; "he's had his eye on her every second during the last ten minutes. He was very mushy." She spoke with a certain hardness, somewhat at variance with her former *bonhomie*, and finished the sentence with a laugh.

The cripple took a deep pull at his cigarette.

"It's none of my business, of course, Mr. Patchway," he said, "but, as you are a stranger to Cannes, perhaps you won't be above taking a tip from a friend?"

"It's very good of you."

"Your pal is heading for trouble if he intends taking up with that girl he's evidently chasing. You saw the man she was with?"

"Can't say I took particular notice—I was otherwise engaged." He grinned with deliberate intent at the girl, who stopped gnawing her under-lip to acknowledge the compliment.

"Well, he's the prince of all the crooks on this coast," was the reply; "and that's saying something, you can take it from me. Has your friend much money?"

"Oh, he's pretty well fixed," was the non-chalant response.

"Then if he gets in with that fellow he'll be stripped clean. Now about to-night: here's my card; we'll expect you both about eight. You needn't trouble to dress; we're very simple folk. Glad to have met you—ready, Dorothy?"

They both nodded to a Bill Matcham who, what with a couple of Giant's Breaths and general bewilderment, did not feel quite so clever as he would have liked.

After the cripple and his companion had gone, Bill rose, filled with a fixed determination.

He had to find Heritage. But when he reached the street Stephen was not to be seen.

He turned to the right. Five minutes past one. Lunch at the Chester was at one-fifteen. The cocktails had made him hungry. There was no sense in his chasing all over Cannes. Steve would return to the hotel some time, he supposed.

It was a rummy business, though—what on earth had made him rush off like that?

Then, as he stepped off into the roadway to allow the whole pavement to a woman leading a Borzoi dog, who might have stepped out of a film, revelation came.

That girl old Stevo was chasing—jumping snakes, it must have been *the* girl !

And, if One-Leg could be believed, joined up with a swell crook.

Things promised to be lively in the near future. He decided it was a good thing he had come to Cannes.

Bill went to lunch with a light heart.

## CHAPTER X

## THE GIRL OF SECRETS

STEPHEN'S one thought as he left Nicolai's was not to let the mystery-girl out of his sight. The determination to speak to her strengthened until it became an obsession ; he would know no peace until he had stood face to face with her, looked into her eyes and demanded something of the truth.

He was not more than a dozen yards behind the couple, and was consequently in time to see the girl step into a wonderful Rolls, a chauffeur in horizon-blue uniform, which matched the paint-work of the car, holding open the door. The bearded man gave the driver an address before he took his seat by the side of the girl.

"The Mont Fleury."

Heritage had been long enough in Cannes to be familiar with the names of most of the leading

hotels. He knew that the Mont Fleury was one of those *caravanserais* patronised by the rich and beautiful if not necessarily the good. Lords were practically three a penny there ; one fell over them at nearly every step. Vicomtes and Barons littered up the place.

The Rolls shot off with noiseless, silken swiftness, leaving him staring after it. Possibly it was merely his fancy, but Stephen imagined that, at the moment of the car leaving the kerb, the girl half turned as though she might be trying, very discreetly, to get a glimpse of someone standing on the pavement. Himself? He hoped so. Hope never did any poor devil much harm, he reflected bitterly.

Before the Rolls had turned the corner he had plunged into the road. A taxi-cab, hooting like a fiend, was making for the entrance of the cocktail bar, having evidently been summoned to take a fare away.

"The Mont Fleury—quickly!" Heritage told the driver, and, without waiting for any reply, he swung the door open and got into the vehicle.

The cupidity of the driver won the day. This Englishman was in a hurry. His experience told him that most Englishmen who came to Cannes paid well, but that those who were in a hurry paid especially well. No doubt this one was going to lunch with a lady. . . . *Bien!* Turning the bonnet of his rickety Juggernaut, he ignored the

call of the page-boy who had just emerged from Nicolai's and started off in the direction of the Californie.

The taxi-driver made excellent progress—so good, in fact, that the cab purled through the imposing entrance to the hotel grounds in sufficient time to allow the man who sprang from it to see the girl shaking hands on the hotel steps with her companion.

Thrusting a twenty-franc note into the taxi-driver's hand, Heritage walked forward rapidly.

"Then I can expect you soon, Mademoiselle?" he heard the bearded exquisite say as he passed.

"Yes—quite soon, Count. And thank you so very much for seeing me home."

"It has been an unforgettable pleasure."

He bowed over her hand, raised his hat and walked down the steps.

The girl turned and looked straight at Stephen Heritage. For the latter it was an unforgettable moment—a moment that he was to recall frequently in later life; a moment, indeed, that he was never able to obliterate; a moment when the world stood still, and the mere matter of living became an ecstasy.

The girl was the first to speak.

"You are a very obstinate person, Mr. Heritage," she said.

"I am a very fortunate one," he heard him-

self replying, and wondered how Providence had given him the sense to utter such words.

Her eyes met his, and for a marvellous moment held them. It seemed to Stephen that he would become drowned in their cool depths.

With an effort he came out of the trance.

"I apologise for being a nuisance, but I must speak to you. There is so much I have to say. . . . But you haven't lunched; I will wait—if I may."

Back behind him the crowd of cosmopolitan idlers, pleasure-seekers, and who-knew-what were strolling languidly in one direction.

"It's unforgivable to pester you like this, but——"

She performed what to Heritage was a miracle.

She smiled up at him, saying: "Now that you're here, you had better lunch with me."

The same kindly Providence which had guided his tongue before came again to his aid.

"You are more kind than I could have believed."

"Whilst you are annoyingly obstinate—but you shall have your lunch before I indulge in any further upbraidings. Do you mind hurrying? The hotel is very full."

Stephen was barely conscious of having his hat and coat taken by a uniformed servant, of walking side by side with the girl through a huge and elaborately decorated dining-room, quizzed

at by several hundred eyes . . . and then he was sitting opposite her. The wonder of it ! She was so near that by stretching out his hand he could have touched the warm magic of her flesh. . . .

He was incapable of speech. Perhaps the girl, with the same infinite understanding she had already shown, realised this, for she took upon herself the ordering, merely saying at the end : " I hope you approve ? "

" Of course—anything." He felt a boor now because the words had been gulped.

Once again came a dream-state. He imagined that this table for two, set in the corner, was utterly remote from the rest of the world—certainly remote from that chattering, vivid-tongued crowd which filled the great *salon*. Unbelievable luck was his : he, a shabby nonentity, a person completely without quality of any kind, was receiving the favour of a great lady—small as had been his knowledge of the world, he knew instinctively that this girl had been born, reared, and was still living in the purple. She was an aristocrat of aristocrats, a thoroughbred of thoroughbreds. That was the reason, of course, why she had been able to meet this peculiar situation with ease instead of embarrassment ; and why, even if it was not sincere—and how could he hope it to be ?—she had extended to him a frank sense of comradeship.

The food, no doubt, was delightful, but Stephen could not have told what he ate or what he drank. Enchanting as it was to be allowed to sit opposite this girl in the intimacy of a meal, yet he longed for solitude and the opportunity to speak freely and without restraint. It seemed that that time would never come.

But, because there is an end to everything, the lunch finished at last.

"I never drink coffee for lunch, but you would like to smoke, I know," said the girl; "we will go into the grounds."

Five minutes later they were sitting side by side in two deck-chairs in a spot so secluded that they might have been cut off from the rest of Cannes.

"And now——" asked the girl, puffing the cigarette which he had lit for her. "Oh, by the way, my name is Howard—Felicity Howard."

"Thank you," he replied, and then became silent—for two reasons. The first was that the beauty of her hands fascinated him, and the second was that now he had the chance there was so much to say that he did not know where or how to begin.

"You will think I am the worst kind of fool—but you bewilder me," he said at length; "you see, I have never been privileged to speak to anyone at all like you before. I think you are wonderful."

Now it was Felicity who said "Thank you."

She meant it. She was perfectly sincere. This was the fullest, the most perfect compliment, she decided instantly, she had ever been paid. The tribute had been so spontaneous that the speaker could scarcely have realised what he was saying.

She looked at the man. The impression that he had been born a gentleman was confirmed. His clothes were shabby, but they were worn in that unmistakable manner which only an inner and unconscious intuition can give. The brown shoes when new had borne a famous name. They had grown old gracefully and with good taste.

"I owe you some money," she heard him say. He put his hand into a pocket.

"You have been to the tables again?"

"No." He shook his head. "Will you allow me to bore you for a minute, Miss Howard? This morning, after receiving your wonderful help, I ran across an old friend. He used to be a clerk at a newspaper office where I once worked, but now he is rich—an aunt he had never heard of left him the fabulous sum of £40,000——"

"Was that the man I saw with you at Nicolai's this morning?" she inquired.

"The same."

"Will you give him a word of warning from—well, one who knows?"

"From you?"

"Yes."

He fumbled.

"I have no right, no shadow of right, of course . . . it is the most terrible presumption—but——"

"You needn't be afraid," she encouraged.

He mustered all his courage and looked straight into the eyes that were the colour of massed blue-bells.

"It hurts to think you—'know'——"

She smiled—and the glory of the sunshine was in that smile.

"That is idealism—and idealism is rather out of place in the Riviera, Mr. Heritage. However, to reassure you, let me just say that the man with crutches and the woman who was endeavouring to charm you and your friend this morning are well-known card-swindlers. They specialise in newcomers to the town."

"I had already been told about them by a local journalist—a correspondent for one of the London newspapers."

"Then you will be able to warn your friend yourself. Now about this money : I sent it to you because I was afraid you had lost money at the tables, and it was necessary that you should leave Cannes."

"I intend to stay," he said. "I should like to ask you a thousand questions, but, perhaps, as you have been so kind, you will permit just one?"

"Ask it first," she parried. With the words

a curtain seemed to Stephen to drop between them. Perhaps he had already presumed too much, but——

“I believe you yourself are in danger here. Is this not so?”

She asked a question in turn.

“Was that why you stayed instead of leaving Cannes immediately?”

“Of course,” he said. “I’m a presumptuous ass, aren’t I?”

She threw away the stub of her cigarette.

“If things were different, if I were the ordinary sort of person, I mean, you would be the type of man I should rather like to have as a friend. Can I say more than that?”

“You honour me,” he said, and by the tone he used he honoured her. “Isn’t it possible now?—just to fetch and carry, you know; to wait about; never to presume, I promise. But, first, won’t you answer my question? You see, I tried to get through again to you on the telephone, but the Exchange said they couldn’t trace the call.”

“The telephone service in Cannes isn’t very enterprising.” She continued quickly: “Mr. Heritage, I am honoured by your confidence, but I am serious when I say that you must leave here at once. There is a train for Calais at three-twenty-two. Won’t you catch it?”

“I hate for you to think me still obstinate—but why should I go?”

"You found a dead man outside the Casino last night."

"Yes." She had started this subject herself. How much would she tell?

"That man was murdered. He was an Englishman holding a very important position. Don't ask me how I know; it is sufficient to say that my information is correct. The police suspect you. Of course, it is ridiculous——"

"The man was dead when I reached him."

"I know. The murderer was the man who ran off as you approached. I told the Commissaire that."

"You told him?"

"Yes. You see, the dead man was a friend of mine. I cannot tell you more than that, but if the police should come to question you——"

"I shall be ready for them."

"It would be much wiser if you left Cannes. Your passport is in order?"

"Quite. But"—firmly—"there are equally strong reasons why I should stay here."

"Yes?"

"One is that I'm not taken with the idea of running away; a second is that I've given my word to this friend Matcham to stay with him; and the third—well, the third is the most important of the lot."

The girl placed her hand on his arm.

"If that third reason happens to concern me

in any way, Mr. Heritage, I should prefer you to eliminate it. Believe me, it would be much better if you did."

While he looked at her she went on :

"I hinted just now that I was not the ordinary type of person. That is true. I am unable to enlarge upon this further than to say that I must refuse, gratefully but firmly, any suggestion of help which you might be prepared to make to me. You see, I am speaking quite frankly."

"Why do you refuse?" he asked.

"Because my acceptance in all probability would place you in a position of tremendous peril. No," she added quickly, "I am not exaggerating; you are in danger now, but it is nothing compared to the risk I refer to."

"Why should you expose yourself to this danger?"

"Because it comes in my job," said this girl of secrets.

"You cannot tell me more than that?"

"I regret it is impossible. And now I am afraid I must go." She stood up, holding out her hand.

"You have forgotten the five thousand francs," said Heritage, handing her the money. "Somehow, I think we shall meet again, Miss Howard. In the meantime, thank you for being so kind."

He found Bill Matcham sitting in the sunniest spot in the Chester grounds.

"Where in the deuce have you been?" was the first question.

"Paying back a debt."

Matcham whistled.

"So it *was* the girl! I thought as much. You can't deceive your Uncle William! But, I say, Stevo——" He hesitated.

"Out with it."

"I should watch your step if I were you. Take the well-meant advice of Grandad dozing in the sun. Your divinity keeps strange company, me boy. The merry lad with the crutches knows quite a lot about the gentleman with the beard, and I overheard some of it. That was why I pretended to be so matey. According to our prospective host this evening, the Bearded One runs a house which it's easier to get into than out of—Castle Despair isn't in it with the Château of the White Wolf. Why—what's the matter, old son?"

He leaned forward solicitously, for Heritage had groaned. A memory, painful and horrific, had returned to Stephen. He recalled the words he had overheard at the Hôtel Mont Fleury scarcely two hours before.

Felicity Howard had said something about seeing this man again—and soon.

At his château?

THIS room, both in its furnishing and its proportions, evoked visions of grandeur. It had been planned by a talented architect in those days when the owners of great French names had sent craftsmen to build their wonder homes in unspoilt Provence.

The man and woman seated at the oval mahogany table, glittering with glass and silver, were in keeping with the room; they more than "belonged"; they sustained and enhanced the scene. One felt that it was they alone who mattered; they were above the setting, splendid as that was.

The servant who had waited on them—a man of some indeterminate Slavonic breed, dressed in a curious uniform—had gone, and now mother and son were alone.

"It is cold; I will sit by the fire, Antoine."

The Count de la Siagne rose instantly and walked to the high-backed chair on the opposite side of the table.

"Dearest, you should have spoken before," he said. His voice had the tenderness of a lover's.

The aged woman, from whose still beautiful eyes the sight had gone, so that now their

glory was hidden by a film, laid her cheek against the hand that was on her shoulder.

"You always did spoil your poor old mother, Antoine."

"One does not 'spoil' the world's most wonderful woman, *ma mère*; one merely loves. Now . . . gently." With infinite devotion he helped her to her feet, and then, walking with slow, steady step, he guided her to another high-backed chair placed by the side of the great hearth, in which glowed and spluttered a fire of giant logs.

This woman was very old, but age had added to, rather than taken from, her original queenliness. In spite of her fragility, which caused her to look like a Dresden figure, she retained a suggestion of strength that was remarkable.

She was eighty-two years of age, but her white hair still grew luxuriously. Piled high above the clean-cut features, it lent the face an additional pallor. And it did something else: it gave the impression that this aged French aristocrat was a figure of steel—cold, glistening, and somehow sinister. Anyone who had been present in that room watching her would have said that the woman diffused an atmosphere of dread, that in some unexplained way she was uncanny.

That there was great affection between these two became increasingly plain. To each of these human devils stewing in a hell of their own

devising and deliberate choice the other was the dearest thing in life. They were bound by other ties than those of blood; the devil had forged chains which kept them prisoners, but which they would not have broken if they had had the choice.

"And now, Antoine, you shall tell your mother all that has happened."

The pair made an effective picture—the man of sixty sitting like a child at his mother's feet, his head pillowed against her knees. A tiny white hand, remarkable still for its beauty, caressed his forehead with light, soothing touches of the finger-tips. With the firelight playing upon the sensitive and regal features of both man and woman, they presented a scene which would have struck any painter of genius with sudden inspiration.

"Westover's dead body was found outside the Casino at Cannes last night," said the Count.

He felt the body of his mother stiffen.

The Count laughed. It was a low, musical laugh. He might have been enjoying some subtle joke.

"Dorando, mother mine, did the job rather neatly . . . a knife-thrust through the heart. There will be no chance of that Englishman talking too much."

Like a thin, icy wind came the woman's comment.

"He should never have been allowed to leave

us, Antoine. He was valuable in many senses. Once here, he should have been retained."

"I know, dearest." The tone was humble, almost contrite. "But Conrad has been punished. Such an accident will not occur again."

"It might have been fatal if this man Westover had talked." His mother was still brooding.

He pressed the tiny hand to his lips.

"You are despondent to-night, *ma mère*; it is not like you. We take risks, certainly, but we have already agreed that they are necessary. Every now and then a wealthy visitor to the Riviera disappears, but what if they have been said to visit the Château of the White Wolf? I am known to be a hospitable person; my poor old mother likes company—she is blind, and so finds time drag rather heavily upon her hands—and aren't there many evil people to be found along the Mediterranean coast?" He used a tone of light banter and gentle raillery. "To cheer you up, *ma mère*," he continued, "I will say that you may shortly expect a visitor."

There was silence in the great room except for the rustle of the woman's dress as she moved in her chair.

"I am blind, and I find time drag rather heavily upon my hands." The words were accompanied by a peal of laughter that, although silvery, would have chilled the blood of any listener. There was hell in that laughter, and the face of almost un-

earthly beauty became devilish. The Count felt the tiny hands of his mother grip his shoulders tightly as she asked a question.

“Man or woman, Antoine?”

“Woman, *ma mère*. A very beautiful girl named Felicity Howard——”

“English, then.”

“As English as the rose she so closely resembles. We must do our best to make her happy, mother, for she is wealthy, and if she approves of the Château she may recommend it to her friends. Since we have turned hotel-keepers, we must do our best to secure future custom.”

A second tinkle of silvery laughter greeted the remark. On the surface there was nothing wrong either in what the Count de la Siagne said or in his mother's encouraging mirth; they might have been enjoying in the privacy of their own company a rather thin but favourite jest. But outside the door a servant, about to enter with some message, turned round as she heard the laugh and ran so hard, her hand pressed to her mouth to keep back the rising scream, that Satan himself might have been at her heels.

“Yes, mother,” continued the Count, “we must do everything we can for Miss Howard. She is so charming that I am already half in love with her——”

“Antoine,” interrupted his mother, with

another of those terrible laughs, "you are most amusing."

"It is true," he insisted; "next to you, *ma mère*, I consider Miss Howard to be the most beautiful woman I have ever seen."

"You are keeping something back, my son; you are not telling me everything." Once again the hand that was so small it might have belonged to a child was caressing his forehead.

"What can I tell you, *ma mère*, except that Miss Howard is attached to the British Intelligence Department?"

"Ah!" The Count could feel a wave of emotion pass through his mother's body.

"And that she is—or was—a friend of that man Westover?" she asked.

"That would not surprise me. She is, I should say, a girl of unimpeachable virtue, and yet she displayed rather marked friendliness to me, a perfect stranger, when I approached her in the Casino last night."

"Ah!" said his mother again.

"This morning I was fortunate enough to run across Miss Howard again in the Rue d'Antibes, and when I raised the question of her paying a visit to the Château she said she would be pleased to come quite soon. All that is needed now is a letter offering a definite invitation."

"And that you will send?"

"Immediately, dearest."

"I am blind, and time drags rather heavily upon my hands." The old woman chanted her dreadful litany again and then bent down and kissed her son's forehead.

"Your news pleases me, Antoine," she said. "I shall sleep well to-night, for you have made me happy. Will you please ring for Xandra?"

Alone in the vast room, the Count de la Siagne lit a cigar and, leaning back in a padded leather chair, reviewed recent events. As his mother had said, the fact that Westover, the meddlesome Englishman, had been allowed to escape, was to be regretted. A great deal might have been learned from this son of a highly placed politician. But Conrad had been punished so seriously he would never be able to offend again, and, in any case, Dorando had repaired the blunder so far as was possible.

Dorando must be back by this time. He would see him. Pressing a bell, he waited until the Slav who had waited at dinner appeared.

"See if Dorando is back. If he is, send him here at once."

The man bowed and left.

Within three minutes there was a knock on the door. An Italian of hang-dog appearance shuffled into the room. He looked furtively at the Count.

"Your report, Dorando."

The man shifted his feet.

"The Englishman, Heritage, did not have it

on him when we attacked him this morning. Perhaps he had left it at his hotel. I left Luigi to find that out."

"You watched him afterwards?"

"Yes. With another, he went to an English bank. There he asked to see the manager. Of course, I do not know what happened afterwards."

"Perhaps he deposited *it* at the bank?"

"That I cannot say. The police at Cannes suspect him of the murder."

The Count, surprised, unbent in laughter.

"That is distinctly amusing. Any other news?"

"He has made two friends—one another Englishman named Matcham, who is rich——"

"Rich, Dorando? How do you know?" The employer's interest had been quickened. He thrived off people who were rich.

"At the hotel—the Chester—he has been talking. Luigi overheard."

"Yes—well, find out exactly how rich he is, Dorando. You know the way."

"Yes, I know the way. But the Englishman Heritage has another friend—the Englishwoman, Miss Howard. They work together."

Suspicion now leapt into the Count's face. If this was true, then something of the truth must already have occurred to Felicity Howard—and she had sent for assistance. Heritage and his

new-found friend Matcham might also belong to the British Intelligence. It must have been because she was meeting this colleague of hers that she had declined to have lunch with him that morning ; that much was plain.

“ How do you know this ? ”

The spy shrugged his shoulders as though the question was not worth answering.

“ My information is correct,” he said ; and the Count, who knew the man could be relied upon, did not pursue the matter.

“ Continue to watch both Englishmen,” he ordered, “ and report to me. You had better return to Cannes to-night. But wait. There is another matter.” He lowered his voice, speaking earnestly for several minutes. At the end Dorando nodded.

“ It shall be done,” he said.

The Count de la Siagne had been a bedfellow of danger so often during the past six years that the question of actual fear did not now enter his mind. But he was certainly rather ruffled as he threw away the half-consumed cigar and lit a fresh one. Everything pointed to this charming English girl being a potential enemy. Leaning back in his chair, he marshalled his facts : An English Secret Service agent of high birth—no less a personage, indeed, than the son of the Foreign Secretary of Britain—had gone out of his way, whilst visiting the Riviera, to cultivate

his acquaintance. That alone had been significant. He himself being occupied by one fact only—namely, that this extremely likeable young man possessed plenty of money—had certainly done nothing to frustrate the other's desire. On the contrary, he had encouraged the friendship by inviting Westover to visit him at his château, which, being above Vence, was very conveniently placed for the purpose to which he was now using it.

Westover had proved to be less malleable than his mother and he had hoped or expected, and after a fortnight had contrived the apparently impossible. In other words, he had escaped from what had become a prison. In escaping he had taken something of extreme value—something which might be instrumental in putting a rope round the Count de la Siagne's neck, or at least in having him placed in a position of considerable danger.

Perhaps the English girl spy had had this secret emblem passed to her. Perhaps she had seen and talked to Westover before Dorando's knife had done its work. That would explain why she was so anxious to come to the Château. She guessed so much and wanted to know more. Well, he would certainly give her plenty to think about. A warm welcome should be prepared for her. Already his mother was making her preparations.

The risk? What greater risk could there be in this case than in any of the others? On the other hand, it seemed to him imperative that, if his surmises about this girl were correct, she should be silenced. The High Council would demand this, once it knew of the danger.

Going to a handsome desk in a corner of the room, he pulled out paper and fountain-pen and commenced to write :

“DEAR MISS HOWARD,

“I am writing to say how much I am looking forward to your promised visit. Could you not come for the week-end?

“My mother, who is eighty-two, but very bright and alert, unfortunately is blind, and finds time hanging rather heavily on her hands. She will give you the warmest of welcomes, and now joins me in cordial good wishes.

“Very sincerely yours,

“ANTOINE DE LA SIAGNE.”

The Count hummed a tune as he secured the envelope.

BACK at the Chester Hotel the two friends were talking.

"You look as though you'd received bad news from home," commented Bill Matcham. "What's worrying you, old son?"

Stephen paid no immediate attention to the question.

"I'll tell you later," he said. "What I want now is for you to repeat every word that crippled chap told you in Nicolai's this morning."

"Well, it wasn't a great deal so far as words went, but it was plenty otherwise. I couldn't understand why he jumped off the deep end so much, considering they were both wrong 'uns. I had always imagined there was a certain brotherhood between crooks——"

"Perhaps they had worked together and fallen out," suggested the listener.

"What a brain the boy has!" Matcham's voice rang with admiration. "Anyway, unless he was putting up a bluff, which I very much doubt, because there doesn't appear to be any sense in that, he hates this Count joker like poison. Just jealousy, perhaps, because the other is in a larger way of business—but there it is. But look here, Steve, you look positively pipped. Can't your Uncle Bill do anything?"

"Yes, you can listen to what I want to tell you."

Matcham did not once interrupt.

"You're in love, old boy," he summed up at the conclusion of the other's story; "and, being in love, you're not—excuse my poor French—absolutely *bon* in the upper storey. What I mean to say is that you're inclined to look at things in a prejudiced way."

"Oh, go to hell!" exclaimed Heritage impatiently.

"Certainly, but just give me time to explain a little more fully what I mean. You meet a girl here who, I am willing to admit, is able to knock spots off practically every other woman in the place. For some reason which isn't very clear to me even now, she does the Good Samaritan. So far, very good. You fall for her and, conscious as you are of not being in her class, you come the Walter Raleigh stuff and do the on-the-knee business. To cut it short, you offer your help because you feel that she's paddling in pretty muddy water. Am I correct so far?"

"Go on."

"*Merci, beachamp*. But what does this girl do when you make the offer of your good right arm? Why, she practically tells you to forget it! Did she take back that money?"

"I forced it on her."

Bill shook his head.

"I don't understand it, and what I don't understand I try to forget," he summed up. "Now that you've given her back the money, I can't see for the life of me what you want to butt in again for. Oh, I know you're mashed on her, old man, but you'll soon get over that. So far this girl has given every indication of being able to look after herself, so why should you worry? I hate to say it, but she may even be in with this Count fellow on some special stunt."

"That's ridiculous," replied Heritage, his tone very curt; "so ridiculous that it's not worth a moment's thought. Good God! can't you see my point? If what the cripple Hewitt said is true, she's deliberately running into danger—terrible danger—putting herself in the hands of a swine. I *must* warn her."

Matcham showed commendable forbearance.

"Doesn't it occur to you that that little lady knows how many beans make five?" he asked. "If the thought hasn't already struck you that she may be perfectly well aware of what awaits her at this Château place, I suggest it now."

"I must see this Hewitt myself," replied Heritage.

"By all means. I don't mind losing a few quid if it's going to set your mind at rest, Steve. And, by the way, talking about money, you haven't very much left. Here"—pulling out a thick roll

of notes—"catch hold of this. When that's gone let me know."

Heritage shook his head.

"I can't take your money, Bill," he replied. "How on earth am I ever going to pay it back?"

"My choice cuckoo!" exploded the ex-clerk, "have we to go into all that twice in one day? Your luck will turn one of these bright mornings, and then you'll have so much oof you won't know where to hide it. Listen, Steve. When we get to this Villa Laurent"—looking at the card which he had pulled out of his pocket—"I'll give you a free hand with One-Leg, and then if you honestly think we ought to lend Miss Howard a hand—well, we'll go to it. I can't say fairer than that."

Stephen's depression vanished.

"Bill, you're a brick!" he exclaimed.

"I'm a brick from Brixton all right," agreed the other. "From now until tea-time, however, I'm going to try being a snorer from Surbiton. I'm beginning to feel my age. Grandad must have his forty winks. Call me when the teacups commence to tinkle." The speaker leaned back in his chair and within a minute was fast asleep.

Stephen was thinking of following his example when he noticed the *concierge* standing on the steps of the hotel. Directly he caught sight of him the man hastened forward.

"Monsieur Caron would like to see you in the

office, Monsieur," he said. There was an expression of apprehension on the man's face.

"All right, Benito. I'll come straight away. What is it all about, do you know?"

"Monsieur, pardon—but I think—I am not sure—it is something to do with the police."

The police!

The girl had been right, then.

Oh, well, he was prepared, in a measure. They couldn't arrest him for a crime which he had not committed; or, if they did, he could trust Bill Matcham to kick up enough fuss to cause the local Consul to take some sort of action.

The hotel manager's face was grave as he acknowledged Heritage's appearance.

"Monsieur, I apologise a thousand times," he said to his guest, "but this gentleman is from the police. He would like to ask you a few questions."

"Certainly." Stephen regarded the sallow-faced man with the long nose and the beady but shrewd eyes. "I am at your service," he said.

He wished the ordeal—for such he feared it would be—might be swiftly over, however.

"I am a detective," announced the beady-eyed man. "Monsieur, who has been kind enough to say he places himself at my disposal, will be pleased to answer the questions I shall put to him." He pulled out pencil and paper and

drew a chair to the table. M. Caron, tugging at his moustache, took the third chair.

"But perhaps you would choose for this interrogation to take place at the Hôtel de Ville?" The detective shut his notebook with a miniature bang.

"Not at all. I have nothing to hide. I shall be pleased for Monsieur Caron to hear everything that is said." The hotel manager's face lost something of its depression at the words, whereas the detective scowled as though an effective piece of stage-management upon which he had been inclined to compliment himself had been bungled.

"Very well." He sat down again and frowned at Heritage.

"Monsieur," he exclaimed suddenly, "do you deny that at twelve thirty-five this morning you were walking along the quay-wall outside the Casino?"

"Certainly not."

"Do you deny that you there bent over the body of a man—a man who was dead through a knife-thrust in his heart?"

"No, I do not deny it. May I relate exactly what happened?"

"One moment, please! Do you deny, Monsieur, that, instead of informing the police instantly of this terrible tragedy, as you should have done, you disappeared like a thief or an assassin?"

"Monsieur!" cried M. Caron indignantly.

The detective waved a hand.

"It is for Monsieur Heritage to answer that question," he said. "Why did you not inform the police of your discovery?" he went on to inquire.

"To be perfectly frank, because I was afraid I might be accused of the crime myself."

"You admit that!" The beady eyes were alight with triumph.

"I have already told you so. I am a stranger in Cannes, and I did not know anything about the local administration of justice."

"It is the best in France," announced the detective gravely.

"I have no doubt. But, as a man of the world, you will appreciate, perhaps, my position. I had left the Casino, having lost every penny I had in the world. It was my intention to commit suicide by jumping into the harbour——"

"Monsieur Heritage!" This from a thoroughly started M. Caron.

"Yes, it's quite true. I came out here with a hundred pounds, hoping to turn it into a fortune. Of course, I was a fool. You won't be surprised to hear that I lost instead of won. Last night I intended to finish everything. But on the way to the end of the quay-wall I saw a man bending over a figure which was on the ground. Directly he saw me this man vanished. I went to the other

to see if I could give any help, and discovered that he was dead—probably murdered by the fellow who had run away. I agree with you, Monsieur”—turning to the detective—“that I ought to have informed the police, but I lost my nerve.”

“That,” put in the hotel manager, “is easily understandable. I trust Monsieur is satisfied?”

The detective to whom the question had been put stared at Heritage.

“You have nothing else to tell me, Monsieur?” he asked.

“Yes. Lying by the side of the dead man’s body was a wallet filled with money.”

“Oh!”

“That money—every franc of it—is now in the Cannes branch of the English Westminster Bank. I deposited it there this morning.”

“Why, Monsieur?”

“Why? To wait for it to be claimed by the relatives of the dead man.”

“You have proof of what you say?”

“There is the bank manager, of course, and a friend who went with me.”

“Is your friend staying at this hotel?”

The answer was supplied in unexpected fashion. The door burst open to disclose an excited Bill Matcham. Bill looked as though he had just passed through a nightmare and was anxious to find the person responsible.

"What're they trying to put across you, Steve?" he demanded.

The detective swung round, frowning portentously at the speaker.

"Who is this?" he inquired.

Stephen found himself grinning. He could not help it; with the advent of Matcham the scene had taken on a comical aspect. Bill, as usual, brought his own atmosphere.

"This is the friend of whom I was speaking just now. He went to the bank with me this morning."

"Your name, Monsieur," said the detective curtly, busy with notebook again.

"I don't quite get this," remarked Matcham with an air of bewilderment. "Steve, who is this undertaker?"

"A French detective detailed to investigate the death of the poor devil I discovered murdered near the Casino last night. He appears to have the idea that I had something to do with it. He wants you to confirm what I have just told him about taking that four thousand pounds to the Westminster Bank this morning."

"Righto!" Bill turned to the frowning detective. "Now look here, Monsoor, I am a rich man—so rich that I could buy up the best part of Cannes, the police station included, and not turn a hair. If the gentleman doesn't understand that

properly," he added to Caron, "perhaps you would translate."

But the detective's knowledge of Bill's mother-tongue was sufficient.

"Monsieur must be a millionaire several times," he replied.

"I am," came the unblushing lie, "and what I want to tell you is this: Every franc will go to defending my friend here against any charge you may be thinking of making against him. He is as innocent as you are of this murder."

"No charge has yet been made against Monsieur Heritage." The remark seemed to be made grudgingly.

"And no charge had better be made—let me tell you that! Now I have a few questions to ask myself. I want your attention, please."

The voice of Matcham was so commanding, his manner so confident, that two out of the three other men in the room were impressed. The third—Heritage—felt inclined to shout with laughter. Good old Bill! He would have made a fortune on the stage.

"The man whose murdered body was found near the Casino last night was, I understand, English. I should like his name, please."

The detective retained something of his former manner.

"Monsieur must please give me his authority before I can answer that."

"Authority? This victim of a Cannes assassin is a fellow-countryman, and you ask me for my authority! Have you heard of the famous London newspaper, the *Morning*, Monsoor?"

"But, of course."

"Well, I am connected with it. . . . I think you would be well advised to tell me the name of the murdered man."

"We wish to avoid all possible scandal, Monsieur."

"So do I. You can rely upon my discretion. But it is necessary that I should know."

The detective bowed.

"The dead man has been identified as the Honourable Gerald Westover, son of Lord Dalrymple."

Matcham whistled softly.

"Lord Dalrymple's brother is one of the largest shareholders in the *Morning*," he said to Heritage. "The fog becomes thicker." Then to the detective: "I take it that you are satisfied with the explanation my friend has given you?"

"It will be necessary for the money which has been placed in the bank to be surrendered to the police."

"Of course—after you have given a receipt for it."

"And until he has the necessary official permission to leave, Monsieur Heritage must remain in Cannes."

"Neither of us had any idea of moving on for a bit, did we, Steve? Very well; we give you our word that we'll stay in Cannes until we hear from you again. Is that quite satisfactory?"

"I will inform the Commissaire," was the reply. "And now, please, we will go to the bank."

Matcham greeted the remark with an expletive.

"Hell!" he said. "I was dying for a cup of tea. But come along, Sherlock——"

The Frenchman looked inquiringly at Caron.

The latter, with a courteous smile, enlightened him.

"Monsieur wishes you to know that he considers you a great detective."

"*Bien!*" The frown disappeared at last.

## CHAPTER XIII

## DEATH SENDS A MESSAGE

MEANWHILE, not more than a mile away, Felicity was very busily engaged.

By the afternoon post came a letter so long that it took her a full couple of hours to decipher it. Ostensibly it was a discursive, rambling account of a week-end her "Uncle Fred" had

spent at Steyning, Sussex, recently, and as such would have been voted insufferably dull by anyone unfortunate enough to have to read it. But when the code she employed gave up its secret, Felicity sat back and pondered. This was a great thing—a tremendously great thing.

Her godfather, Sir Godfrey Barringer, had sent startling news. Information had come in from various sources, he said, to the effect that very real trouble was being brewed against Britain in consequence of recent pacts she had signed, and that the instigators thereof were reported to be travelling as fast as train, steamer, and aeroplane could carry them to formulate their final plans at a big meeting.

The chief of Z 1 added that he had reason to believe this meeting would be held shortly at either Cannes, Nice, or Monte Carlo. "I'm banking on Cannes," he added.

"The object of these people is to bring about another war in which this country would become involved. If they were successful in doing so they would stand to make millions. They are thoroughly unscrupulous and very powerful. I would give my left hand to know exactly what devilry they are plotting."

There was a great deal more, but this was the gist of the message. Felicity was bidden to increase her vigilance.

After carefully burning her notes, she lit a

cigarette and gave herself over to that dreamy state which induces concentrated thought. She had a great deal to think about : first, the death of Gerry Westover ; then the invitation which she hourly expected to receive from the Count de la Siagne ; then this message from Barringer ; and, last but by no means least, the meeting with the man Stephen Heritage. The memory of the talk that afternoon was still very fresh in her mind. She was able to recall the vibrant quality of his voice, the eagerness with which he had spoken.

It did not require much imagination to believe that the man was in danger of being in love with her. Strangely enough, the idea did not seem grotesque ; although she dismissed it quickly, she did not regard it with contempt. Perhaps this was because, she told herself quickly, the man represented a new type ; the marked, almost exaggerated respect he had paid her was in vivid contrast to the careless, offhand manner of the average man of her class.

But with what charming deference and humility he had offered her help ; altogether a quite delightful man, and . . .

But it was time to dress, she decided.

At the precise moment that Felicity, entering the dining saloon of the Mont Fleury, became the centre of attraction, the man who still hovered on the threshold of her thoughts turned to his com-

panion and said : " It's half-past seven. Let's get along."

The rest of the Chester crowd had gone into dinner. Bill Matcham watched the door close behind the last of the saunterers with a speculative eye.

" I hope this Hewitt bloke feeds his pigeons before rooking 'em," he said. " Oh, I know, I know ; you're all soul at the moment, but I feel all stomach. Anyhow, here's hoping for the best. No harm in that, I suppose?"

The *concierge* peeped out of his little office, where the telephone was fixed, and asked : " Can I get you a taxi, Messieurs?"

Heritage answered.

" No, thanks, Benito. We're dining out, and Mr. Matcham intends to get an appetite by walking."

" Not half I don't," corroborated Matcham. " Look here, Benito, to be on the safe side I'll get you to leave a plate of sandwiches and a bottle of white wine in my room by the time I get back. Will that be all right?"

" But certainly, Monsieur."

" Now for it, then," said the ex-clerk. He stepped through the door the *concierge* was holding open. " Which way to the Californie, Benito?"

" You can go by that gate," replied the *concierge*, pointing to the left ; " turn to the left at

the bottom of the street and keep straight on up the hill.''

Bill thanked him in his really dreadful French and walked down the steps.

Heritage was silent as they stepped out on to the gravelled drive. To Bill this prospective visit to a card-sharper was merely an interesting experience, just another more or less idle adventure. He had nothing personal at stake.

For the past hour he himself, however, had been possessed by a sense of dread expectancy. Something terrifying, he felt, was about to happen. It was as though he had been suddenly gifted with an ability to read the future. What this tragedy might be he had no idea, but that he was walking on the edge of a precipice he felt certain. He had thought of conveying something of this feeling of apprehension to Matcham, but believed that Bill, not understanding his state of mind, would merely laugh derisively. And any kind of laughter now would have jarred.

Fate had dealt very strangely with him during the past few days, and, if any credence was to be placed in this sense of foreknowledge which had come to him so uncannily, he was destined to have yet more weird experiences. From the soul-numbing humdrum of his former existence he had been thrown into a life so spectacularly exciting as to be almost incredible. There was a lure in this danger-quest upon which he had been started

by destiny, however, and he knew he would not stop until he had come to the very end, wherever that might be. Although he paid tribute to the premonitions which had filled his mind for the past hour, he did not allow them to deter him. He was going through with this thing now that he had started. There would be no reward—he would be the worst kind of fool even to think that there might be—and the only satisfaction was that he would be keeping the promise he had made to himself. But that, and the knowledge that he was working for the girl whose memory would be with him to the end of his life, were sufficient.

Bill characteristically broke in.

“Shiver me timbers, Steve, but you’re as lively as a dumb man going to a funeral! You’ll have to speak now, if only to ask this cove the way. The Villa Laurent. See if he knows where it is. You know what my French is like.”

They were by this time in a dark, winding road, badly lit and ill-paved. Beyond an occasional motor-car which came screeching round one of the hairpin bends, they seemed to have the world to themselves. At the moment that Matcham spoke, however, the light from an electric standard showed a French workman. He was swinging an umbrella and humming a tune.

“But, yes,” the native said when Stephen put the question, “Monsieur will find the Villa

Laurent four hundred yards or so up on the right. It is a house with orange walls and blue blinds. Very artistic, yes."

Stephen, thanking him, had gone barely a dozen yards before he stopped. From behind them down the hill floated the sound of a laugh.

All his forebodings returned.

"Why should that fellow laugh?" he said to Matcham; "there was nothing funny in what I said, surely?"

"Oh, come on, old man," was the somewhat impatient reply. "He's probably tickled to death at the thought of the garlic stew that's waiting to be demolished when he gets home. And talking about stew, I feel I could eat an elephant—raw. Let's push on."

Still vaguely uneasy—that laugh had seemed to him to hold a note of teeth-bared mockery—Heritage moved forward again. Bill, urged on by his hunger, was setting a stiff pace, and the next few hundred yards were covered quickly.

"Villa Laurent," said Matcham, striking a match and looking at the name painted on a gate; "here we are. Hullo, there doesn't seem to be much doing, though. The blinking place isn't very inviting; what do you think, Steve?"

Heritage, following the direction of the pointing finger, shuddered, he knew not why; caution whispered a warning. "Keep away," it said; "keep away!"

The villa, which stood back some fifty feet or so from the road where they now were, was in complete darkness. Not a light showed. It was just a humped mass of gloom—eerie, somehow, and certainly forbidding.

“Perhaps he lives round at the back,” suggested Bill. “I’m going in, anyway. The fellow invited us to dinner, don’t forget.”

“Keep away!” The voice of caution whispered again to Heritage, but, with Matcham already inside the gate, he had no alternative but to follow.

It was a small, flat house of the usual stucco. There was a loggia in front and a door at the back of this, which, when Matcham tried the handle, proved to be locked. The windows of both rooms in front had the blinds drawn.

“Not much of the fatted pheasant atmosphere about this, I must say,” commented Bill bitterly. He intended his tone to be one of comic jest, but to his companion it sounded like a joke being made over a grave. This house, if occupied at all, seemed more like a place of the dead than the living.

“Come on round to the back ; it’s no use staying here,” said Matcham.

Stephen endeavoured to thrust aside the misgivings which now crowded upon him in greater force.

“Try the bell,” he said, pointing.

"A bell, eh? I didn't notice that. Here goes for a rouser."

Catching hold of the bell-handle, the speaker gave it a tremendous tug. From what seemed a great distance there came to them a faint tinkle—a mere wisp of a sound—and then Matcham reeled backwards. The bell-handle had come away in his hand.

Bill flung the wreckage indignantly to the ground.

"This place is beginning to give me the willies, Steve," he said; "but I'm going to get in, all the same. Round the back, there's a good lad. Follow your uncle."

A few seconds brought them to the rear of the villa. Pitch darkness still shrouded everything with an inky pall, but Matcham, striking match after match with frequent objurgations as he scorched his fingers, presently gave a whinny of excitement.

"There! That window!" he cried. "It's open."

If the sight of that raised window, opening on to a gully of darkness, made the speaker elated, it inspired dread in the heart of Heritage. Not fear—dread. One by one the facts were proving that the singular premonitions he had had were being justified. "Keep away," whispered the voice of caution for the fourth time.

But Bill was importunate and not to be put off.

"There's something funny here, Stevo," he whispered hoarsely, "and I'm going to see what it is."

After that, what was there to be done except to follow Matcham in through this window, which seemed as if it might have been left open purposely for them to enter?

The room in which they found themselves was inky black.

"Quietly," whispered Heritage, in turn, touching his boisterous companion on the arm. "Wait while I get a light."

It was significant, now the crisis had come, that Heritage should take on the leadership. After all, this was his affair. Had it not been, neither would have come to this sinisterly silent villa that night; they would have been dining in comfort at the Chester, with lights blazing and a feeling of security all about.

"All right, it's your show," replied Matcham. He, who had led up till now, was quite content to follow and obey. "Here, catch hold of this," he continued, and Stephen felt something cold, which he knew to be a revolver, thrust into his hand.

From somewhere beyond them in the house floated a faint, almost imperceptible sound.

"They've heard us," whispered Bill. His voice was hushed as though fear had leapt in beneath his guard.

"It was only a floor-board creaking," replied Heritage steadily, and hoped that what he said was true.

Very carefully he struck a match. The light showed a room furnished as a sort of lounge. There was a buffet with plenty of bottles and glasses and a card-table already set out, with two new packs of cards lying on the green baize cloth.

The thought struck both of them simultaneously: This was the room where they were to have played that night. . . .

The match burned to its end. Darkness wiped out everything again. But Stephen had seen the door on the other side of the room, and he moved towards it, after signing to Matcham to follow.

He found himself in a space which he imagined to be a passage or corridor. His breath came more quickly. It was here that the real danger, if any existed, would be: an enemy, watching, could pick them both off with ridiculous ease. Yet now that they had come so far they must keep on. In this house there might be a clue which would reach out to Felicity Howard and the danger which threatened her.

He had to find it.

There was a tug at his coat.

"For God's sake strike a match," said Matcham, his voice snapping. "I can't stand this blasted dark any longer."

Because the desire to find out all that might

be waiting to be seen was irresistible, Stephen did as he was bid.

As he had supposed, they were in a passage. To the right a circular staircase led upwards. To the left was another room.

"Nothing so far," he had just told himself when he felt his arm seized.

"Beneath that door—*look!*" Bill's voice was febrile with excitement. It was like a violin string that had been carelessly twanged.

Stephen's left hand, groping along the wall, found a switch. He pressed it down. The light was so dazzling after that former impenetrable gloom that it hurt.

"*Blood!*"

Matcham's exclamation, shrill with terror, rang out with violent force. The words seemed to be hurled against the wall and to be flung back into their faces.

Heritage felt like cursing the other for being such a fool. He would have done so had not his eyes caught that thick, dullish-red stream trickling from beneath the closed door on the left and reaching almost to his feet.

There was no longer any need to wait. That room must contain a horror unspeakable, but he had to see it.

In his desperate haste he flung himself against the door. It crashed open, precipitating him into the centre of the room, and causing his feet to

stumble against something big and heavy—something that was dull and unresponsive, and alarmingly still.

“The cripple—oh, my God !”

Before Stephen could turn, Matcham had told the grisly secret. He looked to see Bill pointing with a twitching finger. The man they had come to visit lay stretched upon the floor—and he was horribly dead. There was a deep cut in his throat from which the blood still welled. And all around was a viscous red lake, most terrible to see.

“Keep quiet !” warned Heritage, for Matcham seemed to be on the verge of another outburst. He himself was tingling. But an unexpected mastery of his nerves had come ; he felt cool and resourceful. Strange—but there it was. He was finding himself in the dark dread of that moment.

They both stood motionless for a full minute after Heritage had found the room switch and had turned on the light. The assassin might still be in the house ; indeed, it seemed difficult to imagine that he could have got far away ; by every sign this crime had been quite recently committed.

“Stand by the door—and shoot at sight.”

Heritage thrust the revolver into Matcham’s hand and urged the other forward.

“My God !” cried Matcham again, but his voice was more steady. It had lost the shrill note

of approaching hysteria. He went to his post like a soldier trained to obey.

Stephen, ignoring the dreadful exhibit, looked round. The room was furnished as a dining *salon*. Four places were laid. It was here, then, that they were to have eaten.

A scene, vivid and startling, flashed before his mental sight. He was able to picture the cripple, moving easily on his arm-crutches in spite of his infirmity, arranging this meal which was to serve as the baited trap. In company with the girl, his accomplice. . . . Heritage turned. It was strange. Where was that girl? Hiding upstairs? Dead herself in another room? Well, he would come to that later.

Another reel of the picture unrolled itself. He saw the man standing just inside the room, not a yard from where Matcham was now. All his preparations had been made; everything was good. A smile appeared on his attractive if hard-bitten face. That night he would be a hundred, perhaps two hundred, pounds better off. The "killing" promised well.

And then . . .

What remained of this imaginative picture was like a scene out of the Pit. The lights must suddenly have gone out, but the assassin, a true creature of the outer darkness, glided easily in the gloom. A lunge, a thrust—and it was done. Very simply. It was possible that the murderer









this afternoon," said Laxendale darkly. As an unkind but candid friend had once remarked, Tommy might be strong on the first service, but the only real use he had for his head was to hang his hat on it.

"Who? Bernard Shaw? I hear he's at Antibes."

"Who's Bernard Shaw?" inquired Laxendale blankly. "I mean that fellow I was talking to you about at the Ambassadeurs last night before——" Realising that he was stepping on delicate ground, he stopped.

"Do you mean le Comte de la Siagne?" asked Felicity innocently. She had to assume this pastoral maiden manner because of Laxendale's former attitude.

"No, not that rotter," replied the tennis player with a frown, "although it's about him we were talking."

She professed to see light.

"Oh, you mean your private detective friend."

"He's nothing of the sort!" declared Laxendale indignantly. "He's a perfectly decent sort—and as good a chap at the net as you'd see almost anywhere."

"But I thought this paragon was at Bordighera."

"So he was—but he came across to-day because of a yarn he had heard."

"So you met; and he, no doubt, gave you

some more of his sensational disclosures. Is that what you are taking so long to tell me, Tommy?"

Laxendale, after looking round, lowered his voice.

"He told me that the dead body of the man Westover had been found—and that the yarn was the chap had been murdered. I thought I'd let you know Fel—you having been a pal of Westover's—before I pushed along to the police."

The thought of this well-meaning blunderer at the Hôtel de Ville gave her a feeling of almost uncontrollable anger. But she mastered it.

"And what do you intend to tell the police, Tommy?"

"What do I intend to tell the police?" repeated the tennis player, his tanned face expressing his astonishment, "why, that this Count de la Siagne fellow is a dirty hound and wants watching. Who knows but what he isn't responsible for Westover's murder?"

Felicity put up a hand in warning. Laxendale, honest, conscientious, and staunch to a degree, must be stopped. His mind must be diverted. This was essential. If he went to the police he would probably have his vague suspicions treated with contempt. That would not matter so much. What was vitally important, however, was that the Count might be placed on his guard. If this happened, everything would be ruined. She must act instantly.

"I can understand exactly how you feel, Tommy," she told him, "but, all the same, you must promise me not to do anything so foolish."

"'So foolish?' Honestly, Fel, I don't understand."

"Well, then, I'll try to explain. You say you intend to inform the police here in Cannes that you have every reason to believe one of the best-known men in the whole of the Riviera is responsible for a terrible crime. Without any actual proof you would try to convince them that it is their duty to arrest the owner of an illustrious name. What do you think they would say to you in reply, Tommy? Why, they would merely smile politely and show you the door."

The tennis player frowned.

"Then I'll tackle the swine—sorry!—myself."

"Tommy," she said, "I hate to have to say it, but can't you realise how absurd you are? My dear man, you simply can't go straight up to a man, even on the Riviera, and say: 'Look here, why did you kill So-and-so?' Don't you see?"

Laxendale ground the stub of his cigarette into an ash-tray.

"Perhaps you're right," he admitted reluctantly; "but what's to be done? Hang it, there's no getting over the facts that that poor

devil Westover has been done in and that he did know this fellow de la Siagne."

"My advice is to let things remain as they are. Lord Dalrymple will probably be arriving to-morrow."

"He knows, then?"

"Yes. I wired him."

"You?"

She affected a nonchalance she did not feel.

"I was called in by the police to identify the body."

Laxendale moved his shoulders as though he would like to shift from them a weighty burden.

"I can't say I understand things a bit, Fel, but you probably know best."

"You don't think I am not playing the game by poor Gerry Westover?"

Laxendale's eyes opened wide.

"Good Lord, no. Only——"

"Only—what?"

"Well, I don't know how to put it, Fel, but out here you seem so different to what you are in London."

"Nonsense!" She had to squash this idea.

"I'm exactly the same." She rose and held out her hand. "I'm frightfully tired, though, Tommy. You mustn't think me rude, but I'm going straight up to my room. It was splendid of you to look me up. And now promise me one

thing: you won't say a word about this to anyone—not even to your news-gathering friend."

"He's pushed back to Bordighera."

"Nor to anyone else. If the mystery of Gerry Westover's death is ever to be solved, the least said about the affair at the present time, the better. Promise, Tommy!"

"All right; I'll be as mum as an oyster." He looked at her inquiringly. "What are you doing to-morrow night, Fel?"

"I don't quite know," she replied with a smile so faint that Laxendale did not notice it.

"I thought of asking if you'd care to feed at the Ambassadeurs again?"

"Thanks awfully, Tommy—but I am afraid I cannot say for certain."

"Oh, very well," said the tennis player, not disappointed because he had not believed he would have the luck.

The letter had arrived by that morning's post. Could she not come for the week-end? the writer had asked. It was Friday, and she was impatient to begin her work. Felicity instructed the *concierge* to telephone to the Château to say she would be ready to start after tea. To have given an earlier time would have shown too great an eagerness.

At a quarter-past five a powerful blue touring

Rolls, a car conspicuous in a town of splendid automobiles, drew up before the hotel entrance. From it descended a man wearing a Savile Row ulster. It was le Comte de la Siagne.

"Mademoiselle, you confer a great honour upon me and my poor house," he said, bowing over her hand. "My mother sends her felicitations and is impatient to meet you."

"I am so sorry to hear of her infirmity."

"But you must not allow that fact to depress you. Most certainly not! *Ma mère*, she is wonderful!—bright, alert, always cheerful. To hear her laugh—so full of happiness—it does me good! True, now and then she finds time hanging rather heavily on her hands, but what would you? She is eighty-two, and has lost the use of her eyes. . . ."

"I am so sorry," said Felicity again. She found herself wishing that the Count had not told her about his mother's disability. She was going into his house as an enemy. There was something distinctly unpleasant about the thought of being unfriendly to anyone who was blind.

"As I said before, you must not think of it. When you meet my mother you will realise what compensations the good God gives to those who suffer. So"—as he watched the hotel servants return from placing luggage in the car—"everything is ready. Shall we not start, Mademoiselle?"

Had Felicity allowed her imagination to run

riot, she would have trembled at the thought which came to her as she stepped into the car. This was unnerving. Normal life, as she knew it, had ended. She was going into an existence which would prove entirely different from anything she had previously known. This adventure was likely to be more nerve-testing than any in her experience.

Before he released the clutch, her companion turned to her.

"You are not cold, Mademoiselle?" he inquired solicitously.

"No," she answered. But it was not true. In spite of the fur coat she wore, her thoughts had induced a fit of the shivers.

These soon passed. The Count drove like an archangel of speed; the car, gently purring like a giant cat, was soon eating up the miles. It was not long before they had left practically all trace of habitation behind and were climbing high into the Maritime Alps.

Twilight came suddenly, and then, like a dying lamp being swiftly extinguished, darkness wrapped the world about.

"That is Vence," announced the Count. "Only another five miles now. I hope I am not going too fast?"

"No, I am enjoying the drive. You have a splendid car, Count."

"Yes," he replied, taking a terrific hairpin

bend with breath-taking nonchalance ; " I bought it from Seabrook, the English racing motorist."

Upwards, always upwards into the desolate solitude of the hilly country leading to the snow-topped Alps, the Rolls twisted and wormed its way. Sometimes it was skirting a precipice, at others it swung through openings that appeared to be cut out of the solid rocks. An awe-inspiring experience with the powerful head-lamps casting grotesque shadows on either side.

The Château of the White Wolf was come upon so suddenly that it was difficult for Felicity to keep back the exclamation of wonderment that rose to her lips. Another bend in the road cut out of the mountain's side, and it was there—a grim-looking mass of sprawling masonry, with a lofty tower at either end plunging upwards to the frowning sky.

The car stopped outside a porter's lodge, a man appeared, and the great gates swung open immediately. A short drive up a winding carriage-way brought them to a stone-flagged courtyard, which reminded Felicity of an English castle.

" Welcome to the Château de la Siagne, Mademoiselle." The Count had already opened the car door and was holding out his gloved hand to assist her to alight.

Fighting the impression of almost overwhelming desolation by which she was suddenly

attacked, Felicity accepted the proffered help and got to the ground.

Slowly, and, it seemed, clumsily, a great door with an iron grille at the top opened. The Château of the White Wolf was ready to receive its latest visitor.

Beyond the door was a cavern of a hall—so gloomy, it appeared to her, that she was reluctant to enter it. But, as she hesitated, she noticed a tiny figure, waiting. It was a woman, so old that she knew it must be the Count's mother.

"Allow me to present you to my mother, Madame la Comtesse de la Siagne," said her host, standing by her side.

As though he was conducting his guest to a royal presence, the Count approached the tiny, fragile figure with every evidence of devoted homage.

"*Ma mère*," he said, "this is the English lady, Mademoiselle Felicity Howard, my friend, who has honoured us by a short visit."

The dull, filmed eyes, staring straight at her, gave Felicity an uncomfortable feeling. Perhaps it was because her nerves were still not under proper control that she felt she could not like this woman, whose piled white hair and china-like beauty should have induced a feeling of respectful affection.

"I bid you welcome, my dear Mademoiselle Howard." The voice of the Comtesse was sweet

and clear ; it reminded Felicity of the chiming of a silver bell. " Come near to me, my child."

Felicity complied. She was standing so close now that she could hear the other woman's breathing. La Comtesse, she decided, must have suffered from some recent excitement, for her breath came in little short gasps. Yet her voice remained steady as she said : " I am blind, as perhaps my son has told you. My hands have now to take the place of my eyes. Will you permit me to touch you ? It is my way of making a stranger's acquaintance. I am able to tell character from the face."

With the eyes of the Count fixed upon her, Felicity could not but yield, although the request, harmless enough as it sounded in the circumstances, made her want to step away.

It was uncanny to feel those light, delicate fingers fluttering over her forehead, cheeks, mouth, and chin. But the ordeal did not last very long, and when it was over she had her reward. " I feel that you are good," said the Comtesse. " I shall be pleased to have you for my friend."

" You honour me, Comtesse," Felicity replied. Her infirmity, coupled with her age, had made this woman somewhat peculiar, but the proffer of friendship she had made was welcome. The time would assuredly come when she might want a friend in that house. Yet, would it prove to be the speaker ? Somehow she doubted it.

“And now you will want to go to your room,” put in the Count. “You will find your luggage already there.” To his mother: “Dearest——” But the Comtesse had already given some summons, for a maid appeared, waiting for an order.

“Xandra will see that you are made comfortable, my child,” said the Comtesse kindly; “we dine at eight.”

“Until then,” added the Count, taking the visitor’s hand and carrying it to his lips.

Felicity followed the maid through a bewildering number of passages until a winding staircase was reached. Her guide did not speak, but pointed upwards with a hand that seemed unsteady. As she started to ascend, a cold draught swept down from somewhere.

“Is a window open?” she asked the maid.

The latter turned. She had a pale face which seemed to bear the imprint of some suppressed suffering.

“I will ascertain, Mademoiselle, after I have taken you to your room.” The voice was flat and toneless.

The staircase was not very high, and at the top another corridor stretched away to the left. At the end of this was a door, which the maid opened.

“Mademoiselle’s room,” she announced.

The first thing Felicity noticed was that a fire burned cheerily on the hearth. This was the most

welcome sight since leaving Cannes. She went up to it, warming her hands, which were cold. After a few seconds curiosity made her survey the rest of the room. This, although low-roofed with heavy oak beams running across it, looked cosy and comfortable. While she still stood by the fire a manservant entered with her luggage, placing it on the wooden rest at the bottom of the bed.

"Shall I unpack for Madame?" inquired the pale-faced maid.

Felicity realised now what was strange in this girl. Her eyes were full of fear. Quite recently she must have passed through some unnerving ordeal and the experience had impressed itself indelibly upon her mind.

"What is your name?" she asked.

"Xandra, Mademoiselle."

"Xandra. A charming name. But you do not look happy, Xandra. I am a stranger, I know, but perhaps I could help—if you want any help."

An expression of longing so intense that it became a pain transformed the girl's face. Then, as though the dominant feeling of fear swept all before it again, the girl looked down, and when she addressed Felicity her face was as lifeless as before.

"Mademoiselle is very kind," she said. But nothing more.

Then she busied herself with her duties, proving extremely efficient.

"If Mademoiselle should require anything further, she has only to ring." She pointed to a push-bell by the side of the bed.

"Thank you, Xandra."

The girl walked to the door. She hesitated for a moment before, moved by a desire which became uncontrollable, she swerved and walked swiftly back to the visitor.

"Why does Mademoiselle come to the Château?" she demanded.

From out of a face as white as chalk the speaker's eyes blazed. Her lips twitched while she waited for the reply.

"Xandra, tell me—I am not offended—why do you ask me that?" There was so much urgency in the other's manner that the question had to be taken seriously.

The girl bit her lip. To save her from falling, Felicity caught her by the shoulder.

"Mademoiselle, this house is ev——" She stumbled upon the next word, which was not completed.

"I have come myself to see that you have everything you require, Mademoiselle." There was no mistaking that silver-bell voice. Standing in the doorway was the Comtesse, "looking" into the room with her unseeing eyes and leaning upon a tall black cane with a silver handle.

Felicity acted on the inspiration of the moment. She saw Xandra's mouth open preparatory to a scream, and, putting out a hand, placed it over the girl's lips. At the same time she patted the maid upon the back to give her confidence.

"Thank you, Comtesse," she said, "Xandra has seen to everything. She has been splendid."

"That is good. Have you yet changed?"

"Not yet, Comtesse."

"Then you can spare Xandra?"

"Oh, certainly."

"I do not want to burden you with our troubles, but once I had a legion of servants. Now——" The speaker broke off. "Since you have finished with Mademoiselle, take me to my room, Xandra."

The maid, her face convulsed with what seemed a fresh spasm of terror, turned to go. Felicity smiled at her encouragingly, and something of the terrible dread reflected in her eyes died down. The Comtesse took the proffered arm and walked away, her stick tip-tapping down the corridor.

Shutting the door, Felicity looked at her watch. She had still plenty of time for a cigarette before she commenced to change. Already she had learned something—that one of the servants was stalked by fear and that this dread became more pronounced at the appearance of the Comtesse, that enigmatical figure who, she felt sure, was

not at all the kindly and benevolent old lady she affected to be.

A wind must have sprung up, for the heavy curtains which Xandra had drawn across the two windows became disturbed. Low, moaning sounds crept in from the passages outside. She felt grateful for the crackling fire; without it she would have been very cold—and very lonely. So lonely, she concluded, that——

Shrugging her shoulders, she told herself not to be a fool. She had been in lonely places before, and had pulled through from some extremely unpleasant experiences. Why should this have a different ending from any of the others?

Stepping away from the fire, she started to dress.

It was a poor dinner. There could be no other conclusion. In spite of the ceremony with which it was served, the meal was one for which a Comte de la Siagne should have apologised.

And apologise her host did.

“This is not the hospitality I should have liked to offer you, Mademoiselle, but alas! my mother and I are poor now where we used to be rich. This château requires many alterations, many more servants——” He sighed without completing the sentence. “But I pray you to believe, nevertheless, that you are more than welcome.”

From the other side of the table, looking so small in that great space of a dining-room, the Comtesse spoke.

"Much can be forgiven a kind heart, and you can be assured, Mademoiselle Howard, that you will find that here."

"Please do not say any more. I am going to enjoy my week-end tremendously, I feel sure."

Mother and son smiled.

"It is a ludicrous situation, perhaps," continued the Count, "but my mother and I have been forced to become hotel-keepers. You see," he went on, "there are people who are glad to get away for a week or so from the noise and the glitter of Cannes, Nice, and Monte Carlo. Up here in the mountains they are able to find the peace and quietude for which they long. So"—a low, ironical laugh—"they come to us as paying guests. Is it not amusing? Are you not ashamed of us?"

"Not at all," was the decisive reply. "I think that it's very brave of you, Comtesse, to undertake such a thing. You must permit me to——"

A tiny hand was upheld.

"Mademoiselle does not mean to offend, I feel sure—but you are our guest for as long as you care to remain. I am blind, and I find time hang rather heavily on my hands. Mademoiselle

has been kind enough to honour me with her presence."

The Count de la Siagne laughed.

"Mademoiselle will certainly stay with us, *ma mère*," he said.

To Felicity the words sounded not so much a statement as a threat.

Looking at him, she saw his eyes were gleaming.

## CHAPTER XV

## THE REVOLVER SHOT

BACK at that villa of death in the Californie the two friends continued to confer.

"Well, what's to be done now?" asked Matcham. He was looking at what had once been a man, and his voice was cracked and strained.

"Nothing," was the reply he had least expected; "at least, not in connection with this poor devil. I've had one bout with the police to-day, and I don't want another. We've got the information we wanted——"

"By God we have!" was the passionate confirmation.

"—and, officially, the less we know about

what happened in this house to-night, the better. That's my view. If we went talking to the police they'd just as likely shove us both into their local gaol on suspicion of having done this fellow in. Don't forget I'm already half suspected of one murder."

"I rather imagine I bluffed that fellow this afternoon, anyway," said Bill, with a return to something of his former manner; "but no doubt you're right, old son. Let's clear off. Ugh! I bet I shall have some pretty rotten dreams to-night."

"We don't go before we've searched the house," replied Heritage; "the cripple may not be the only one," he added significantly.

"Hell, I should hate to think of that girl——" started Matcham. "But, all right, Steve; carry on."

Although they explored the villa from top to bottom, there was no further sinister find. Apart from that grim dining-room, everything was orderly and conventional.

"If she worked with him—where's the girl?" asked Bill, when they had come to an end.

"I've been wondering that ever since we got here. A dozen things may have happened, of course. She lived here with him without a doubt, but when the murderer started to get busy she may have been seized by an almighty funk."

"And sloped off? But that's a damned

ghastly thought—leaving a one-legged man in the lurch.”

“The whole thing is ghastly, isn’t it?” replied Heritage; “and now the sooner we clear out the better.” He started to lead the way into the back room through the open window of which they had gained an entry half an hour before.

“My Gosh! it sounds awful to say it, I suppose, but I’m hungrier than ever,” declared Matcham, when they had left the Villa Laurent a couple of hundred yards behind.

“I could do with something to eat myself,” was the sober response of his companion.

“Well, as we’ve missed dinner at the hotel, I suggest we go into a restaurant—and a place where they have a band. I’m dead tired of quietness and silence and general creepiness for the moment.”

Stephen nodded because he understood the other’s mood.

“We’ll go to the Café de Paris on the Croisette. That ought to be noisy enough for you.”

Another ten minutes’ walk brought them back into the town. The outlying streets of Cannes are as deserted after eight o’clock at night, even in the season, as those of an English market town, but every time he heard a footstep behind him Heritage stepped into the roadway to allow the person to pass. He was living in a fantastic world

in which the more bizarre and extraordinary the occurrence, the more likely it was to happen. The affair that night would not end in Bill and him just leaving the Villa Laurent; there were bound to be developments—but he was determined that one of these should not take the form of a knife-thrust in the back before they reached the Café de Paris.

After the recent experience it was not surprising that he should look warily at every passer-by. He had given Bill back his revolver and had only his bare hands to depend on in case of an attack. But these were clenched, and he moved on the balls of his feet like a boxer ready to spring. To-morrow he would have to buy a revolver. To go about unarmed after what had happened would be the act of a fool.

Bill, usually so talkative, remained strangely silent. It took a great deal to quieten the ex-clerk from Fleet Street, but that night's tragedy had done it. For the time being, at all events.

Now he stepped up to his friend.

"It makes you a bit jumpy, a thing like this, doesn't it, Stevo?" he said. "Look at all these houses with the lights glinting through the shutters." They were passing down the Boulevard d'Alsace at the time. "God knows what may not be going on in some of them! Perhaps that cripple's girl . . ." His voice ended in a stutter.

"You're getting fanciful, Bill," replied Heritage. "Think of what you'll order for supper."

His own thoughts were running riot enough without receiving any help from Matcham. The murder that night had been so fiendishly cold-blooded, had been done with so diabolical and yet so cool a hand, that his reason almost threatened to give way when he thought of Felicity Howard placing herself in the power of the man who must have planned it. Why? And why? And why? What had been her reason for going to that swine? Why should she cultivate the acquaintance of this super-scoundrel? The answer was a riddle which mocked him.

The roar of a train drawing up at the station attracted his attention as they crossed the wooden bridge leading to the centre of the town. He was grateful for the momentary relief from his thoughts.

"Keep your eyes about you here," he warned Matcham as they went down the steps on the other side. He had never liked this particular part of Cannes. Touts for the lower-class hotels and questionable resorts hung about in twos and threes outside this entrance to the station even in the daytime, and it did not require much imagination to turn those sallow-faced youths and men, furtive eyed and evil looking, into active criminals.

"If anybody so much as nudges me I'll jump on him," proclaimed Bill.

They passed undisturbed, however, through the motley throng of rascally Cannois and turned into one of the many narrow streets leading to the Rue d'Antibes. Here was more life and bustle, although the same air of desolation that marked the rest of the town at night was apparent.

"This gives me the jam-jars," declared Matcham. "Where is this Café de Paris?"

"We shall be there in three minutes," promised Heritage.

Across the open space dominated on the other side by the gigantic Casino, now a blaze of lights, with an unending stream of cars drawing up to the entrance, Stephen led his companion until the Croisette was reached. In the darkness this far-famed but disgracefully kept thoroughfare took on an air of romance. The lights of a corner café shone invitingly.

"Here we are," said the guide, and, taking Matcham's arm, he led him into a room crammed with people.

After the dark and deserted streets the restaurant afforded a pleasing contrast. Bill Matcham took one long appreciative look round and became a changed man.

The waiter who came forward was inclined to be supercilious until Bill said the few heartfelt words that clamoured for utterance. Then the fellow took on so much life that he might have

received a powerful electric shock or a more prosaic, but equally potent, kick in the slacks.

"Nothing like looking these Frogs straight in the eye, Stevo," said the wonder-worker when they were installed at a table overlooking the street.

"I'm willing to bet that particular specimen is an Italian," smiled Heritage.

"Same thing," replied Matcham, his complacency in no way impaired. "Look 'em straight in the eye, shove out your chest, and they'll give you the earth. Try to be pleasant, and they'll look at you as though you're something the cat's left on the mat."

"You seem to have learnt something, Bill."

"I'm learning all the time, old son. Now, don't let's waste any more breath. Do you think this show could supply a beefsteak?"

"I'll see." He signalled for aid.

The waiter who had conducted them to the table—he was evidently a junior *maître d'hôtel*—gave the important matter of the beefsteak his most earnest consideration. Perhaps the fact that Bill Matcham's basilisk eye was fixed upon him with full penetrative power had its effect, but at the end of the self-communion he declared himself for the honour of France, Cannes, and the Café de Paris.

"Le bif-stik—but yes," he said; "and cooked à l'anglaise? *Oui*—it can be did."

Bill waved a hand. In much the same way Napoleon must have moved an army corps.

"Then let it be did at once—or quicker than that, if poss.," he ordered; and, fluttering his thin legs like a ballet dancer in the final stages of a *pas seul*, the waiter vanished.

"Glory be to God!" said Bill fervently ten minutes later. Then, with much smiling and general "um-pa-dah," as the ex-clerk styled it, a noble dish was placed on the table. Here, garnished by tomatoes and having a pleasing frill of roasted potatoes, was "le bif-stik" in all its robust appeal and native charm, and the eyes of Matcham watered, not merely in anticipation, but in gratitude.

"Let's show these do-dahs"—indicating the crowd of fashionables by whom they were surrounded—"how to eat, Stevo," he said. "I may be coarse, but at least I'm hearty."

The nervous tension had made even the more restrained Heritage ravenously hungry, and the Herculean trencher-work of the two young Englishmen soon attracted general attention. To see Bill Matcham using his knife and fork was a sight for gods, but not dyspeptics. "He must be a butcher, that one," commented the waiter he had frightened; and Bill certainly did make his portion of the meat look foolish.

"Now ask him for the heaviest suet pudding on the premises, Steve," was the instruction

Heritage received when the first course was over.

Stephen smiled as he translated to the man, who had become pop-eyed. But, staggering and dismayed, the latter declared once again for the honour of France, Cannes, and the Café de Paris.

"But, yes," he said weakly, and hurried off to the kitchen. If his legs appeared to fail him as he went, that may have been merely an illusion.

The suet pudding, when it came, was of such proportions that it might have been the favourite daughter of the beefsteak.

Once again Bill attacked, bringing up his first reserves. He hesitated once—that was before taking the last end-piece—but he kept valiantly on to the end.

"A cigar now and about a pint of coffee, and I shall be able to carry on until breakfast," he announced; "if you can call it breakfast what they give you here. More like a butterfly's lunch, if you ask me."

Ever obliging, Stephen leaned forward to call the waiter, who by this time could be observed wiping his brow with a napkin.

As he did so a remarkable thing happened. He felt the hair on the back of his head disturbed by something which seemed like a slight gust of wind, and then, from the other side of the large room, came the sound of splintered glass.

"*Monsieur!*" cried the waiter, horror on his face, and dropped instantly to his knees.

The puzzled Heritage noticed that several other people had followed the waiter's example. Instantly the crowded restaurant became a pandemonium of sound—with terror the dominant note.

It was Matcham who supplied the solution.

"Get under the table, for Mike's sake!" he hissed. "Someone in the street is trying to pop you off with a revolver!"

The marvel to Stephen, as he obeyed the instruction, was how the man could have missed. Then he recalled his sudden leaning forward. That gesture to the waiter had undoubtedly saved his life.

The pandemonium in the café increased rather than lessened. Those of the diners who were not crouching beneath the tables rushed into the street. Quickly a crowd gathered outside the window through which the bullet had passed.

"Don't say anything about this," warned Heritage in an undertone. "We'll pay the bill and get back to the hotel."

"Where we shall probably find a snake hidden in each bed," commented Matcham bitterly. "But, I say——"

"Wait until we get outside!" came the rejoinder, curtly uttered.

Their waiter appeared pleased to see them go. This relief may have been due to the suspicion

that Heritage was the person at whom the assassin's bullet had been aimed. On the other hand, the man may have become fatigued under the strain of the Englishman's orders. He accepted the big tip which Matcham gave him, but in his ceremonious bow there was a hint of coldness.

"I think we'll have a taxi," said Heritage.

"Might as well," agreed Bill; "only we shall have to be careful the driver doesn't spit poison at us."

The man who brought his cab to a halt at the kerb appeared innocuous enough, and, anyway, Bill had haled his revolver out of his pocket in case of any emergency. The short journey to the Chester was accomplished without incident.

They went straight to Stephen's room.

"Damned if I like this position," remarked Bill, shutting the door. "Anyone could come snooping in through the grounds and get in here unless the shutters were fastened. My advice, old son, is to shift to the top floor to-morrow. The air will smell sweeter and it'll be safer."

"I don't know if I shall be here to-morrow," replied Heritage, turning after seeing that the windows were securely fastened.

"Not here? What's the idea?"

"One reason being," continued Heritage, "that I object on principle to being shot at whilst I'm eating my supper. It's exciting, but not

orthodox. Rather than stay here waiting to be slaughtered, I intend to start operations myself to-morrow."

"And you'll take your Uncle William, don't forget that."

"If you're still keen, Bill."

Matcham snorted.

"Do you think I'm going to be left out? Not on your sweet life! I'm tagging along. And when I meet this Siagne swine there'll be fireworks."

"You must let me have the first chance, Bill."

There was a knock on the door.

Stephen went forward and quietly turned the key.

It was Benito, the *concierge*.

"You are wanted on the telephone, Monsieur," he announced.

A wild hope surged through the listener. The previous time when he had been called to the telephone it was Felicity Howard who had spoken to him. Could she——?

"Someone on the telephone," he called over his shoulder, and was off along the corridor.

But when he picked up the receiver it was a man's voice.

"Is that Mr. Stephen Heritage?" The tone was courteous, but it held an unmistakable note of authority.

"Yes—who are you?"

"It is Lord Dalrymple speaking," was the reply.

Lord Dalrymple ! The British Foreign Secretary !

"I intend to call on you at once, Mr. Heritage, on a matter of considerable importance," said the voice.

## CHAPTER XVI

## THE WATCHER

FELICITY fought her fear.

"Mademoiselle will certainly stay with us, *ma mère*," the Count de la Siagne repeated. As he uttered the words the mask slipped momentarily from his face. Gone was the courteous smile, the polished grace ; the expression now, with the lips curling back from the white teeth, was Satanic. The man in that instant was pure wolf.

She did her best to act the innocent, pretending not to have noticed anything unusual, and smiling back at her host.

"That is very kind of you, Count," she said, "but, of course, I should not dream of trespassing unduly on your hospitality."

A thin peal of laughter came from the Comtesse. The evil expression vanished, but a frown now caused the Count to wrinkle his forehead.

"You must excuse my mother's mirth," he said in a tone of explanation. "She considers it absurd that a visitor possessing your personal charm and intelligence should think even for a moment that you could possibly outstay your welcome, however long you consented to remain at the Château."

"What Antoine says is, of course, correct," corroborated the Comtesse, turning her sightless eyes towards the girl.

Felicity smiled again at the Count. But the smile was prompted by the head and not the heart. She was not deceived. The Count had made one mistake, his mother a second. Realising both facts, he had endeavoured to throw a cloak over them. But in that moment of revelation she had been able to catch a glimpse of both their souls—and the sight was unclean. But she had at least this satisfaction—she knew exactly where she stood. They would endeavour to keep her a prisoner in the Château. The thought, if she had allowed it to oppress her, would have been unnerving. Instead, she succeeded in casting it out of her mind. She was getting used to the atmosphere of the place.

In the poorly furnished drawing-room was a grand piano. The Comtesse, at her son's invitation, seated herself at this and played with a marvellous touch. None of the masters came amiss to those delicate fingers, in spite of her

infirmity. But her brilliant technique was especially marked in playing Chopin.

When, after at least an hour, the executant said she was tired, the Count paid her charming homage.

"My mother is the finest amateur musician I know," he said, guiding the fragile figure away from the piano. "It is the greatest joy and solace in my life to hear her play. Did you enjoy it, Mademoiselle?"

"I have enjoyed the Comtesse's playing exceedingly," was the reply. The words were as sincere as the Count's; she had been very moved. The perplexities of human nature! A man whom, she believed now, was capable of, perhaps, any crime, to find solace and joy in Chopin's exquisitely sad melodies. . . .

Her playing had apparently exhausted the Comtesse, for she announced her intention of retiring.

"You must stay and talk to Antoine," she said in wishing Felicity good-night. "I will send Xandra after I am safely abed."

"Oh, but I should not think of it, Comtesse," was the swift answer. "I am used to doing without a maid; I always travel alone."

"No doubt. You English girls are so independent and reliable." A slight enigmatical smile disturbed the speaker's lips. "But, all the same, I shall insist that Xandra sees you are made com-

fortable for the night." Nothing could have been kindlier than the homely words, and yet Felicity felt there must be a covert reason hidden away somewhere at the back of them.

"You will smoke another cigarette?" the Count asked after the door had closed behind his mother and the maid with the strange name and still stranger manner. "And please tell me something of your life in London, Mademoiselle," he pleaded. "I have not been to England since the war. It must be greatly changed."

The conversation that ensued was merely conventional; at least, on the girl's part. She confined herself to the latest plays and films and the current Society news.

"And your politics," her host said at length. "I understand that many modern young English ladies nowadays take a great interest in the way their country's affairs are being conducted. Is that true?"

"There is a certain section, perhaps, which professes to do so, but, with all respect to my sex, I do not think that Englishwomen in Parliament have proved themselves to be much of a success."

The Count smiled.

"They are too emotional, perhaps, and they allow their feelings to rule their heads as well as their hearts. They are also, no doubt, in too great a hurry to get things done. The scenes

which they have with each other in the House of Commons may add to the gaiety of your newspaper readers, but they can scarcely be said to lend lustre to your Parliamentary debates. No, I can understand that."

"I am afraid I must agree with you, Count," replied Felicity demurely. She began to wonder where this talk would lead. That her host intended to direct it into a channel of his own choosing seemed certain.

"But I understand, Mademoiselle, that certain high-born young Englishwomen, distressed at the monotony of modern existence, have been known to play at higher game—to attempt far more hazardous tasks than representing a constituency in Parliament. Is that not so?"

She parried the question with a smile.

"Young women are attempting to rival men in so many respects, of course. They drive racing cars and they fly."

"Yes—yes, of course," replied the Count; "but I can read all these facts for myself in the newspapers. The work to which I was referring, my dear Miss Howard, is not published broadcast; it is kept secret."

"It sounds highly interesting, whatever it may turn out to be. A friend of mine has taken up interior house decoration——"

"I refer to Intelligence work, Mademoiselle."

She pretended to grasp his meaning at last.

"You mean Secret Service, Count? But what need is there for spies nowadays? The war finished all that, surely?"

He contemplated the glowing top of his cigar with what appeared to be amusement.

"Nevertheless, my dear Miss Howard, I am credibly informed that Cannes at the present time enjoys the honour of entertaining at least one very famous member of the British Secret Service."

"A man, of course?"

"A woman. She possesses great charm and even more ability."

Felicity softly clapped her hands.

"You know her? But how thrilling! A real adventuress! Where can she be seen?"

The Count de la Siagne flicked some ash off the lapel of his dinner-jacket.

"Alas! I have not the honour of this celebrity's acquaintance. All my information is based on gossip I have heard in the Casino. The lady in question, it appears, is a well-known habituée."

"I should love to see her. Is she anything like the people one reads about in the sensational novels?"

"Far more true to life, I should imagine," was the reply. With a deliberateness which must have been intentional the Count changed the subject. The talk became innocuous again.

After another quarter of an hour her host rose.

"We keep early hours at the Château—a pleasing contrast to the night life of Cannes," he said. "You are, perhaps, fatigued, Mademoiselle, and would like to retire? If you are up early I think I can promise you a truly wonderful sunrise."

"Yes, I think I will go to bed. The prospect of that sunrise is too alluring. Good-night, Count, and thank you ever so much for your kindness." As she held out her hand she might have been a conventional visitor rendering conventional gratitude to a conventional host. Inwardly, she was measuring this opponent and conjecturing how quickly he intended to strike. Unless she was wrong in her judgment, it would not be long before he came out into the open.

"I will ring for Xandra."

"That is very kind."

She was very much Miss Convention. Whether the man was puzzled or merely amused, it would do no harm to keep him guessing.

When the maid appeared she looked paler than ever. She spoke no word until, her duties done, she turned to leave the room.

"*Bon soir*, Xandra," said Felicity.

"*Bon soir*, Mademoiselle." The reply was so low as to be scarcely audible. With a perceptible shiver the girl opened the door and disappeared.

Felicity guessed what had happened. That uncanny old woman, the Comtesse, had suspected the maid of talking, perhaps indiscreetly, and had so frightened her that the power of speech had almost left the girl. She would have to give Xandra time to recover ; it would be disastrous to attempt to get any further information out of her for the present. But she had been able to establish two facts, both of which were valuable : (1) That some dreadful taint was connected with the Château, and (2) that the girl Xandra would befriend her if she dared.

The first task Felicity set herself after seeing that the door was safely locked was to ascertain that her small automatic revolver was in good working order. This was a house in which she could take no chances. Danger lurked everywhere ; the Château was saturated in an evil atmosphere. Both the Count and his mother were criminals. Of that she was already positive. And criminals of a class apart. They were adversaries to be feared.

There was still a good fire in the hearth, and, coiled in a large chair, with the revolver on a small table by her side, she reviewed the evening. So far from being tired, she felt very wide awake. Inviting as the large bed behind her looked, she was reluctant to undress because she knew that sleep would be difficult. Whilst nothing had happened on the surface, too much had occurred sub-

terraneously for the prospect of a good night's rest. The sunrise, if seen at all, would be witnessed by a rather jaded observer.

If Felicity had been the average person, she would certainly have condemned herself for having placed herself in her present position—a position pregnant, without doubt, with hidden and perhaps horrible peril. So sure was the Comte, her chief enemy—or would the Comtesse prove the more redoubtable foe of the two?—of his power that he had even given her a warning! The Secret Service girl to whom he had referred was unquestionably herself—and he had allowed her to know it. Naturally, he had lied when tackled, but there was no significance in that. What was significant was that he had shown himself to be so confident.

What did he intend to do? The hint he had given that evening was that she had a great deal of information about the British Secret Service which he would like to hear. No doubt. Her attempted simplicity had not deceived him, of course, and he would quickly turn from being merely idly inquisitive to demanding the truth openly.

And when he did——?

She flung the end of the cigarette into the fire and started to undress. She had made one golden rule in her life, and that was to allow the next day to look after itself.

Before she got into bed she looked to the windows. It was rather surprising that the universal French custom was not followed in having outside shutters, but the fastenings seemed secure, and they were manipulated from the *inside*.

She had prognosticated correctly; sleep would not come. Her brain became a shifting myriorama. A scene or a figure would project itself upon her consciousness, only to be replaced the next instant by a new impression. Thus the crowded dance floor of the Embassy Club in Bond Street followed close upon Sir Godfrey Barringer's Whitehall office, and this, in turn, switched to the dimly lit quay-wall at Cannes, with the man Heritage bending over the dead body of poor Gerry Westover.

Although it was through Gerry's death that she was now at the Château of the White Wolf, yet it was of the living rather than the dead that she found herself finally thinking.

Heritage.

It was a good old English name; it fitted the owner. He had seemed so earnest in that shyly suggested offer of help. Of course, she had been compelled to refuse it—there was no possible alternative—and yet she had been grateful. The look of blank disappointment on his face she had had to ignore. No man had really entered her life yet, and she could not allow this stranger to do

so. Perhaps by this time he had forgotten the incident ; and it would be better for him if he had done so.

A familiar sound from outside broke in on her thoughts. A car had driven up to the Château. She looked at her watch : it was twenty minutes past midnight, and she had been in her room two hours. This was interesting ; so interesting that she got out of bed and crossed to the nearest of the two long windows.

Pulling the curtain carefully aside, and keeping her body covered as much as was possible, she looked out. This room must be at the back of the Château, for there was no trace of any carriage-drive. There was a large strip of ground that might have served an English home for a tennis-lawn, with what looked like a big out-house at the end. That was the full extent of her view. But for a brilliant full moon she would not have been able to see as much.

There had been a purpose behind her host's solicitude. He had wanted her to go to bed early. The Count de la Siagne was receiving visitors.

Quite a number of visitors. With intervals of roughly ten minutes between, she heard three other cars drive up. The Count must have called a conference. Could these be the plotters Sir Godfrey Barringer had mentioned in his coded message ?

She ought to be present at that meeting. The

risk, of course, would be enormous, because as yet she had had no opportunity of becoming familiar with the run of the Château, and if she lost her way and was discovered, what possible excuse could she have unless she feigned to be walking in her sleep?

But the temptation to see these midnight conspirators—for such she had no doubt they were—was irresistible. Instead of getting back into bed, she put on a dressing-gown, which she fastened tightly about her, thrust the small automatic into the right-hand pocket and stepped quietly across the floor.

Just as her hand was about to turn the key, Felicity stopped.

She had been anticipated. There were at least two people on the other side of the door and they were whispering together.

So eerie did those subtly-hushed voices sound that she hesitated. They suspected that she might not be asleep—perhaps that she might even attempt to spy on them.

She dropped to her knees and placed an ear against the keyhole. And, in this position, she was able to catch a few words :

“Wait . . . signal . . . morning.”

After that followed the sound of footsteps dying away. One of the men—she believed it was a man's voice she had heard—had gone. Leaving the other on guard? From the three words she

had been able to catch, the inference was that the man who had spoken had ordered the other to wait outside the door until he received a signal, which might not be until the morning.

An all-night sitting of the enemy whilst she was kept a prisoner. . . .

There could be no doubt about it. A man was outside. She could hear him swearing softly to himself in Italian. A scraping sound preceded an unmistakable odour ; the guard was beguiling his vigil by smoking French tobacco.

The position was exasperating almost beyond endurance, but it required patience. To act precipitately now would be to lose everything. The man outside would be armed, and at the slightest suspicious sound he would shoot ; he had probably received very definite orders on this point.

Not only the Count, but his associates without doubt, knew now that a suspected spy was on the premises. Anything might happen. It was possible that passion would over-ride every other feeling that night. In that case they might decide to come and seize her. A clean death would be the least of the evils which would follow.

She must not think of that ; she dared not think of it. It was vitally important that she should keep her head. But instinct made her cross to the window after rising from her knees, and pull the curtain aside so that she might look out upon the outside world which represented freedom.

As she did so her whole body stiffened in terror. Peering at her was something which turned her mind sick with fear.

## CHAPTER XVII

## KRANG

FOR a second only this terrible spectre confronted her, and then, with what sounded a gibberish cry, it was gone—clean down the side of the Château wall. The vision came and went so quickly that she could not be sure whether the thing had been man or beast. It must have been one or the other, for her imagination could not have conjured up such a horror. It had a face so incredibly bestial that the mind revolted—a huge mouth, unbelievably monstrous, and evil, beady, peering eyes set in a thicket of hair. . . .

Only that resolutely trained, lightning sense of self-preservation saved her from calling out. If she had not been aware of the watcher on the other side of the door she would have been obliged to scream ; as it was, she leaned against the wall spent and gasping. For the moment every nerve was a quivering rawness.

Reaction came after a time. Whatever it was that had looked in on her she would discover to-

morrow. Knowledge would lessen the sense of dread.

Perhaps it was due to sheer nerve exhaustion, but she slept after a while; and her waking thought was one of beauty and not of terror; the sun was shining into the room, and, listening, she heard a tapping on the door. For a moment she hesitated, and then, getting out of bed and turning the key, she saw the maid Xandra standing outside holding a tea-tray.

"Mademoiselle has slept well?" the girl inquired.

Her voice was gentle. There was a kindly look in her sad eyes. More strongly than before, Felicity felt that she could rely on this maid's help—if only Xandra's courage did not fail at the critical moment.

"So soundly did I sleep, Xandra, that you may have knocked more than once perhaps?"

"Yes—I knocked three times. Monsieur le Comte presents his compliments, Mademoiselle, and says it is a glorious morning to see the country."

"I must get up quickly, then."

"I will turn on Mademoiselle's bath."

As she sat up in bed drinking the really good tea, Felicity felt as though the Hand of God had moved to banish all the dark things of the preceding night. Had she dreamt those horrors? Much as she would have liked to believe so, she

knew that this was not the truth. The low whisperings and the face at the window had been real.

She bathed and dressed quickly. Xandra returned when she was ready.

"Monsieur le Comte is expecting Mademoiselle," was the explanation.

Dressed in immaculate white flannels, her host presented an agreeable figure as he bent to kiss her hand.

"You look as radiant as the morning, my dear Miss Howard, and no compliment could be more deserved. I need scarcely ask if you slept well?"

"So well that Xandra had the utmost difficulty in awakening me. But now let me see this domain of yours."

"With pleasure. We will go on the balcony. Permit me."

He led the way through the room in which they had dined the night before to a wide, flagged balcony. The portion of the Château to which this belonged she saw was built upon a rock at least sixty feet high.

In front stretched a wonderful panorama in which all the colours of the rainbow seemed blended—browns and greys, blues and bronze-greens, with a beautiful golden tint submerging into each.

"Did I not say we should have a wonderful morning?" asked the Count. "You are, alas!

an hour too late for the actual sunrise, but, still, this gives you a good idea of the neighbouring country and the beauty with which it is surrounded."

"It is so beautiful that it almost takes one's breath away."

"Many people standing here on this balcony in the morning have said the same thing," replied the Count. "It is a relief to retire to this place after the hectic and exotic life of the Riviera towns."

"Do you receive many visitors, Count?"

"Not many. Although the family funds are so low, the idea of taking in any what you call Tom, Dick, or Harry as a paying guest is repugnant to my mother. But occasionally we are obliged to extend hospitality to small parties. Otherwise we should have to close the Château. Shall we go in?"

As Felicity turned to follow she wondered when she would get the opportunity of discovering to whom the bestial face which had peered in on her the night before belonged. Even with the glorious sunshine flooding the world the memory was affrighting.

Peace came again. Breakfast at the Château that morning proved unexpectedly pleasant. For one thing, Felicity was hungry; for another, there was something more substantial provided than the

inevitable coffee and rolls ; and, for yet another, it was eaten beneath an orange blind on the sun-lit balcony.

Looking even more fragile than she had done the night before, the Comtesse appeared in time to partake of the meal.

"You slept well, Mademoiselle?" she asked, and again Felicity lied.

"Splendidly!" she said. The sun was giving her back confidence. She was still alive—very much alive—after that night of terror, and she was determined not to show these people any fear.

"That's excellent news," commented the Comtesse. "Well, Antoine"—turning to her son—"what are your intentions to-day?"

The Comte de la Siagne laid down his coffee-cup and smiled across the table.

"To give Mademoiselle Howard happiness," he replied. "Unfortunately," he added, turning to his guest, "I shall be detained at the Château seeing to some wretched business matters, but I have arranged for Dorando, my chauffeur, to take you for a drive around the countryside. Would that be agreeable? Or you could ride. There is at least one decent mount in the stables."

"Alas! I did not bring any riding kit—but the drive would be delightful." Did they for some reason wish her to be out of the way? She was willing to fall in with their desire on two

counts. The first was because any real work would have to be undertaken at night, and the second was that a few hours spent away from the Château would be very welcome. The man Dorando also might be induced to talk, although that was not probable.

Whilst she was in her room preparing for the drive, the thought recurred that the de la Siagnes might attempt to go through her luggage. Unlocking one of the suit-cases, she transferred a thin, soft leather case to her handbag. Her automatic also went into the latter.

Walking quietly, she was about to enter the dining-room when she heard the Count's voice.

"He escaped during the night."

Then came the silvery treble of his mother's : "But he might have killed——"—a pause followed before the sentence was completed—"the wrong person."

"Darling mother," Felicity heard the Count answer in laughing tones, "have you ever known Krang kill the wrong person?"

"Not up till now, I agree. But——"

"Don't you worry," cut in the Count ; "order has been restored. I have seen Krang, and he has promised me to behave."

"If any of the others met him they might be afraid."

"They won't meet him—unless I think it's necessary."

It was dangerous to stay there any longer ; a servant seeing her would decide instantly that she was eavesdropping. Stepping back a few paces, she started to walk forward, making more noise than she would ordinarily have done.

"Here I am !" she announced.

If the Count suspected anything, his expression gave no sign.

"Dorando is already waiting, Miss Howard," he said. "Are you quite sure you will not be too lonely?"

"Quite sure. And please do not tell me where I am going. I want everything to be a surprise." With her flushed cheeks and dancing eyes she might have been a schoolgirl out on holiday.

"That is the spirit." He smiled as though he understood and shared her enthusiasm. "Venturing into the unknown is always the spice of life. I have planned a tour which I hope you will find interesting. Dorando knows the country, and you will find him intelligent."

"I hope you will enjoy your day, Mademoiselle," said the Comtesse.

"I'm sure I shall." The last impression she had as she left the room by the side of her host was the Comtesse's smile. The face at that moment might have belonged to a saint. . . .

Dorando, as befitted his name, looked Italian. He was dark skinned and furtive looking. To

her surprise, he wore ordinary clothes and not uniform.

As the Rolls shot away, Felicity turned her head, ostensibly to wave farewell to the Count, who remained at the Château entrance, but really to get the best possible view of the house whose secrets she was determined to discover.

She was able to form some opinion now why the Château had been given the name of the White Wolf. Set high upon the rocks, it took on the shape of a crouching beast in its architectural design. Built of whitish stone that gleamed in the dazzling sunshine, it appeared imposing but somewhat sinister, a place that looked as though it might have a thousand secrets and never yield up one.

To the north, where the Maritime Alps reared their snow-covered peaks, was nothing but rugged, precipitous country. Standing sentinel there were pine and fir trees, their branches overhanging the great walls and giving to the Château an air of brooding melancholy. A dire place at night. Even now that God's sunshine was on it, Felicity felt it was to be feared—not only for the people who lived there, but on its own account.

The car turned a corner and the view was shut out.

The driver kept to his task, his face fixed immovably in front. He made no attempt to open

up any conversation, and Felicity was content. She welcomed the quiet.

Who and what was Krang? Was it the creature who had, to use the Count's words, "escaped during the night"? Was it Krang who had looked in through her window? Was it man or beast? Whatever it was, it killed. Remembering that incredibly bestial face, this was easy to believe. Was Krang to be the chosen instrument in her case when the time came? She gripped her bag tightly, and the contact brought relief.

She tried to concentrate her attention on the gorgeous scenery. Higher and higher the Rolls climbed, using a road that wound round and round like a monstrous spinning-top. Apart from an occasional car, she had the world to herself. Dorando was a good driver, and he travelled at an easy pace. At noon they arrived at a hotel at Le Pont du Loup.

Felicity had lunch on a sun-baked terrace overlooking the wonderful viaduct. A stream meandered beneath, and peace lay upon the earth like a heavenly cloud. Yet, at a table not a dozen yards away, sat the man who had been made her gaoler as well as guide that day. She had intimated that she would be willing for him to sit at the same table, but Dorando had shaken his head.

"It would not be correct, Mademoiselle," he muttered.

How blessed and wonderful is youth! In

spite of the man's ominous presence, she made a good lunch, in which freshly caught trout was the principal dish. Back in the Rolls—if the Count was so frightfully poor, how could he afford to run this wonderful car?—she endeavoured once again to get Dorando to converse, but all the man proved willing to talk about were the points of interest to be seen between there and Grasse.

They continued along the road which the map marked out as the famous Les Gorges du Loup route. The driver stopped to allow her to alight to see the cascade, a sight designed to delight the eye of all true excursionists.

There were two small charabancs unloading passengers, and some of the latter "trippers" smiled as she joined the throng. How easy it would have been to have asked for the protection of these people once she had explained that Dorando was a member of a criminal gang!

She shook herself free of the tempting thought, gazed upon the wonder with Dorando still close behind her, and then walked back to the car.

A stay of two hours was made at Grasse, the town of flowers and perfumes, which shows itself shyly amidst charming scenery on the southern slope of the Roguevignon, in the basin of the Mourachone. Felicity had heard a great deal of this centre of the perfumery industry overlooking the fertile plains carpeted by violets, jonquils,

mignonette, tube-roses, and other flowers waiting to be distilled at the various scent factories in the town.

It was at Grasse that Dorando broke his spell of silence. Perhaps the scent of the flowers worked the miracle. His information proved a very mixed bag.

"The former Queen of England, Victoria the Good, used to stay here," he said; "also the great English writer, Monsieur H. G. Wells, has a villa in Grasse. It is said by some that Grasse goes back so far as the sixth century, when it was supposed to have been established by a colony of Sardinian Jews. The Jewish influence is still strong in the town."

Having made this somewhat surprising conversational offering, the dark-skinned, furtive-looking chauffeur relapsed into his former reticence. Acknowledging the verbal gift by a nod, Felicity made a tour of the scent factory, outside of which the car had stopped.

Showing visitors round the local perfumeries is one of the chief Grasse industries. The guides have a tact and a finesse which are irresistible. For the next hour Felicity forgot her profession and remembered only that she was a woman. Being a woman, she surrendered to the spell of the place and bought three bottles of perfume.

It was not until the return journey to the Château was well started that she reflected:

Would she live long enough to use even one of the bottles?

Dusk was making the light uncertain as the car swung in through the drive gates.

There was still sufficient visibility, however, for her to see a number of men standing near the entrance of the Château. It was only a momentary vision, for directly they saw the car turn the corner they all quickly vanished.

But the sight, brief as it was, made Felicity reflect. The Count had lied to her; he had said there was no one else staying at the Château. But who were these men? Her heart quickened its beat as she realised: they were the members of the Conference de la Siagne had called—the men who had come so mysteriously in the early hours of that morning.

## CHAPTER XVIII

## INTO THE UNKNOWN

"THE British Foreign Secretary?" echoed Bill Matcham when he heard the news. "Revolving pea-shooters, what does *he* want, Stevo?"

"Ask me something easier," replied the thoroughly perplexed Heritage. "If Lord Dalrymple hadn't said he was coming here, I should have thought it was a ruse to get me out of the hotel."

"Us, you mean. Where you go, likewise follows your Uncle William. But, look here, you can't receive a Foreign Secretary, who's also a Lord, in your bedroom; it simply isn't done. We shall have to go upstairs. Benito will fix us up."

The *concierge*, with the admirable adaptability of his class, made arrangements at once. He conducted the friends to a small private sitting-room on the first floor.

It was into this that a tall, somewhat shambling man of about sixty was ushered a few minutes later. But if the figure of this visitor was awkward and his clothes careless alike in matter of cut and the way they were worn, the noble head and striking face more than atoned and recompensed. Before his name and rank were known, Lord Dalrymple would have been recognised as a personage.

As is the case with most truly great men, his manner was simplicity itself.

"Of course, your friend may remain at our talk, Mr. Heritage," he said, seating himself after shaking hands. "It is very kind of you to receive me like this. But the truth is I have only just arrived by air—and the matter I have come about will not wait." The speaker's body drooped from the shoulders; the man himself appeared completely exhausted.

"May I get you something, sir?" asked Heritage.

"No—no, young man. Thank you—thank you." As though the invitation acted as a reminder, he straightened himself. Stephen noticed now, as they looked at each other, the firm set of the jaw. The rest of the face was tired and fretted by lines caused either by anxiety or overwork, but there was no mistaking the determination of the mouth. This man could show an iron will when it was demanded.

"I will not waste your time, Mr. Heritage. I have come to Cannes to take home the dead body of my son. I understand that you were the person to discover him shortly after he had been murdered."

Stephen stared.

"Was the man I found outside the Casino your son, sir?"

"Yes. Please give me what information you can."

Heritage told his story as simply and as concisely as possible.

"I do not know if the local police have already gone to the bank, sir; but, if not, the money will still be there. I am sorry for having destroyed the wallet."

"You have no suspicion who committed the crime? You were not able to see the man who ran away sufficiently well to be able to recognise him again?"

"Unfortunately, no, sir."

"Then I will not trespass any further on your time. When next you are in London I shall be pleased to see you again. My address is 126, Berkeley Square."

Bill Matcham, previously abashed by the presence of such a notability, now spoke.

"The local police seemed to think, sir, that Heritage may have had something to do with the—crime. You can take it from me——"

"Such a suggestion is palpably absurd," was the answer. "I will convince them that they are wrong."

After Heritage had returned from seeing the visitor into his car at the hotel entrance, he looked at his companion.

"This thing gets rummier and rummier," he muttered.

Matcham's reply was shrewd.

"You've made one good friend through it, anyhow," he said, "and that's Lord Dalrymple. I thought he would ask you a lot more questions than he did. What would you have said if he had wanted to know anything about that girl, for instance?"

"I should have told him the truth, of course; but I'm glad he didn't."

"Why? It would have relieved you of a great deal of responsibility."

Heritage put his hands on the other's broad shoulders.

"It's that responsibility I want, Bill. Do you feel like a trip into the mountains to-morrow?"

"You mean you're going to call on the Count de la Siagne?"

"Just that, Bill."

Matcham's comment was characteristic.

"If I'm to be murdered to-morrow I may as well get to bed early."

It was Benito who supplied the information—but he did so with a grave face after being pledged to secrecy.

"One goes to Vence, Monsieur, and the Château is some miles farther on—not towards Gourdon and Grasse, but straight up into the mountains. It is lonely country, and——"

"You can speak quite frankly, Benito."

"Perhaps I ought not to say anything more. It is, perhaps, merely idle gossip that I've heard."

"Well, never mind—let us hear it."

"The Château de la Siagne has not too good a reputation. That was what I was about to say, Monsieur."

"We shall be able to find that out for ourselves, Benito, for we have been asked to call." This was a lie, of course, but it was impossible to tell the *concierge* the truth.

"We shall be coming back here," put in

Matcham, "although we don't know exactly when, so keep our rooms."

"Certainly, Monsieur." Benito, good fellow that he was, seemed about to make another remark, but contented himself with bowing before turning away to see to the morning post, which had just come in.

"Oh, Benito," called Heritage.

"Monsieur?"

"Where can I buy a revolver?"

The eyes of the *concierge* opened a trifle wider, but he was ready enough with the answer.

"There is a very good gunsmith's in the Rue des Etats-Unis, off the Rue d'Antibes," he said.

It was to this shop that the friends first made their way after leaving the hotel. The morning was bright and sunny, and the popular street leading to the Croisette was thronged.

Out of the fifty pounds which Matcham had persisted in loaning him Heritage purchased a serviceable-looking Smith-Wesson, which the shopkeeper recommended, and a quantity of ammunition for both this and Matcham's revolver.

"And now—what?" asked Matcham as they strolled towards the sea.

"My proposition is that we go back to the Chester, pack a few things, and get to Vence in time for lunch. We can go either by private car

or by one of the charabancs." They were outside one of the many tourist agencies at the time.

"Private car," decided Matcham. "For one thing, it will be quicker, and, for another, we shall feel that we are not being spied upon. In a charabanc the bloke sitting in front or back may have a bottle of prussic acid all ready to hand. Benito can see to the ordering of the car."

By eleven o'clock they were off, the *concierger* standing on the hotel steps and waving a response to Bill's farewell.

"It's funny to think that I may never see that cove again," commented Matcham, as the car took the corner into the Rue Saint-Nicolas.

"I hate bringing you into this, Bill," said Heritage.

"That's more than enough of *that*," was the quick response.

An hour's rapid travelling through some country which would have appealed to them as being picturesque if their thoughts had not been occupied with other things, brought them to Vence, a town which Matcham, on account of its size, immediately summed up as being "one horse," in spite of the fact that Heritage told him it was a favourite spot for artists.

"Artists!" Bill snorted. "I want to *eat*!"

They were served an excellent lunch at a small hotel, and it was over this meal that they talked of their plans.

"We can't decide anything definite until we get on the spot," said Heritage. "If we could reckon on the Count not recognising us, we might pretend to be stranded travellers and ask for a night's hospitality. But that would sound a bit thin, perhaps, in any case—and we should have to have a car."

"Why?"

"Well, I shouldn't think this was much of a country for walking tours."

"And yet you say it's a hot-bed of artists! What do artists do but walk? Why, they're too poor to do anything else."

"Have it your own way, Bill. I quite agree that we didn't want that driver hanging round, but it still seems to me that a car might be useful. I can drive—a bit."

"So can I—a bit. But with these roads . . . I'll tell you what. We'll tell this fellow—at least, you will—that we're interested in local architecture. Ask him if there are any châteaux worth seeing round these parts."

"I'll put it a little less crudely than that," grinned the other, as he beckoned to the proprietor, who was waiting on them in person.

Several minutes' volubility on the part of the hotel-keeper, and then, with a final bow and smile, he withdrew.

"We'll have some wine of the house with the old boy and then be off," said Heritage.

"Has he given you full details of the route march?"

"Yes—roughly. The road is fairly straight, he says, all the way to the Château, and as long as the light holds, which will be for another four hours at least, we ought not to go wrong."

The fine old brandy, served in the curiously large glasses, acted as a good finish to the meal, and they wished the hotel-keeper a cheery *bon-jour*.

When his guests had gone the man summoned his wife by vigorously clapping his hands.

"Where do you think those two young Englishmen are going, Celeste?" he said. "To the Château de la Siagne!"

His wife crossed herself.

"May the good saints preserve them," she replied fervently. "Did you not say a word of warning?"

"It is their affair. Who am I to offend a gentleman like the Count de la Siagne?"

"Yes," agreed his wife slowly, "it is their affair; and we have to live."

But she crossed herself a second time.

SZULC, whom some said was an Armenian Jew, others a bastard Greek, and yet others the product of a Roumanian father and a Tartar mother, twisted his fat lips.

“So that is the girl, *hein?*” he asked. “She is pretty.”

“Yes—that is the girl,” replied his host. The Count de la Siagne was in an awkward position. This man, unspeakable as he was, headed the Syndicate for whom he worked, and in whose councils he occupied a certain, if lowly, position. These men who controlled untold millions between them, and whose schemings were so potential that each manœuvre caused fresh history to be written, had condescended to use his Château as a meeting-place in which to elaborate their latest plot destined to throw the whole of Europe into a fresh deadly convulsion of war. It was merely a concession; the place had suited their purpose. He had invited the girl because he desired to show his employers how clever he was—to be able to produce in person the actual agent to whom the British Government had entrusted the work of spying on them. What a *coup!*

The presence of Felicity Howard brought complications, however. He might have known that

a girl so beautiful would assuredly bring complications—especially with Szulc—Szulc, whose relations with women were notorious in every underground hell in Europe. . . .

"Yes, she is very pretty," said the sallow-skinned millionaire-intriguer; "you hear that, *Count?*" He said the title with an open mockery that stung de la Siagne like a whip-lash. The bloated opulence of the speaker said as plainly as words: "What do I care for your title, or any other man's? I am better known and more powerful than you all for I am—SZULC."

"I agree," answered the man, who would cheerfully have killed him if he had dared.

He cursed himself now for his folly. He had forgotten Szulc, that monster. Szulc would attempt to rob him of what he had promised himself. Before, he had had merely his mother to fear, and, terrible as she could be, he had never doubted that issue. But Szulc was a problem.

"If you will excuse me now," he said politely.

Szulc made a guttural sound which may have signified assent. His host left the room quickly. If he had stayed, his feelings would have got out of control. For a man of his rank to be treated so—it was maddening.

He composed himself as he heard the tip-tapping of his mother's stick along the corridor.

"Mademoiselle Howard has returned, Antoine," the Comtesse said; "how fresh and

charming her voice sounds ! I heard her speaking to Xandra."

Thrusting his mother aside, the Count walked away.

He felt possessed by a fever ; he had to see the girl. All through the hours of the conference that day—when the members of the Syndicate had discussed the fates of nations just as though they were pieces being moved on a chess-board—her face had haunted him. Strange that the one real passion of his life, crammed as it had been with emotional affairs, should concern a girl who had constituted herself an enemy.

An enemy ! Yes, she was that privately as well as professionally. For all the control which she exercised, her native antagonism showed itself at times. It was then that he knew she hated him.

*"Mademoiselle!"*

She had come upon him so quickly round that bend in the corridor that, master of poise as he prided himself upon being, he was momentarily startled.

"That ride !" she said ; "it was glorious !—I shall never forget it. Do you think, Comte, your mother would consent to accept a small present from me ?"

"I am sure she would. The Comtesse, like the rest of us, is human enough to delight in receiving presents."

"I hope, then, that she will approve of the

bottle of perfume which I have brought her from Grasse."

In that moment Antoine de la Siagne might have been said to change. Extraordinary as the emotion was, he found himself wishing that he was a different man. This girl looked so cleanly exquisite, so delicately pure, so virginally fine, that—that . . . But, of course, it was madness, and he was a fool. What did he want with scruples? And how could he afford to have them?

"My mother and I have been lonely without you," he said.

She thought she would provoke him.

"Not having any other company?"

"Not having any other company, Mademoiselle."

A laugh sounded behind the speaker.

And there, grotesque, but horrible to look upon, was—Szulc.

## CHAPTER XX

## THE INN IN THE FOREST

THEY were lost.

Darkness had come, and they were like blind men moving in a sightless world.

"Hell and all the Peckham Town Councillors!" exclaimed Bill Matcham. He had just

stubbed his right big toe for the eleventh time in as many minutes.

"Let's sit down, Stevo," he said—and did so in an unexpected pool of water. Which did not, of course; add to his calm, even if it added considerably to his language.

The more collected Heritage essayed with his foot to find something to sit upon, discovered it in a biggish boulder, and lowered himself with half a sigh and half a groan. He was depressingly tired; and, if the truth must be told, a little exasperated by his companion's loudly expressed lamentations.

"We should have brought a car," he said.

In the other's present mood he had expected opposition, but he did not yet know fully his Bill Matcham.

"You're right and I'm wrong," came the agreement. "But, oh, Stevo, your Uncle Bill will make amends; I'll promise you that. At the moment I must confess I'm not quite myself; the seat of my pants is oozing what I'm sure is slimy green water, and I've nothing but a hole where my stomach ought to be—but wait, something will turn up—if it's only the morning."

Stephen continued to pull at the pipe which he had lit. Next to a trusted pal there is no friend like a pipe. Heritage had bought this particular briar at a certain famous shop in the Haymarket on a Saturday night just before he had left

London. The purchase had cost him a guinea, and at the time it had seemed like paying for half the earth. But the solace, comfort, and pride that pipe had given him ! Like a gratified parent he had regarded with loving care the rich wood getting darker and darker. Never a night passed without he had caressed its hot bowl softly against his nose to see the grain of the wood becoming more and more deeply marked. Heritage was one of that noble band of smokers who could not tolerate a pipe already coloured. Bill Matcham, who always carried at least five pipes in his different pockets and who never paid more than eighteenpence for each, laughed at such finickiness. But Bill, for once, was wrong. There may be good men with honest, trustworthy souls who are to be found smoking pipes that the makers have already coloured, but. . . .

How they had come to this *impasse*, neither Bill nor Stephen could have told. So far as was possible, they had followed the road which had led, according to the hotel-keeper of Vence, straight to the Château de la Siagne.

The trouble was that, though the way may have been straight, the road wasn't. Three miles out from Vence it came to an end. In a wall. On either side branched off another road, but which one to take ?—that was the question.

Bill Matcham solved the problem—or imagined he had—by clambering over the wall.

"Keep straight on, Monsoor Chicken Caserole said, Stevo," he had remarked ; "so here goes."

"Wait a minute," advised Heritage, but nothing could induce the other to believe that he might be wrong.

"Both those roads—if you can call 'em roads—lead *away* from the damned place," Matcham argued ; and eventually, although he felt convinced somehow that they were making a mistake, Heritage allowed himself to be persuaded.

They walked on, over country wild, barren, and precipitous ; and they had not proceeded many miles before it became evident they must be on the wrong track. There was not a sign of human habitation so far as the eye could search ; they were in a wilderness of desolation.

Then the light commenced to give. By this time they were footsore and weary in mind and body. Bill said that he felt like death—death that was too long-drawn-out.

At the moment that he sat down in the miniature lake they had been in what appeared to be a forest for perhaps half an hour.

"Let me just say what I'd like, Stevo," murmured his companion ; "a chop with chips and plenty of Worcester sauce. A pint—no, not a pint, a quart of beer and a beautiful big bed afterwards. I wouldn't insist upon being tucked up by a nice, sisterly chambermaid because I should be

too tired. That's what I'd like, old corkscrew ; as it is, I'm cold and damp and——"

"Dry up," cut in Heritage, not unkindly ; "you haven't earned the chop yet, let alone the tucking-in business. When I've finished this pipe it will be a case of *allons*——"

"*Allons*, old boy?" queried the ex-clerk ; "what's *allons*? It sounds like something nasty."

"It will be—but you'll have to get over that. It means to get on—to walk."

"I'd walk if my feet would only let me. Don't hurry, old man, with the pipe ; take your time." The speaker struck a match to light a cigarette, and by its flame Heritage could see that Matcham's face was bedewed with sweat. What a couple of fools they had proved themselves to be.

It was too late now to speculate how they could possibly have gone astray ; that was assuming, of course, that the Vence hotel-keeper had directed them aright. The only fact that mattered was that they were benighted—lost in a forest where the silence was so deep that a breathless suspense seemed to hang all around them.

"Come on," he said at length when the tobacco at the bottom of his pipe was burned to ashes ; "*allons!*"

"*Allons* be jibbered. . . . Oh, all right, keep your hair on, Stevo." Matcham rose lumberingly, and looked around. "'What big eyes you

ing, but during which both had the uncanny feeling that they were being secretly watched.

By the time their patience had worn thin, footsteps could be heard creeping forward, a bar was withdrawn, and the door opened.

Through the aperture of a foot a face was thrust.

Although the light was anything but good, Stephen saw sufficient of the face not to like it. Round as a schoolboy's it was, but greasy and sly. Moreover, there was a cast in the left eye. The man wore no collar, but had a dirty white scarf twined round his thick throat. A fringe of reddish hair was plastered down on the low forehead.

"A beauty, isn't he?" commented Bill.

"Shut up! Let me talk to him." Then in French to the man: "Are you the landlord?"

"*Oui, Monsieur.*" The reply was sullen. "But who are you to come disturbing honest folks at this time of night?"

"You have a curious idea of time, my friend," was the answer; "unless my watch is wrong, and I do not think so, it is not quite seven o'clock. You talk as though it were one in the morning."

"Well, what of that? One's affairs are one's affairs."

"Decidedly—but, at the same time, I suggest that if one is an innkeeper, as you profess to be, the affairs of one's customers also deserve

some attention. My friend and I would like some supper, and, if possible, a bed—at any rate, shelter for the night.”

Round-face considered the matter. Stephen could have kicked him whilst he was doing so, whilst Bill Matcham gave a very creditable performance of gnashing of teeth.

“Supper is possible, but my rooms are all engaged,” the innkeeper replied eventually.

“Very well, we will sleep in a chair.”

The landlord made no reply to this suggestion, and turned away. He was about to close the door when Matcham pushed past him. Enraged at the fellow’s insolence, Stephen quickly followed.

Five minutes later they were seated in a close-smelling, darkly illumined room that led off a dismal passage. A bottle of indifferent wine was on the table, and they were waiting with what remained of their patience for the meal which the innkeeper had sulkily promised should be got ready.

Once this room might have had some dignity, and perhaps even a little majesty. It had pannelled walls, a wide hearth, and other evidences of a former style. Now, everything was dismal and wretched with decay. Having seen the innkeeper, Stephen did not wonder. It was a mystery how he obtained sufficient trade to get a living in such an isolated spot. That he had some custom that night, however, was certain; the voices whose

murmurings had penetrated through the cracks in the outside shutters proved as much. Funny why these men should have ceased talking immediately and remained absolutely silent. What could they have been discussing?

Bill took a drink of the sour wine, delivered himself of a groan, looked lugubriously around, and said: "It only wants a gallows, Stevo, to make this place look like a real home. What was all that stuff Bluebeard was spouting at the door?"

"He said that whilst he would be kind enough to allow us to eat on the premises he couldn't give us a room because his were all engaged."

Matcham pulled out his revolver and placed it on the table.

"Stevo, old sausage," he said impressively, "if that Flapper's Delight isn't a crook, then I'm a film-producer."

"I shouldn't be surprised, but all the same you needn't let him see that you carry a revolver. It might precipitate a first-class unholy row. And we don't want that yet. Let's have some food first."

"H'm. I dunno about the food. That wine's enough for me. Alphonse with the fringe struck me as being quite a likely lad to do the Borgia with the Burgundy."

"Well, stick it for a bit, anyway," came the advice.

The innkeeper entering with the beginning of the meal in the form of two plates of soup put an end to the talk.

In spite of Bill's gloomy prognostications, the food proved excellent. The vegetable soup was rich and satisfying, the fish and chicken which followed left no room for complaint. The whole meal was a very welcome surprise.

"Well, if I *am* poisoned it won't be such a bad death," declared Bill at the end. "Tell old Pudding-face that the *chef* shall herewith be awarded the Grand Order of the Fried Tomato, and, further, that the sum of twenty francs shall be given him in the form of a gratuity."

The landlord received the compliments of Heritage without a change of expression.

"I have not always been in this abomination," was all he vouchsafed in reply.

"Now what about a room? Are you sure you cannot give us a bed?" asked the spokesman, affecting not to notice the man's bad temper.

Before he could receive a reply a knock—low and discreet—sounded on the door. The innkeeper went to it, followed by the curious eyes of Matcham, opened it so much after the manner of a stage-conspirator that Bill was forced to give a vivid pantomimic imitation, looked out, evidently listened to what was being whispered to him from the other side, and then, shutting the door again stood with his back to it.

"Perhaps I can arrange for a room," he said, a faint animation creeping into his voice. He turned and left them.

"This reminds me of a film I once saw down at the Astoria, Brixton," said Matcham; "it was called 'The Lost Loves of Red Olaf.' That cove was Olaf to the life. Thank God, I'm sleeping with you and not with him, Stevo. Do you think he'll air the sheets?"

The ten minutes which followed seemed to throb themselves into eternity. This inn represented a fresh mystery—and one which, by every intuition he possessed, Heritage felt concerned him. There was something evil being hatched in that house, and——

He sprang up, his hand on the pocket which held the newly purchased revolver.

"Bill, we must get out of this!" he said tensely.

"Why?" Matcham had sobered.

"Why? Can't you feel that——?" He put up a warning finger as the door started to open.

It was the landlord, and he had changed. A look of what might have been taken for benevolence in a normal face showed on his repulsively greasy features.

"Monsieur," he said ingratiatingly, "a word with you in private."

Heritage looked at the man. What had happened? What was he getting at?

"Monsieur," said the innkeeper again, "a lady has called. She asks for a Monsieur Stephen Heritage, an Englishman——"

He did not wait to hear any more.

"Where is she?" he roared. It must be Felicity. By God! Felicity! What a miracle!

"She is outside in a motor-car, Monsieur. I have just seen her. She is in desperate haste—I had to tell you——"

"Wait here a minute, Bill," cried Heritage and dashed from the room.

The innkeeper closed the door behind him quietly. The look of benevolence had now changed to a leer.

## CHAPTER XXI

## DELILAH

STEPHEN, as he rushed out of the room, felt his heart was on fire. All his thoughts raced to one goal—Felicity!

Since he had known the name of this girl she had been Felicity to him. Just Felicity, nothing more. His love for her had torn down all the trappings of convention. Whatever her surname might have been he would have ignored it, since it meant nothing. He had gone straight to the core—hence Felicity. Just as there was no other

girl like her, so there was no other name. Felicity—happiness.

He had never dared to think until this moment that the symbol could have any significance for him—but now a miracle had happened. She had got to know by some means that he was staying at this vile inn and had come to fetch him. To do what? To go where? He didn't care. God! how wonderful was this moment!

By this time he was at the end of the smelly passage and past the door on the right from which the stealthy whisperings had come when Bill and he had stood outside the inn an hour before.

What did he care now for whisperings which sounded stealthy and became mysteriously hushed? The whole world could be engaged in comic-opera conspiracy if it had that desire. He was on his way to meet the girl he loved. . . .

"The car—it is standing out there, Monsieur." As he stood in the entrance, peering into the darkness of the night, the landlord, sidling up, touched him on the shoulder and pointed to where a darker blur could be seen in the general gloom.

"Did the lady give any name?" he asked. A momentary urge of doubt made him put the question. Yet if it was not Felicity, whom could it be?

"The name, Monsieur, was Mademoiselle Howard. I had to say that Mademoiselle was in a great hurry."

Fool to be standing there when perhaps every moment was precious ! All his confidence returned, he stepped out into the night. Quickly he covered the thirty yards between the house and the car.

It was a huge touring car with the hood up which waited. From the back seat a voice called softly : " Mr. Heritage ! " He could not see the face, but that low, hushed voice was sufficient.

In front was a driver—a well-trained chauffeur, apparently, because he gave no sign of being alive—staring straight in front of him. He was alone with the girl whose face was hidden, but whose voice drew him irresistibly.

He tried to say her name, but before he could utter it there came an urgent whisper : " Get in—we must rush away ! Quickly, please ! "

How could he resist that appeal ? He took the handle of the door and turned it. Then, lowering his head, he stepped into the car. He forgot that he was hatless ; he forgot everything, including the fact that Bill Matcham, who was certainly entitled to some explanation, would be waiting impatiently for his return. He was only conscious that, sitting in the other corner, was Felicity—and that she of her own volition had come for him.

The interior was very dark, but through the gloom there was wafted to him a scent, subtly fragrant and wholly feminine. It acted on him like a drug.

"Felicity!" he cried, and all his soul went into the word.

"Oh, my dear!—my dear!" A hand, bare, its whiteness showing up luminously in the darkness, went out to him. He pressed it to his lips—he, the reserved, the hesitant, the self-contained Stephen Heritage!—and then, how it happened he could not tell, she was in his arms, all the supreme, intoxicating loveliness of her, and he was pressing kisses upon any portion of her face which could be reached through that beastly veil.

Why was she wearing a veil? Was she afraid of being recognised? Veils went out with the Flood, or the war—he forgot which; anyway, no one wore them now. No one——

"You hug like a bear, my dear!"

His arms went slack. He felt suddenly cold. There was some ghastly mistake.

*This girl wasn't Felicity!*

He knew it by every intuitive prompting. He knew it as surely as he was alive. That voice did not belong to Felicity Howard; the girl he loved could never have used such a phrase. Besides, the voice now sounded entirely different.

"I beg your pardon," he said coldly. That was merely a beginning. There was a great deal to be added, and he was going to add it. In a moment he would begin asking questions, to which this masquerader—no wonder she wore a veil—would have to furnish satisfactory replies.

"Stephen—how silly you are! Aren't you going to kiss me again?"

No, of course this girl wasn't Felicity. It was still impossible to see her face, but he did not want any further proof than the satirical laugh which followed the jeering words.

Who was she? And what was her game? Leaning over, he seized the veil and tore it away.

A face which wore a mocking smile stared back at him.

"You fool! You'll be sorry for doing that."

He recognised the face—this was the girl who had been with the cripple Hewitt in Nicolai's cocktail bar!

"I had to know who you were—and what was at the back of this practical joke," he replied. His hands itched to be at her throat, and so he pressed them down on to the seat of the car.

"You'll know soon enough. I can promise you that."

"I want to know now."

"All right, you fool—you shall!" Putting her fingers into her mouth, she whistled after the manner of a street urchin. Whilst Heritage was wondering if this could be a signal of some sort, he heard the door on his left open.

He turned quickly—and in that instant something heavy thudded down on his bare head, and he sprawled helplessly at the feet of the woman.

The latter laughed.

“Very neat,” she commented; “home, James!”

Odette Blanchet had lived in London and knew its slang.

## CHAPTER XXII

## THE MONSTROUS MUMMER

SZULC !

Felicity recognised him at once from the descriptions which Sir Godfrey Barringer and others had given her. Even were the circumstances different, it would have been impossible to believe that there could be two such men in the world. Providence could not have allowed it.

“You must really introduce me, Count,” said the intervener. His loose lips were still smiling.

She could have smiled had she dared. The Count de la Siagne, master of intrigue and finesse though he might be, was plainly nonplussed. He scarcely knew how to bridge this impasse.

Yet he smiled. A very ghost of a smile, but it would have served in the ordinary way.

“Mademoiselle Howard — Monsieur Paul Flégier.”

“I am enchanted,” said Szulc.

“It is a pleasure to meet you, Monsieur,” she responded. To have carried conviction she should have extended her hand, she supposed, but to

have those lips touch her flesh was beyond contemplation.

Szulc here ! The knowledge was stunning and yet tremendous, because it explained so much.

"Monsieur Flégier is a composer, Mademoiselle ; he has come unexpectedly from Lyons to give my mother the honour of playing his latest work."

Felicity looked across at the arch-enemy of her country, and therefore of the world.

"May I be permitted to hear it also, Monsieur Flégier ?" She must pretend to believe this story. But for Szulc to be mistaken for a maker of pretty melodies ! . . .

The Count coughed, but the man by his side paid no heed.

"I shall be delighted, Mademoiselle," he said. "I had already asked that our host might give me that charming pleasure. To win Mademoiselle's appreciation would be an exquisite experience."

"But now," broke in the Count, "it is necessary that we should excuse Mademoiselle. She has been motoring all day and no doubt is tired."

"But, of course," agreed Szulc, "we men forget how beauty needs rest. Yet I console myself with the thought that I shall have the pleasure of rejoining Mademoiselle at dinner."

"That will be delightful," smiled Felicity.

Her quick wits enabled her to read all that was in this man's eyes. They told her that she was in far worse peril than she had imagined. With the Count she might have managed, but here was a more ruthless enemy. She must endeavour to play one off against the other ; therein might lie the confusion of both. It seemed the only chance.

" I really must go," she said, but as she turned she flashed Szulc another smile. A gleam came from the odious eyes.

She was breathing quickly by the time she reached her room. The maid Xandra was laying out a dinner frock.

" You needn't wait, Xandra ; I can manage quite well."

" Very well, Mademoiselle."

There was no need now for this girl to talk ; she had found out far too much about the Château of the White Wolf herself.

Yet there was one thing.

" Xandra, where is the key of this door ? Someone has taken it away."

The girl's face expressed her astonishment.

" The key, Mademoiselle ? But, surely—— ? But, yes, it is gone," she added, after looking.

" It must be brought back ; I am going to bathe and change."

" But, of course, Mademoiselle. I cannot understand. . . . It is nothing to do with me, Mademoiselle ; I have not touched the key."

"See to it immediately." She believed the girl to be truthful, but there was just the doubt.

Within five minutes Xandra had returned.

"It was the carelessness of one of the maids. She was polishing the door and the key fell out. Here it is, Mademoiselle." She placed a key in the lock.

It was not until she ascertained that the key fitted and that the door could be securely locked that Felicity showed she was satisfied.

"Tell the maid that she must be more careful another time," she said. The story was obviously an invention; not, she believed, on the part of Xandra; but she could not pursue the matter any further. When she went down to dinner she would take the key with her.

"You do not require me, Mademoiselle?"

"No, thank you, Xandra."

With the girl gone, she locked the door and slipped off her clothes. Stretched full length in the hot bath, her mind centred inevitably on the man whose presence at the Château had come as such a surprise to her. And yet, she told herself, she might have known that Szulc would be in this plot which, according to Sir Godfrey Barringer, was being planned. It was inevitable. He alone could supply the motive-force.

She tried to recall all that she had heard about

this man. By every count he was a fabulous figure, all the more powerful because it was only occasionally that any reference to him crept into the newspapers. Ridiculous as the description might have sounded to the average person, those who had knowledge knew him to be an international mischief-maker possessed of almost incredible power. The owner of practically unlimited wealth, it was his delight to play off one nation against another. In the destruction which followed he reaped his harvest. He could be relied upon to use tottering world markets to personal advantage.

Wars were his speciality. He was like a malicious demon eternally brewing trouble. He had hundreds of creatures, and these bribed and wormed their way into the confidence of those in high places. Szulc sowed corruption and reaped dishonour. He laughed at the League of Nations and spent his days showing how futile Geneva could be. Morally he was an imbecile, but intellectually he was a giant—unquestionably the greatest man in Europe. It was his delight to try to send the civilised world mad, so that crime on an unprecedented scale might flourish. He was at the back of every outbreak of social anarchy. Kings or presidents were alike to him. To topple down, that was his creed, and out of the chaos he made capital. The irony of it was that his depraved ingenuity brought him fresh millions. A

man of such fabulous wickedness that his existence could scarcely be credited.

Yet, like the Biblical bay-tree, he flourished. Dissolute and drunken, so that his conduct was a byword, he yet retained his brain and his life. Many attempts had been made on the latter, but none had succeeded. He seemed immune from ordinary risks. An utterly fabulous figure, as already stated ; one of those human phenomena who occur only now and then in several generations, but to the Chancellories of Europe he was potently real. The files of the different Secret Services testified to that.

England had always been Szulc's obsession. He would have liked to play with Britain as he had with lesser nations. In that, of course, he was not singular. England, because she stands four-square, is always the target for the iconoclast.

Much of Szulc's energies had been directed to the downfall of the country he hated. He had not succeeded, but he had caused the Intelligence Departments, especially the one which Sir Godfrey Barringer controlled, very considerable anxiety and trouble. Many agents had been sent on his trail, but he had contrived to elude and hoodwink them all. And now pure chance had brought her face to face with this arch-enemy ! It was her opportunity. Could she use it ?

No wonder the Count had been confused. He

had not bargained for the appearance of Szulc so soon after uttering that lie about there being no one else in the Château.

She dressed carefully and slowly. She made no attempt to evade the situation which faced her that night. Yet she was on the horns of a dilemma. There was the hope that Szulc, if drunk, might talk. To make him speak she would have to exercise all her feminine attraction. But in this direction a hideous danger lay. The one outstanding weakness Szulc had was women, and he was unscrupulous enough to take what he wanted.

Felicity carried a vanity-bag when she went down to dinner. In it was a revolver.

## CHAPTER XXIII

## BILL GOES TO BED

AFTER ten minutes' wait, Bill Matcham started to feel uneasy. What could be keeping old Stevo? Surely he ought to be back by this time?

What he should have done was to have got up and followed when Heritage left the room. That message may have been a trap—what more likely?—but Heritage had shown by his manner that this was a job he intended to do on his own.

He, Matcham the mutt, was not wanted. Two were company and three were a police raid ; that was what had been in old Stevo's mind, as plain as mud.

Bill snorted. It was time he had a word with this charmer himself. Highly necessary, it seemed to him, that he should cast the discerning optic and give her the once-over properly. Fellows—the best of 'em—were such asses where women were concerned. This girl with the pretty name might be the real goods, but, on the other hand, she was just as likely to be a hussy. It would take William to find this out. He must certainly get Stevo to introduce him—and what better opportunity for it than now ?

The first check he received to this laudable ambition was when he reached the door. To his amazement, he discovered that he could not open it ; he was locked in the room.

Amazement soon gave way to anger. So he had been right ; there *was* something fishy in the business. That dirty dog of a landlord—he had carefully planned it. Then what about old Stevo ?

Bill did not waste much time in either vain regrets or commiseration. He had to get to his pal, and there was a locked door standing between.

At first he thought of sending a revolver bullet through the lock—that would startle Pie-face—but second thoughts made him pick up a heavy

stool and bang upon the door. The tattoo which he kept up was deafening and, it proved, effective. After the fifteenth bang he paused momentarily, and had the satisfaction of hearing footsteps approaching rapidly.

The next moment the door was flung open.

Then ensued a pantomime which would possibly have struck an observer as being irresistibly comic.

The landlord, over whose head the stool was being held threateningly, burst into a torrent of French of which Bill could not understand one single word. To paraphrase Tennyson, Matcham had no language but a curse, and this he used fluently. The result was confusion.

Eventually, when the storm had abated slightly, Bill put down the stool, went to the door, and went through the motion of trying unsuccessfully to open it. At this an expression of something approaching intelligence showed in the landlord's face, which appeared to the other's fancy to become more unprepossessing every minute. The man, after pursing his lips, bowed. Then he raised his hand and struck himself a light blow on the forehead. If it meant anything, Bill took the gesture to convey that the landlord knew he had been a bad boy, but it was all a legitimate mistake, and everything could be satisfactorily explained if he (Bill) could only speak the only intelligent language there was in the world.

So far, not too bad, although why an honest innkeeper—but, then, this blighter wasn't honest ; how could he be expected to be with a face like that?—should make the mistake of locking a guest in without realising what he was doing was scarcely credible. However, there was a more important matter than that to be decided ; he had to find old Stevo.

He tried to convey what he wanted by pointing first to the seat where Heritage had sat during dinner and then to the door. The innkeeper evidently comprehended, for he took Bill's arm and started to lead him out of the room.

"No monkey tricks, mind," Bill said in warning before realising that the other could not possibly understand what he was jabbering.

The man replied in French, which left Bill exactly where he was before. After that he gave up talking.

When they stood on the threshold of the inn, looking out into the darkness, the landlord resorted to pantomime again. Even Bill, who was violently prejudiced, had to admit it was not badly done. From the little he already knew he was able, through the landlord's vivid gesticulations, to supply the rest : Heritage had gone out to meet a girl in a motor-car, had got in and had driven off with her.

A nice thing ! Where did *he* come in ?

Where had Stevo gone on this love-making

expedition? The landlord shrugged his shoulders as much as to say: "How do I know?" when Bill, remembering murkily the *allons* of the forest, shouted "*allez?*"

There seemed nothing for it but to wait until Heritage returned. It was to be supposed that he would return. But, hell, of course he would. It wasn't like old Stevo to leave a pal in the lurch like that. Tired as a dog, he'd write a note for Heritage and then pile into that waiting bed.

Going back into the room where they had eaten, he made signs that he wanted to write. The landlord, who appeared to be in a much more amiable mood—no doubt, he was one of those coves who improved upon acquaintance, Bill decided—fetched watery ink, some thin paper, and the world's worst pen.

After he had spluttered the note—

"DEAR STEVO,

"What the devil did you pop off like that for? I am in bed.

"BILL."

Matcham, placing his head on his hand, emitted an imaginary snore.

"*Mais, oui,*" said the landlord. For the second time that night he took his guest's arm.

He turned off sharply to the right after leaving the room, and started to climb a winding staircase, the threads of which creaked beneath their foot-

steps. So far they had been in the dark, but, stopping on what appeared to be a landing, the landlord struck a match and lit a guttering candle. Then, with his right foot he thrust open a door and signified to Matcham that he might step inside.

Bill did so—not, however, without some misgiving. Heritage had been away only a short time, but already he was missing him badly. He felt very lonely on his own.

It was perhaps because of this that he temporarily lost control of his common sense, and said something which he would have given anything a moment later to have withdrawn.

He was within the low-roofed, sparsely furnished bedroom by this time, with the landlord standing watching him from the doorway.

“How far is the Château de la Siagne from here?” he asked.

The geniality, real or assumed, which the landlord had been at some pains to portray for the past ten minutes, vanished instantaneously at the name. He scowled, but made no reply. Pointing to the bed, he placed the candle down on a shabby chest of drawers, and withdrew.

Bill had felt overpoweringly drowsy a few moments before, but now the desire for sleep had left him. The expression on the landlord's face had banished it. He had the feeling that if he lost consciousness something rather horrible might

happen to him. And with Stevo probably wanting him somewhere or other, he couldn't risk that.

He felt convinced that he had made a tragic blunder in mentioning the name of the Château de la Siagne. What an ass! That had given the whole show away, of course. No doubt this villainous innkeeper was in close touch with that Count-fellow; perhaps he was even one of his paid assassins. Running this rotten inn might be merely a blind.

The swiftness with which the landlord's expression had changed proved one fact: the Château de la Siagne must be near at hand. Had Stevo been kidnapped and taken there? It certainly looked like it. Then the girl had been used as a decoy.

But if Stevo was out of the fight, he mustn't allow himself to be done in. That bed, for instance. Now that he came to look at it, he didn't know that he liked the thing particularly. It wouldn't be surprising if it proved to be one of those beds one read about that sprang up and hit you directly you got into it. No bed—not this bed, at any rate—for him that night: he preferred the floor. That bit of the floor just behind the door, so that if anyone came in—there was no lock fixed, he noticed—he would be able to get an early glimpse of them.

Having come to this decision, Bill laid his over-

coat on that portion of the uneven floor which he had selected, and stretched himself upon it.

His improvised couch was far from comfortable, but he stuck it resolutely. He was getting rest of a sort. He would have liked to take off his boots, for after the day's hard tramping his feet ached abominably, but he remembered that, in the event of a rough-and-tumble he would want protection for his feet.

After an hour had passed he felt not only cold but extremely bad-tempered. Nothing had happened—or seemed likely to happen. He should have got into bed and taken a chance. As it was, he ached in every limb, and he would have the choicest stiff neck of his life in the morning through that confounded draught whistling in from under the door.

Well, he had had enough ; uninviting as the bed appeared, he would try it, after looking carefully between the sheets, of course.

He rose, feeling awkward through stiffness, and started to walk across the floor. As he did so a sound came from outside. It was only a slight sound, but it made him stop and turn. He was now standing by the side of the bed—in much the same position he would have taken up if he had started to undress.

Realising he was in the direct line of vision for anyone standing in the doorway, he started to step to one side. As he did so, however, his

feet gave beneath him. The floor had suddenly opened. He crashed into an emptiness that was as black as the Pit.

#### CHAPTER XXIV

#### SZULC MAKES AN OFFER

HER right hand resting on the vanity-bag, Felicity sat motionless.

Szulc was speaking.

"I go from here to Paris," he said, "and the one woman I should like to take with me is you. Of course, that could be accomplished without your consent—you are intelligent enough to understand that—but I am not a brute; I prefer acquiescence to force. Beauty should be respected not violated.

She shook her head.

"Your proposition, Monsieur Flégier, is no doubt intended to be flattering—but I do not care for Paris in February."

"Which means," retorted the gross caricature of a man sitting on the opposite of the table, "that you do not care for me. But my love is sufficient for both."

Felicity laughed. She had been with this man for over an hour—Szulc had ordered that they should dine alone—and her nerves had almost

reached the cracking-point. If she had not laughed she would have screamed. The memory of that hour would be ineffaceable ; she had been forced to look into a soul that was wholly vile.

" You laugh, Mademoiselle, when I protest my undying affection for you. Believe me, that is not a wise thing to do. Flégier does not bestow his love upon every slut of an Englishwoman who passes his way ; even in your case there were special circumstances. Shall I tell you what these were ? "

She made no answer. She had angered him with her contempt, and silence might provoke him further. This risk had to be taken. Information might pour from him in rage and it was information she wanted. This man was the brain of the conspirators who had met at the Château.

" You do not answer. Let me say, " went on the choking tones, " that, whilst I am forced to admire your courage, I deprecate your discretion. Believe me to be wholly sincere when I counsel you not to laugh again. "

" But how can I help it. Monsieur Flégier ? " she asked ; " you profess this marvellous affection for me, it is true, but surely you do not expect me to return it. "

" Beauty and the Beast—is that your unspoken analogy, Mademoiselle ? " A thin film of sweat showed on the speaker's face.

She essayed a further bluff.

"Monsieur, do you not think it is time this conversation ceased? I have been more than patient already. Is it customary in French artistic circles for a man to propose to his host's guest within an hour of his meeting her that she should become his mistress?"

"I am not like ordinary men, Mademoiselle. And the time has come, I think, when the somewhat stupid subterfuge of the Count de la Siagne can be dispensed with. My name is not Flégier——"

"It is Szulc—I knew it all the time," she added quickly.

Foolish, perhaps—but the desire to get a blow home after the vileness to which she had been subjected was irresistible.

The man rose to his feet. His thick, ugly fingers gripped the edge of the table with such force that the knuckles showed white.

"So—you know that, Mademoiselle?" he said thickly. "Then what the Count tells me is true—you are a spy!"

"A spy? Please don't be ridiculous."

"Ridiculous!" He choked over the word. "Few living people, I would tell you, Mademoiselle, have dared to call me ridiculous."

"Yet you are being so now," she persisted; "why should I be a spy? I have sufficient money to enable me to live in comfort."

Szulc made an angry gesture.

“As to your reason for being a spy, that does not concern me. You came here in the hope of obtaining information for your employers, the British Government. But you will learn that two can—what is it you say?—play at that game. It is obvious that you do not realise accurately your present position; not only are you in danger from the Comte and his mother—not a very amiable *grande dame*, that one!—but if my colleagues knew the truth about you they would certainly order you to be instantly suppressed. That would not be pleasant, eh? I guess your age to be twenty-two or twenty-three. You are in the full flower of your loveliness; with you youth and beauty, going hand in hand, form an irresistible combination. It would be a tragedy if you were called upon suddenly to die—that is why I have suggested you should accompany me to Paris.”

She shook her head.

“Wait, please,” he entreated; “since the call of adventure is evidently the motive power which induced you to take up your present occupation, let me assure you that under my direction you could experience power as well as thrills. Since you know who I am, you know what I can do.”

She pretended ignorance.

“What can you do?”

“I can command Europe!” came the storming reply; “soon——” And then he checked himself.

"And you offer me employment under your command?—is that what is in your mind?"

He looked at her with avid eyes.

"I offer you life instead of death," he replied.

"And power, I think you said?"

"You would have such power as few women in history have ever enjoyed. You would be associated with a man who can rule Europe and control nations." Monstrous as this boast sounded, she knew it to contain more than a measure of truth.

"That remains to be proved," she commented.

"Proved!" He was on his feet again. "Soon——" and then the door opened. The Comte de la Siagne stood in the opening.

Szulc turned in a tempest of fury.

"What the thousand devils do you mean by coming in here?" he demanded.

Felicity watched the other turn deathly white.

"The Council sent me to say that your presence was urgently required."

The other frowned.

"Tell them I am too busy to come for half an hour," he replied.

The Comte stood his ground.

"Pardon—but they were insistent," he continued; "a matter of great importance requires your consideration."

Felicity rose.

"I will go to my room ; please do not allow me to detain you."

Szulc, to whom this remark was addressed, made her a grotesque bow.

"This conversation of ours must be resumed, Mademoiselle, for it has just reached an interesting stage. By all means go to your room until I find myself free again. You will now, please, excuse me." He turned and waddled out of the room.

Directly he was gone the Comte closed the door.

"What has that *canaille* been saying to you?" he demanded. Gone was the former polish, the fine manner. Antoine de la Siagne had turned primitive.

She turned the knife in the wound.

"Monsieur Szulc has just done me the honour of inviting me to accompany him to Paris."

An unrepeatable French oath blazed from his lips.

"You——" But the threat was not uttered. For the door had opened quietly.

"I must ask you to accompany me to the meeting of the Council, Comte," said Szulc.

Ten minutes later Felicity was in her room. If there was any part of the Château safe for her, it was here.

She was tantalisingly near her goal. Perhaps

before the night was out she would know practically everything of value—at least, she would know enough to suit Sir Godfrey Barringer's purpose.

But in that very fact lay her greatest danger. There was not a person in the Château who would hesitate to murder her if she was caught attempting to escape. Xandra? She was not yet sure of the girl.

Should she pretend to accept Szulc's offer, infamous as it was? Once out of the Château——

There was a knock at the door.

"Yes?" she called.

"It is I," answered an unmistakable voice.

"You cannot come in here," she said.

"Alas! that I am forced to disobey so charming a lady," was the reply. Szulc stood before her.

"To lock your door is a reflection upon my chivalry, Mademoiselle," he added in a tone of ironic rebuke; "but do you not say that love laughs at locksmiths? Very well, then."

She had to try to placate this man, even while her soul sickened at the sight of him.

"What else do you want to tell me?"

Szulc grinned.

"A young Englishman has just arrived at the Château," he said; "his name is Heritage—Stephen Heritage—and the impression seems to be amongst my colleagues that he also is an

English spy. No doubt a colleague of yours? Balloting has just taken place to decide his fate. The rest are unanimously agreed that he should die. The ultimate decision, however, has been left to me—that was the reason I was called away just now.”

Although her heart seemed to stop beating, she had to speak. And not only to speak but to affect indifference.

“And why do you tell me all this?”

“Because,” was the reply there could be no misunderstanding, “the fate of this young colleague of yours is in your beautiful hands. I am prepared to save him from death on terms—my terms, of course.”

## CHAPTER XXV

## THE COUNT GIVES WELCOME

THE face which Stephen saw looking at him directly he recovered consciousness was familiar—hatefully familiar. The Comte de la Siagne was regarding him intently.

From the man, he started to look at the room. But he found himself incapable of much movement owing to the manner in which he had been bound; he was trussed up like a fowl, and lying

on a large couch in a room which he would not have been surprised to hear was somewhere underground. The atmosphere was damp, raw, and unpleasant.

The Count, who was in evening dress, drew the stool on which he was seated nearer.

"It is my dinner-time, Mr. Heritage," he remarked; "but I could not deny myself the pleasure of welcoming you to my Château. You will, no doubt, feel gratified that you have been able to enter my house with such a minimum of trouble. I received early information that you had arrived at the local inn and made immediate arrangements for your reception. The lady proved a ready lure, it appears."

Heritage choked back the words which he would have liked to utter.

"Where is Miss Howard?" he asked.

"You mean your colleague?" supplemented the Count; "Miss Howard is in another part of the Château busily engaged in gathering the information which you both imagine, no doubt, will be so useful to the British Government."

"You're talking rot," was the reply; "I've nothing to do with the British Government." But as he spoke a flood of enlightenment came to him: Felicity Howard must be in the British Secret Service! He had heard from a man who had been in some branch of the Intelligence during the war that sometimes women were em-

ployed. That explained a great deal ; in fact, it explained everything.

"Of course," he heard the Count continue, "there is a very small chance of any such information being allowed to leave the Château ; it is rather too important for that."

Heritage realised he must try to blind the speaker.

"For a presumably intelligent man you seem to be under a most ridiculous assumption," he said ; "I have already told you that I have not the slightest connection with the British Government ; whilst as for Miss Howard, she is almost a complete stranger to me. Having said that, I want to know what you mean by having me brought here like this to-night?"

The Count motioned with his hand.

"Shall we say that I found it politic ? Information reached me that you were desirous of entering the Château. If the denial which you have just made is correct, may I inquire the reason?"

"I'll tell you that. Although I have been in Cannes only a short time, I have heard sufficient about your reputation to know that you are not the most desirable person to entertain a young Englishwoman of beauty and charm. To be frank, I intended to see Miss Howard, if possible, and give her a warning. Is that sufficient?"

"More than sufficient, my friend. Such unselfish devotion is to be commended. I trust you

will allow me to convey your compliments to the fortunate young lady in question, and express regret that you are not in a position to see her."

There was an undercurrent of something besides cynical banter in the speaker's voice.

"You realise, of course, the risk you are taking in treating an Englishman like this?"

The words appeared merely to amuse the listener.

"My dear Monsieur Heritage, may I be permitted to remind you that I am accustomed to taking risks?"

Stephen nodded grimly.

"Yes, with two murders to your credit within a week, I'm inclined to agree with you. But it's possible to go too far, remember. If Miss Howard is not back at her hotel, safe and unharmed, by to-night, there will be certain inquiries made at this damned Château of yours."

The Count moistened his lips with the tip of his tongue.

"That is very interesting news. May I ask the name of your informant?"

Heritage took a bold plunge.

"Lord Dalrymple, the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs," he replied.

The Count rose from the stool and glanced at his watch.

"Your conversation is interesting in the extreme," he said; "alas! that I should have to

leave ! But you will be given another opportunity to talk."

A smile which Heritage would have given ten years of his life to avenge followed the statement.

Pride kept him silent ; he would not allow the man any further satisfaction. He was afraid he had said too much as it was.

After the Count had left Heritage felt like giving way utterly to despair. He had been the world's prize fool. Not only had he landed himself in a hopeless mess, but he had failed in his trust to the two people he admired most in the world. Only his burning anger prevented him from completely breaking down.

He pulled himself together. He had to act, not mope.

He must get out of this cellar, or whatever it was. But the wish was impossible to encompass ; he soon realised that. The fellow who had tied him up knew his job. He was as secure as a rat in a trap. His thoughts made the long-drawn-out suspense agonising.

It might have been an hour—he could not judge the passing of time—after the Count had left him, that he heard the door scraping open. A wild hope surged through him. And with the hope came an inspiration.

Closing his eyes, he pretended to be asleep. From beneath the lids he saw a servant dressed

in some kind of uniform coming towards him. The man carried a tray, on which appeared to be some food.

The servant placed the tray on the stool which the Count had used for a chair, and, bending over the prisoner, studied his features. It was a testing ordeal for the nerves, but Heritage came through it successfully, for the man softly chuckled.

A yet greater trial awaited the prisoner, however, for the man now began to rummage in the other's pockets. Robbery was evidently his motive; he wasn't so true to his trust that he could ignore any easy pickings which were to be had.

"*Sacré!*" he growled between his teeth. He was prevented from effective exploration by the ropes which were drawn so tightly round the prisoner's body.

After looking swiftly at the door, he commenced to loosen one of the bonds. Heritage waited breathlessly; here was an unlooked-for chance if only he could take advantage of it.

The man's greed was his undoing. Loosening this particular rope meant that the prisoner's arms became free—and, with a swift, upward movement, the captive's hands were at the incautious thief's throat.

Too late he realised the mistake he had made. He had meant to rob whilst the prisoner was asleep, and then retie the rope. Now he was

struggling for breath, and trying in vain to shout for assistance.

Heritage had no mercy. He could not afford to have any. Everything depended upon him throttling the other. Blows from the other's fists rained on him, but he scarcely felt them. What he concentrated on was getting a yet firmer hold on the man's windpipe.

And soon he had his reward. With a final faint, despairing gurgle, the servant collapsed and became limp. All the life went out of him so that Stephen had the impression that he was holding a gigantic doll.

In order that there should be no mistake, he drew the senseless body towards him so that it flopped against the long wooden structure to which he had been fastened. With his hands free it was comparatively easy to untie his ankles. Cramp made him wince when he first stood up—but the joy of being free !

The tables were now turned. As quickly as possible he went through the servant's pockets. He retrieved his money, and also found a bunch of keys. These he appropriated, on the chance of them proving useful.

Heritage debated the point whether he should wait until the man recovered and then try to force some information out of him. But risk was in that waiting, and it was too great ; any moment might see a squad of other men at the door.

He must get out of that cellar even if he was recaptured. That chance had to be faced in any case.

Once outside, he stopped for a moment. Did any of the keys fit the lock? The third he tried slipped in easily. He smiled as he turned it. The Comte de la Siagne wouldn't have all the laughs.

He found himself now in a labyrinth of dimly lit passages. Whilst he stood puzzled, undecided in which direction to go, he heard footsteps drawing nearer and nearer. How many men there were he could not tell, and he dared not wait to ascertain. He turned to take the corridor on the right, and ran with the speed that only fear can lend.

The passage had many twists, and if only he had possessed a revolver he might have beaten back any number of pursuers. But—and he felt like cursing at the memory—the Smith-Wesson he had bought at that shop in the Rue Unis-Etats at Cannes was in the overcoat which he had left behind at the inn.

He did not slacken his speed. If he had been inclined to do so, a shout which reverberated noisily would have urged him on. The locked door had been discovered, and perhaps by this time the servant had recovered consciousness.

Another turn, and he was facing a massive door fitted with a huge lock. This appeared to denote the end of the journey. Shouts from behind sounded clearer; the hunt was evidently up.

The position seemed desperate ; if he returned the way he came he would inevitably fall into the hands of the pursuers.

He looked despairingly at the bunch of keys. It seemed a forlorn chance—and yet there was one that appeared big enough to fit that brute of a lock.

It did ! Some strength was required in turning it, but he managed it after a struggle, and was soon safely on the other side with the door re-locked. So far the luck had been with him.

Looking round, he saw that he had stepped outside the Château proper and was now in the grounds. Before him was a broad strip of lawn with a large outhouse of some sort at the other end.

Stepping out on to the grass, he glanced up at the pile of masonry which loomed above him.

Suddenly his interest quickened. Twenty feet or so above him was a lighted room—and from this room there came the sound of a stifled cry.

A woman had uttered it, and his intuition told him that woman was Felicity Howard.

## FELICITY !

He had known it was she from the moment that he heard the cry ; and now, as though to remove any doubt that might have remained, he could see her figure outlined against the window. She seemed to be on guard. . . .

The sight acted as a fresh goad. He only waited long enough to turn quickly at hearing a sound behind, but in that moment something incredible sprang at him out of the night's darkness.

This new enemy was wholly monstrous and wholly horrible. It had a bestial face, the lower part of which seemed to consist mainly of a huge gash of a mouth.

He became faint with an unimagined terror—the reek of the creature alone gave him a sense of physical nausea—and it was not until he felt a pair of hands that seemed made of steel fasten round his neck that he rallied from that first unnerving element of surprise.

But he soon found he was at an overwhelming disadvantage ; it was like fighting a phantom. His groping hands touched nothing but the air ; he could not reach his opponent.

Guttural cries of savagery came from the

latter. Swiftly those terrible hands were squeezing the life out of him. He slipped, and, horror upon horror, the monster was on top of him. . . .

Heritage knew this to be Death. A blood-red mist swam before his eyes; his heart felt like bursting. The end had come.

Then, like relief from a nightmare too poignant to be longer borne, the grip on his throat lessened. From somewhere at the end of where stretched Life a voice called :

“Krang !” And again : “Krang !”

It was the voice of the Count de la Siagne—and the voice of this Thing’s master, for, after listening, it loped off towards the other end of the big lawn.

“Naughty boy !” Heritage heard the Count say, “what were you doing? Be quiet now !” What sounded grotesquely like a whimper followed.

“Come on, you bad boy, and eat your supper.” Followed the clang of a door being shut and—silence.

Stephen lay still on the grass. He had been reprieved and, ironically enough, by his bitterest enemy ! In the darkness the Count could not have been able to see what was happening. The wonder of his escape flooded through his soul, giving him a greater grip on returning life than anything else could have done.

Then he got to his feet. Why was he wasting

time like this? Up above him in that room Felicity was in danger; he had seen her backed to the window, her right arm outstretched as though she were keeping someone at bay with a revolver. He must get to her; too many precious minutes had already been lost. If such a danger as he had faced existed outside the Château, what devilry might not be unloosed inside?

Considering that he was unaccustomed to such violent exercise, the manner in which Heritage clambered up the side of that château wall would have surprised the average onlooker. True, he had the assistance of a particularly stout creeper, but under normal circumstances it is certain that he would have been totally unable to accomplish the feat. But there were two strong influencing factors. The only girl worth a moment's thought was facing peril in that room above. That was the first. The second was that when he was half-way through his climb he heard a loud curse, and it was a man's voice which had uttered the oath.

He had only a very faint recollection of what followed until the time when, knocking on the window, he saw Felicity's startled face. She looked at him as though he were a ghost; but, after staring fixedly for a few moments, she showed the practicality of her mind by opening the window.

He literally fell into the room.

She helped him to his feet.

"Why did you come after I warned you?" she asked.

"I had to. Do you imagine I could allow you to be here alone—with these devils?" In that tense moment they both dispensed with frills, cutting to the bone.

His voice had risen, and she checked any further outburst by lifting a finger.

"Hush!" she said. "There is no time now to talk. Is it possible to get out that way?"—pointing to the window.

Remembering the experience he had had, he shook his head.

"There is something too horrible to tell you about on guard below. It nabbed me. I should have been dead by now if the Count hadn't called it off." Even if the creature was caged it might break loose again.

The girl's eyes widened.

"Was its name Krang?" she asked a little breathlessly.

"Yes. That was what the Count called it. Have you seen the beast?"

She nodded.

"Last night. It looked in at my window."

"My God! What do they keep it for?"

The girl's hand reached out and touched the back of a chair.

"They use it to kill people—the man who was here just now——"

He interrupted.

"Did he hurt you? I saw you pointing a revolver."

There was a hint of hysteria in her voice as she answered.

"He wanted to touch me—so I shot him."

"Shot him? I didn't hear any report."

"I used a noiseless automatic. No"—answering the unspoken question—"I don't think he is dead. If I had had any sense I should have aimed for the heart and not for the shoulder. But he is very angry, and when a man like Szulc——"

"Szulc!" he interrupted again. "Who is Szulc?"

"Szulc is the name of the most evil living creature." Her tone left no room for doubt.

"But I thought the Count was the danger. It was through him I was kidnapped and brought here."

"The Count is merely a subordinate—one of Szulc's underlings. He made me an infamous offer just now—an offer which, of course, I refused. That was before I shot him. After lurching out, holding his wounded shoulder, he said that the offer would not be repeated."

"May I ask what the offer was?" Heritage did not know why he asked the question, except that now he was by the girl's side he seemed to

have become so closely identified with her that the thought of their ever being separated again was impossible.

Felicity looked straight in front. Stephen noticed her hands were clenched.

"He wanted me to become his mistress," she replied. "For that I was to receive half of his kingdom."

"He seems almost as unpleasant as his name," commented Heritage, whose blood was seething. "Where is this sweet being now?"

He had started towards the door when the girl seized his arm.

"He must not see you," she said urgently. "That would be fatal."

"Fatal . . . for him," growled Heritage, but out of respect for her request for caution he stopped.

Then he became foolish.

"My dear," he said, "what does anything matter now that I've found you?"

## CHAPTER XXVII

## THE COMTESSE CACKLES

IN the great dining-room below, Szulc was nursing his hurt, which had been dressed by a servant, and fostering his rage. The damnable

spitfire—to shoot him like that ! The automatic she had used was only a toy, but it might have been the means of his death. It would have to be taken away from her.

He heard the tip-tapping of a stick and rose awkwardly as the Comtesse entered the room.

“Antoine,” she said, “are you here?”

“Your son is not here, Comtesse,” answered Szulc. “I am waiting for him myself. Can I guide you to a chair?” He went across and offered the assistance of his arm.

“It is very kind of you, Monsieur.” She sat down. “Will you please be good enough to see if the door is securely shut?”

“You shut it after you, Comtesse,” he told her.

“I wanted to make sure. It is a great misfortune to be blind, Monsieur. And now will you do me the favour of giving me five minutes of your valuable time?”

“I am at your disposal, Comtesse.” He speculated : What a wonderful beauty this woman must have been in her youth and middle-age ! Even now she was remarkable.

The Comtesse leaned forward.

“Draw your chair closer, Monsieur Szulc,” she whispered. “What I have to say is for your ear alone.”

He did as he was requested, curiosity rather than courtesy prompting him. Then he stared.

The still-beautiful face had become vulpine, repulsive. It glowed with some mysterious force of devilry.

"It is about the English girl upstairs I wish to speak, Monsieur Szulc. My son Antoine is weak. I am afraid he has fallen in love with her—but you, I know, will not be so foolish."

"No. I promise you not to be so foolish, Comtesse." The wound in his shoulder—the servant had not been able to extract the bullet—was throbbing like the devil.

"It is impossible, of course, to allow her to leave the Château," said the Comtesse; "she knows too much. Antoine made a mistake, I think, in inviting her here at this time. And yet, I don't know. She is a danger averted." The face was thrust still nearer the listener. "Not that she will be the first visitor to disappear from the Château de la Siagne."

Szulc felt himself attracted to this terrible old woman. There was an affinity between them.

"And haven't inquiries been made?" he asked.

A thin peal of cackling laughter greeted the words.

"Oh yes, but what are 'inquiries'? Antoine has simply said that the poor unfortunates must have been set upon by mountain bandits. You recall, Monsieur, that this is a very lonely and desolate part of the Alpes Maritimes."

"But this girl is, without doubt, an accredited member of the British Intelligence," he persisted.

"All the more reason that her mouth should be shut for ever!" The Comtesse's lips closed with a snap. "You will not fail me in this, Monsieur? It is for my son's own good that I speak."

Szulc, who had plumbed many human depths, had now an entirely new experience.

"What is it exactly you wish to do, Comtesse?" he asked.

For a minute the woman spoke rapidly, her voice low and husky.

At the end Szulc remained silent.

"Comtesse," he said finally, "you were born out of your generation. You belong to an earlier age."

The woman made acknowledgment by another thin peal of laughter.

"I must leave you to convince Antoine," she said, rising. "He would not listen to me."

Back in the room which was a prison, Felicity turned to the man whose fate had become so inextricably linked with hers.

"You must go," she said. "Of the two the window is the safer way, in spite of——"

"Krang." He shook his head. "No, we must cut out the window; it would be impossible

for you. I hate this waiting. Why can't we make a dash for it? You have a revolver, and I have a couple of fairly useful fists."

But to this suggestion she gave no approval.

"They will know by this time you have escaped, and the house will be full of searchers. The only way for you is through the window. As for Krang, I will let you have my revolver."

"My God, you don't!" he answered. "I'm not going on my own. Let's make a dash for it," he pleaded again.

"I can't leave yet, even if it were possible. My work is not done."

He stared at her.

"You put your work before your life?" he asked in amazement.

"I must," she replied simply and without any suggestion of heroics. "I am bound to do so by the oath I have taken."

"You are in the Secret Service?"

"Yes—how did you guess?"

"The Count informed me. My dear," he went on, "you must try to realise that with him and this man Szulc, whoever he may be, knowing this, every moment you stay in this place is terribly dangerous."

"Of course," was the reply; "that is why I want you to leave. Please!" she entreated, and would have thrust the revolver into his hand if he had not stood away.

"That's impossible!" To give colour to his determination, he sat down.

She shrugged her shoulders as though recognising how useless was further argument.

"Where's your friend?" she then asked.

Very briefly he told what had happened.

"I feel terribly to blame," he said, coming to an end.

"That is all the more reason why you should get away while there is yet time."

"My place is with you," he answered doggedly.

"You know you are acting very foolishly."

"I know that I would rather die with you than live by myself."

After that Felicity felt that anything she could have replied would be inadequate.

"I have no doubt but that we shall die," she said after a pause. "I was too confident in coming here alone. I should have had help. How bitterly I regret that now!"

"Do the people at the Mont Fleury know where you are?"

"No; they only know I was to be away for the week-end."

"Did you say when you would be back?"

"No. I did not know how long I should have to stay here."

"But if you don't return, inquiries will surely be made by your friends?"

"I have no friends in Cannes—only acquaintances. Yes, there is one man—but I purposely put him off. He warned me against coming here, and I had to laugh him to scorn."

"Where is he now?"

"Bordighera, I believe."

"There's not much hope from him, anyway. But if we can only hold out until to-morrow——"

"What is to happen, I am afraid, will happen to-night."

"Never mind. Let me complete what I was going to say. Lord Dalrymple, the British Foreign Secretary, is in Cannes—at least, he was yesterday."

"How do you know?"

"Because he came to the Chester Hotel to see me."

"About his son?"

"Yes."

"Did he refer to me?"

"No."

"No?"

"Because I was ass enough to imagine that if you wanted any help I was the one to give it you. I didn't want anyone else butting in."

"Did Lord Dalrymple know you were coming to the Château?"

"No—but the *concierge* of the Chester did. He's a bright chap—one of the most intelligent fellows I've ever met. Like your friend, he gave

us a warning about this place, and if we're not back soon he'll go to the police, I'm sure of that."

"It may then be too late. Besides, I don't think the local police would move against the Count unless they had overwhelming evidence; they would not take the word of a mere hotel *concierger*. We must not rely on that."

He refused to be daunted.

"There is still Matcham," he said. "He can't speak French, he wants to fight everyone who looks at him a second time, and he may be dead by now. But if he's alive you can depend upon him doing something. He'll guess I've been carted along here, and——"

He turned as a voice barked sharply from the door.

"Both of you, please put your hands above your heads."

In the speaker Felicity recognised the chauffeur who had driven her that day. To Heritage also came recognition: this was one of the crooks who had attacked him on the sea-front the morning after the Westover murder.

He would have risked a rush at the man, both of whose hands held a revolver, had not Felicity quietly said: "Don't be foolish—wait!"

"Quickly, now—or I shoot!" came the warning.

"IT'S useless to resist," said Heritage. The thought of the girl receiving a physical hurt was unnerving. It almost unmanned him. Whatever awaited them, they would be together. That was a certain consolation, and there was still the chance of being able to make an attempt at escape, impossible as this was at the moment.

Felicity did not reply to the advice. Instead, she turned to the man at the door.

"What do you want?" she asked.

"You are to come with me—both of you," he said in French. He stood aside so that they could pass. When Heritage momentarily hesitated, he thrust the revolver forward with a vicious gesture.

"The quicker you move, the safer you will be," was his warning.

Stephen shrugged his shoulders. He had to make some movement in order to conquer the desire to risk everything by punching this olive-faced swine in the jaw.

Outside the door was another gaoler. He, too, was armed.

"This way," the latter said harshly.

They followed this guide down the winding staircase which had become so familiar to Felicity; and then, leaving the ground floor,

where the rooms she knew were situated, they descended a number of stone steps to find themselves in a cold, damp corridor. To the left was a door, on which the leader knocked.

A voice called "*Entrez,*" and the man, thrusting open the door, entered the room. The prisoners were able to see a number of men seated at an oblong table. In the centre was one who had discarded his coat and whose left arm was in a sling. Heritage judged this unpleasant-looking person to be the Szulc of whom Felicity had spoken.

The chairman of the proceedings scowled as the guide seemed to be making some kind of report. Then he made a fierce and abrupt motion of his hand.

The man, turning round quickly, walked back to the prisoners.

"You are to come inside," he said.

For the second time since this grim piece of mummery had started, Heritage was tempted to take the risk of rushing at his two gaolers. But the pressure of a revolver barrel against his back reminded him of the duty he owed his common sense. The only way he could hope to protect his companion was by keeping a firm grip on himself—at least, for the present.

He felt something warm touch his fingers, and his entire outlook became changed. He caught Felicity's hand and held it tight. A courage that

he could not have hoped to possess flowed into him at the contact.

So, with hands linked, they walked into the room.

"Let us hear what they have to say," Felicity whispered. He nodded, signifying that he understood it was a hint for him to be cautious and not to provoke these men.

His curiosity, which even the sense of peril could not squash, made him look round. The setting for this scene was appropriate enough; its gloomy atmosphere might have served for a film of bizarre sensation. Szulc, whoever and whatever he might be, evidently had an eye for the picturesque.

The room was chilling. Its stone floor was bare, as were the walls. Except for a space round the table where the men sat, there was no illumination; the rest of the chamber was shrouded in darkness.

From the setting Heritage turned his attention to the persons who were to be his judges and—quaint, if disturbing thought—possible executioners. This idea might have appeared fantastically absurd but for the knowledge which Felicity had recently given him. As it was, he remembered that the girl whose hand he held was a self-confessed member of the British Secret Service, who, out of a sense of daring, perhaps misplaced, had ventured alone into this strong-

hold of dangerous plotters. Now that she was discovered she would have to pay the penalty. And he——

Stephen's thoughts were recalled to the present by a rasping voice.

"A pretty picture ! It is a pity there is not a photographer present to immortalise it !"

There could be no question who had spoken ; it was the man seated in the centre—the man Stephen had identified as Szulc—the brute whom Felicity had shot in the shoulder. His repellant face was flushed with rage as he glared across the table.

"A pretty picture !" he repeated, with a smashing blow on the table ; "but later—well, we shall see !" There was a wealth of covert evil in the threat.

Yet Heritage, who would have denied possessing more than average courage, felt like smiling. This was *opéra bouffe* ; it couldn't be really taking place. That grotesque-looking creature sitting in his shirt-sleeves—he might be the most ugly, but could he be the most evil man in the world ? Felicity had certainly used the term, but she must have been distraught ; she could not have realised the value of the words. The fellow looked merely grotesque to him.

Stephen looked at Szulc's companions. These criminals—if such they were—did not look the part. All the abnormality was concentrated in

the chairman; the others were commonplace enough. The one sitting next to Szulc on the right might have been a cheap commercial traveller, judging by his clothes; whilst his right-hand companion looked exactly like a touring actor. Both the other two appeared equally nondescript and innocuous. 'What was there to be feared from such as these? It was ridiculous.

"Stand up straight, and look me in the face!"

It was Szulc speaking again. And he was addressing him. Stephen, answering the challenge, stared back at the man—and quickly his blood went cold.

Felicity had been right. He might have known that she was not the type to use the wrong words. This man now looked the very incarnation of evil. He could not tell why he himself had not appreciated the truth before.

"Place them apart!" ordered Szulc. "To hell with their love-making!"

With a brutal blow one of the gaolers knocked their hands asunder before placing himself between them.

"May I inquire when this farce can be expected to end?"

Heritage, although disobeying the unuttered request of Felicity, had to speak. It was a relief from a bondage which otherwise would have been insufferable.

Szulc thrust his repulsive face forward.

“You desire information, Mr. Heritage?” he inquired.

“I certainly do.” Now that he had started to speak he must go on. “I demand to know, in the first place, why Miss Howard, who is a countrywoman of mine, is being insulted in this outrageous fashion? When you have explained that quite fully, you can carry on with telling me why I was brought to this place by a trick and made a prisoner.”

Szulc smiled.

“Shall I humour him?” he asked, turning to his colleagues.

The man who bore such a striking resemblance to a touring actor exploded a tremendous oath.

“Cut their throats and have done with it,” he said. “We have something better to do than to waste time over this play-acting.”

A chorus of assent came from the other three.

Szulc returned to the prisoners.

“My friends are inclined to be impatient, you see,” he remarked. “To an extent I am in agreement with them. They have come here to discuss a matter of tremendous moment, involving considerable sums of money. They fear that all their plans may be ruined by the impertinent inquisitiveness of two such nonentities as yourself and your companion. Consequently, they urge the immediate destruction of you both. Again, I am in complete agreement with them.”

He paused as though expecting some comment, but Heritage waited.

"However," the speaker continued, "since every prisoner has a right to hear the charge preferred against him, I propose to answer very briefly your question. We will take Miss Howard first. She is a spy of the British Government who took advantage of a kindness on the part of the Comte de la Siagne, the owner of this château, to practise her vile and abominable trade at the expense of my colleagues and myself. Since the penalty of a spy in wartime—and a state of war exists between myself and the British Government at the present time—is death, I have no alternative but to pronounce the dread sentence."

Stephen, starting to move his hand, had it jerked violently down to his side.

"As for yourself, it is an established fact that you are an intimate friend of the accused; and, since you have seen fit to concern yourself so closely with the doings of this acknowledged spy, you must be prepared to take the consequences. In the circumstances I have no alternative but to sentence you to the same fate as this woman."

The last two words acted as the final goad.

Rushing forward, and leaning across the table so that his eyes were not more than two feet away from the other's face, Heritage flung back a taunt.

"I don't know what kind of game you think

you're playing," he said ; " but let me assure you that it's likely to be a very dangerous one. There are men in Cannes—Englishmen—who are only waiting for a chance to——"

"Stephen !" called a voice. "Please . . . no more !"

He turned and looked at Felicity.

"My dear," he said, instantly penitent, "I am sorry."

The mischief had been done, however.

"But this is interesting," remarked the man who was taking on himself the duties of a judge.

"It means that we must expedite these proceedings." He looked at the two guards.

"Away with them !" he said curtly.

It was impossible, with the threat of death hanging over their heads, to remain inactive any longer. Heritage took a running leap at the nearest man. The fellow had been prepared, however. He avoided the blow, which would have knocked him senseless had it landed, and butted the Englishman in the stomach with his knee. It was such a foul and brutal trick that Heritage became doubled up with pain. Whilst he was trying to pull himself together, a blow descended on the back of his head and he completely collapsed.

Ten minutes later Szulc sat alone in that judgment chamber. It was not only the pain in

his shoulder that was making him almost insensate with rage. Every minute a murderous madness took a deeper grip on him.

In spite of his planning, this scheme on which he had banked so much, which was to throw Europe into chaos, remained in the balance. Benatzky had not turned up for that conference; and no word, moreover, had been received from him. Upon the life and death of Benatzky, an agent whom he had never known before to fail, a great deal—perhaps everything—depended. If he had been taken . . . Heritage's statement about Englishmen at Cannes who were only waiting a chance to—— He must get to know exactly what the fellow had meant; he must be made to talk. And now—instantly.

He rose with surprising swiftness for a man of his bulk, cursing as the fire of agony raced through the wounded flesh, and was halfway across the room when the door opened.

"I want a few words with you, Szulc," said the Count de la Siagne.

Szulc stared at the visitor. He did not recognise the tone the other used. And the man himself was practically a stranger. This was a new host to the one he had hitherto met.

"Is it important?" he snapped.

"It is vitally important." For a moment the subordinate had assumed the leadership; the Count pointed to the chair which the other

had just vacated and seated himself in one near by.

It was only when he sat looking into the Count's strained face that Szulc realised he had obeyed the unspoken command. The knowledge added to his fury.

"Be quick, then. What is it you have to say?"

"This," replied the Count slowly. "If that English girl suffers one moment of pain I'll kill you with my own hands!"

So unexpected was the answer, so audacious the threat, that for a moment Szulc was completely staggered. The recovery was announced by a bellow of fury that filled the room.

"Vile scum!" countered de la Siagne, jumping from his chair. "And who are you to give orders in my house? Do you forget that I command here?"

"You? Command?" The tone was incredulous.

"Yes, Szulc. I command. This is my house, and I will prove that I am master in it."

He walked to the wall behind the table and pressed a bell.

"You know what will happen to you?" asked Szulc. He might have been speaking to a wilful child. "Insubordination is an unforgivable offence with me."

The Count made a gesture of impatience. He

kept his finger on the bell until a servant appeared.

It was the latter who spoke first.

"Monsieur le Comte," he said, "a gentleman has just arrived—a Monsieur Benatzky."

"Bring him here," roared Szulc; and when the man had turned away: "We will settle this other matter some other time."

But the Count was adamant.

"It must be settled now." Without waiting for an answer, he left the room.

Watching him, Szulc merely shrugged his shoulders. Now that Benatzky had come, he had more important matters to consider.

## CHAPTER XXIX

## "THE LITTLE LOVER"

FELICITY shuddered.

Her worst fear was receiving abundant proof. This terrible old woman was mad. And her madness was of the most fiendish and revolting type.

The Comtesse de la Siagne continued:

"Within a few minutes now your courage will be tested, my beautiful. With your body—that body which my foolish son has found so attractive

that he was willing to be false to his doting mother—with your body bared, I say, you will receive such caresses as you never dreamed. See, already I have your little lover ready.”

If Felicity had been able to scream she must have done so. For the situation was beyond human endurance. From that Council Room in which she had received such a ghastly mock trial she had been taken to another smaller room on the same level. Heritage, struggling furiously, had been dragged off in another direction. For the first time since she had been at the Château her courage completely failed. Heritage had run into this peril because of her—and now he was being taken away to be murdered. There could be no doubt of it; Szulc was not a man to make empty threats. Besides, the very fact that they had shown themselves to be—was “lovers” the word?—would have decided their fate with Szulc, if nothing else had been against them. To be supplanted by another man—what evil fury must have possessed that brute beast?

But this ordeal which now confronted her was worse than anything Szulc could have conceived. With her hands strapped behind her and her ankles tied together, she faced a demoniac hag. The gentle Comtesse de la Siagne had become a creature that could only have existed in the imagination of a diseased brain. This fragile aristocrat, whose blindness conjured pity from

everyone she met, had changed into a monster possessed by a fabulous wickedness. From the bosom of her dress the Comtesse had pulled a dainty poignard, and along its cruel, glistening blade she ran a caressing finger, a finger that was white and small as a child's. . . .

Felicity recoiled at the sickening sight. How vividly returned to her the unspoken warning of the maid Xandra ! What was it the girl had said ? "Mademoiselle, this house is ev—" The uncompleted word had been "evil," without a doubt. God only knew what dreadful things had been done there—done by this mad old woman with the rotted soul. Gerry Westover had been fortunate, for he had escaped, even though he had died later at the knife of one of de la Siagne's assassins. But she was a prisoner—a prisoner without hope of escape. She had been inclined to scoff at Tommy Laxendale's melodramatic stories of the Château, but now she knew them all to be true. Those men and women who had disappeared—they had one and all been murdered, and murdered horribly by this blood-crazed creature who now, laughing softly to herself, rocked to and fro on her tiny feet.

"You will not be the first whose flesh this little lover has kissed," crooned the Comtesse. "After my son has gained what he wanted he has handed them over to me. I am blind, and time hangs heavily on my hands—he ! he !—so that

you see it is only kindness to allow me a little relaxation. Oh, I could tell you strange and wonderful stories of those the little lover has kissed. Strong men have pleaded—to me, a poor blind old woman, whom God has seemed to have forgotten. . . .

“You may wonder what satisfaction I can obtain, since I cannot see their faces. But my ears are very sharp, my beautiful, and what they say is music to me, sweet, wonderful music. And you need not think that your shrieks or screams will be listened to; these walls are thick, and those about me are very faithful.

“You, my beautiful, are very brave. I know that. Otherwise you would never have ventured so much; you would have thought twice before coming to the Château de la Siagne to pry out my son’s secrets, armed with an outfit to pick locks and a revolver to shoot men. But you will shortly have need of all your courage. That lover of yours—they tell me he is your lover, Monsieur Heritage, the Englishman—he will be there to see, but he will not be able to help you.

“You do not speak. Perhaps your thoughts crowd too quickly in your mind for you to give any of them utterance. No doubt you are judging me to be mad. Perhaps it is so, my beautiful; perhaps when God chose one gift He decided to take two. But this I know: I would not change places with anyone else in the world to-night.

You are young and strong ; many times will the little lover have to kiss before the play is ended. . . ."

The girl's head drooped forward. She had borne so much ; she could endure no more. Consciousness slipped from her.

Heritage found himself mumbling incoherent prayers. He wondered why his reason had not already left him.

On the opposite side of the room he could see Felicity. She was strapped to a wooden structure fastened to the wall, and her clothes had been torn from her, so that now she was naked to the waist. Uttering crooning sounds that sounded indescribably revolting was a tiny old woman, in whose hand flashed a dagger. This much he had been forced to watch. But infinitely worse was to follow.

The old woman walked across to him. By her gait and glazed eyes he knew that she was blind.

"Monsieur Heritage," she said in a childish treble voice, "we have not yet been introduced. May I be permitted to present myself to you? I am the Comtesse de la Siagne, the mother of your host."

"Who will have to answer for this specimen of his hospitality, Madame."

She inclined her graceful head at the remark.

"No doubt he will have a reply," she said.

“Unfortunately, at the moment the Count is engaged”—she smiled at the word—“or he would give you that answer now. Will you please excuse me?” as a manservant touched her on the arm.

Heritage felt now that his sanity had really gone. Strain at his bonds as he might, he could not make them give an inch. He was completely powerless—and over there, on the opposite side of the room . . .

He could not look. The unspeakable purpose of the dagger which the blind woman held became plain. Felicity was to be tortured, perhaps mutilated, by that soft-spoken, graceful-mannered hag from hell. . . .

A mist came before his eyes; he heard the blood thundering in his ears; he felt his heart leaping in his breast. Through the mist there came the sound of a mocking voice—a voice sweet and yet terrible, the voice of the blind Comtesse.

“The little lover is eager to kiss you, my beautiful . . .” it said.

THE man who had called at the Château and given the name of Benatzky looked across the table and frowned.

"I have had tremendous difficulty in getting here," he said; "that is why I am two days late."

"Why did you not send a message?"

"Because I was afraid. Ever since I left Geneva I have been followed." The man gave a realistic impression of being panic-stricken. "During the past two months I have grown this beard"—he touched the black hair—"it was necessary."

"You were followed—here?" Szulc rapped out an impressive oath.

"No—I think not. In fact, I am sure of it. But it was touch and go until I got to Cannes. If it had not been for this"—he pulled out what looked like a small silver cross from his pocket—"I might have been taken several times. But this, of course, helped."

"I will have your full report later, Benatzky," said Szulc, rising. "In the meantime there is another matter to be seen to."

He was quickly on his feet, but the man who called himself Benatzky had also risen. He re-

mained motionless whilst the other approached him.

“So you have grown a beard, have you, Benatzky?” snarled Szulc. With remarkable swiftness for a man of his build, he lunged forward.

His right hand never reached its objective. The other hated to hit a man who was partly incapacitated, but this was not a time for nice scruples. Not only his own life, perhaps, but—infinitely more important—the life of a girl in the full bloom of her exquisite womanhood, was at stake.

He hit swiftly, surely, and with tremendous power.

Szulc crashed heavily backwards and, once on the floor, did not move.

The striker cogitated. It would not do to let the body remain there. He must dispose of it in some way. Looking round that bare room, he despaired. There wasn't a chance of hiding a mouse, let alone a man of sixteen stone.

But before trying to hide the body he must get what documentary evidence there was. Szulc's coat was hanging at the back of the chair on which he had been sitting. Rushing to it, he searched the pockets quickly, bringing out a number of papers. Without waiting to examine them, he pushed these into his pockets.

The table had no drawers, but on it rested an attaché case made of stout leather.

He lifted the lid, to find a mass of papers. With a celerity born of long practice he sifted them, low exclamations of satisfaction greeting discoveries from time to time. The documents that called forth these expressions he placed on one side before finally transferring them to a voluminous pocket in his overcoat.

Szulc was still unconscious, he discovered, when he had finished, and the problem of hiding the body remained as acute as ever. It would be necessary for him to remain in the Château sufficiently long to discover Felicity and to rescue her if she were in danger, as no doubt she was. In order to do this without undue risk of discovery, it was essential that the unconscious body of Szulc should not be found. As he stood over the man a temptation drove him hard. If he killed this plotter an incalculable amount of future trouble would be saved the world. An end would come to many evil things. And, incontestably, the man deserved death.

One shot—and it would be finished. He would be doing his country and the world the greatest service possible in killing this arch-enemy.

With the revolver in one hand he dropped on to one knee. Something prompted him to place his hand over the man's heart. He could feel no

beat. Szulc was already dead. That knock-out blow, which would have merely rendered unconscious the ordinary man, had killed him. With his bulk, and considering the life he had led for so many years, it was, perhaps, not surprising. Anyway, one problem was solved.

The other—the disposal of the body—remained. But he would have to chance that. His immediate need, now that he had the all-valuable documents, was to find Felicity—find her and get her safely away.

## CHAPTER XXXI

## THE KILLER

STEPHEN did not know if he had lost consciousness, but he was wideawake enough now. In order to make doubly sure, he bit his lower lip until the salt taste of blood came.

This torture-room had become an inferno of terror. A creature grotesque and yet horrible had ambled in through the suddenly opened door. One glance told him the truth: this was the Thing with which he had fought on the lawn outside—the Thing called Krang. . . .

It was a gigantic gorilla.

Behind the creature stood the Comte de la Siagne, its master. He spoke to the animal in some peculiar language which Heritage could not comprehend, and the beast snarled in understanding.

It rushed immediately to the nearest person—Stephen noticed it was the man who had committed that dastardly assault upon Felicity a few moments before—and, whilst the man screamed in fear, got its hands to the wretch's throat and squeezed, gibbering fiercely. . . .

Within an incredibly short time the man lay limp, his face convulsed so as to be scarcely recognisable. Casting the body aside, the gorilla looked round for a second victim.

Fresh screams tore the air. The sight was unforgettable. The second servant who had been detailed by the Comtesse to assist at this sadistic orgy was raging in agony. He was evidently trying to summon up enough courage to attempt to rush past the gorilla, who was closing inexorably upon him. The Comtesse was standing by her son's side ; her right hand was empty. The Count now held the poignard which his mother had called "the little lover." As for Felicity, she must have mercifully fainted. Her face was lowered, and, although it strained forward, her body was perfectly still.

"Why did you bring Krang?" The Com-

tesse's treble could be heard amidst the horrible cries of the gorilla's second victim.

"To show that I am master in my own house," was the reply she received ; "and now I think we will go. Krang will see to the rest."

"Go !" Was it possible that Felicity and he, both helpless prisoners, were to be left in that shambles ? "Krang will see to the rest." Did that mean—— ?

By this time Krang had hurled his second victim so hard against the wall that, if the man had not already been dead through strangulation, the force with which the skull met the masonry would doubtless have killed him.

A fiercer snarl than any the gorilla had yet uttered now shook the air. Heritage saw the beast turn and look at him. He had been recognised.

Like a drunken man attempting a crazy dance, Krang swayed towards him. The gorilla's abnormally long arms were outstretched. Another second . . .

Then, from somewhere beyond, a revolver shot rang out. The bullet must have taken Krang in the brain, for the beast, whimpering in uncanny human fashion, fell back, slumped heavily to the floor, and remained still.

"Oh, my God !"

A bearded man, a perfect stranger to Heritage, had entered the room. He had a revolver in his

right hand, and he stood motionless for a moment regarding the two prisoners with blank amazement. Recovering himself, this stranger, switching the revolver to his left hand, and pulling a knife, from his pocket, began rapidly to cut Heritage's bonds.

"I don't know who you are," he said in a crisp, authoritative tone, "but you look English, anyway, and I take it you are a friend of Miss Howard's?"

"Yes—thank God you came! Another minute . . . and after me it would have been Felicity!"

"Don't think of that now," the stranger, whose eyebrows had lifted somewhat at the "Felicity," answered. "What we have to concentrate on is getting out of this damned place—and with an unconscious woman on our hands it won't be easy, let me tell you. Here, take this revolver and stand by the door—don't be over-scrupulous——"

"I can promise you that."

"Right! And now I'll see to Miss Howard—my God, what fiends to treat a girl like this!"

Five minutes later Felicity had revived. From time to time she took a sip at the brandy which the rescuer held to her lips.

The stranger called across to Heritage, who was still by the door.

"All clear outside?"

"Wait a minute; I'll see."

"Oh, be careful," Stephen heard Felicity murmur as he stepped into the corridor.

## CHAPTER XXXII

## XANDRA HELPS

HE was willing to be careful, for his common sense told him that caution must watch his every movement. Upon him as scout the safety of Felicity and this stranger, who had materialised so providentially and mysteriously, depended. And yet, when he was barely three yards away from the door of the torture-room, and before he could even glance round the corner, every resolution but one left him.

He had but one desire : to kill.

Before him, staring with wide open eyes, was the Comte de la Siagne, that evil son of an unspeakable mother. He still held in his hand the poignard which he had taken from the Comtesse.

It was the sight of this which turned Stephen's blood into a racing torrent of fire. The "little lover" brought back with searing vividness the terrible scene through which he had recently lived. And this devil had been responsible—directly or indirectly he had been responsible. Why had he returned? To glut his eyes upon the shambles?

One word the Comte said, and one only. It was to prove the last to pass his lips.

"Krang——?"

And then, measuring his distance, Heritage leapt at the man's throat. There was not even time for the hand holding the dagger to be upraised before the Englishman's hands were clutching the windpipe. So primal was Heritage's lust to kill that he forgot the weapon with which he could have shot his enemy, and the revolver dropped from his open hand to the ground.

The Count, sensing the other's relentlessness, struggled with the desperation of a man who knows his life is at stake. He fought frantically, endeavouring without avail to lock his legs in those of the younger man and bring him down. The dagger had been hurled from his grasp in that headlong onslaught and had joined the revolver on the stone floor.

Heritage was much the younger man, and he was possessed by a strength which must have appeared superhuman to his adversary. Twenty seconds—and the end had come. The degenerate

aristocrat who kept a gorilla strangler as a pet had had his own life squeezed out of him.

Scarcely had Heritage realised the truth before he was joined by the bearded stranger. By the man's side was Felicity, wearing the man's overcoat.

"We wondered what had happened to you," said the man in that voice so crisply authoritative; "what's this?" He touched the corpse with the toe of his shoe.

"It's the Comte de la Siagne—and I've killed him—thank God!"

"Killing's cheap to-night," was the curt comment. The speaker turned to the girl: "You don't know your way about these cellars, I suppose?"

"No."

"I don't like having to run the gauntlet of the lot that are still in the house," he said; "but we shall have to do something because there are people coming. Sounds like that hag with her retinue. They may have discovered friend Szulc is also a corpse by this time."

Heritage, for an explanation, looked at Felicity.

"Stephen, this is Sir Godfrey Barringer, of the British Secret Service."

"We'll waive the usual compliments until afterwards," said the man, who was still a stranger in name to Stephen; "and now I think it's time we did a bolt. Try this way. You go on ahead with

Miss Howard while I bring up the rear and endeavour to cover the retreat."

There was no time to argue. Taking Felicity's arm, Stephen hurried her up a side turning which ran at right angles to where they had been standing. The passage into which they now plunged was unlighted, so that it was impossible to see exactly where they were going.

But with the noise behind them increasing every moment, they kept on.

"Barringer?" questioned Stephen, pausing because the girl's breath was now coming in gasps.

"He'll be—all—right," she replied. Then swiftly upon the words came a shot, and the whole of the underground portion of the Château reverberated with the sound.

"Get on there—quickly!" snapped a voice from behind. Barringer himself was now in precipitate flight.

The pack was in full cry: Heritage could hear the shrill screams of the Comtesse rising above the deeper notes of the men, and he shuddered. If Felicity should fall into that she-devil's power again . . . But Barringer and himself would have to be killed first; that thought was a consolation.

There was a flash—and a bullet spat against the wall just over Felicity's head. In almost the same instant Heritage put his foot out in the dark-

ness—and found nothing. He reeled, tried in vain to save himself and then dragged Felicity, whose hand he had been holding, down—down——

The descent was short if painful. By the time he had reached out to ascertain what had become of Felicity, he realised that the mishap had been nothing worse than falling down a flight of steps which neither had been able to see in the darkness.

A slight moan near by tore at his nerves.

“My dear, are you hurt?”

The reply brought a sense of disaster.

“It’s my ankle—I think I must have twisted it when I fell. But I shall be all right.”

“What’s the matter there?” asked Barringer.

Heritage whispered earnestly :

“Mind these steps—you’re standing on the top of them. We can’t go any further—there’s an end. I can feel the wall. And Miss Howard has sprained her ankle.”

“Good God ! And here they come !”

There was no doubt about it ; the hounds had scented out the quarry. They had found the passage and were tearing down it. Another second or so. . . .

“Mademoiselle !”

A voice which Felicity, now helped to her feet by Heritage, was able to recognise, sounded near at hand.

“Xandra—is it you ?” she asked.

"Yes, Mademoiselle. Through this door," now came the injunction in a low, earnest tone. To his amazement Heritage noticed a girl standing on the right. Behind her showed a glint of light.

It was veritable touch-and-go. As the girl glided home the bolt behind Sir Godfrey Barringer, who had been the last to enter this unexpected sanctuary, they could hear the foremost of the vengeance-seeking pursuers tumbling down the stairs.

The fugitives allowed themselves a few breaths of comparative peace. For the moment they were safe—plucked from death by the hand of a serving-maid. They were in another underground passage, but one which could not have been used for many years.

"It is a secret way which I discovered by chance," explained Xandra. "Mademoiselle is hurt?" she asked anxiously.

"I have twisted my ankle, I think, Xandra—what can I do to show you how grateful I am?"

The girl flashed the light of the torch which she held, lighting up the damp walls of the passage.

"You can take me with you, Mademoiselle, when you leave this evil place," she said, "but you must be quick."

"Where does this lead?" asked Barringer.

The girl turned.

"The other end of this passage is in a room below the gardener's lodge in the grounds of the Château," was the answer. "In the old days it was used for"—her voice dropped—"a shameful purpose."

"Anyone in the lodge?" asked Barringer.

"No, Monsieur. The Count does not employ a proper gardener."

"Excellent. I have a car waiting outside the entrance gates. If we can only get to it! Tell me," he continued to Xandra, as Felicity, holding a man's arm on either side, commenced to hobble forward, "how did you manage to discover this secret passage?"

"I have been trying to find a way to escape from the Château for many months, Monsieur. Oh, the sights I have seen, the things I have heard. . . ."

"Yes, I can understand that," said Barringer sympathetically; "but once we are away from here I can promise that you need have no further fear."

"You shall return to London with me, Xandra, and be my maid," supplemented Felicity.

"Oh, Mademoiselle!" was the passionately grateful reply. "Ever since you came to the Château I have been thinking how I could help you."

"I hope that's safe," muttered Sir Godfrey.

The wolves behind had discovered the hidden door, and were endeavouring to break it down.

"It will last, never fear, Monsieur," replied Xandra, smiling for the first time; "but all the same, we should hurry. Mademoiselle——?"

"Oh, I'm all right—never mind me, Xandra." Although racked with pain, Felicity smiled reassurance at the girl.

Five minutes later they were standing inside a small room in the gardener's lodge. It had taken the united strenuous efforts of Sir Godfrey Baringer and Stephen to push open the trap-door which led to freedom, but they had done it at last.

"Now for the final dash," said the Secret Service chief; "everything depends, of course, on my car being where I left it."

"And upon there not being a crowd at the entrance gates," put in Heritage.

"There is no need to take that risk, Monsieur," said Xandra. "I know a door in the wall through which we can pass. Come"—her voice rising with fresh excitement—"let us go!"

Stealing through the dark grounds, they heard a clamour coming from the Château behind them. The occupants who remained appeared to be upset over something. . . .

Xandra was an admirable guide. She led them straight to the postern gate she had mentioned. The key was rusty, but it fulfilled its office, and

they all passed through, to stand upon the mountain road which led up to the entrance of the Château a couple of hundred yards away.

"Safe!" exclaimed Felicity. Throwing her arms round Xandra, she kissed the maid.

"Mademoiselle!" said Xandra, overcome by the honour. The word was followed by a cry. "Someone is coming! They will see us!"

The unmistakable sound of a motor-car being driven at a tremendous speed could be plainly heard. A moment later it showed itself. Whoever was driving must have been in a terrific haste, for he took the dangerous corner with a nerve-shattering recklessness.

With a furious grinding of brakes the Renault slowed up. A man jumped out. He held a revolver and shouted hoarsely in English: "Hands up, the whole damned lot of you!"

Someone laughed hysterically.

"Bill Matcham!" cried Heritage. "Bill, by God!"

"Napoleon's nightshirt!" came the reply. "And in another minute I should have been plugging you with lead. Hi!" he shouted back to the driver, "we shan't want to storm the battlements, after all. *They're here!*"

"Thank Heaven!" replied a voice which Felicity was able to recognise as Tommy Laxendale's.

"All explanations later, I suggest," said the

practical Sir Godfrey Barringer, rejoining the party and sizing up the situation instantly. "I've found my car."

## CHAPTER XXXIII

## JOY IN THE MORNING

THERE was a supper at the Mont Fleury Hotel, Cannes, that night. A feast of combined thanksgiving and celebration, it lasted into the early hours. In fact, dawn found the participants still out of their beds.

One story followed another. Bill Matcham was given the honour. . . . He explained that the first discovery he made after falling into the bedroom cellar at the Inn of the White Wolf was that someone had preceded him. That someone had proved to be an American named Laxendale. The latter, after Bill had given his somewhat astonishing story, supplied a few surprising facts of his own. He told of his anxiety concerning Felicity Howard, and how he had abandoned an idea to go to Bordighera and had set out instead to get to the Château de la Siagne in order to see that she was safe. Losing the way,

he had been forced to take shelter at this same villainous inn.

After tremendous efforts the pair contrived to escape from the cellar—only to find the place deserted. The landlord, for some reason, must have got frightened.

“But the car?” asked Felicity.

Matcham chuckled.

“Oh, we just pinched that,” he replied nonchalantly. “While we were roaming about, trying to get our bearings, we saw an undersized chauffeur and an oversized dago of some sort tinkering with the engine of that Renault, and, considering our need was greater than theirs, we just gave them a couple of clouts and hopped off. You see,” the speaker added ingenuously, “we imagined that we might have to make a quick getaway from the Château, and so we simply had to have a car. Laxendale is going to tell the local police that he found it abandoned in the mountains.”

“Good work, Bill,” commented his friend. “I hated rushing off like I did from that inn, but——”

Bill looked at Felicity.

“No further apologies needed,” he interrupted concisely.

Sir Godfrey Barringer’s story was told privately to Felicity.

“Poor old Gerry Westover was on the right track when he went to the Château,” he said. “He guessed the Count de la Siagne was up to something, and he did his best to find out what it was. What happened to him at the Château we shall never know, I suppose, but he managed to get away with certain information, there’s no doubt. And, what was even more important, he got hold of the secret emblem of this unholy crowd—which, ironically enough, took the form of a small silver cross. He forwarded this to me as a trophy of the chase, and said he had discovered that one of the principals of the gang was called Benatzky. Now, look how Chance works sometimes, my dear,” the speaker continued. “Shortly after I got this note from Gerry, I had to go over to Paris. There, with the help of a very good friend of mine, Descamps, of the Sûreté, I managed to locate this fellow Benatzky. We met alone, and I—well, I managed to persuade him to tell me almost all I wanted to know. The thought then came to me that it might not be a bad idea to take this fellow Benatzky’s place at the conference which, to save his skin, he said was to take place at the Château.”

He looked affectionately at the girl.

“Never again will I allow you to run such a risk, my dear,” he said penitently. “Of course, I wasn’t to know that following up poor

Gerry's death would lead you into that inferno where you would meet a madwoman like the Comtesse de la Siagne, a creature whose crazed and perverted brain could only find satisfaction in—but it is too unpleasant a subject to be pursued."

"I have recovered my nerve," replied Felicity, "even although the stories Xandra has told me about the Château are scarcely believable. Le Comte, as well as his mother, was a degenerate. Both came from a terrible stock; the de la Siagnes have an evil family history. Money was the obsession of the Count. That was why he invited people he knew to be wealthy to the Château. After he had robbed them they were handed over to Krang—or the Comtesse. It was also the greed for money which made him a tool of Szulc, no doubt."

"No doubt," agreed Barringer; "but how long had these murders been going on?"

"For the past two years, Xandra says. She was terrified to give any information, because she felt she would not be believed."

"Didn't anyone have any suspicion?"

"Yes. That the Château had an evil reputation was gossip in the Casino. Tommy Laxendale heard about it—and passed the news on to me. The crash would have come soon, no doubt. The innkeeper got away in time. Xandra believes that there was an arrangement between him and the

Count whereby de la Siagne was handed over any benighted tourists who ventured into that vile inn. Why the landlord took fright we shall never know, I suppose."

"What does it matter? The only thing that counts is that, thanks to you, no more devilry will be done at the Château of the White Wolf," summed up Barringer, and now, unless I'm very much mistaken, that young fellow Heritage wants a word with you."

"I have just had some news which I rather wanted to tell you," said Stephen hesitatingly. "Some solicitor fellows have written me."

"Good news, I hope?" said Felicity.

For reply he pulled a letter out of his pocket and handed it to her.

She read :

"449, BEDFORD ROW,  
LONDON, W.C.

"DEAR SIR,

"Your uncle, the late Mr. Martin Barclay, of Chicago, who was a former client of ours, has bequeathed to you in his will the sum of two million dollars. The information has been sent to us by Mr. Barclay's American solicitors, and can be regarded as authentic.

"We shall be glad if you will give us an early call.

"Faithfully yours,  
"STEVENSON, ARMITAGE AND CO."

“I cannot tell you how glad I am,” was her comment. “Won’t this alter your entire life?”

“It may,” he said; “at least, it gives me a possible chance——”

“Of what?”

“Of telling you I love you. I couldn’t have done it before.”

He held out his hands, and she took them.

The eastern sky became flooded with glory as they walked back to the hotel.

THE END

