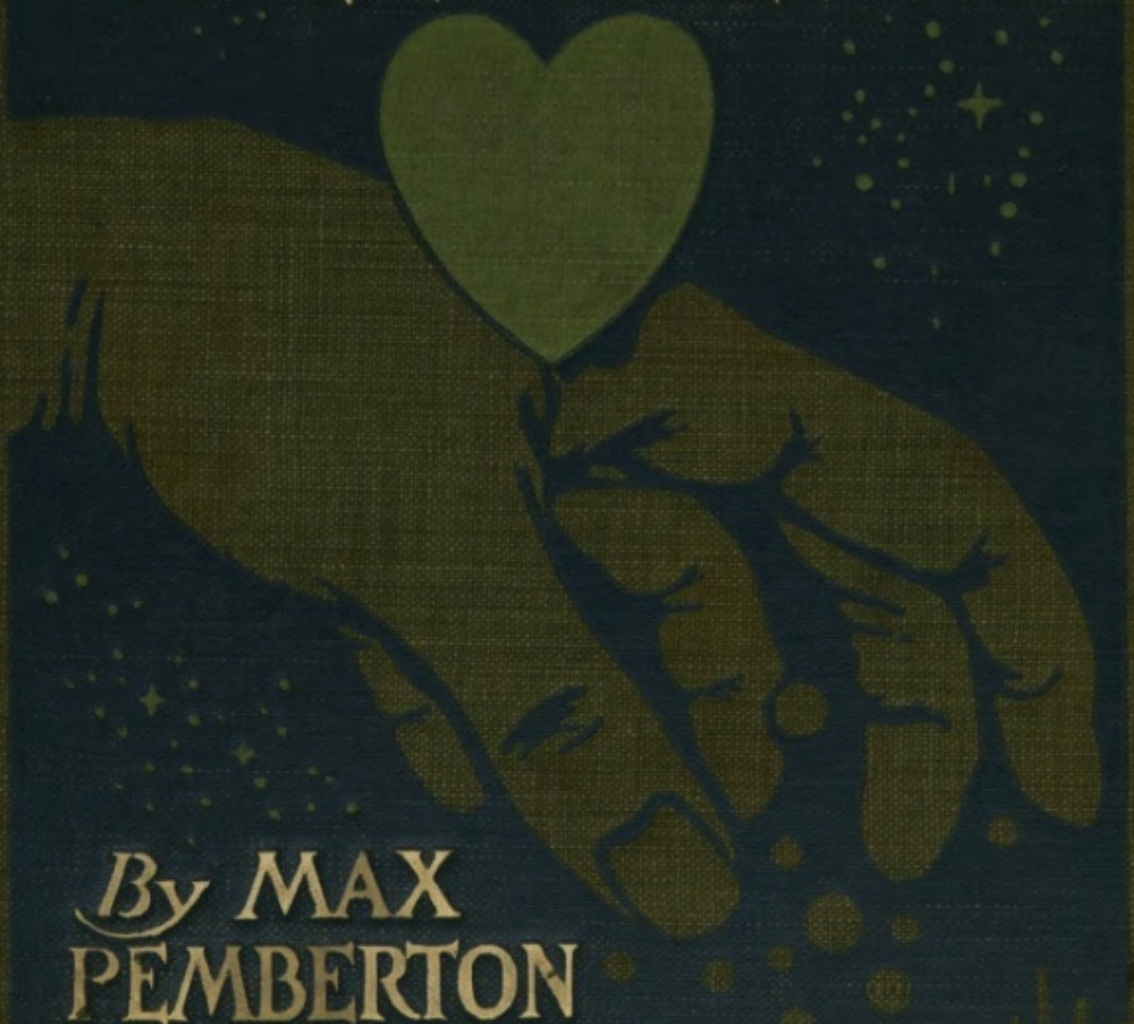
The MYSTERY of the GREEN HEART



By MAX PEMBERTON

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"Oh," she cried, "I feel just as though I were drugged"

(*Page 123*)

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THE MYSTERY OF THE GREEN HEART

BY

MAX PEMBERTON

Author of "The Little Huguenot," "A Daughter of the States," etc.

FRONTISPIECE BY

ARTHUR WILLIAM BROWN

NEW YORK

DODD, MEAD AND COMPANY

1910

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CHAPTER I

THE NEWS IS MADE KNOWN UPON THE FIRST DAY OF JULY

THE story of the Green Heart begins properly at Pangbourne upon the morning of the first day of July in the year 1908. A week had yet to run until the opening of the regatta at Henley; but Pangbourne, nevertheless, reflected aquatic anticipations of lively business and patronage.

Boats were sent down to Henley by the watermen every day. Steam-tugs attached themselves to monstrous houseboats and began to tow them toward Reading and Shiplake. The inns were full of people who preferred to stay at some little distance from the regatta course.

To such an inn, the Swan, which lies but little removed from Whitchurch Lock, there came a little after five o'clock upon the morning of the first day of July a young Oxford boatman named Huggins, who beat loudly upon the door and implored the awakened sleepers to come immediately to his assistance.

"There's a boat agen the bank by the weir," said he, speaking as one who was utterly unnerved by what he had seen; "do you come along wi' me, for I'm blest if I know what to make of it."

Now Huggins was answered by an ancient waterman of the name of Jarvis, who slept in one of the attics above the river and was just about to go down to open

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the boathouses. Hearing the hullabaloo, he put his head out of the window and espied a strange young man, holding a hand to his heart as though to help his breathing, and so very white and shaken that the importance of his words could no longer be doubted.

"Ay, mate, and who be you?"

"I'm Huggins from Oxford. We're taking the ships down to the races, but were held up last night by way of Streatly. Here was I about to make the lock just now when my mate see the thing. I tell you it's a boat and a lady in it. You'd better come down quick."

The old man muttered something about a boat with a lady in it being no new thing in these parts; but he went down nevertheless, and as he went he awakened his master. The loud knocking had brought other inmates to the windows, and one of these, a young physician from the Addenbrooke Hospital at Cambridge, now put in his word.

"What's up, my man?" he asked.

Huggins repeated his story.

"I see the boat in the long grass. She's dead, or I don't know the likes of it. A fair lady, too, with diamonds on her. That's what sent me here."

"Did you wake the lock-keeper?"

"What's the good of he? I was through the St. John Ambulance class in Oxford and I know it's a doctor we want. If you can tell me——?"

"I am a doctor. Wait a minute and I'll come down. Where do you say the boat is?"

"It's over agen the weir bridge. You'll see it if

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you step across. I tell you it's given me and my mate a rare fright and no mistake."

The doctor made no reply, but withdrew to dress himself. When he arrived upon the scene there was quite a little group of pale-faced men standing hard by the boathouse. Day had broken with a heavy haze, which promised heat later on. The wind whispered in the reeds, and the water lapped coldly in the channels by the sheds.

"Now then," said the doctor, "if we are all ready! Have you got anything in the way of an ambulance here? No? Then bring some oars and ropes. I don't suppose there's much the matter, but we should be ready for anything. You come with me, my man, and show me where it is. And Johnson, get some brandy, if you please."

He addressed himself to one of the servants of the inn, who obeyed him with alacrity. Men love a leader, and this young fellow led by right of knowledge. As the group moved away toward the weir bridge, they heard shouts of laughter from the little room down by the water's edge. The cries came from a company of undergraduates making ready for their morning bathe, in ignorance of the tragedy.

Behind them an early train on the Great Western Railway went by with a roar and a vomit of flame to Didcot and the junction. The steam-tug which was towing Huggins' racing boats to Henley, lay moored by the opposite bank, and steam poured from her valves. This robbed the scene of its silence, for the river had no other craft to show, and the streets of Pangbourne were without any signs of life. More-

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over, the church clock struck half-past five as they reached the weir bridge, and this quickened all their steps.

Huggins had said that the boat lay among the reeds, but none espied it until they came to the very place where it had anchored itself, and then three of them saw it together. It was an ordinary skiff, such as is used for pleasure purposes upon the Thames, built of teak and handsomely furnished with blue carpet and cushions. Driven by the stream, it must have narrowly escaped the main current of the weir, but accident or the wind had turned it aside at the last moment, and now it lay against one of the piles with the stern swung round against the bank.

Within the boat lay the body of a woman who might have been any age from twenty-five to thirty. Her hands were clasped together in an attitude which suggested prayer or pain. Her head was bowed so that the jewels upon her neck were visible, but more remarkable than these facts was that of her dress. She was gowned, in the words of those round about, as though for a ball or a party. And this rich gown of pansy chiffon embroidered in flowers of pink and gold, over a skirt of white silk, spoke of tragedy so surely that even the doctor began to admit its possibilities.

"Bring the boat round," he cried in a stern tone; and then to one of the lads, "Run to the police station, my boy, and send an inspector here. Tell him it is urgent."

The lad was only too willing to escape a scene so grim, and went headlong upon his errand. The boat

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meanwhile was brought round very gently to the bank and the body lifted to the grass. There they laid it upon the cushions from the skiff while Dr. Travis put his fingers upon the pulseless wrist and then placed his ear to a heart which would never beat again.

"She is quite dead," he said, rising at length, and then, "Poor lady, there has been foul play here; it is a case for the police."

They heard him with awe. The lock-keeper was now upon the scene, and eager questions were addressed to him. When the inspector from the station at length arrived, he drove the merely curious away, and then talked aside with Dr. Travis.

"I have sent for the ambulance, sir. The surgeon has been telephoned. Do you make anything of it?—do you know the lady?"

"I can tell you nothing," said the doctor. "They awoke me a little after five, and I came at once. She has been dead some hours, though. I leave it to your surgeon to say how many."

"But it is not a natural death."

"I think not, though it might be the heart. She has suffered much—the lower limbs were paralysed before she died."

"Poor thing—and a very beautiful woman, sir. You can see she comes of a class." The doctor then listened to the lock-keeper. For the first time some whisper of identity was to be heard, and the mention of a name.

"The boat's from Highlands Castle, sir—the prince's place."

"How do you know that?"

"By the queer burgee; that's a foreigner, sir, and

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so's the prince, though his horses make us to forget it sometimes."

The doctor listened very seriously.

"You are speaking of a great name—one of the greatest in Europe to-day," he said at length. "This lady would have been a friend of his."

"Ay, to be sure, and, now I think of it, I've seen her more than once in that very boat along with his Highness, too, and others as pretty as herself. Why, only yesterday there was a young man asking me—but perhaps I'd better say nothing about that. I'll tell the police."

Dr. Travis said he would be wise to do so. A sergeant of police and two constables had now arrived and made themselves masters of the situation. The crowd, augmented considerably as the village of Pangbourne awoke to the news, collected by the Swan Inn and discussed the affair with animation.

But no one yet spoke of murder, though many had a thought of it in their hearts, which they would express loudly enough by-and-by.

This was the state of affairs, the police waiting for the ambulance, the crowd increasing every moment, the day beginning to break with a glorious promise of summer, when a fast motor-car came along the river road from Streatly, and all who knew the locality recognised it as the private carriage of Prince Maurevale of Dara. Immediately now the least intelligent of the onlookers could say that the unknown lady had been staying with the prince's party at Streatly, and that identification must be established without delay. Interest remained at high pitch. The crowd pressed

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forward, and was with difficulty restrained by the police.

The prince himself was in the car, and was the first to cross the weir bridge toward the island. He was followed by a young lady of eighteen years of age, enveloped from head to foot in a light grey motor-coat, and so agitated that she made the passage of the bridge with difficulty. Together these two advanced toward the body, the prince lifting his hat as he came, the young lady covering her face with her hands.

It was evident that they recognised the unknown at once—the prince with a loud cry, his companion with a flood of tears she could not repress.

Meanwhile the constables drew back as an act of homage both to the dead and the living. Dr. Travis remained alone with the distinguished foreigner that he might relate what he knew of this affair.

"I am privileged to meet you, sir, under most unhappy circumstances," he said. "There is no doubt, I fear, that this poor lady has been dead for some hours."

The prince inclined his head, as though grateful for the doctor's courtesy.

"At what time was this discovery made?" he asked.

The doctor answered that it must have been at five o'clock.

"Are you able to give any explanation of her condition?"

"Impossible until an autopsy has been made. My first opinion pointed to *angina pectoris*."

"But now——?"

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"I think that she may have come to her end by foul means."

The prince sighed, but did not protest. The doctor, however, stepped forward to assist the young lady, who reeled in a swoon, and would have fallen but for his outstretched arm.

"I fear that the scene has been too much for her. . . . It is natural. Let us take her back to the inn."

"No," rejoined the prince firmly; "to my carriage, if you please."

And then, going up to her, he said: "Stella, Stella" —and at these words the young lady opened her eyes again and permitted him to lead her toward the carriage.

"Let all those who know anything of this come to me at Highlands Castle immediately," said Prince Maurevale. "I should like to see Inspector Jarrard as soon as possible. He should get help from Reading."

A sergeant of police replied that the inspector had gone back up to the station to communicate with headquarters, but would go to the castle directly he returned and had put the body on an ambulance. Dr. Travis, however, would remain upon the scene until the police surgeon arrived—and this being arranged the prince drove off. All thought it remarkable that the name of the lady had not been mentioned, and that the prince had received the story of her death with such brief questioning. None, however, wondered at the conduct of his companion, which was but natural at such a tragic moment of recognition.

By this time a police ambulance had come from

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Reading, and the body was set upon it and conveyed to Highlands Castle, which stands upon the hills just above Streatly. The boat remained in the custody of the police, and was subjected by them to a close scrutiny. The contents proved to be such as a river skiff should possess; but, in addition to the sculls and the boathooks, there was a walking-stick of black ebony with an ivory knob.

Of this the inspector took possession, and, having invited Dr. Travis to accompany him, he set out for the castle. The gates were already surrounded by a concourse of people, come together none knew whence, but attracted as kites by this story of death.

These already spoke of murder . . . and the rumour gained strength as the day wore on.

It was repeated in all the papers next day that beyond a doubt Lady Anna Maclain had died of poison.

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CHAPTER II

IN WHICH WE LEARN MORE OF PRINCE MAUREVALE

It was Prince Bismarck who said of the House of Maurevale that its sons would live to write a page in the history of Europe. This was after the signing of the famous Berlin Treaty, in which Russia rewarded her stout allies in Wallachia by robbing them of precious territory.

But thirty-four years passed before Europe heard again, except in a social way, of the sole survivors of that house of genius.

Prince Maurevale was no patriot in the common sense. He had graduated at a German university, but he came to England in his twenty-second year, and there he remained. There was no more popular member of the Marlborough and the Jockey Clubs. His good looks had become a fable. The very cabmen at Newmarket and at Epsom spoke of "Maury's" horses, and were wont to recommend them to all and sundry.

In London this true Bohemian was well known to the people; his little white house in Park Lane had long been an object beloved of 'busmen, and his coach remarked by frequenters of Hyde Park.

He was in his thirty-seventh year at this time; but had never married. Had he done so he would have inflicted a wrong upon the multitude of social gossips, who bandied his name in amorous play between the

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courts of Alsatia and of Arlington Street, and were never so happy as when finding him a wife.

For all this, his friendships were many, and even his friends could not deny the strange influence he wielded over women. This was rather mental than physical, the fruit of a sage and eloquent intelligence rather than of athletic gifts which could not be denied. As a horseman, a fencer, a shot, and an oarsman, he could hold his own in any company. His daring as a gambler was admitted, and that is a quality which rarely fails to make an appeal to women of his station.

That such a man, the idol of a society which a poet had declared to consist chiefly of the bores and bored, should awake one morning to find himself the best discussed and, in a way, desired of any in Europe is less remarkable when the story of his ancestry is remembered and the promises made for its descendants by so shrewd an observer as the great Prince Bismarck.

To his friends these sudden revelations of notoriety came without surprise. They knew that Maurevale of Dara was by no means the dilettante that rumour had made him out to be. Ambitions of no ordinary kind had governed his acts from his boyhood. For every day spent upon the heath at Newmarket or the moors of Macrihanish there were five days afterwards in the wonderful laboratories and workshops of Highlands Castle, of which the world knew so little. To these, said the intimates, Prince Maurevale gave the best of his life; upon these he spent the most part of a considerable fortune. His work was done neither for appearance nor for reward, but in the name of humanity.

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How the truth leaked out it is a little difficult to say, but the world awoke one day to hear that Maurevale of Dara had become in a sense the master of Europe. And this neither by personality nor by fable; but by the possession of a scientific secret and the completion of an invention which might make war henceforth impossible.

He had, said the electrifying rumour, discovered methods of governing a torpedo so wonderful and so uncontestable that their possession in the navy, even the smallest, might make that navy master of the world.

For not only had he thus established a mastery of the most subtle of all forces, but to it had linked a knowledge of high explosives surpassing that of the Germans, and so wonderful and far-reaching that he himself had grown to fear his own secret.

Convinced of the reality of his pretensions—for here rumour gave the most precise particulars of the results accomplished—the diplomatists of Europe asked themselves immediately that momentous question, "Upon whom will this sovereignty be bestowed? Would this dilettante of the booths and bazaars of Vanity Fair throw in his lot finally with the country of his adoption, or might other nations buy the secret at a price?"

A further question, put in the dark corners of the diplomatic palaces, suggested the Secret Service and its possibilities.

Would Prince Maurevale be dethroned by spies, or would he first establish his boast that there should be no more war?

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These were vital matters, and interested the whole world.

Admitting the ideal to be a fine one, very naturally the diplomatists of Europe refused to accept it. "Maurevale," said they, "must be bought at any price —or if not bought, then treated as an enemy against whom all weapons may be turned."

They filled his house with spies and dogged his steps at every turn.

The great idea became the vulgar theme of secret service agents—and the most blatant of self-seekers.

These, however, plotted and planned to the prince's amusement. No page of tragedy had been written about this affair until the body of Lady Anna Maclain was carried to Highlands Castle, and society heard with awe the story of her death.

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CHAPTER III

THE JURY IS PERPLEXED

THE coroner's inquest was held upon the third day after Lady Anna Maclain's death, and the jury assembled in the chaplain's library, which is over against the early English cloister of Highlands Castle, and justly famed for the beauty of its Jacobean panelling.

A jury had been gathered diligently of zealous officers, anxious to please so generous a patron as Prince Maurevale. They were for the most part strangers, but Mr. Bell, a schoolmaster, served at the last moment, and a local preacher, by name Turner, made up the complement.

All approached the castle with bent heads and solemn faces, in token of a grief of which they were unconscious, and as a witness to a sympathy which was but an expectation of reward.

A wet and rainy day found Mr. Child, the butler, over-anxious about their boots, and posted at the cloister gates. Highlands Castle stands above the River Thames at Streatly upon a round, green hill. There had been no carriages provided, so hastily was all done —and these good fellows had walked a long way in quest of the two shillings with which the Government rewards them.

Within, the castle was very silent and typical of death.

Footmen moved a-tiptoe, as though they were afraid

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of their own shadows. Questions were put and answered in hushed whispers. The jury sidled into the great room and responded to Dr. Flack, a deputy-coroner, in timid monosyllables. The chaplain, who was also the rector of a neighbouring church, St. Agatha's, wore his cassock, and the silk of it rustled pleasantly wherever he moved. The body had already been viewed as it lay in the open coffin before the altar, tapers upon either side of it, and so great a harbourage of flowers round about that the dead woman's face could be seen with difficulty.

Anon the castle party entered, and instantly the jury stood and bowed deferentially. The busy chaplain became even busier, setting the chairs with due regard to the rank of the sitters, and not disdaining the menial task of dusting them.

Maurevale was the first to come in, and he was followed immediately by Lady Constance Heliers, the daughter of the Duke of Alton.

Those who were acquainted with Maurevale could not but remark the gentleness of his demeanour to all about him, and the solemnity his example inspired.

Not a tall man, he could tower by his personality in any assembly. He had a soldier's figure, but the face of a poet—and there were those who had said that he was not unlike the pictures of the great Lord Byron. His dress was that of an English gentleman.

Almost as closely observed as Prince Maurevale was Lady Constance, the Duke of Alton's only daughter.

Scandal had told many a lying tale of this charming if eccentric girl. To-day it would make of her

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the greatest woman gambler in Europe; to-morrow it would hint that she was about to marry an actor.

The duke's notorious poverty fostered these cruel scandals and wrought a culminating injustice. At the same house there were many who rightly shook their heads when Lady Constance's name was mentioned, and it was recalled that her dead mother had been well known in theatrical circles more than thirty years ago. These said that she would marry Maurevale if she could: and none who knew her doubted the meaning of her friendship for the prince.

It was very natural that such a lady should surrender to the solemnities of such an occasion as this, and make no pretence to other than feminine attributes.

Entering the room upon Maurevale's heels, she glanced quickly at the jury, and then averted her eyes and looked up to the galleries as though wondering if the books would speak. For the chaplain she had a gracious smile as he bent to offer her a chair. A woman would have said that her dark hair matched her mourning, and that black was her colour. The greengrocer, however, who had a seat in a dark corner beneath the gallery, wondered why she wore so much jewellery.

Immediately attending Lady Constance Heliers came Maurevale's brother, Georges, a fair-faced young man who was then serving in the Roumanian Army, and had come to England for a holiday. His methods were precise and soldierly. He saluted the coroner, bowed to the jury, and then drew back to make way for the Count of Fours, a French gentleman of some fifty years of age, who treated every one with the

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stately courtesy characteristic of the French aristocracy, and apologised once more for the absence of Madame, whom he declared to be prostrate and quite unable to be present.

The count's manner was not less agitated when he uttered these words than had been Lady Constance Heliers' when she first observed the jury sitting about the table. Both were evidently overwhelmed by the tragedy which had come upon this unhappy house.

Of the others of the castle party, the one most remarked was the youngest daughter of Lord Kerrimore, Stella Insole, whom more than one judge had pronounced to be the most beautiful of the débutantes that year.

She looked a mere child in her delicate gown of black, and instantly made a sure appeal to the hearts of the humble audience. Here was one whom a true sorrow had afflicted. The round blue eyes spoke at once of intellect and of love; the forehead of a clever race. She was girlish in all her movements, and more than one spectator remarked that she seemed obsessed by Maurevale's presence, and hardly lifted her eyes from his face.

This was the young lady who was recognised by Dr. Travis and by Huggins, the boatman, as having been Maurevale's companion upon the fatal morning.

She was followed into the room by three young men who had been taking part in a tennis tournament in the locality. Their efforts to distract and to console her were alike abortive, and in the end they abandoned them and fell to discussing the company from unobtrusive seats in the shadow of the gallery.

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It was now the coroner's turn to make an obsequious speech, flattering the house of Maurevale and regretting the necessity for this inquiry. Quite maladroitly he dwelt upon the poor lady's virtues, and the mystery surrounding her death. "That mystery, gentlemen," he added, "we are now come together to unravel—as far as the evidence permits us to do so. The jury have already seen the body. I will, therefore, call the boatman Huggins without further loss of time."

Huggins, the young boatman who had discovered the skiff by the weir, stepped up to the table and gave his evidence very clearly. He had been attracted by the dangerous situation of the boat, and had crossed the lock to examine it. Then he saw that it was not empty, and that a lady was asleep—as he thought—in the stern of it. When he drew nearer he came to the conclusion that she was dead.

"What made you think so?"

"The way her was a-lying."

."How was that?"

"Upon her side. She looked very pretty."

"Was there anything else extraordinary about her appearance?"

"She was dressed for a party—I thought that uncommon."

"Did you observe that she wore any jewellery?"

"Yes."

"Tell the jury what it was."

"A string of diamonds round her neck, and an armlet with a broken link."

"How a broken link——?"

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"One of a chain. Something had been took orf of it."

"You imagine that to have been the case?"

"Well, I don't know for certain."

He paused for an instant as though nettled by the cross-examination, and in the brief interval a voice was heard.

It was that of the Count of Fours.

"The gentleman is quite right," he said quietly; "the ornament that Lady Anna Maclain carried upon her bracelet was a heart of green jade."

He bowed to the coroner and sat again. Meanwhile there was a buzz of talk over in the corner where the servants were sitting, and the voice of a maid-servant was heard declaring that monsieur le comte seemed to know everything. She was a Frenchwoman, Berthe, the maid to Lady Anna.

"That is true," she cried in her own tongue; "the heart of green jade is missing, monsieur, but it was there when Madame went out to meet Captain Ferman."

A juryman asked that the words should be translated, but the coroner silenced him, and declared that the maid would give her evidence presently, and that everything must be taken in its proper sequence. Huggins the boatman could add nothing further to what was already known, and was soon dismissed. Equally laconic was the evidence of the police surgeon, who took refuge behind the Home Office.

"The lady has undoubtedly been poisoned," he said, "but there is no evidence as yet to show the nature of the drug employed."

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"You do not think it is antipyrin, or any of the nostrums for headache commonly used by women?"

"I am quite convinced it is not."

"There is no evidence of any violence having been used? This poor lady could not possibly have been the victim of one who attempted to rob her?"

"There is absolutely no justification for such an assumption."

"Do you think that the drug was self-administered?"

"It is impossible to say 'Yes' or 'No' to that. No poison has been found in her rooms."

"And the Home Office will make its report immediately?"

"I am momentarily expecting it."

"Could there be any possible connection between this trinket which is missing and the crime you believe to have been committed?"

The doctor smiled.

"As much as between the wood of that table and the Emperor of China."

The coroner now said that they were to have the privilege of hearing Prince Maurevale, who immediately advanced to the table. A hush fell upon the room, and all listened intently.

"I believe I am correct in saying that you have known the dead lady for some years?" the coroner began. The witness inclined his head.

"She was among the number of your intimate friends?"

"Undoubtedly so—I mourn for her loss as for a sister."

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"Had you any reason to believe that she was in trouble?"

Maurevale hesitated.

"She had the troubles of a woman whose birthright is obligation. I do not think we need enter into that?"

"Then you wish us to understand that you know of nothing which might have impelled her to self-destruction?"

"She was the last woman in the world, the very last, about whom such a thought could arise."

"Had she been long at Highlands, sir?"

"She came with us from London—three weeks ago."

"Being then in an ordinary state of health?"

"I have never seen her better. She had great hopes of aiding me in my work—it gave her pleasure to do so."

"She was, I think, the only sister of the present Earl of Farrard, who is in Australia. May I tell the jury that she was much beloved in society?"

"It would be very proper to do so."

"And that she had many friends?"

"Certainly—her friends were numerous. She was a clever woman, but not too clever to be popular."

"Sympathetic, I may take it?"

"Undoubtedly."

"And without enemies?"

Maurevale shrugged his shoulders. It was obvious that the question was unwelcome.

"The humblest have their enemies," he said. "It is a privilege they share with the greatest. This poor

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lady has earned the title to that distinction. She was not immune."

"That we understand. She would possess both friends and enemies in the world's common way. But we are here to investigate what we must consider at the moment a very terrible crime. I am compelled to ask you, sir, if you know of any particular circumstance in the life of Lady Anna Maclain which would justify further investigation."

Again Maurevale displayed his displeasure.

"I have no right to speak," he said at last; "it is for the police to do their duty. My generalities will not help you. They may be less than just—they may be criminal."

"By which I take you to mean that you know of nothing which is not in the ordinary circumstance of our daily lives."

"You have put it better than I, sir."

The coroner was highly pleased at the compliment, and signified to the jury that they should thank the prince for his assistance. The next witness called was the local inspector of police, who gave his evidence from a notebook with the sharp clack of discipline and the precision of convinced authority.

"I was called to the river at five-forty by a boy from the Swan Inn. There I found the boat from which they had taken the body of a lady, subsequently identified as Lady Anna Maclain. The doctor who had been the first summoned pronounced her to be dead. He thought it might be heart disease, but was not sure."

"Did you observe any significant fact—anything which might help the jury?"

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"Nothing except that the lady's jewellery had not been interfered with, and that a man's walking-stick was in the boat."

This confession, uttered in the hard, metallic voice peculiar to policemen, instantly arrested the attention of every one in the room. Shuffling feet and bent heads denoted the importance of the evidence. The coroner took his pen into his hand again and prepared to write.

"What kind of a stick was it, inspector?"

"It is here, sir—the jury can see it for themselves."

He turned about to speak to a sergeant at the door, and the sergeant to a constable in the passage without. Presently the stick with the ivory knob was passed from hand to hand and laid upon the oak table before the coroner; and this was the moment when the Count of Fours, who had watched the whole proceeding with startled eyes, rose again to his feet and intervened for the second time.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but the stick is mine."

The coroner nodded his head, and said, "Presently, sir," meaning that the count's turn would come. Then he continued to question the inspector.

"The medical evidence in the possession of the police points, I understand, to a very serious crime. Can you help the jury with any further information, inspector?"

"Not at present, sir. The case is in the hands of the authorities at Reading, and I believe that an arrest will be made presently."

"It would not be in the interests of justice to speak of that?"

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"Not on this occasion, sir——"

He retired from the box to give place to the Count of Fours. This handsome old gentleman began with an expression of regret and pity which greatly moved all who heard it. He declaimed upon the dead lady's wealth and his admiration for her many virtues. Then he spoke of the circumstance.

"The stick is mine, sir—I have missed it some days. It would now appear that I left it in the boat upon the last occasion of my embarkment. There is no importance to be attached to it. I am glad to be able to say so."

"Otherwise you can tell the jury nothing?"

The count paused and wiped his forehead with a very large handkerchief.

"There is one thing," he said; "a box of green jade has been mentioned. I would wish the jury to know that madame, my wife, gave that to Lady Anna."

"We are much obliged to you for the information, count. Would you be good enough to describe the ornament?"

"Certainly, it was a bon-bon box bought by my wife at Pekin. Its value lay in the beauty of the jade—nothing more. The Chinaman who sold it spoke of a superstition. I pay no heed to that."

"Can you remember the nature of the superstition?"

"I fear not—these silly tales do not interest an intellectual man."

"And you attach no importance to its absence?"

"Why should I? The poor lady would have lost it as she stepped into the boat. Nothing could be more natural."

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"It seems so. We are very much indebted to you, count. Perhaps upon another occasion, madame la comtesse may tell us something more of this box. Let the maid Berthe now be called."

The count returned to his seat, and the maid Berthe, who had been devoted to the dead woman, was called to the table. Her distress was very real, and overcame her utterly for a little while. When she recovered her self-control a truly Celtic outburst opened her evidence, and she declared hysterically that Captain Ferman should answer for the crime.

There was a general cry of astonishment in the room. Maurevale drew his chair nearer to the table, and, resting his chin upon his hand, watched the girl with an eye which no gesture, not even the lightest, escaped.

The name of Captain Ferman had been blurted out without any reticence, and in a way the coroner pronounced to be improper.

"Come, come, my girl," he cried, remembering that the jury but half understood the jargon of French and English in which the maid spoke, "you must wait until the questions are put to you"; and then to the count he said, "Would you, sir, be so obliging as to tell the jury just what she does say?"

The count agreed, and advanced again to the table. He was obviously very nervous, and his nervousness increased as each answer was received. It might have been thought that he was the friend of the man whose name had been dragged in thus at the last moment, and that he resented the testimony that he must pass on to the jury.

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"Now, my girl, please to answer us categorically. You were Lady Anna's maid?"

"Yes, certainly, sir."

"How long had you been in her service?"

"One, two, three years—after she returned from India."

"We have heard nothing of India. It would not be necessary, I suppose, gentlemen" (this to the jury). "She was a good mistress to you?"

"I would have died for her."

"Did she take you into her confidence: tell you about her troubles or anything of that kind?"

"Ah, oui—but always of Captain Ferman. I shall never forget, jamais——"

"Please to calm yourself. You say she spoke of Captain Ferman. Can you tell us anything of it?"

"His Highness know all about it. She cannot abide the captain—she run away from him."

"Come, now, you are talking nonsense. She disliked this gentleman and avoided him. Is that what you wish to tell the jury?"

"Yes, sir; I wish to say so with all my heart."

"Did her ladyship tell you as much?"

"Every day—when the captain wrote."

"Can you remember any particular occasion?"

"This is Saturday—well, she spoke of him on Sunday morning. There was a letter then."

"Was she upset by it?"

"She cried, messieurs, cried a very long time. Then she said she must go to London the next day to see the captain."

"Did she carry out that intention?"

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"No, messieurs, there was a telegram."

"Did you read it?—you need not be afraid to tell us."

Berthe blushed until her face was dangerously crimson.

"She left it upon the dressing-table—I must see it."

"And the words of it——"

"It said, 'Tuesday if possible—otherwise Wednesday.'"

"Nothing more?"

"Nothing more, sir."

"Do you know if Lady Anna went to London on either of these days?"

"She went on Tuesday, sir."

"But not on the day of her death?"

"No, sir; the captain came here upon that day."

It is needless to say with what astonishment these significant remarks were received. The coroner wrote down every word that she spoke, and the inspector of police made copious notes.

"You say that Captain Ferman came to this house on Tuesday last? Are you quite sure of that?"

"I do not say that he came to this house. But he was at the house of the boats, and madame met him there."

"How do you come to know that?"

"I am gone to the village to buy some writing-paper. The short way home is by the river gate and the little house where they keep the boats. Then I am much frightened. I hear a voice, and I know it for that of the captain. A lady is with him—it is madame."

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It was to be observed that she fell to the French idiom and the present tense as the shame of her confession seized upon her and prompted her to anger. The coroner waited a little while for her to resume, and then continued:

"You are willing to swear that you saw Captain Ferman?"

"I will swear by the crucifix, monsieur."

"Could you tell the jury what time it was?"

"It would have been at ten o'clock, sir."

"Are the village shops open for the sale of note-paper at ten o'clock?"

The girl went crimson.

"No, sir; the shop was shut."

"And you did not buy any note-paper?"

"No, sir; I did not buy the paper."

The jury nodded their heads to each other at this point, and the coroner made one of those gestures aside which might have implied that he disbelieved the witness. At this point, however, Stella Insole, who had listened to the evidence with an intensity which betrayed the most poignant interest, whispered to one of the young men who stood by her chair, and he in turn whispered to the prince. The latter thanked him with an inclination of the head, and immediately passed on the message to the coroner, who began to question the maid anew.

"What did you do when you had seen the captain?"

"I came away at once, sir."

"You did not watch him?"

"Oh, monsieur!"

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"But you can swear that you heard Lady Anna's voice?"

"If I should mistake it, sir!"

"And being convinced that it was she—what then?"

"I returned to the house and to her bedroom. I wish to make sure."

"Did you find the bedroom empty?"

"No, sir."

"It was not empty—who was there, then?"

"Monsieur Blandy, the steward, he was there."

"Oh, but that was very unusual—what was he doing there?"

"I beg your pardon, gentlemen, but I was a-shutting of a winder."

The interruption came from the far corner of the room, where Mr. Blandy, the steward, watched the proceedings in the company of certain maids and footmen whom it had been deemed wiser to make confidants in this affair.

He was a bald-headed, red-nosed man, who was utterly taken aback by this accusation. Perhaps an observer would have said that the emphasis of his protest was a little unnecessary and possible of misinterpretation; but he continued to address the company round about in muttered phrases of complaint, and did not cease even when he was told to hold his tongue.

"You saw Mr. Blandy in Lady Anna's room. Are you able to say what he was doing there?"

"Yes, sir; he was turning over the papers on the writing-table."

The admission astounded the court. Quick glances

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were exchanged between the coroner and the jury; the inspector looked closely at the witness and began to bite the end of his pencil. A wasp indeed, this pale-faced, smooth-tongued Frenchwoman, who had worshipped her dead mistress as a divinity.

"Are you quite sure of this, my girl? Will you swear it on your oath?"

"Oh yes, sir; I am quite sure."

"And you repeat that when you entered your mistress's bedroom—but what time was that?"

"I did not look at the time, sir."

"Shall we say it was after ten o'clock?"

"Oh yes, sir, it was after ten o'clock."

"You entered the bedroom, and Mr. Blandy was there?"

"He was, sir."

"Turning over the papers on the writing-table?"

"I will swear it."

"Was the electric light turned on?"

"Over the table, sir."

"And it remained on—this light over the table?"

"No, sir; he put it out when he heard me coming."

A murmur of surprise greeted this new admission, and did not subside for some moments. Many eyes were watching the unfortunate Blandy, who could control himself no longer, but boldly declared the girl to be a liar. The coroner, however, silenced him by the stern reminder that he would be heard presently, and continued his task.

"What did Mr. Blandy say when you discovered him?"

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"He said that the wind was blowing the things about."

"In the room, of course. Did you agree with him?"

"No, sir, there was no wind."

"And you told him so?"

"I told him he had better go quick, or I would let my mistress know."

"And he went at once?"

"At once, sir."

"Without saying any more about the window?"

"He never mentioned it, sir."

"But he spoke about the wind?"

"Oh, I did not listen to that."

It now became clear that the girl had nothing more to tell the jury, and she was permitted to go, having contrived in a few short sentences to incriminate two people and to put the court in some doubts as to her veracity.

Mr. Blandy was the next witness to be called, and he floundered to the table in a great state of heat and excitement. His early statement was severely censured by the coroner, who told him very plainly that he must behave himself.

"This girl is a liar through and through," he began, and then, as though to impress the jury, he added, "a French liar."

"Oh come, sir, that is not the way to give your evidence. Tell the jury what you were doing in Lady Anna's room on the night of Wednesday last."

"I have told the gentlemen—I was there to shut a winder."

"What took you upstairs at such a time?"

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"A noise of the things blowing about."

"You could hear it from the hall below?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you were in the hall?"

"Well, not exactly in the hall—I was in the corridor."

"Which corridor?"

"The one that leads to the pantry."

The coroner turned to the prince and asked him a question. He looked very serious upon receiving an answer.

"I am told that the corridor you name is on the opposite side of the house. What have you to say to that?"

"Why, the wind was blowing the blinds about there, and so naturally I thought of the bedroom upstairs. Is that to stand against me?"

"No one is suggesting such a thing. We merely want you to tell the truth."

"Well, there it is then. I'm no liar like that girl."

"Did you enter more than one bedroom?"

"Yes, two or three——"

"Whose were they?"

"His Highness's to begin with."

"Is that near to the room occupied by Lady Anna?"

"No, it's in the other wing."

"So you went straight from one to the other—neglecting other rooms?"

"I went to the rooms I thought the most important. Lady Anna was next door to being mistress of this house."

The coroner passed it over.

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"She was an important guest?"

"She was Number One from the start."

"And you were most desirous of making her comfortable?"

"I was indeed, sir."

A further question was about to be put—the coroner had it upon his lips in fact—when a telegram was brought in for the inspector of police, and by him passed over the table. When the coroner had read it also he handed it to Maurevale and then to the jury. Its contents, however, were not made public, and presently, somewhat to the surprise of all present, the inquiry was adjourned.

"Until this day week, gentlemen, at the Bull Hotel. You must not let anything that happens elsewhere influence your minds in the meantime. I am asked by his Highness to thank you for your attention. The fees will be paid next time."

The house-party discussed the affair in scattered groups as they crossed the great cloister to the castle precincts. Very voluble and full of his grievance, the old Count of Fours recalled the episode of the stick, and declaimed against the coincidence as he accompanied Lady Constance Heliers to the house. The university boys kept together, and were as awed as young men ever are in the presence of death. The prince walked with Stella Insole, who waited with trembling heart for him to speak.

"Must I not know?" she asked at last. The question had been expected by him from the moment the telegram came, and was not to be avoided.

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"Yes," he rejoined reluctantly. "It is as we feared, and Ferman is arrested."

She did not answer him. Her face was colourless, and her heart beating rapidly. Perhaps for the first time the prince realised how much of womanly sweetness and sympathy she added to her beauty. This day revealed so many things.

"Let us go to my room—I have much to do, Stella," he said, "and you must help me now."

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CHAPTER IV

THE PRINCE AND STELLA INSOLE

PRINCE MAUREVALE'S room at Highlands is in the western wing, over against the great laboratory, which is famous, not only throughout the country, but the world.

It is a very large apartment with a domed ceiling, panelled after the manner of Joseph Vernet. Luxury abounds therein; but a love of ancient art is the predominating note, and there are paintings of the early Italian and Spanish schools which connoisseurs travel far to see.

Perhaps, however, there is no ornament of his sanctum which the prince values so highly as the great glass case which contains the addresses and the gifts which have reached him from the various peace societies of Europe. These have come from many nations; from Berlin and from Paris, from the Czar of Russia and the President at the White House. They all bear witness to a common recognition of a noble aim.

To this room came Maurevale with Stella Insole immediately after the inquest in the chaplain's library. His assistant, that pale-faced youth, Otto Walther, whose devotion was unquestioned, sat at a table in the corner when the pair entered; but at a sign he withdrew, and then the prince turned to Stella and bade her speak.

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"You have much to tell me," he said, in a kindly tone. "Is not this our opportunity, Stella?"

She answered him, to his surprise, that she could tell him nothing—and emotion mastering her, she repeated this assurance with tears.

The confession was wholly true. The supreme secret would never be his unless his lips forced her own to utter it. The passionate love for him which had tortured her these many months lay locked in the treasure-house of her heart. And he, Maurevale, who believed that he could read woman as an open book, did but say that she grieved for her dead friend, Anna Maclain, and would not be comforted.

Her father, Lord Kerrimore, was a fine type of the Irish nobleman, who had rendered Maurevale some friendly service in Egypt many years ago. When trouble came in Ireland and the father was beggared, the prince remembered his obligation and fulfilled it. The old baron received an altogether preposterous fee as the master of the Maurevale stable at Newmarket; the only son, Albert, was in a Lancer regiment; the two daughters, Stella and Kitty, became the children of Highlands, and made it their home.

Maurevale liked young society—light and laughter and beauty were essential to his well-being. These qualities he found in Lord Kerrimore's daughters—but Stella, the youngest, had begun to interest him lately by the possession of other gifts. She was a critic of perception above the ordinary. Her talk was often witty and sometimes shrewd. She studied the sciences laboriously, but wept over her own inability to master them. In the end she could confess to herself that she

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was merely a woman, and that any attempt to win the prince's favour by empiric subterfuge could but end in winning his contempt.

She was foolish, of course, to dream about such a man, and she knew that she was foolish. The succession of distinguished guests at the castle showed her women of many stations and diverse gifts, descendants of great houses, the daughters of millionaires, the noted beauties of society succumbing to Maurevale's dominant personality, and utterly conquered by it. Her life at Highlands permitted her to hear almost daily the ancient story that this was a man who would never know the love of woman. She assented to the proposition, believed it for a while, and then came to doubt it. And her doubt was awakened upon the day Lady Anna told her that her faith was false.

She had believed that the dead woman was to become the prince's wife, and nothing but death had altered her belief.

It is easy to imagine that circumstances such as these forbade her to reply to Maurevale as he wished or to be other than embarrassed by his interrogation. She could not answer him frankly, and her silence grieved him.

"So," he said, "it would appear that even my friends turn from me?"

She protested against it hotly, watching him with burning eyes as he paced the long room, and wondering where she would find courage. Presently she said:

"Is it not that your friends may fear to speak—do they not trust you absolutely?"

He turned and looked at her.

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"In what, Stella?"

"In that you, who have rewarded right, will know how to avenge wrong."

"Do you mean, then, that I shall leave my work to become a policeman?"

He came and laid a hand upon her shoulder.

"Stella, do you believe that Captain Ferman loved Anna Maclain?"

"I do most certainly believe it; but I believe no less that my sister loved him."

"Knowing my opinion of him, and that I had forbidden him this house?"

"Forgive me; a woman's love owes nothing to another's opinion. It is all-sufficient in itself."

"True, true. Too often do we forget how far our hearts lie from what the world would teach us. I forbade Jack Ferman my house. Why? Because his ambition was greater than his friendship. He would have sold me to the English Government. He wished to open these doors and possess himself of my secret. He measured his intellect against mine, and found it to be a child's. And now you tell me that I must save him! I ask you why, child?"

"Because you know that he is innocent."

"I know! Did you hear them at the inquest?"

"Yes, but they were poor people who do not think."

"And their evidence is false?"

"I believe it to be mistaken."

"Ah, but let us consider. It is clear that this lady, who stood as my own sister to me—it is clear that she has been the subject of a foul crime. The last person seen with her is Jack Ferman. He writes to her making

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secret appointments. I know, for she herself told me, that he has been trying to make her the instrument of his espionage for some months past. She resists him—implores him to abandon his dishonourable task—to leave her. Then she is found dead, poisoned in my house. Am I to suffer that dishonour?"

"You will avenge the crime."

He stood and raised a hand in solemn witness.

"By the help of Heaven, yes, I will avenge her."

He went to the window and looked over the quadrangle.

"Observe," he said, "that is Lady Heliers' carriage. She is the first to go. A woman who has spent her days protesting against the selfishness of modern life is the very first to leave me when I have need of her."

"Is it not well that one who was so bitter an enemy to her we loved should leave us at this time?"

The prince turned his dark eyes upon her.

"Can we be sure of love or enmity?"

"A woman can."

"Ah, you correct me. I shall accept a woman's judgment. Her flight, you see, is not even dignified. She is leaving a message with the count, I doubt not for me. The count himself paces the quadrangle impatiently because madame, his wife, will not rise and quit my house. He would fly from this vulgar scene of death and escape the searching eyes which are already watching him. The night may permit him to go, and to-morrow we shall know him no more. So much for these sacred friendships. Now let us see what our servants are doing."

Maurevale crossed the room to one of the windows

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upon the opposite side, and there looked out upon the kitchen court. This was a paved quadrangle which showed him a group of men-servants gathered about the affable, if suspected, Blandy. The steward was gesticulating wildly, and plainly talking in loud tones. Presently a bell summoned the men, and they went their ways, while Mr. Blandy himself stood a little while in deep thought. Then he also crossed the court with quick steps, and, going toward the stable-yard, was lost to their view.

"Do you see," said Maurevale, with a sigh, "this man was called a faithful servant yesterday. To-day he is preparing to leave my house. He will go by night, and stealthily. Should I not say, Stella, that he is a guilty man?"

"Or one who is very much afraid——"

"I see, and fear shunning the ordeal adds to it a thousandfold. To-morrow Mr. Blandy may be in the custody of the police, and I, in spite of the service he has rendered me, powerless to help him. Is not that a heavy punishment for an indiscretion—is it justice, Stella?"

"I think you will keep Mr. Blandy."

"I——"

"And punish the real author of this crime."

He sighed, and fell once more to pacing the room as a man who protested silently against the rôle he must fulfil.

"Our ambitions tower to the stars, to fall again as birds that are stricken. Then we lie crouching on the earth because it is our destiny. Do you know, Stella, that I was upon the point of attaining my desires,

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fables that they seem? Do you know that Europe has begun to believe me when I have said there shall be no more war? I was to go to Berlin this week and state the conditions upon which I will entrust my inventions to a chosen nation for the preservation of the peace of the world. Of all the zealots who supported me in this, Anna was the most devoted. Now death strikes her down. The lust of money forces us back upon the primal instincts. Her devotion to me awakens the appetite of the brute. She is the enemy—she must pay the price."

"Do you believe all this of Captain Ferman?"

He paused, and looked at her with searching eyes.

"Why do you ask me that?"

"Because all our hope is in you. Oh, you will save Jack Ferman!"

"If he is innocent I will save him. Tell your sister so. If he is innocent. Meanwhile, I say that you must be my ally. We must begin our task now, this very moment. All our great schemes must be forgotten until it is accomplished. There must be neither rest nor weariness. It is for her sake, Stella; for the sake of a woman who has loved me."

"Tell me what to do, and you shall have no more devoted servant."

"I believe it—herein fortune is kind to me, for it seems to tell me that what I have lost may be found again. You are a woman, and you have a woman's instincts. Use them for your sister's sake. Her love is not less noble because it is unselfish. I must think well of Ferman because she commands it. Help me to do so, Stella."

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"Ah, sir, if I had but the cleverness——"

"You will find it in love, child. We shall be alone in this henceforth. Let us work as though Anna herself were watching and helping us."

He paused once more, listening to a sound of wheels which came up from the courtyard below—and as he did so a smile of contempt crossed his face.

"As I told you, the amiable count has persuaded madame, his distressed wife, to flee this dangerous country and return to the hospitable and less curious shores of France. He was a man sent by the French Government to beg the secret of my work. I will not say that he returns empty-handed, for madame goes with him. Do you think it odd that his stick was found in the boat, Stella?"

"I thought it odd that he should make so much of it."

"Exactly, but there was something else which was made light of. Did you think of that also?"

She looked up with wondering eyes.

"The heart of green jade——"

"Ah, truly, the heart of green jade, which the doctor told us was of no more account than the table before him."

"Did you believe that?"

He answered her very solemnly.

"So little that when I shall have found the heart of green jade I shall find also the murderer of Anna Maclain."

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CHAPTER V

THE LAW, BUT NOT NECESSARILY THE MAJESTY THEREOF

Sir Malcolm Morrison, the famous chief inspector, is wont to complain, and the complaint is just, that there would be few undetected murderers in England if he were called to the scene at an early hour.

A practice so desirable is frustrated chiefly by the vanity of a local police. These take a case in hand, frequently bungle it, obliterate the vital clues, utter many fine platitudes, and then in despair communicate with Scotland Yard. Sir Malcolm Morrison comes in as a physician at the eleventh hour, when the patient is already *in extremis*, and the man upon the spot has nothing further to do but to pocket the fees his ignorance has earned him. Let it be admitted without preface that such an indictment of bureaucracy could not be made when the search for the murderer of Anna Maclain began.

So swift was the action of Scotland Yard that an almost immediate arrest followed, and London heard with an amazement most profound that one of the most popular young soldiers of the day was in custody.

The handsome, witty, dare devil Jack Ferman, the woman's favourite, the friend of princes, the notorious rider—he in custody for the murder of a woman he had been known to worship. Little wonder that the social world seemed to stand still, that nothing else was as much as mentioned among those who were in "the

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movement." Incredible, said society. And disgraceful, added his friends, unless the evidence were overwhelming.

Of this evidence the world learned but little at the police courts. Proof that Ferman had been with the dead woman on the night of the tragedy was put in, and his own refusal to give any account of that secret meeting. A remand was asked for and granted by a magistrate, who believed that the police knew their business and would never make such a mistake as this. Excitement waxed, and became as a fever among the captain's friends. Lady Anna's would-be avengers were not less numerous.

These were the facts when that distinguished officer of police, Sir Malcolm Morrison, alighted from a brougham at the door of Highlands Castle upon the afternoon following the inquest, and asked for his Highness Prince Maurevale.

A quiet and dignified personality this, six feet in height, dressed with precise care, wearing gloves of lavender suède, and a silk hat which could brave Bond Street unashamed.

The interview took place not in the great study where the prince had received Stella Insole earlier in the day, but in the small red library to the right of the hall as you enter the castle. Hither a footman, who went warily before so distinguished an officer of police as Sir Malcolm, conducted the visitor, and here the prince met him five minutes later.

"Sir Malcolm Morrison—that is a name I should know well——"

"And I that of Prince Maurevale no less."

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And then he said, with a light wave of the hand:

"But I regret the circumstances, sir."

Maurevale replied, still looking at the card in his hand.

"And I no less. You have come here to get my help, of course."

"If you can help me! At present the case seems quite clear. This young madman poisoned her because she would not marry him."

"You believe that, sir——"

"The police believe everything and nothing. It is as far as the evidence leads us."

"But the coroner's jury——"

Sir Malcolm smiled, and brushed it aside, as it were, with a gesture of the hand.

"We must have our farces in England. I have read the evidence. Very amusing and, in its way, instructive."

"And yet it is evidence which led you to arrest Captain Ferman."

Sir Malcolm raised his brows.

"The maid Berthe——?"

"No other."

"I will not debate it. Permit me to ask a question in my turn. How did you come to be at Pangbourne at that hour in the morning?"

"Because my boatman, Willis, is an early riser."

"He missed the boat——?"

"Yes."

"Which he knew to be out on the previous evening?"

"Certainly—he alarmed the house. There is another reason. Miss Insole, my guest, was anxious concern-

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ing Lady Anna. She was awake when the alarm came——"

Again Sir Malcolm seemed to listen.

"Why was she anxious?"

"A woman's anxiety. Lady Anna had left the dinner-table pleading headache. It would be natural."

"But uncommon in your circles. Pardon the levity. I will see the room and the boat, if you will permit me."

"Indeed, I will accompany you. The others have already been here."

"Then I shall expect to do little good."

They rose and went upstairs together. The door of the dead woman's room had been sealed by the local police; but Sir Malcolm broke it without ceremony and went in. Everything was just as Lady Anna had left it. A long cupboard was half-full of her gowns and hats from Paris and Vienna. The table was littered with brushes and ornaments, but not with bottles, for these had already been sent to London for analysis. An open book lay upon the bed—the cover of which had been turned down as though for some one who wished to lie there without undressing.

The chief inspector made a swift survey of this room, but it seemed to afford him but little satisfaction. From time to time he asked a question of Maurevale, but did not appear to pay much attention to the answers.

"They are well off, the Farrards?"

"Pardon me, I know nothing of their income."

"But it would be fair to ask the question now. Are you not the target for every adventurer in Europe?"

"They say so. A man who strives for peace between the nations begins by making many enemies."

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"Of course he does. The finer his mind the grosser the minds by which he is surrounded. They come here to steal your inventions. You are aware of it."

Maurevale smiled.

"They afford me much amusement, Sir Malcolm."

"Did the poor lady know anything of them?"

"As much as I did——"

"She would have done. Ferman, I remember, is on the staff."

"You are suggesting——"

"Nothing at all. But if I were on the staff at Whitehall, and I heard that a certain distinguished visitor had invented a high explosive which would make war against the power possessing it impossible, I think I should want to know what it was."

Maurevale smiled again, but would not take up the issue. Presently Sir Malcolm said:

"By the way, do you ever use coniine here?"

"Why do you ask that?"

"Oh, I'll tell you. A preparation of coniine has been found in Ferman's rooms."

"Indeed, and yet it was not coniine which poisoned this poor lady."

"You say——"

"A mere opinion."

"But I am profoundly interested."

"Then I do not think that she was poisoned by coniine."

"They won't agree with you—and if they don't, Ferman will hang."

"For a crime he did not commit; I think not."

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Sir Malcolm drummed with his fingers upon the marble-topped washhand stand.

"You have other ideas, sir?"

"Certainly, but they are no more than ideas."

"You say then——?"

"That this poor lady was poisoned not by coniine but by a combination of drugs, of which one was certainly the poisonous rhus."

"Ah, an Indian drug——"

"No, Chinese."

"Then that would seem to say——"

Maurevale shrugged his shoulders.

"That we are as far as Streatly is from Pekin from the author of this crime."

It was Sir Malcolm's turn to smile now. These fine theories were altogether too distant for him. He had a plain case for a jury, and would not complicate it. Why should he?

"I fear you will not convince us, sir," he said. "For Ferman's sake I wish it were otherwise. The evidence—I beg your pardon, but is that a button lying by the door—a red button?"

He crossed the room, attracted by a bright red object which lay upon the black mat against the door. Evidently their entrance had disturbed the mat and brought this button to light. The inspector scanned it very closely, then passed it to the prince.

"What do you make of that?"

"It is the ordinary button of the Légion d'Honneur."

"How very curious that it should be here. Let us see, among your guests were——"

"It would belong to the Count of Fours."

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"Ah, that unfortunate count. His stick—the box—and now the button. Evidently good reputation has quarrelled with him. Well, I will take care of it. There is just one thing more. May I see your steward, Mr. Blandy?"

"Certainly—if he is in the house."

"But you do not imagine——?"

"Oh, so many things happen."

They left the room and returned to the hall. There Maurevale rang the bell and asked the footman to send Mr. Blandy immediately. While they waited, the talk was of common things—of Maurevale's horses about to run at Newmarket, of his patronage of the new Aero Club, of the stupidity of politics and the dangers of the European situation. But no further reference was made to the one subject until the footman returned, and said with some confusion that Mr. Blandy had left the castle and would not return, they thought, until nightfall.

"Ah," said Sir Malcolm, "that is unfortunate."

But he made no further observation whatever and drove off as he had come, a shrewd and wary ally of the law whose majesty he worshipped.

Maurevale, however, went straight to his own room, and as he went his butler Child stopped him in the corridor and told him the news.

"I don't know how to tell your Highness—but they've come for Mr. Blandy."

"Ah," said Maurevale, "I was expecting them." And that was all.

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CHAPTER VI

THE PRINCE AND THE ACCUSED

THE governor of the prison had been advised by the authorities that some courtesy beyond ordinary must be shown to Prince Maurevale of Dara, and that the unusual privilege of a private interview with the prisoner had been accorded to him.

This was nominally in the interests of justice, but more truthfully in those of a common official purpose to stand well with a man whom all Europe was seeking to propitiate.

So it came about that the men met in a private room by the library, and that no warder either watched or listened at a forbidding grating.

It is needless to say with what surprise Jack Ferman heard the name of his visitor, and with what vague suspicions he received him.

In some sense Maurevale of Dara had been the author of all his ills—alienating the affections of the woman he had loved, and creating by his genius those temptations he had been unable to resist. And now this man came to him in prison—upon a mission he could but surmise and resent.

John Philip Ferman, as his name was written correctly, had just attained his thirty-fifth year, was fair and florid in complexion, and possessed of those soldierly manners which women especially find pleasing. His antipathy to Maurevale of Dara had been entirely

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official until Lady Anna Maclain visited Highlands Castle, when it passed to a bitter jealousy which the fires of a racial prejudice intensified.

The humiliation, nay, the actual dangers, of his present position were acute enough that this new ordeal must be added to them.

And yet he went to the room, hoping he knew not what of the encounter.

The prince, who was dressed in a grey frock suit, and carried a heavy stick with a silver knob, stood to receive the prisoner, and held out his hand to him very willingly.

"Captain Ferman, believe me that I have come here in the hope of serving you——"

"I must believe, prince—but I'm glad you told me."

Maurevale ignored the obvious gaucherie of the retort, and pushed a chair forward.

"Shall we sit, Captain Ferman?"

"Then it's to be a long pow-wow."

"As you shall choose to make it. And first will you permit me a certain freedom in recounting an older story?"

"I'll permit you to say anything you please if you'll tell me why they say I murdered a woman for whom I would have given twenty lives if I'd had 'em."

"We shall come to that by-and-by. To begin, you have been engaged for some months in trying to steal the secrets of my laboratory at Highlands, so far as they concerned your experts at Whitehall."

Jack Ferman leaned back in the plain deal chair, and his face flushed crimson. So matter-of-fact had been

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the accusation, so devoid of anger or of malice, that he was at a loss to find a word in answer to it. And there he sat, colouring like an overgrown schoolboy, and yet wishful to tell nothing but the truth.

"Well," he stammered at last, "that's so, and I'm not ashamed of it. They're all after 'em—and why shouldn't my country get em? We'd have paid you a bigger price than the Germans——"

Maurevale silenced him with a gesture.

"I bore you no ill-will, though I considered it wiser for prudence' sake to deny you my house. Your country has claims upon me, but none which determined me at present to depart from my own intentions where these secrets are concerned. You acted in what you believed to be the national interest, and I held you blameless. Then came your attempts to suborn my friends to your own ends. You tempted Lady Anna Maclain to betray me, and were rebuffed. Do I speak the truth, Captain Ferman?"

The soldier bent his head; he would not look his adversary in the face.

"It's true—I can't deny it."

"And yet it is a most dishonourable thing to admit."

"It depends upon your point of view—I was doing my duty."

"Come, come, sir; your duty would have been richly rewarded had you succeeded in tempting this unhappy woman."

"I know it, nevertheless——"

"Pray spare me that. Your present situation may be in some part due to the folly of officials, but in a great measure it is the consequence of your own acts.

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Let us admit as much, and we have made a good beginning."

"Then I won't deny it. I was wrong to tempt Anna; but we both wanted the money, and we wanted it badly."

Maurevale sighed.

"Had you come to me and said so, I would have spared you many hours of shame. Now they are inevitable—for you and for her. If there is any hope left to me, it is that I may save you from the final consequence of this unsoldierly career to which you have so long devoted yourself. For that I am come here—to be your friend because you were the friend of a woman I revered."

He spoke with a deep emotion which the other could not resist. Jack Ferman had played with the deeper truths of life for many years, but now the play was ended, and he saw himself upon the brink of an unimagined consequence and drew back afraid. He had loved Anna Maclain passionately enough—but to passion cupidity had been allied, and now he must gather the fruits of his desire and make no complaint because they were bitter.

"Oh!" he cried, almost as one in despair, "you don't tell me that any one believes it? Great God! they don't think I killed her?"

"The police are confident of it. They have found the poison coniine in your rooms. I hear that the correspondence on both sides is compromising beyond hope. You actually threatened her in your letters. You spoke of giving her so many weeks or days in which to answer your so-called ultimatums. Believe me, there is but a

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plank between you and the scaffold. I doubt even my own power to save you——"

"But—but I say it's a black lie. I never had any poison that I know of in my life . . . and as for killing her, I'd as soon have killed my own sister. Why don't you tell them it's a lie—why don't my friends speak for me? I loved her madly. Must I be kennelled here like a dog for every coward to point a finger at? I tell you I loved her—I loved her madly—she never could have been anything to me, but I loved her—and now they say I could do this thing. Oh, you can't believe it; there isn't an honest man in all London who would suffer them to say it——"

Maurevale endeavoured to calm him, but succeeded with difficulty. Jack Ferman had gone lightly enough into this, the battle of his life, but the stress of it had broken him already, and he, who was the light of the social booths and bazaars a month ago, now cut a pitiful figure enough. In truth both Maurevale and the world which knew him had yet to discover the master key, but while the one had a clue to it already, the other did not so much as imagine that it existed.

"My dear fellow," said Maurevale, with some kindness, "let me beg of you to reflect rather what you shall say than what may be said by others with whom we have no concern. I am here as your friend, and implore you to help me. The police say you are guilty; I believe you to be innocent——"

"Thank Heaven for that! If you say so, others will follow."

"You must help me to say so. You must answer my questions."

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"So far as I can answer them."

"But surely there are no secrets at such an hour as this?"

"I'll tell you when you come to them."

Maurevale sighed and watched the face keenly. This new manner did not reassure him; there was even the suspicion of a hangdog look, a something not altogether candid, a sudden lapse to suspicion, a reticence which did not promise well. But he avoided any remark upon it and continued, suavely:

"Did you know Lady Constance Heliers at all?"

"Oh yes, I knew her."

"Was she ever in India——?"

"Not to my knowledge——"

"And therefore would not have been acquainted with Lady Anna at that time?"

"I never saw her there——"

"Although you were stationed—in the Punjab, I think, for some years——?"

"That's so; why do you ask?"

"I have a purpose—sufficient that you did not know her there. I now come to another point. You were at Streatly on the night of the murder?"

"I'll not deny it."

"Why did you go there?"

"To tell Anna something she very much wanted to know."

"Ah—and you feel indisposed to make me your confidant?"

"I cannot make any man my confidant."

"It is a question of honour as between man and woman, Captain Ferman?"

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"It is so."

"Then I shall respect it absolutely; but you will not be surprised if others do not do so."

"I am prepared for that."

"And the consequences——?"

"Oh, I don't know; I daren't say—I won't think about it."

"They will compel you to think about it."

"Then let them. It's all the amends I can make her. Let them do what they like."

Maurevale nodded approvingly.

"You are a brave man, Captain Ferman."

"No, don't call me that. I tell you, I'm a coward—there isn't a bigger coward in all London to-day. Man, I just sit in my cell thinking about it all until sweat runs down my face. I killed her, I, Jack Ferman—I killed her. And I must stand before my fellow-men accused of that. I must hear the lawyers arguing it; I must fight for my life before a jury of my fellow-men who know nothing about the truth and never will know anything—when it's all over, I may go to the scaffold for her—go to my God, charged with the death of a woman who never had a truer friend. See, I am telling you my secret thoughts—you, the last man I would have named to hear them in all the country. You know now what I am, and you can pity or despise me as you choose. I tell you I stand in the shadow of death, and I know it; can I say more?"

He rose abruptly, a spasm of agony upon his face and his pupils dilated by the visions of his own creation.

"Afraid—for myself, yes, and for her no less. You know the truth now; you know the whole of it."

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"Why do you say that? Am I a wizard?"

"No; but you are a man who is clever enough to believe that I am ready to die for Anna Maclain."

"Shielding the true murderer——"

"Ah, that's the question. Tell me who did it, and I will answer you."

"Then you yourself are in ignorance——"

"As ignorant as you are—if you are ignorant."

"Credit me with no superhuman powers, I beg of you. I am no wiser than the others, but I go to work in a different way. For instance, this heart of green jade——"

Ferman turned about, but his expression was simply curious.

"The trinket she wore on her bracelet! What's that got to do with it?"

"We must ascertain. Do you remember if she wore it upon the night you speak of?"

"I can't remember. But I've seen it, of course. A funny little green heart with some Chinese letters upon it. She used to consider it a sort of charm."

"Is that why she says, 'Pray that the green heart may hide me when the hour comes'? The police make nothing of it—but you will remember it, Captain Ferman."

"I do remember it, but I cannot speak of it."

"I see—this also concerns her honour. Would the same apply to her friend, White Hill——"

"Ah, you know about that——"

"I hear of it from the police."

"Ah, they are a clever lot. Well, White Hill is the

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name of a diamond mine. All the world knows that——"

"Oh, the world is not so well informed——"

"But I'll swear it—I'll swear it on my——"

"I think not, Captain Ferman, or I shall begin to lose faith in you——. White Hill is the name of a man. Will you tell me more now——"

"Not a word, if it costs me my life."

"White Hill, then, must be protected."

"I cannot tell you. He didn't kill her. He wasn't in England."

"I will believe you. There is nothing else, I think, except to speak of courage."

"Do you say it——"

"I do say it."

"After what has happened between us!"

"I say it in the name of the woman——"

"Oh, you have made a changed man of me; I see that the sun is shining."

"Beware, however, of your divinities, and—remember that I may fail."

"You—you fail——"

"It is possible. I must speak of it."

"I won't believe you. I shall sleep to-night. God! What the nights have been!"

"I can understand that. I must make them otherwise. By the way, you know they have a warrant for Blandy—my steward?"

"A warrant for Blandy—oh, come. A warrant for poor old Blandy—ha, ha, ha. Now that's news."

"Yes, and he has bolted."

Ferman became deadly white in an instant.

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"Bolted! Blandy bolted——"

"Yes, I thought you would like to know. Well, I suppose the time is up. Good-bye, Captain Ferman. I don't suppose I shall be able to see you again until the trial. There you will hear of me."

He held out his hand and the other shook it.

But he uttered no word, and his agitation was evident as Maurevale quitted the room and followed the warder to the great gate of the prison.

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CHAPTER VII

THE HOUSE OF THE FIVE GREEN SHUTTERS

MAUREVALE had said that Mr. Blandy, his steward, had bolted, but this was only a manner of speaking, for it turned out afterwards that the good fellow had left a note for his master promising faithfully to return within the week, and pleading "urgent private affairs" for his absence.

How far he would have been faithful to this promise or what were his true intentions no man might say. He left Streatly upon the day of the inquest, and that night he was in London. There he stopped at a humble hotel in Soho, largely frequented by foreigners, and, having ordered his room and his dinner, sauntered about the streets for a while and then went off in the direction of Pentonville Prison.

The visit, if the testimony of Jabez Fenn, a young detective, who followed the faithful Blandy upon his round, is to be believed, appeared to afford the steward but poor satisfaction. He was obviously restless and ill at ease; bought the recurring editions of the evening papers, but did no more than glance at them; haunted the prison as though he had the will to visit but was afraid; and returned finally to the mean hotel and to the by no means humble repast he had commanded there.

His evening—for as such he would have referred to it—was occupied in the lighter amusements. A good

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bottle of Burgundy, despite the season, put some heart into Mr. Blandy and brought quite unnecessary colour to his cheeks. He puffed at a cigar vulgarly and omnivorously as though to lose none of the smoke for which he had paid. Becoming bolder each hour he quitted the hotel at last to visit a music hall, where none laughed louder at Scotch sallies or misunderstood them so thoroughly. Finally, he returned to Soho at a quarter to twelve o'clock, and, still unconscious that he was watched, he went to his bed to sleep as soundly as the most innocent man in the country.

It was late next day when he descended to breakfast, and London by no means at her best. A fetid blight had settled upon the city and hidden the sun from perspiring humanity in the intolerable streets. Though the month was July the atmosphere should have been that of humid November, and to make matters worse heavy showers of hot rain fell at intervals, but did nothing to clear the air. Upon such a morning Mr. Blandy opened his newspaper to find that the police were after him, and that he was wanted in connection with the murder of Lady Anna Maclain.

He sat at a well-spread breakfast table when he read this intimation, and had self-control enough to keep the sheet before his eyes that none might discover his confusion. If his heart drummed and his breathing was stertorous, none of his neighbours remarked the fact, for they were foreigners to a man, and would have suffered any eccentricity from that unknown species, the Englishman. To them, Blandy, the steward, was simply *bon garçon* fretting for his food. And he, in turn, ignored their presence, for was not he remembering that

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he had given his name to Alphonse, the proprietor of the house, and that the first fool who asked for it would most certainly get it?

He, Arthur Blandy, wanted for murder! It had come to that, then, after twenty years of honourable service. He, who had been the model for the servants' hall in the past, church-goer, oracle, wise man, he to stand in the dock with felons. And all for the sake of a promise—but he thrust that thought aside, for it was but a new reflection upon his folly.

A wiser man, perhaps, would have put on his hat and gone straight over to the nearest police station to give himself up. Arthur Blandy did not dare to do that. A dull perception appeared to tell him that defence might be his undoing. He had gone through the incidents of the crime a hundred times since its discovery, and had arrived invariably at the conclusion not only that the world might think him guilty, but that a jury might declare him to be so. And now the moment had come. The police were at his heels; he might feel their hands upon his shoulder before the clock struck again.

He put the paper down and made some pretence to eat his breakfast. A subsequent confession admitted that the room swam before his eyes, and that the people in the street were so many black figures swaying in the mists, but he remained manfully at the table for at least a quarter of an hour, and when he rose he had mastered the more evident agitation from which he suffered, and could ask for his bill in a firm voice.

Clearly now the man's mind was hovering between a choice of two courses, and he could arrive at no settled resolution. Going to the door, he bade the German

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porter call him a cab, but delayed to get his bag, and conversed disjointedly and in broken phrases with Monsieur Alphonse, the proprietor. When this mood passed he acted with great energy, hurrying hither and thither, giving his directions in a loud voice and announcing to all who were there to listen that his destination was Euston. Thither the hansom drove him ploddingly, but he did not stop at the terminus, and, giving another direction at the top of the Tottenham Court Road, he was carried to St. Pancras Station, where he took a third-class ticket for Ely, and found a compartment to himself.

The train left London at twenty minutes past twelve, and arrived at the cathedral city at two o'clock. Mr. Blandy appears to have been still indefinite in his purpose, for he delayed even to seek out an hotel, and the report says that it was a quarter to three when he sat down to a modest repast in a humble inn, and four o'clock when he climbed into a dogcart and set out for an unknown destination. He had, however, previously questioned the groom as to the whereabouts of a certain inn known as Five Miles from Nowhere, and, having ascertained that this was situated upon the marshes of the River Cam, and was supposed to be exactly halfway between Cambridge and Ely, he drove away alone, and did not return to Ely that night.

His absence, be it said, would have been the occasion of some excitement at the inn but for an unusual circumstance, and one that set some tongues wagging in the house. This was nothing else than the arrival in Ely, at a quarter to eight that night, of a powerful Mercédès car, carrying a single passenger and driven by a

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Frenchman who had hardly a word of English. When the car stopped, the owner, as it seemed, descended, and put a few questions to the landlord in a tone which did not fail to command an obsequious answer.

"You have one of my servants lodging here."

"Well, sir, I don't know about that—but there is a stout gentleman——"

"Did he give his name——?"

"I can't say that he did, sir—I was over at Mildenhall when he came. Perhaps my missis will know, and if you wait a while I'll step up and ask her."

The stranger consented to wait as requested, and the landlord returned anon with the intimation that the stout gentleman had left his bag behind him, as was supposed, and that the initials upon it were "A. B." Certainly he had hired a dogcart to take him to a part of the world rarely visited by anybody—viz., the inn known as Five Miles from Nowhere. Which information was imparted with true rustic bonhomie and without an afterthought of suspicion—so guilelessly indeed that the stranger's intimation that he himself would pay the bill provoked no word of question whatsoever.

"Your servant, did you say, sir——?"

"My steward, who is here upon my business. This is my card. And now, if you please, for my servant's valise."

The landlord gaped at the card, read and re-read it; then doffed his hat with celerity and stood bareheaded before his guest.

"Glad to meet you, sir. I've won many a good 'un on your Highness's horses at Newmarket——"

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"And will many another, I hope. Do not trouble about the change—and do not expect my servant to return."

He re-entered the car—a limousine whose many windows stood wide open—and was driven away at a rapid pace in the direction of Cambridge. This was at the hour when Mr. Blandy, having quitted the safe high-road as he had been directed, arrived at a country whose desolation appalled him, and whose solitudes are without rival even in the marshes. Flat to the point of wonder, its horizon without trees, a brown river flowing sluggishly between high banks of mud—humanity appeared indeed to have fled from it, and even Nature to hide beneath her sorriest cloak.

A solitary village stood upon the confines of this dark prairie, but thereafter the traces of habitation were few. Here and there a white farmhouse rose protestingly amid a rampart of dykes—but the grey road was almost without landmark, and the few labourers who trod it were the guardians of the pasture lands which science has salved from the waters. No whisper of a kindlier land, no voice from the world of men and things came to break the silence of the waste. The sun gave no images to the black pools, nor did the wind stir them to life and beauty. Everywhere a droning harmony of the insect-laden air lulled to drowsiness, but never to activities. For this was the Ultimate Land of which the poets have written.

Mr. Blandy drove out upon this wild marsh just as the church clock in the village struck seven.

He had never visited the place in his life before, and yet some of the landmarks appeared familiar to him.

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The great square tower of Ely Cathedral, looming in the distance as in mockery of the desolation around him, enchained his eyes and claimed his interest. From time to time he stopped as though to take the bearings of the tower by a little silver compass he carried upon his watch-chain. The few landmarks were diligently observed, the trend of the river and the situation of the farmhouses. Presently he espied a clump of poplars situated, perhaps, the fifth part of a mile from the track, and these interested him greatly. He looked to the right and to the left, watched the road afar to be sure that none moved upon it, then turned the horse toward the grass and drove straight to the thicket.

The road was very rough, little more than a cart's track, and one which did not appear to have been used since the winter. The difficulties, however, did not daunt Mr. Blandy, who held on grimly to his seat as the cart swung and rolled over the ruts—and considered himself well rewarded when a sudden turn permitted him to see a squat house at the heart of the copse and to count the windows which gave upon the garden. These he perceived were five in number, and diving into his pocket he produced a paper upon which were written the words, "the house of the five green shutters." No longer did he doubt that he had reached his destination, and whipping up the horse and buttoning up his coat, as was his habit, he drove straight on to the garden gate and there called loudly for some one to admit him.

Mr. Blandy has confessed that he waited a considerable time before it dawned upon him that the house was unoccupied.

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His loud shouts of "Hi, there—are you all asleep?" obtained no answer whatever. He did not espy any dog or hear the baying of a distant hound. A poor, half-starved cat did, indeed, crawl upon the window-sill of an upper room and mew most dismally, but her appearance said clearly that she had not been fed for some days, and that the omission was due to the simple fact that there was no one about to feed her. This dawned at last even upon the dull intellect of Arthur Blandy, and stepping down from the cart and tethering the horse he advanced up the narrow garden path and beat upon the door.

No one answered his knock. A critical eye cast upon the asters and geraniums of the tangled garden told him that they perished for want of water, and had been some days untended. The shutters of the house were open and the front door unlocked. Mr. Blandy hesitated no longer to do the obvious thing, and opened the door boldly. He entered the hall and looked about him.

There was nothing interesting here, and yet Mr. Blandy appeared much relieved to discover an old hat-stand and a plain deal chair beside it. In the well of the stand there stood a common pink parasol, such as women use in a garden, and an old iron rake with a broken handle. The stairs beyond were carpeted, and a scrubby geranium in a dirty pot served for the ornament of the miniature conservatory upon the first floor. These did not interest Mr. Blandy at all, and opening the door of the right-hand room without further ceremony he peeped round the edge of it as though still afraid there might be somebody in the house.

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The alarm was quite unnecessary. None the less the somewhat elegant furniture of this cramped apartment astonished the worthy steward and brought him to a halt. These chairs of a French design—they were never built for such a house as this. The buffet with the great silver cup—it did not speak of a peasant occupation. He stared open-mouthed at the Japanese ornaments of the mantelshelf, at the neat row of leather-bound books and the elegant bureau which contained them. A step further and the portrait of a woman confronted him—and at that Mr. Blandy gaped as he had not done for many a day.

It was a full-length picture, drawn in crayon, but with rare skill. Arthur Blandy knew nothing of nationalities, but his limited education caused him to say that the portrait was that of a Turkish lady, young and beautiful beyond all expression. Such eyes looked out upon the astonished man that he felt quite abashed even when he remembered it was but a picture. The deftly suggested robe of pure white, the veil fallen aside as though by accident; the oddly shaped Eastern hands with the tapering filbert nails, the little feet peeping out from the spotless petticoat were all portrayed so faithfully that Mr. Blandy found himself drawing nearer the picture inch by inch until at last, forgetful of everything—of his situation, his purpose in coming there, and even of his danger, he dashed his hat down violently upon the table and fell to a vulgarity he could not resist.

"What a gal!" said the steward, and then again, "I'm damned if ever I see her like," and with that he thrust his hands deep into his trouser pockets and

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stared intently at the picture for five full minutes together.

The distant baying of a hound and the sudden failure of the light reminded him where he stood, and brought him to a new recollection of his purpose in visiting that scene of remotest desolation.

He had been brave enough in the sunshine, but now that the sun had set, a strange fear of the place fell upon him and set him itching to be off.

He had come there upon one of those strange impulses which drive men headlong when crime is the whip, and now that he had come the fatuity of his purpose dawned upon him.

Of what service, either to him or to the man who had employed him, were these witnesses to a prosperity foreign to the marshes? How would they save Captain Ferman from the gallows or help him, Arthur Blandy, to deny that he was accessory? The answer must be, "Not at all." And meanwhile the unknown master of this place might be watching him where he stood—prying upon him even while he pried, resolving even while he stood irresolute. And at this he went hot and cold and made a hasty movement to the door.

"I'll go to London," he said; "I'll see the captain's lawyers."

The resolve was good, but hardly was it made when he heard a step upon the path outside, and standing rigid, he cried, "The police, by God!"

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CHAPTER VIII

FLIGHT

For a moment Arthur Blandy listened with ear intent; then a new expression crossed his face.

"It's the prince, by all that's wonderful," he cried aloud.

He had never been afraid of so kindly a master, and he was not afraid now.

A child finding a father in a moment of the uttermost peril, a prisoner at the bar told that the case against him is false, could have experienced no revulsion of feeling as sure as that which now came upon the astonished steward.

"Your Highness—thank Heaven for that!"

Maurevale wore a long travelling cloak and a motor cap with ear flaps which disguised him effectually. He had left his motor a third of a mile down the road, and had walked to the cottage as surely as though he visited it every day. Entering without any hesitation, he espied the quaking Blandy, and a smile crossed his face as he did so.

"Good-evening, Blandy. I don't think you were expecting me."

"Heaven, sir, who'd have thought of such a thing?"

"And yet you leave your wheel-marks very plainly upon the dusty road. A desolate neighbourhood, Blandy, and one with which you are quite unacquainted."

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"That's true, sir. I was never here in my life before to-day."

"And you propose to live here in the future?"

"No, Highness; God forbid."

"Ah, but we shall talk about it presently. There are other things to be discussed before we do so. To begin with, Blandy, I have been travelling a good many hours, and am very hungry. Do me the favour to visit the larder of this house and to see if there is anything to eat there."

"The larder, Highness—but I don't know if they've got a larder."

"They will hardly be without so desirable an addition to a furnished villa. Make your investigations and report to me."

The steward was almost too astonished to speak, but he went off nevertheless, and the prince could hear him delving presently amid strange crockery and stumbling against doors with which he was unfamiliar. He himself spent the interlude in a swift survey of the apartment, which culminated finally in the detection of the picture and a prolonged study of it. A pocket glass with a powerful lens helped him to examine this painting very closely, especially the texture of it; and, not content with this, he removed a fragment of the yellow paper and put it away carefully in a little silver box carried in his waistcoat pocket. When this was done Mr. Blandy's step in the passage warned him of espionage, and he sat again in the chair by the window and would seem to have no eyes but for the solitudes of the landscape.

"Well, Blandy, are we to dine comfortably?"

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"There's nothing to eat in the place, sir, but a bit of cold rice pudding and some stale bread. Why, it must be two days old."

"Let me see it, Blandy—a rice pudding, did you say?"

"Yes, sir; nothing else whatever, excepting the groceries."

"Ah, we are indeed unfortunate, and the lunch basket in my car quite empty, I think. You yourself dined at Ely, I believe."

"I did so."

"And told every one that you were going to the village inn known as 'Five Miles from Nowhere.'"

"That's so, sir."

"How very foolish, Blandy—and how very kind to your friends, the police."

"Oh, master, I'll take my oath before Heaven that I had nothing to do with it."

Maurevale looked at him beneath gathered brows.

"And the man who bought the fidelity which was mine—your employer who bade you spy upon me for money, what of him, Arthur Blandy?"

"I don't know, sir, any more than a child. If you ask me truly, I believe he done it."

"He did it, Blandy, if you please—not he done it. Were I of your opinion, be sure I would not jest. But I am here for your sake and for his—because I know humanity, and do not judge it. Now show me your rice pudding and let me see if I must go fasting. Hurry up, man, for time is short. Do you not know that the police are on our track, and that I am at my

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wits' ends to save you from them? Look alive, then, before it is too late."

He spoke peremptorily, and a chill ran through the steward's veins, as though the hand of Fate had touched him with icy fingers. This wizard knew—but would knowledge bring salvation? Arthur Blandy trembled in every limb as he set the things upon the table and watched his master's keen eye examining them.

"Do you know anything of rice, Blandy?"

"It's twopence a pound, I believe, sir."

"A serviceable reminder. Observe the fine quality of this particular variety. It is such as they eat in China, I think—a growth that is rarely employed in this country."

"Indeed, Highness, I would never have thought of it."

"But you had some other country than England in your mind when you came to this lonely house, Blandy?"

"It wouldn't be true to say that, sir."

"Then why did you come?"

"Highness, I'll keep nothing from you——"

"You would be wise not to do so."

"Captain Ferman told me all about this house three months ago."

"I have imagined as much."

"He was always very anxious about Lady Anna . . . used to ask about her almost every day. 'Blandy,' he says to me, 'if ever you hear of any trouble happening to her and you can't get at me to tell me all about it, you go to Ely as I have directed you,

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and give 'em my message. It shall be worth five hundred of the best, I promise you——'"

Maurevale listened with strained ear.

"What was the message, Blandy?"

"I don't know its meaning any more than the dead, sir——"

"Tell me what it was."

"The word 'hasib,' sir—I was to lay particular stress upon the hache."

"I see, lest it should be misunderstood. Do you know what the word 'hasib' means? I think you said that you did not. Well, it means 'danger,' Blandy. It is a word used in Arabic very frequently."

"Indeed, sir, you astonish me."

"And you were sent here, plainly, to warn some person, who, however, has already received that warning and has fled."

"It would appear so, sir——"

"In which case we might be clever enough—but let us see, here is a bureau at which a person might write. There are books upon it, and one has lately been used. Yes, it is a common railway guide, and the page is marked at the trains—why at the trains—where do you think, Blandy?"

"I cannot make a guess, sir——"

"Then I'll tell you. The train is from Ely to Harwich, the through express to catch the Continental boat. How interesting, how very interesting—and, upon my word, this is more remarkable still."

Maurevale's astonishment was quite unfeigned. The page of the Bradshaw had been marked by a telegraph form, and that form, it appeared, had been delivered to

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a person named Prevost at the Marsh House Farm some days prior to their visit. When the prince passed it to the amazed Blandy, that worthy discovered the identical word he had been commanded to utter.

"Why, it says 'hasib,' sir!"

"It does, Blandy——"

"And says it plainly——"

"So plainly that we must destroy it lest the police should discover it."

"You said, Highness——"

"That the police must not discover it."

"Not the police—but that telegram might save Captain Ferman's life."

"More likely to hang him, my excellent fellow, much more likely——"

"Does your Highness seriously mean this?"

"As seriously as I say to you that the least mischance to-night may cost you your neck. Was it not to save it that I had you watched to-day?"

"You had me watched, sir!"

"Certainly, from the moment you left my house until you set out from Ely. You see, I am lucky; I might have missed you on the road; but I did not, and here we are, and the question is, at what time will the police arrive?"

"You think they will come here then, sir?"

"If you do not prevent them, certainly they will. Crediting them with common intelligence, they should be here before the morning. They may be here sooner. We, however, shall be already on our way. Now go and see if that horse of yours is still there. He trou-

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bles me greatly, Blandy; he is much in my mind—go and see that all is well with him."

The steward left the room, hardly knowing whether he stood on his head or his heels; but Maurevale, watching him out, began to search the apartment anew with swift and searching eyes; and when that was done he went upstairs and passed from bedroom to bedroom of the lonely house.

A large apartment overlooking the road interested him much, and he examined its contents minutely, especially the empty bottles on the washhand-stand and the fragments of paper in the drawers of the dressing-table. A smaller room, plainly furnished for a servant, and a nursery which had evidently not been used for a long time, were the objects but of a brief delay; and, when he had searched the kitchens and the sculleries and had returned for a few moments to the sitting-room to open and identify the books on the writing-table, he was ready to set out with Mr. Blandy.

It had fallen full dark by this time, a moonless night with heavy clouds in the west, and a shudder of wind upon the marshes. Lazarre, the French chauffeur, had lighted the acetylene lamps of his car, and they shone as stars across the flat meadows and showed the turbid waters of the dykes at the roadside. Not a human being, however, passed upon that lonely track; no human tread disturbed the solitude of the waste; and when the prince was sure of the fact he bade Blandy get up into the trap and drive on before him.

"Until I shall stop you, Blandy, at some convenient spot; the signal will be three blasts of the horn. Do you understand?"

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"I understand, sir——"

"Then drive on as fast as you can. Hush—one moment. Do you hear that, Blandy?"

"It's a hound barking, sir——"

"And it means?"

"It means they are after me, sir."

He said it with chattering teeth, the while his hands trembled, and he fumbled with the reins until he could hardly sort them out.

"I'd better give myself up, sir."

"You will hang if you do, Blandy."

"No child's more innocent than me."

"Then play the man—or must I play it for you? Here, give me the reins. Now, get up beside me—fool, I say, get up. Don't you understand the police are on your heels?"

Mr. Blandy climbed up anyhow, awed by the stern word and afraid to disobey it.

They drove a mile and a half, perhaps, and then espied a farmhouse, one dim light in a bedroom indicating its situation, and a watch-dog barking loudly at their approach. This they passed without hesitation, for it stood at some distance from the road; and when they had passed it, they found the grassy track changed for the semblance of a tolerable highway, running between muddy banks across a vast marsh where innumerable cattle stood asleep and motionless waiting for the dawn. Following this a little way, the prince at length discovered a gate giving upon a meadow, and halting there he bade the astonished Blandy descend.

"Open the gate," he said in a voice which brooked no argument, and was obeyed without a word.

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"Now help me to unharness this obliging horse—do you hear what I say, Blandy——?"

"Oh yes, Highness, but the people at Ely——"

"They will have no cause to regret the circumstance. Come, man, are you losing your wits?"

"I beg your Highness's pardon."

"You are right to do so. The police will admit as much to-morrow. Do you not still hear them, Blandy? Surely you have ears!"

"Oh yes, I can hear that dog plain——"

"You do not hear a dog at all—you hear another motor-car. Listen again. That is a Panhard humming across the marsh. You have some three minutes, Blandy, no more. Did not I tell you so?"

"I'm sure I leave it to your Highness. It makes me quite faint to think of it."

Maurevale smiled but did not answer. He had spoken truly when he said that he heard a motor humming across the marsh, and he realised that there was no need to alarm his wretched servant further by any suggestion of hypothetical danger.

"Get into the car!" he cried suddenly, as he turned the horse upon the marsh and left the derelict cart by the roadside. The steward obeyed him without a word, and then as peremptorily, Maurevale told his driver in French to turn out all the lamps.

"We must pick our way for a mile or two, Lazarre. They will stop here quite a long time, and we can light up after we have passed the next village. Now, go ahead, my boy; I trust to your skill."

Lazarre replied that the banks would make the driving easy; and he started at once, picking his way with

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rare cleverness and delighting in the test of his ability. They were none too soon, for hardly had they made the first bend of the narrow road when a glimmer of light above the meadow indicated the approaching car, and they could hear the squeal of the brakes as it was brought to a halt and the men spread abroad to search the fields about. Maurevale had reckoned that the derelict would serve them above any device his ingenuity could suggest. It was an hour before the police left the place at all, and by that time the fugitives were beyond Six Mile Bottom, and well upon their way to a destination where none would follow.

Day had dawned when Arthur Blandy first began to understand that his master had saved him, for the time being, at any rate, and that their journey had carried them to the brink of a wide estuary, beyond which were the fretting waters of the North Sea. He perceived a village upon the far bank, and a few yachts lying at anchor in the fairway. To one of these, a shapely white steamer, from whose copper funnel a haze of smoke was drifting, the prince made a signal directly he came down to the water's edge, and it was answered immediately by the watch on board. A boat put off and came to the mole, and Blandy understood that he was to be the passenger.

"I will send for you," said Maurevale, "directly I have need of you, and it is safe for you to come. My officers have their instructions, and you will obey them implicitly. Meanwhile, I wish you *bon voyage*, and congratulate you upon your good luck. Really, Mr. Blandy, you are a very fortunate man."

The steward was too dumbfounded to speak. The

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swift episodes of this terrible week, the wonders of the long night, the seeming miracle which had carried him to the ship and the sea stilled his tongue and left him witless. He muttered a few awkward words, tried to ask a question and failed as dismally, and then, without any further utterance whatever, stepped into the boat and was rowed away toward the waiting yacht.

Maurevale, however, re-entered his car and bade Lazarre take him back to London.

The hours were precious, and he knew the dead woman bade him lose none of them.

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CHAPTER IX

AT NEW SCOTLAND YARD AND ELSEWHERE

A SINGLE landaulette set down Maurevale at the doors of New Scotland Yard at a quarter to nine, and he was admitted at once into Sir Malcolm Morrison's private office.

This was just forty-eight hours after his visit to Cambridgeshire, and London still talked of little else but its nine days' wonder.

And this was very natural, for the death of Lady Anna Maclain had postponed the social festivities planned by more than one famous house which suffered by death what it never would have sacrificed to the living woman.

Elsewhere the friendships were busy and staunch. Hundreds who had known Captain Ferman protested against the monstrous criminality of his arrest, while the minority which declared the evidence to be incontestable was hardly able to obtain a hearing.

The disappearance of Arthur Blandy and the discovery of the derelict cart by which he had attempted to escape the police were the last straw.

The common tongue now named Blandy as the real author of the crime, and hinted darkly that the old Count of Fours, who had returned to Paris, knew much that a jury would like to know. Wonder was expressed that the police had made no inquiries in that direction, or if they had made them had failed to profit by them.

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In the main astonishment prevailed, and an utter confusion of ideas which took refuge in a general estimate of Ferman's chances and the efforts which his friends were making on his behalf. Some said that all depended upon Sir Malcolm Morrison and his mastery of the evidence; others declared that if Ferman died Prince Maurevale would have sent him to the scaffold. But all agreed this must be the most sensational trial the new century had known, and that nothing quite like it was to be read in social story.

At such a moment, and at the height of such a cataclysm of argument and of interest, Maurevale met the great detective for the second time since the day of the crime, and listened with keen interest to the excuse which had summoned him to Scotland Yard.

Never perhaps had there been such a battle of wits in that official sanctum. Seated upon either side of a great oak table, the one man old and white in experience and success, the other buoyantly youthful and animated by the loftiest purpose, the two faced each other as masters of a diplomacy which should give life or death to the subject of it.

Each realised the subtlety of the mind opposed to him. Each knew that a word ill-spoken might prove the master key.

"You sent for me, Sir Malcolm, and I have travelled a hundred miles to see you. It would be about my servant, Blandy, of course."

Sir Malcolm's brows lifted slightly—he had a note of this upon his papers, but was about to mention other things.

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"We shall come to that, sir," he said, with just a suspicion of impatience, "but first of yourself. Had I wished to discuss the servant, it would not have been here. What I wish to tell you concerns yourself. Is that unexpected?"

"By no means. But it is a subject of which I am very weary."

"And yet apparently one of sustained interest to others. You have in your service a young man named Otto Walther. Do you repose complete confidence in him?"

"The most absolute."

"Then you will be interested to know that at nine o'clock last night he attended a meeting of the Italian Society of so-called patriots at 29A Portland Place. Was that to your knowledge?"

Maurevale was very greatly interested.

"Indeed," he said with raised brows. "So you believe that Otto has turned politician. And Italian! That is quite extraordinary, Sir Malcolm."

"I ventured the opinion that you would think so. Let us see. Here is an account of his movements. He departs from Highlands Castle at half-past eleven o'clock; is in London at 1.11; drives from there to Eton Terrace, and appears to have an interview with a lady who was lately your guest, the Lady Constance Heliers; goes afterwards to some apartments in Welbeck Street, tenanted, we find, by his father, Dr. Frederick Walther; is unable to see that gentleman, and goes thence to the South Kensington Museum, spends a couple of hours there, and dines afterwards at Earl's Court. At nine he is in Portland Place, at the meet-

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ing of the Italian Society, where he remains until a quarter-past ten o'clock, when he accompanies his father back to Welbeck Street, and thence goes alone to Paddington. Do you not find that an interesting recital, Highness?"

Maurevale assented with a nod.

"In all particulars but one most interesting and accurate, Sir Malcolm."

"Do you mean to say——?"

"That all this is known to me? Yes; I mean to say so."

"And what is the particular we have overlooked?"

"Unimportant, but human. A lady accompanied our young friend to South Kensington, and dined with him at the exhibition afterwards." Sir Malcolm sighed.

"I had not imagined that you worked so zealously, or would watch those whom you trust."

"Pardon me, I am too old a student of human nature to conduct my experiments at hazard. Those who serve me are first taught to be meticulous, and after that to be elusive. The lad Otto has been watched, not because I fear him, but because I fear for him. He visited London to serve me—as you would serve me, Sir Malcolm, by the warning you are about to utter. At the same time I am really very much obliged to you."

"There is no question of obligation, sir. It has been known to us for some months that the agents of at least two Powers have been instructed to devote their whole attention to your affairs. Now we understand that the time for patience has passed, and that

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more drastic methods may be followed. Naturally, our first duty is to warn you."

"I affirm my sense of obligation. I can see that you are already disposed to take a wider view where this particular case is concerned. Does it go so far as to suppose Captain Ferman's innocence?"

"By no means. I am inclined to think that it supports an assumption of guilt."

"Indeed?"

"Supposing always that the dead lady was the obstacle to the success of the captain and his friends."

"I see, I see. Certain good people, being determined to steal what they cannot buy, find Lady Anna is in their way. But I remain perplexed."

"It is a delicate matter."

"Go on, go on——"

"They believed you were in love with her."

Maurevale inclined his head.

"That would be the common opinion. I understand it."

"And being in love with her, that you might bestow upon her knowledge which the others could not purchase or steal."

"In short, my dear Sir Malcolm, that I might surrender to her entreaty and come to an immediate understanding with the English Government at her call. I am glad they do her so much justice. At the same time my solicitude for the young man remains. Why should he have killed a woman who, if this account be true, was working for a common object? Surely your hypothesis would not make of him a traitor?"

Sir Malcolm drummed upon the table with his fingers.

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"I am afraid it is so, sir."

"Then, permit me to tell you it is an exceedingly foolish hypothesis."

"We shall establish it in court, I fear."

"Upon whose evidence?"

"Upon the evidence of circumstance and probability. The correspondence makes it plain. She implores him in her letters to abandon his hopes. What hopes? That she would rob you at his bidding. Are there others? Can you say that such a man worked for English employers? I think it is impossible. He was poor, and the Government which tempted him rich. Beware of its agents, sir, for when you become sufficiently dangerous—well, then I will answer for nothing."

"I remain your debtor. Were the information a little more specific it would be more valuable. I mean if there were names——"

"I have mentioned one. Your servant, Otto Walther. His friends will naturally be the objects of your suspicion. I see that your own agents are being employed in this matter. Let me counsel them to begin by watching this young man. Remember, his father was a German suspect five-and-twenty years ago. The skin is cast, but the man remains. So I say, vigilance—and, again, vigilance—and for the third time, vigilance."

"I shall not forget it. Meanwhile you forbid me to carry good news to Captain Ferman's friends?"

"It is impossible. That young man will pay the ultimate penalty as sure as I am sitting in this chair."

"Pardon me, Sir Malcolm, but you are standing."

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They laughed together, for the chief's earnestness had carried him to his feet, and he stood when he spoke of "vigilance." The jest passed, however, in an instant, and the two separated upon the more serious notes of menace and of warning, the one having learned much, the other little from the interview. Whatever had been Maurevale's attitude as an auditor he was deeply impressed by the earnestness of Sir Malcolm's words, and he left the building in a new mood of ultimate despair with which a deeper study of the tragedy did not fail to afflict him.

He worked to establish peace among the nations, and this was his reward; that he must defend his honour and his life against the nations' emissaries. Even here, in this land of liberty, in London, the heart of the world, men conspired that they might debase his hopes and make of him a discredited dreamer, who must pay the uttermost farthing for his faith in humanity and its destiny. The preacher of the noblest creed that man can recite, the creed of Peace, these schemers would buy his silence at a price, or, failing to buy it, resort to measures more desperate than purchase. This he had always known; but to-night the truth of it shone clear in the darkness of the labyrinth. He must protect himself against them that the innocent should not suffer by his ambitions. All his intellect, his wealth, his influence, must be brought to bear upon one object: the truth and its publication to the world.

The carriage had taken him from Scotland Yard to Park Lane, and he awoke from his reverie to find himself approaching the "little white house," known to every omnibusman as "Maury's," and very familiar to

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the many distinguished foreigners who visit London during the spring and summer months.

It was then a quarter to ten o'clock, and the social ferment of the night at its zenith.

He recognised many acquaintances; women enshrouded in satin and ermine who were rocked in the cradle of a luxurious equipage as they passed from stage to stage upon the exacting pilgrimage; men who hurried by in hansoms or taxicabs, familiar figures haunting the steps of clubs. Open windows, the visions of white figures and of stooping backs, the froth of music, the aureole of lamps spoke of ambitious hospitalities and of a response no more real. He espied the beggars lurking in the shadow of the park railings, and would ask himself again what is the true meaning of this play we call life, and whither must the truth or the justice of it be sought? When he answered that sympathy is the key, and by sympathy alone shall the riddle be read, he thought, he knew not why, of Stella Insole.

He had known thousands of women in his adventurous life, but never yet one who thus could compel remembrance, or remind him that the hours were so many since last he had seen her; and he began to be impatient because the traffic delayed him and the mass of carriages forbade him to press on quickly. When at last he entered the hall of his own house, he asked immediately if the young ladies had arrived from Streatly, and was answered by his butler that they were then upstairs, having delayed to dine until nine o'clock.

"Which is to say that they did not think you would return to-night, Highness," the man added, fearing

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with true menial apprehension that he might have to serve the repast anew. But Maurevale immediately undeceived him.

"I am going to the duke's reception in half-an-hour. Let them prepare me a bath. I will see Miss Stella in my study immediately . . . and afterwards if Paul is here——"

"He returned twenty minutes ago, Highness."

"Then let him come when I ring."

He passed on up the stairs and entered his study, a long, narrow room at the back of the house, lighted by lamps cunningly placed in the frieze, and harbouring books which the rarest taste had furnished. Here a moment later came Stella Insole, dressed in a gown of black lace and wearing an ornament of diamonds about her neck—and as she stood in the glow of the light, her eyes bright with expectancy and her hair aflame with threads of gold, he understood that she also had been counting the hours, and that impatience was not his alone.

"You sent for me, prince——"

"Indeed, yes, Stella—to hear you reproach me that it was not sooner. Let us see, it is four days since I have seen you—four days. Have you remembered that?"

"Oh yes—but I understood that it must be so."

"And that I must go away again immediately?"

She shook her head. Her quick breathing showed an agitation she could not hide.

"Will that be for long? I hope not."

"I hope so, too. When next I see you it will be at Lausanne for the Conference."

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Her eyes were wide open now.

"Do you wish me to go to Lausanne, then?"

He began to pace the room as though thinking deeply.

"We must have change. It is the master-key of life. I go to Switzerland for the Peace Congress, and afterwards to the East. You will naturally wish to visit your friends, and since London has so little to offer us, perhaps you would like to take your sister to France."

He paused and looked at her, and then, as though a look reproached him and he was ashamed of the subterfuge, he said:

"Stella, I wish you to accept the invitation of our old friend the Count of Fours, and to take your sister to the château at Aizy-la-Belle."

He knew that she would be astonished, but he was equally sure of her assent. Stella, indeed, was not thinking of herself at all, but of her sister Kitty, and of what absence must mean to her at such an hour. So much Maurevale understood without words, and taking her hand he said:

"It is wiser for both of you. These are dangerous hours, and the less Kitty knows of them the better. You will go to the count's house to help me, Stella—and to help your sister. He is a very pleasant gentleman, and his good wife has no faults but those proper to her sex. Let us help them, if we can, to a better understanding of each other. Above all things, let us try to clear her good name from the paltry suspicions which cluster about it. Will you not go to Aizy-la-Belle for that?"

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"Indeed, I will do so gladly."

"Then you shall start to-morrow morning. Meanwhile I am all curiosity to hear what has happened at Highlands in my absence. You have much to tell me, I am sure, Stella."

"So much that I hardly know how to tell you at all."

"Then do not think of me in the matter. I shall be a stranger to whom you are telling everything from the beginning. It is important that you should do so, Stella. Our friend's life depends upon our candour. We must hide nothing from ourselves, not even our thoughts. Now sit there and tell me. I shall not interrupt you."

Very quietly and methodically she began to tell him that she had visited Lady Anna's dressing-room in his absence and had searched it anew lest anything had been overlooked. When she spoke of her belief that she heard steps while she did so, and was convinced that some one had watched her while she worked, the prince listened with grave face. But a stranger confession was to come. This very morning, as she was leaving Paddington Station, the same idea had recurred to her. For an instant she heard behind her on the platform the same pattering of feet which had so alarmed her at Streatly. Now as then her attempt at discovery had been vain. There had been no one near her to excite suspicion. A holiday crowd surged upon the platform, but was not remarkable. She did not believe that she had been followed.

"None the less," said Maurevale, "you were convinced of the steps?"

"I am sure of it—I could not be mistaken."

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"A quick step?"

"A shuffling step, as though some one walked in slippers."

"Did you look round quickly?"

"At once."

"And remarked no one near you?"

"Except a porter and a woman of the working classes."

"So that it might have been a hallucination?"

"I do not think it was."

"But it might have been. And upon this occasion our young friend Otto Walther was not there to help you as he had been on the night of which you speak?"

"Oh yes; he came up with us from Streatly."

"He accompanied you—let me see, did Otto question you after you had visited the dressing-room?"

"Yes, several times. I thought him very anxious."

"To know of your discoveries—which is odd, since you made none?"

"None of importance."

"You would not have done. There was nothing whatever in that room, I remember, but a glove in the right-hand drawer of the dressing-table?"

"And in the glove——"

He turned in his chair and looked her straight in the face.

"There was something in the glove, child?"

She coloured with a girl's pride that she should have been able to answer him, and fumbling an instant with a locket attached to her bracelet she took therefrom a white tablet and laid it on the table before him.

"That was in the glove," she said.

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CHAPTER X

PAUL THE RUSSIAN

MAUREVALE laid the tablet upon a sheet of crimson blotting-paper, and, taking a magnifying-glass from the drawer upon the right-hand side of the table, he studied the little white object with the profoundest care. Evidently he was both surprised and perplexed, and his mind worked visibly upon certain perceptions which had come to him.

Stella, upon her part, watched him with a child's desire for approval. Would he say that she had done well? Would he ask her in all earnestness for that help of her comradeship which, hitherto, had been but the subject of his flattery? If she might but win his whole confidence, the confidence of a man who was known to distrust women and to despise their intellect! This was in her thoughts as she watched and waited for him to speak.

"Let me see," he said at last, "you found this in Lady Anna's glove——?"

"Yes."

"It was turned half inside out, I remember, and was such a glove as women use when they are travelling."

"Or driving in the country."

"A kid glove, and new. She might have worn it on the afternoon of her death."

"I think it very possible."

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"And evidently she carried the tablet in it because she had been suffering very much from headache. That would be quite natural. You, however, brought it to me in the locket upon your bracelet, and that sets me thinking. Did Lady Anna, I wonder, ever carry her tablets in a locket?"

"I asked the maid Berthe that——"

"You did! Capital! And she said——"

"That sometimes her mistress carried them in the heart of green jade, which is missing."

"My dear child, this is a most excellent service. Jack Ferman may yet live to thank you for it. I hope so—but I will not deceive you by any false hopes. We are but upon the threshold of our task. A hundred difficulties confront us, any one of which may be fatal. Let us resolve to meet them together, Stella, resolutely and with courage. You will go to France to-morrow, but I have little hope of your work there. What is wanted is the inspiration of an instant which shall reveal a dead woman's secret, and show us why we have not guessed it. That may yet come—to one of us, Stella. Should it be you, lose not an hour in finding me wheresoever I am. And remember, I have chosen you of many to be my helper in this."

"I could never forget it. At Lausanne I will tell you what I have done."

He sighed deeply. This Lausanne, with what hopes of an inspired ambition had he not contemplated his visit thither a month ago. And now he must think rather of an altar of pride upon which a woman who had loved him lay already dead; an altar whose fires

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were those not of good will toward men but of vengeance.

Stella Insole understood this quite well, and as he rose to bid her farewell she spoke of it.

"I had hoped so much of Lausanne."

"Yes, my child. Is it anything to you that I dream dreams?"

"The world would not call them dreams if it knew the truth."

"But, being ignorant, sends the servants of its disbelief to silence or to kill me. Such is humanity's faith in humanity. Such will ever be the rewards of him who says, 'There shall be no more war.' But I am grown a philosopher, and I go where philosophy must serve me. Is it not eleven o'clock? Lady Constance will be losing patience, and that would be a tragedy. Good-night, Stella; let us keep a little faith in humanity even yet."

He held out his hand and caught her own for a moment in his. She was very pale, and her heart beat strangely.

"I wish you were not going to see Lady Constance," she said.

He asked her why.

"Because I'm afraid of her."

"A woman's just estimate. I fear her also, and for that reason I am going to see her. Rest assured, little friend, my enemies are known to me, and while they are known I am content. It is ignorance which is perilous, and against that we are powerless."

He spoke with some emotion, and it was not hidden from her that he was sensible of the perils now sur-

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rounding his path and of the mysteries growing more profound every hour and baffling him by their changing perplexities. But this ebb of courage passed instantly, and, bidding her write to him every day, and promising that he himself would not forget how precious the news might be to her, he left her to return to her sister with what message her affection might dictate.

It was growing very late, as he had said, and his movements henceforth were impatient. When a man stepped forward from the shadows of the hall and expressed a desire to speak with him he turned half about with a gesture of despair, but discovering him to be no other than his foreign secretary, Paul, displeasure gave place to gratification, and he bade the young Russian—for such was the secretary's nationality—step into his brougham with him and tell him the news as they went. This the young fellow did very willingly, and they had no sooner entered the carriage than he began to speak freely of the work he had done during the recent days.

"Your Highness has received the report concerning Herr Otto Walther?"

"I have studied it very closely, Paul."

"There is nothing to add to it."

"But you will see that his father, the worthy Dr. Frederick, is kept under close observation."

"It shall be done by a picked man, Highness. I think the Frenchman, Clouson, is the best for the task. M. Lépine, the Paris Prefect, recommended him highly to us, you will remember."

"I remember perfectly. Let him be chosen. He will watch the doctor night and day—and his friends.

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The German correspondence particularly should be useful. He will need brains if he is to make anything of it. Have you had any news of the maid Berthe, the young lady who is so very anxious to hang this unfortunate young fellow who is charged with the crime? I had hope there."

"I fear we shall disappoint your Highness. She has not yet left the castle, and has been seen by nobody. But she has received a telegram."

"Ah! then her friends are not idle. Did you obtain a copy of it?"

"Certainly, but your Highness could not read it by this light. It is strange, however, and worthy of notice—in French, and a proverb. 'Le cœur ne veut douloir ce que l'œil ne peut voir.'"

"Meaning that what the eye sees not, of that the heart will not complain. I find it strange, as you say. When was it received?"

"Yesterday at half-past six o'clock."

"From London?"

"From Vigo Street, Highness."

The prince was very much interested. Some minutes passed and found him quite silent, but presently he asked:

"Has she been away from Highlands at all?"

"Twice upon the river, Highness."

"A curious employment for a woman who has just lost a mistress to whom she was devoted. Which way did she go?"

"To Pangbourne——"

"Ah! to the scene of our unhappy discovery. And then?"

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"She waited there as though expecting some one. But none appeared, and she returned with apparent reluctance to the castle. I may say at once that the telegram was not answered."

The prince assented with a nod. They had come by this time to the top of Piccadilly, and were just turning eastward toward the Duke of Asherton's house. Indicating that his driver should proceed very slowly, the prince passed to other topics as though this were already dismissed.

"The woman must be kept under close observation. Your own tasks, Paul, have a wider field. I fear I must send you to the East."

"To the East, Highness?"

"Yes, I want you to search the history of the young Earl of Farrard, and to discover for me the names of all the places which he and his sister visited between the years 1900 and 1905. If necessary, you must follow in his steps. But I may think it wiser to go myself. That will be as your story decides. You will lose no time, Paul."

"Not an hour, Highness."

"Then let me hear immediately what progress you are making. This is the duke's, I think. Well, I may hear much or little to-night—but I am beginning to doubt if England, or, indeed, Europe, can tell me the whole. I am much in the hands of my friends, Paul . . . very much."

"They are the hands of those who would give their lives for your Highness."

"I believe it, and am grateful to them. Do you return to Highlands to-night?"

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"If possible, sir."

"Then tell my servant Otto that we are going to show his old enemies the Admiralty what our brains can do, at Shoeburyness, in a few days' time. Let him be prepared."

"I will not forget, Highness."

The carriage turned into the well-known courtyard of the duke's house at the words, and the prince descended without any further remark. He was very late, and the majority of the guests had already arrived, but one carriage followed him to the door, and he was by no means displeased to see that its occupants were no other than Lady Constance Heliers and that notoriously rich and amiable youth, Rupert Wally, the Australian sportsman. These shook hands with him very cordially, and passed before him to the orgy upon the staircase.

Maurevale, however, stood a moment in deep thought.

"She has taken to love-making, then?" he said to himself, and added, "with an honest man, I perceive. Well, that is not what I had wished . . . and I do not think I shall find the heart of green jade in this house."

He shrugged his shoulders, and went on up the stairs.

And as he went a bishop linked arms with him, and began to speak of the dead woman in tones at once of curiosity and of awe.

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CHAPTER XI

A NEW NAME IS HEARD

THE Duchess of Asherton's receptions were in a way political, which, as a wit remarked, was as good as to say that they were politically in the way.

The dear old duke was notorious for his amours and his political indiscretions, and had more than once threatened to destroy his party by a troublesome gift for the truth, exceedingly embarrassing both to politicians and to women. The duchess, on the other hand, smiled sweetly upon all the derelicts from Westminster, and having promised them baronetcies in a whisper, sent them back to their pens the most loyal and devoted followers of a Prime Minister who was not even at the pains to remember their names.

Maurevale had often been pressed by the duchess to be present upon these occasions, and not infrequently chided for his absence. She welcomed him this night with a fervour that was not all a sham; and regardless of the bishop, who had just begun to speak of the possibilities of Ferman's guilt, she bade them make way for his Highness, and carried him at once to the centre of the scene, where stood Herr Krussman, the famous German diplomatist, and the Grand Duke Ferdinand, about to attend the Peace Congress in the name of the Czar. These received Maurevale with a cordiality which nothing but self-interest could excuse. He was the one man in London they were most desirous to see.

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"Herr Krussman, do you know the prince? And you, duke—of course, you know each other. Now where is Bertie—we really must find Bertie, or he will never forgive me. Why, there he is—I thought he would not be far away."

Thus the duchess, as she introduced the cosmopolitans to each other. The young man Bertie, otherwise Mr. Herbert Alltalk, now pushed his way through the press, and having wiped the perspiration from his steaming forehead, he greeted the prince with lofty cordiality.

"Good of you to come under the circumstances. Every one is wondering if you are going to Lausanne. I'm sure Herr Krussman wants to know that. Don't you, Excellency?"

Herr Krussman bowed.

"We could not fail to be interested in anything Prince Maurevale does."

"I take it as a great compliment," said Maurevale quietly; from which moment he turned to speak to the foreigners, quite ignoring the young man.

"Have you been long in England, Excellency?"

"Five days—I am fortunate in the sixth. They told me I would not see you to-night. The surprise is the more welcome."

"And the expression no less. You were doubtful about my going to Lausanne, then?"

"Frankly, we doubted it—unless you had come to a decision."

"To offer my work to the nations."

"Or to one nation," intervened Herr Krussman.

The prince shrugged his shoulders.

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"I wish to be quite frank with you, gentlemen. My work henceforth is solely in the interests of the peace of Europe."

"For which his Majesty works unceasingly," said the Grand Duke.

"And earns the homage of all thinking men thereby," said the prince.

"But the suspicions of the diplomatists and the sneers of those who preach peace in the newspapers——" rejoined the German. Maurevale ignored this.

"I have long believed," he said, "that science and not diplomacy will make an end of war. The silent gun, the high explosive which shall not be local in its action, the torpedo against which your nets are unavailing—these are great mediators. My years have been given to the study . . . if I think it completed, well, I am the optimist and none is compelled to believe. But incredulity is a matter of indifference to me. Rather, gentlemen, I seek honesty."

They smiled together—the Grand Duke kindly, the German with the air of a man who was listening to a fairy-tale.

"An *ipse dixit* is of little value in the councils of Europe to-day," he said. "Your gospel stands or falls not by peace but by war, prince. How are you going to convince us at Lausanne? How shall we convince our Governments in turn that your claims—pardon me—are not open to the suspicion of an exaggeration which would be fatal to them?"

"That," retorted the prince, "I shall leave to the delegates."

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"Then you will attend the council?"

"It is my earnest hope."

Herr Krussman watched him closely.

"Ah," he said, "then I perceive you are aware of what will be said if you do not come."

"Perfectly aware; they will say I am an impostor, and cease to consider me further."

"It might be their misfortune, prince."

"It certainly would be so——"

The Grand Duke was about to reply to him when the young man, Herbert Alltalk, having demolished a Cabinet Minister with a fury of eloquence which put the music to shame, turned again to join in the talk; but at that moment Lady Constance touched Maurevale upon the shoulder, and reproached him for neglect.

"My dear man, are you really so dreadfully annoyed with me?"

"Why should I be annoyed?"

"I have a thousand things to say to you, and you will hear none of them. Let us go where the world no longer turns upon its own axis—or somebody else's. There is news."

She said no more, and Maurevale followed her quietly to a corner of the balcony overlooking Piccadilly. The press was lighter here, and the curtain shielded them a little from the turmoil of sound and the elbows of the schemers. At the same time they could see all that went on in the room had they the mind to do so.

Lady Constance was dressed in a satin gown of a deep red shade. Her ornaments were diamonds, of which she wore a magnificent tiara and a pendant, whose real stones had long been the security for some

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of her many gambling debts. There was no wilder bridge player in London, and none with whom the shady gamester played more willingly. She owned horses whose performances were, in sporting parlance, as black as her eyes. But of her wit and shrewdness there was, unfortunately, as little doubt as of her social insolvency—a fact with which Maurevale was very well acquainted.

"Well," he said, "and what is the news I am to hear?"

"That your man Blandy has been seen in Calais."

"Indeed, then I wonder that those who saw him did not communicate with the police."

"Oh, but they are friends of yours. Do you remember Archie Kerrington, Lord Sapiston's son? He has just come over, and he is quite positive that he saw Mr. Blandy on the platform at Calais."

"Did he tell you so himself?"

"I haven't seen him yet—but Mr. Wally tells me that he was in the club this afternoon telling everybody."

"Ah, but I do not remember that I have had the pleasure of receiving Mr. Kerrington at my house."

"He says that he knows Mr. Blandy quite well—he used to see him at Newmarket. I think we ought to do something for poor Jack Ferman's sake. Now, really, don't you believe him to be quite innocent?"

"It is difficult to answer you. Innocent is an abstract term."

"But you must have definite opinions. A man always has."

"Especially when he is ignorant. I am naturally

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deeply interested—and my interest brings me here to-night."

"That is why I came—I have been trying to see you for some days. Do you know what people are saying——?"

"I have been too busy to ask."

"They are saying that you ought not to go to Lausanne until Jack has been cleared."

"And do you agree with them?"

"Oh, absolutely. I think it should be a point of honour. The poor woman was your guest. Do you not owe it to her to remain here?"

"I have never thought of it in that light. Perhaps there is some exaggeration. The evidence against your friend may not be what you believe."

"There is no doubt of it at all. Sir Malcolm has told my father that nothing can save him. Oh, my dear man, the letters. Why, every one knew that the pair of them were working for the Admiralty. Apparently you were the last to become aware of it."

"If I was unaware of it!"

"Then you knew?"

"Let us say that I understand women."

"A miracle! And that antediluvian sentiment common to schoolgirls saved her at the eleventh hour! Really, if it were not so very dreadful it would be exciting. She quarrels with her too progressive friend, and he, they say, kills her. You really have some responsibility in the matter."

"I am unaware of it, and so I am here."

"And we must keep you—set snares if necessary.

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I am thinking of one at Goodwood. Why not come down to the duke's box for the week?"

"Would that help Captain Ferman?"

"I think it might. We would try to get Sir Malcolm down, if only for the night. And I would ask other friends of Jack's—we could have a council of war."

"But that is the date I should set out for Lausanne—by the way, there is your friend, Dr. Frederick Walther. He appears to be looking for you."

"For me—how absurd! I hardly know him. Is he not the father of your tame youth with the big eyes? I thought you said so."

"It is true—but I thought that you knew him well."

"Quite a hopeless mistake. Let us talk of something more pleasant. Now, won't you come to Goodwood if I ask you——"

"The invitation would be quite irresistible if it were not for Lausanne."

"My father says that if you knew what he knows you would not go to Lausanne at all."

"A wise man, undoubtedly. Is he good enough to add reasons?"

"He thinks you have too many friends in England, too many interests here; besides, the Kaiser means to wreck the Conference. You should go to Berlin first . . . the other thing is make-believe."

"I will remember it. Meanwhile I am convinced that Dr. Frederick is looking for you. Why, here he is."

It was quite true. The doctor, altogether a typically benevolent old gentleman with a white beard and the face of a prophet in the pictures, having wandered about the great saloon aimlessly, now sauntered out

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on the balcony, and seeing Maurevale, greeted him with cordiality. The glance which he exchanged with the Lady Constance as he did so was instantaneous and full of meaning to one who had eyes to read it. Maurevale, however, seemed quite unconscious of it.

"My dear doctor, what a pleasant surprise!"

"I am delighted to meet you, sir—of whom my dear son never ceases to speak with affection."

"Ah, but Otto is a very good boy. Have you seen him lately?"

"It is many weeks . . . but I am intruding. Is not this a lady whom I had the pleasure of meeting once at your house? I thought so—but I have such a poor memory for names. Pray forgive me, madam."

"My dear doctor, I was once your patient, and you saved my life. No physician should forget such a miracle as that. But perhaps you only remember the dead."

"It would depend upon their sex," said the old man sagely, at which they all laughed and returned together to the saloon. Just as they entered a voluble German attaché went up to the doctor and greeted him in his own tongue. The remark appeared to concern Egypt and a certain Tahir Pasha, concerning whom the doctor had been inquiring.

"Well," said the prince to Lady Constance, as he was about to bid her good-night, "I will remember your invitation to Goodwood."

"That would be splendid of you. If you are tired of London before then, do not forget the 'box.'"

"Your cottage at Wargrave?"

"Yes, I am there every week-end—sometimes almost

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alone. There would always be room for Prince Maurevale."

"That is an invitation I must underline. If I thought that I might meet Archie Kerrington there, and hear the news of my man Blandy."

"Oh," she cried, her black eyes flashing with excitement, "I will ask him if you promise to come."

"Then I will promise—for, let us see, shall we say Saturday week?"

"It would be perfectly delightful of you."

They parted upon it, she going off on the arm of Rupert Wally, he making for the door as though to leave the house. Half-way down the great staircase, however, Maurevale espied the bishop, who loved to talk of the dead; and, making the coming trial of Captain Ferman an excuse, he led the ecclesiastical worthy into an alcove of the conservatory, and there detained him for ten minutes with all the gossip, pertinent or otherwise, he could command. Then, as though uncertain of his purpose, he returned to the door of the big room and watched the throng until he had detected the white-headed doctor and Lady Constance.

They were together engaged in ardent conversation, and almost regardless of others about them. Apparently the meek and philanthropic physician was much agitated, and reproached his partner for something she had or had not done—and so far was the dispute carried that the pair went out to the balcony to resume it. Maurevale in his turn, directly he had made sure of this, descended to the hall, and sent his footman for his car. His work at the duke's was done, but he understood that elsewhere it was but beginning.

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CHAPTER XII

STELLA WRITES FROM BLOIS

THE car was a Mercédès limousine, employed despite the warmth of the July day, and the direction the driver received was to go to Henley Bridge first, and then as he should be ordered. But the real destination was the Lady Constance's bungalow at Wargrave.

Maurevale could hope for little news from Stella Insole, who had been but a few hours in France. He had, however, received a letter from her and was glad that she had remembered his wishes.

The note itself spoke both of haste and of travel, being written upon the paper of an hotel at Blois and obviously in an interval of waiting.

To Maurevale it came as a message from the heart of a comrade, and he wondered at his satisfaction. Many women had written to him during his eventful life, but he could recall no letter which moved him to a similar emotion or had been received with such pleasure.

And what images it conjured up—of his own splendid home at Highlands Castle, of the spreading lawns and the fabled yews and the secret places of the gardens wherein she had walked.

All the beauty of the house was associated with her now that she was absent, and no scene could be imagined which she did not dominate. As a child she had come to the castle, and as a child he tried to believe that she

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had gone forth. It was hard to admit that love already might fold its wings about her, and a man utter the common platitudes with Stella Insole for their object.

Here was the shadow upon the page and one that fell darkly before Maurevale's eyes.

Otto Walther, his assistant, was in love with her. The lad had confessed as much and asked permission to speak. And he, Maurevale, had not known how to answer him.

Otto Walther, to whose genius he owed so much! Otto Walther, the dark-eyed dreamer whose name might be remembered when his own was forgotten! Did not the police say that he, also, was among the suspects?

In that house of mystery there were many rooms. Whither should he seek the key which would unlock the golden door?

He tore the envelope of Stella's letter and found it less brief than he had expected. She spoke of the journey gratefully, and of her sister Kitty's well-being. The old count had met them in Paris and taken them thence in his son's motor to Blois, whence the château lay at a distance of twenty kilometres.

"I cannot remember, dear prince," she went on, "if you are well acquainted with this country of which one hears so very much in these motoring days. Surely the realities of its beauty must survive the onslaughts of popularity and leave it unspoiled. To-day we have driven many miles upon the banks of that fair river, the Loire, by which lies France's Arcadia. Not a boat anywhere upon its wide waters; nothing to be seen but sandbanks and deep pools which speak of dead

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years. The roads themselves go straight as an arrow toward an horizon of limpid blue. There are countless miles of acacias, which must make this a fair garden in the spring-time—but the boundless fields are eloquent of the earth to which the peasants bend as though the call of a final destiny compelled them.

"I would have had Kitty see something of Paris, if by seeing it I might teach her to forget. What a rare mystery is a young girl's love, dear prince, and how many are its humiliations. Had it been she herself who suffered, her friends would have known nothing of it; but because it is the man who loved and slighted her she is not afraid to kneel to us that we may save him. What her own life henceforth must be I do not dare to think; but will it not be reward enough if we can give her but a few years of that happiness her courage has deserved?

"For my part, I speak to her ever of hope, and of that hope which lies in the shadow of a beloved name. While your friendship remains it is forbidden to despair. Far away here in this beautiful land the reality of all we have left is more cruel as it is more distant. We think of you, sir, and reproach follows that selfishness which permits us to think of ourselves. And yet, God knows, I grieve for Kitty, for she is heartbroken.

"You asked me, prince, to speak very frankly of all I see at Aizy-la-Belle, and that I shall not hesitate to do. The dear old Count of Fours was much agitated when he met us in Paris, and went in perpetual fear that some unpleasant person would discover and annoy him. He asked me more than once if you had

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ever been in Egypt or knew that the Lady Anna had been there. Much of what he said I did not understand at all, especially his references to a certain Tahir Pasha, whom he seems to have known many years ago. The way he bundled us out of the place was quite troublesome, and when a little Egyptian boy found his way to the door of the car and tried to speak to him he became almost apologetic. He is very much changed since the happy days at Highlands—rolls the perpetual cigarette quite carelessly and uses naughty words when the detestable little dog, Cæsar, comes to him to be nursed. Do not you remember that at Highlands the wretched little beast was hardly ever off his knees—thus are the idols downcast.

"I have no news of madame yet. This, I fear, is not a house of amities to which we are going, and yet I am sure the dear old count is very glad to have us, despite his evident fear of his good lady. His anxiety to hear all the news concerning Jack Ferman is painful, and it is ridiculous to remember that vulgar rumour has connected him with the crime because his stick was found in the boat.

"He begs you write to him yourself and assure him that all is going as your friends could wish. Alas, I cannot believe that it is so, for I am so foolish as to think that were it the truth I, before others, would have heard the good tidings.

"I have written much of Kitty in this letter, and so, dear prince, let my conclusions be of her.

"She dreamed a dream of Jack last night, and it has greatly affected her.

"She thought he came to her across the sea to tell

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her that he was condemned, and to say that he was not unprepared to die. Her faith in him is quite noble, and I would be the last to treat it lightly. Why he ever left her for Anna I do not know, for his letters to Kitty were always frank, and if he had ceased to love her I am sure he would have had the honesty to say so.

"Is not this one more of the many mysteries I pray God we shall unravel?"

. . . . . .

Maurevale folded the letter carefully and put it into his pocket.

Many perplexities now joined to the pleasure which its perusal had given him, and some of them were profound.

Thrice in a few days had he heard this name, Tahir Pasha—and from places so widely separated.

Already it began to appear that Ferman's safety lay in no subtle defence based on the facts of the case, but upon the discovery of this mysterious actor, Tahir Pasha, and of his story. And if that were so, time had become of the essence of success—and this must be a race of the wits against time, with an innocent man's life for the stake.

On the other hand—and here was a thought which shook the house of conjecture to its foundations—Ferman himself might dread the discovery of Tahir Pasha, as he would dread it if he were guilty and had taken an Eastern accomplice in his crime. The motive became of supreme importance, and was difficult to estimate. Had it been a sudden and not inexplicable passion for a woman who did not love him, then motive

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surely was all sufficient. But Jack Ferman had been very much in love with little Kitty Insole for a season, and he had known Lady Anna during that time. How came he then thus to be the victim of a volte-face which threw him back upon a mad desire to possess this beautiful woman and to kill her because she denied him?

Well might Reason stand baffled before the very clues she had discovered. Well might he, Maurevale, continue to say that nothing but a miracle could snatch Ferman from the gallows.

. . . . . .

The car had carried him to Henley by this time, and he lunched at the club and sat afterwards to smoke a cigar upon the terrace overlooking the river.

The afternoon had turned dull and cheerless, and few boats were abroad. From time to time heavy clouds gathered above the hills by Hambledon and threatened rain to scare the pleasure-seeker—a circumstance which caused the prince some satisfaction and seemed to cap his plans.

To the few launches or rowboats which went up or down the river to the Temple or the Marsh Lock he paid but scant attention. His object was to present himself at Lady Constance's cottage at such an hour as would justify him staying the night even if he must put up at an inn. Fortune, however, had something better in store for him, and when he discovered it, a suggestion rather of the inevitable than of coincidence attended it.

This was a little after three o'clock.

He had finished his cigar and contemplated sending for his car that he might make a detour upon the road

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to Oxford, when an electric launch came down from Marsh Lock, and who should there be sitting in its bows but that benevolent old gentleman, Frederick Walther.

None knew this old hypocrite better than the prince, but the surprise of the encounter was so great that for a moment he quite failed to recognise him. When surprise passed, he remembered the cottage and the telegram which spoke of her ladyship's indisposition. Surely the old doctor was returning from a visit to Wargrave!

Maurevale had no doubt upon the latter point. Constance had told him of its virtues often—and indeed since the old duke had lost nine-tenths of his money in a brewery, a speculation which left him a poor but honest teetotaller—the cottage at Wargrave and its modest display constituted the main part of her luxuries.

As for the doctor, his appearance was not so benign as usual, and even a passer-by might have noticed the abstraction of his manner; while a vulgar youth would have described him as looking for sixpence between the floor boards.

Wearing a frock-coat and a crushed straw hat, he had the air of a professional man who had snatched an hour from study or consulting-room, but hastened back to it with a problem which compelled him to expedition.

This also was fortunate for the prince, who otherwise would hardly have escaped detection, at what cost to his plans he might not say.

As it was, he did not move from his seat but just watched the doctor until the launch had gone as far as Temple Island; then, acting with decision, he re-entered

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his car and drove as fast as he dare to Marlow Station on the Great Western Railway.

"This old gentleman," he argued, "has been to see dear Constance at Wargrave, and is returning to London from Marlow to avoid any possibility of being recognised at the local station. Some urgent news sent him there, and most probably was the same news which caused her ladyship to decline to see me. Well, I must discover the nature of it at her own house—but first to be sure of my supposition."

This was no difficult matter, for he had ordered his driver to wait by Marlow Bridge, and anon the launch appeared and set the doctor down at the landing-stage. Still preoccupied, but apparently fearing detection no longer, the old gentleman directed a firm step toward the railway station, and so was lost to view. Immediately afterwards, Maurevale set out for Wargrave and arrived at the Lady Constance's cottage exactly at seven o'clock.

It was a gay little building, bungalow-fashioned, and built just where the river sweeps to Shiplake and the islands. A kindlier evening, with a flood of warm sunlight, showed the white walls and green jalousies to perfection; while all the air was redolent of the sweet perfume of mignonette, which disputed with the roses and the crimson ramblers for possession of the garden.

Such an hour suggested the lightest side of life—love and laughter and music of the night; but it was hardly typical of that very magnificent person, Lady Constance, or the atmosphere of gaudy shams in which she moved. Maurevale smiled quietly as he crossed the long conservatory which guarded its inner door and

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rang boldly at the big brass bell. He would look to find Phyllis here—not my Lady of Belgravia.

A sour-looking manservant opened the door and said bluntly, "Her ladyship is not at home." When, however, he had taken a second look at his visitor and had heard his quiet response, his attitude became very different, and he appeared not unwilling to qualify his negative.

"I beg your Highness's pardon—but perhaps you did not receive her ladyship's telegram?"

"A telegram," said the prince, boldly entering the hall, "then her ladyship is ill——"

"Not ill, your Highness, but unable to see anybody to-night."

"Ah," said the prince quietly; "then I will beg her to do me the favour—but here she is, my good fellow, and will speak for herself."

This was very true. Lady Constance herself, hearing voices, had permitted her curiosity to get the better of her prudence, and appeared without warning at the head of the little flight of stairs leading to her boudoir. A clever actress in an ordinary way, this situation was too much for her, and every look, every attitude, spoke of chagrin.

"But, prince," she stammered as she came down, "I sent you a telegram."

He affected to treat it quite lightly.

"My lucky star shines," he rejoined; "a telegram speaks of anxieties. How many things I should have imagined if that telegram had deceived me. As it is, I know the worst—the village inn and a bed upon which it is impossible to sleep."

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"Then Herbert has told you that I must go to town?"

She looked at her manservant, who had received no instructions to tell this particular lie, and he cast modest eyes upon the parquet. Maurevale found the situation quite delightful.

"Herbert forgot to mention it, but I could imagine no other justification for your malady. You are going to town, my dear lady, to see a specialist—and this, oddly enough, is the last night of the opera. Well, well, the inn, I hear, is passable, and I am really too weary to motor back to-night. Shall I drive you to the station, by the way, before my man stables the car? Your train, of course, is the 8.24, as I see you are dining. There is plenty of time, therefore, and if you decide to honour me by an invitation——"

He laughed and indicated the open door of the dining-room, where a maid was busy about a flower-laden table. Plainly, whatever were her ladyship's engagements, she meant to dine before fulfilling them, and, so intending, her last excuse for sending this most unwelcome visitor to an inn had vanished. Evidently she was at her wits' ends, and no art could conceal the fact.

"My dear Maurevale," she said, falling naturally to the familiar manner, "you know perfectly well there is not a man in England I would sooner see in this house. Something troublesome has happened—that is all. Let us have dinner at once, and then decide what we will do. I put you off with the greatest reluctance, and you know it. Do not make matters worse by being cynical."

"Cynical, my dear lady! I was never more serious

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—or more hungry in my life. As you are in such a hurry, and I see they are about to serve dinner, shall it be *costume de voyage*, and will you forgive me——?"

"Yes, yes," she cried, "let us dine as we are, by all means, and you can tell me all the news before I go."

They sat to table presently, and an excellent little dinner was served. Maurevale found this so well chosen that he was compelled to believe that it had been specially prepared in view of his visit. In that case, Lady Constance had received her ill news by the first post that day, and had telegraphed to Frederick Walther either to confirm or to discuss it. Why, then, did she propose to go to London? Or was her proposal mere bluff, the tale that came first to her lips, and one suggested by Maurevale himself? He thought it must be so—her chagrin could be set down but to one cause.

She expected a visitor at the cottage, and would see his privately. Maurevale was quite sure of this and the conviction gave him much satisfaction. He, also, would venture to discover the identity of the unknown person who could provoke such a flutter in this dainty dovecot.

With this eventful object in view, he kept his eyes wide open, and did his best to amuse.

That the assignation was in any way connected with her ladyship's partialities for flirtations of mild and other varieties seemed against the probabilities. The suggestion flattered neither his vanity nor his common sense. He knew that she had been scheming for months to get him to her cottage, and did not believe that she would have sacrificed such a diplomatic opportunity had not the motive been altogether of a singular nature.

So he talked to her in his lightest mood, and studied

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her manner as he did so. Certainly she was a beautiful woman, and it was a thousand pities that the foolish old duke had fooled away the fortunes of his house. Had it been otherwise, his daughter would not have been reduced to these questionable friendships, or thrust back upon the society of knaves. Poverty is a hard taskmaster, and chooses the task.

Maurevale remembered this while he entertained her, and pity rather than contempt lay at the back of his thoughts. He never warred against women, and would not war against this woman. When he spoke of himself, his object was not to learn her opinion, but that of her friends, known and unknown.

"You have read of our little entertainment at Shoeburyness?" he asked, when dessert had been served; "but do you read the papers, by the way?"

"At intervals—it is always pleasant to know that dreadful things did not happen yesterday."

"And so you read the news of the day before—a capital plan."

"But I knew you were brilliant," she said; and then archly, "You could not fail to be, and I hear the Admiralty was delighted with your work."

He pretended to take it seriously.

"I have done enough to bring half the rogues of Europe upon my tracks. Perhaps I have also done something for our friend, Jack Ferman."

"Really—that would be good to hear. They say there is no hope for him. Is it so?"

"Ah, if I could tell you. There are possibilities—but no certainties—at least I should not have said so forty-eight hours ago."

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She opened her eyes.

"And now?"

"Oh, now—well, now I know something."

He watched her as he uttered the words, and observed that her whole will was bent upon the suppression of an apprehension which threatened to betray her. Her interest in Jack Ferman he had always believed to be both curious and sentimental, but he would not accuse her of inhumanity.

"You know something," she exclaimed at length; and then, with the effusiveness of a born social actress, she said: "Oh, my dear man, you are not going to tell me that Captain Jack is safe?"

"I would give much to be able to say it. Do not forget that I have received him as my guest, and that this charge has come from my house."

"How could I forget it? Impossible. I am not a victim of nerves, and I don't believe in ghosts the least bit in the world—but I will tell you that hardly a night has passed that I have not dreamed of Lady Anna. Why, I can see her now as she came down to dinner on that awful night; I can hear her laughter, and remember that I thought that tears were not far off. Forget! I am not likely to forget that!"

"Your womanly instincts would forbid. It is impossible that any one who knew her should either forget or forgive. For my part, I will hunt this assassin down to the very grave; I have sworn it, and I will keep my word."

"Then Heaven help the guilty person, my dear Maurevale—if you find him."

"I shall certainly find him. Whether it will be in

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time to save Ferman's life I cannot tell you. But that he will be found I am as certain as that these are excellent peaches."

"I am glad that you like them. And it is always good to hear a man who is not afraid of his own convictions. Can you tell me anything of this elusive monster, I wonder, or is that a question which should not be asked?"

"By no means. It is a fair question. In the first place, I would have you know that one of his friends is a German."

"A German!"

"Yes, a German and a woman—though generally believed to be a man."

She laughed, and by her laughter betrayed her sense of relief.

"That is a story of a hundred years ago, is it not?"

"Not at all; it is a story of to-day."

"And the name of this interesting person——?"

"Oh, her name is Ludwig Monheim—but, pardon me, you appear to be ill. The room is too hot for you, I fear."

"I am very stupid, prince. Don't notice me—these July nights are intolerable."

"Then let us go outside—or, if you prefer it, I will open the other window. That is better, is it not? And now, what was I saying? Why, of course, that this German woman being dead——"

"Dead! you did not say that she was dead."

"Such are the facts. She was drowned as she attempted to board my boat off Canvey Island on the

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night after I had demonstrated my torpedo before the Admiralty at Sheerness."

"How very dramatic! And, of course, her secrets are buried with her?"

"Far from it—they are already in the possession of the police. A crimson tarboosh, such as Egyptians wear, was found in the boat. We have now to trace her accomplices—and, will you believe me, our quest carries us first to the West End of London."

"To the West End of London—really, it is overpoweringly hot here——"

"Agreed—your courage is greater than your strength. Let me give you a little brandy—you will be the better for it. And I see that the decanter is here."

She was deadly pale, and fanned herself incessantly. A keen observer might have noticed that Maurevale acted with unusual rapidity, but with less than his usual adroitness. He fumbled with the stopper of the decanter, and the glass rang musically as he poured a little brandy into it.

"Drink this," he said, "and then we will go outside."

She obeyed him with unusual docility, and when she had drunk the brandy she tried to rise, but immediately sank back into her chair and pressed her hands to her forehead.

"Oh," she cried, "I feel just as though I were drugged."

"What a silly idea. Rest a little while on the verandah. I will see that no one disturbs you. Let me give you my arm. Come, it will pass at once in the fresh air."

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He almost lifted her to the verandah, which ran the whole length of the room, and then, having arranged the cushions of a low lounge chair, he returned to the dining-room and rang the bell. When the servant appeared, his instructions were mandatory, and such as would command obedience.

"Her ladyship is not very well and is resting. See that she is not disturbed, please. And tell my man that I am returning to London to-night."

The man promised obedience and withdrew. Directly he had gone, the prince went a-tiptoe to the verandah, then returned with silent foot and extinguished the candles one by one. When this was done he crept into the shadows by my lady's chair and waited—he knew not for what.

She had fallen into a stupor, and lay as one heavy in sleep. It was getting dark upon the river, and the passing boats had an air of unreality, as though they were ghost ships upon phantom waters. From time to time a murmur of laughter and song would be heard, the tinkling chords of the mandoline or the more ancient and less popular banjo. The neighbouring gardens, however, were deserted, and when it became fully dark, and distant house-boats hung out their lanterns, and lights shone from pretty windows, Maurevale might have imagined himself to be the sentinel of a world apart, the keeper of a house of silence upon the borders of a dreamland. But this delusion of sentiment was momentary. He knew, for a truth, that the issues were beyond all words vital to the man whose life he would have saved for Kitty Insole's sake.

A quarter of an hour passed and the situation re-

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mained unchanged. It is true that a very ordinary kind of boat was eased for a little while before the cottage, and that, having gone on, it returned presently and again took up a similar station; but no attempt was made by its occupant to come ashore, nor did the darkness permit him or her to be seen. In the end, the skiff joined the others going up to Shiplake or down to Henley, and for fully ten minutes the river showed no human being nor any glimmer of light upon which the vestige of an hypothesis might have been built.

To say that Maurevale was disappointed is to express but ill the vexation which attended this rebuff. He knew that the drowsing woman might recover consciousness at any moment; and having recovered it, would destroy in an instant the gauzy fabric of his schemes. Watching her intently, not a little afraid of the consequences of his venture, he perceived that she lay as one in a heavy stupor—and stupor was all that he had wished to contrive. From this she might awake at any moment, and if she awoke, that was the end of this night's work.

He rose from his seat impatiently, and stepping over the balustrade of the verandah, where the bushes blackened the shadows, he crept a little way down the deserted garden and peered out upon the still river as though incredulous of its silence. A sweet sound of singing arrested his attention pleasantly, but not with any holding interest; and when he had seen that the stranger was a girl, and that a man paddled the punt which carried her toward Marsh Lock, he turned about and would have returned to the house. Then, as abruptly,

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he halted and listened with ears which were awake to the lightest sounds.

There was a footstep upon the grass, familiar and unmistakable!

Once before had he listened to that shuffling gait and wondered at the mystery of it—and now he heard it plainly here at Wargrave, and could say that whoever came stood within twenty feet of the shadows which harboured him.

A halting, treacherous step, as though a man crossed the grass in slippers and stood almost at every turn in the winding path to be sure he was not observed—such it was, and as such, it recalled to Maurevale the night of his return to Park Lane and the steps of which Stella had spoken.

And this also had been the mystery of Highlands Castle, and Stella herself and Otto Walther had played their part in it. The recollection fired him to an interest keen beyond any he had known since the beginning of it. Here and now he would learn why this woman had hesitated to receive him, and why Frederick Walther had come to Wargrave that afternoon. But vastly more important than all, he would discover the identity of the unknown intruder who had entered Highlands Castle within a few days of the murder, and had left it unidentified despite those who guarded it.

He did not move, hardly dared to breathe; but listened entranced to that confession of the steps. And first he could say that the unknown approached covertly and with no great courage at his back. Sometimes the fellow would take three or four steps quite boldly; then stood motionless for long minutes together. This hesi-

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tation convinced Maurevale of two things. He judged that the interview with Lady Constance savoured of the clandestine, and again, that some signal or other was missing, and for want of it the man went warily.

This conviction became sure when a rustling of leaves upon the right-hand side of the path declared that the intruder had entered the little summer-house and had pushed the honeysuckle aside to do so. In some sense now he was trapped, and the advantage was with his adversary. But this might not be a real advantage, for Maurevale could not imagine him to go unarmed, and a fracas would be disastrous. So he hesitated an instant, still reticent to declare himself.

How might he see the man's face and yet go undiscovered? The problem perplexed him, and found him without idea while a full minute passed. Then, as suddenly coming to a resolution, he crept along the grassy border and discovered that he might approach the summer-house from the back. Advancing as deftly as any Indian, he made the place and began to examine it closely. As he had hoped, there were little glass windows upon either side of the door. These would serve his purpose. He took a match from his pocket and struck it—and keeping himself in the shadow he held it before the window. In the same instant a face looked out almost full in his own—and he dropped the burning match and stepped so far back among the bushes that they hid him like a cloak.

It was no shuffling step now that the prince heard upon the grass, but one of a man who fled from discovery and had conceived the possibilities of flight from the beginning. Almost leaping to the boat which

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awaited him at the steps, the unknown drove his skiff across the river with clumsy strokes and was lost almost instantly to view. The prince, however, returned at once to the verandah, and lighting a candle he held it close to the sleeping lady's face, and was fully content when she opened her eyes and stared up at him.

"Well," he exclaimed in the most natural voice possible, "and are you better, my dear lady?"

She made a great effort to sit up, and shielded her eyes with a trembling hand as she did so.

"Oh," she cried, "my head is whirling"—and then, "why did you let me sleep?"

"It was much the best thing to do. But I fear you won't be able to travel to London to-night."

"I must—I must go. What time is it, prince?"

He took out his watch and held up the candle to see the hands of it.

"It is nearly half-past ten, I think."

She uttered a loud cry, upon which many interpretations might have been put, and struggled to her feet.

"Ten o'clock . . . it cannot be ten o'clock."

"I assure you that it is."

"Then I must go at once."

"It is quite impossible. Let me send for your servants and make up your mind to the inevitable. You really are not fit to do anything to-night."

"Oh, I have promised and I cannot disappoint. Did not I tell you——?"

"Certainly, but all these things are of so little account when health is in the case. For myself, I must return to town, and if you really can trust your servants to do the nursing——?"

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He waited, and watched a great sense of relief pass into her eyes. His presence had been the obstacle, and now he was about to remove it. She spoke no more thereafter of a journey to London, but only of his departure.

"It seems so ridiculous that you should go—but what can I do? My head is just whirling—and, oh, it is all so silly, but I seem to be half blind."

"You will be perfectly well after a night's rest. I think you would be wiser not to get up to-morrow and to see your doctor if your head should trouble you. But I don't think it will—indeed, I should be very surprised if it did."

She looked at him searchingly, a little recovered from her dizziness, and her suspicions awakened. Something had happened this night of which she knew nothing, and dread fell upon her lest it should have been the thing she imagined.

"Tell me," she exclaimed suddenly, "who came here to-night?"

"Here? I am quite unaware that you had visitors."

Her suspicions were not allayed.

"I dreamed as I slept that a strange man stood by my side—I thought I heard you talking to him."

"Quite a conventional hallucination—you will not expect me to tell you that it was absurd."

"Then no one has been——?"

"I have been aware of nothing more remarkable than the tripper who gazes enraptured from the hired skiff—he could not be called interesting, and so I did not invite him in."

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She was altogether deceived by his manner, and greatly relieved. Presently she said:

"I shall really take your advice and go to bed. Will you ever forgive me for this fiasco?"

"You are absolved absolutely—with my blessing. The dinner was excellent."

He held out his hand, and at the same moment the surly manservant opened the door and showed the flaming headlights of the car. Maurevale's last impressions of the house were such as set it in a pentagon of lighted windows with a little door wide open and a vista of a cosey staircase and a beautiful woman, prettily gowned, waiting impatiently for his departure. He waved a last good-night and gave the word to go; but a quarter of a mile from her house he stopped his driver abruptly and bade him return to the inn.

There a boat was quickly found, and pulling a little way up the stream the prince arrived at the house he had just left and perceived in a moment that my lady had not taken his advice at all, but that she had returned to the verandah, and stood there with such a bright lamp by her side that no passer-by could have failed to recognise her.

"So," he said to himself, "she is an optimist, and still waits for her friend. Well, I do not think he will return to-night at any rate."

And then he said:

"An Italian or a Spaniard—obviously a go-between! And I am looking for an Egyptian who wore a crimson tarboosh. Indeed, this is a very great mystery, and who shall say that the truth of it will ever be made known?"

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CHAPTER XIII

THE MARSHES ARE REVISITED

WEEKS of heavy thunderstorms and of a close and enervating atmosphere had given place to a glorious hour of summer at her prime when Maurevale revisited the House of the Five Green Shutters and was answered immediately by no other than his steward, Arthur Blandy.

But how changed was this Hector!

No longer chubby of cheek and sleek of limb, but an emaciated image of the Arthur Blandy who was; a haunted, timorous relic of a man, starting at his own shadow and trembling at every sound. The prince's knock fell as a blow upon his heart. He could hardly speak when the pleasant voice greeted him.

"Ah, Blandy, so you have arrived?"

"At ten o'clock last night, Highness—an awful journey."

"The yacht set you ashore at Harwich and you came by the boat train to Ely—I hope you were discreet, Blandy?"

"My own father would have passed me in the street, Highness. Such a mock of a man I was."

"Quite right—quite right. I am glad to see you are growing wiser."

"It's been a dreadful time, sir. Fancy me starting up like a frightened hare every time I see a policeman."

Maurevale laughed.

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"That was quite unnecessary, Blandy."

"Unnecessary, Highness!"

"As I say, unnecessary. The police have your story from the first line to the last. I myself have written it down for them—and moreover I have promised that you shall be present at the trial."

"You don't say so, Highness!"

"Indeed I do. So henceforth you will think entirely of your work for me."

Great beads of perspiration fell from the man's brow, and he wiped them away with a monstrous silk handkerchief. What hours of agony he had suffered—and that awful night of darkness and haunting sounds through which he had awaited his master's coming. Were these unnecessary? He could have kissed the hand which carried the tidings.

"I am sure I am very much obliged to your Highness; you've made a new man of me."

"Very well, then; let us go to business. Has any one been here since you came?"

"Not a living soul, sir—not since I came."

"Ah, then, you have reason to believe——"

"That some one has visited the house before me? Yes, Highness, I believe that. The picture has gone."

"The picture——?"

"Of the queer-looking lady in the Indian dress."

"You don't say so, Blandy. Well, I must see that for myself."

He entered the sitting-room immediately and discovered the truth of it. The portrait of the Turkish lady no longer hung upon the walls—but the statement that it had gone was premature. Stepping to

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the buffet above which it had been suspended, the prince perceived the picture wedged between the furniture and the wall, and with a little help he quickly recovered it.

But in what a state! A man might have said that it had been slashed by a knife or a sword—so cut and torn it was. And the frame half broken to pieces as though by the same savage assault.

Maurevale set the relics of the picture against the wall, but made no immediate remark upon them. Had he told Arthur Blandy the truth, he would have said that this portrait carried him in thought, not to Turkey, but to Egypt, and that the face was the replica of many he had seen in Cairo. But he confessed nothing of this; and when he did speak it was to bid the steward guard the relic carefully.

"I am renting this place, Blandy, and I propose to buy the furniture. Directly you hear from me, send this picture to Park Lane. If the agents come here meanwhile, pretend that you have just arrived and are looking round in my name."

"Would you wish me to stay here all the time, Highness?"

Maurevale turned upon him peremptorily.

"Until the murderer of Lady Anna is discovered you will not stir a step, Mr. Blandy."

Blandy sighed, but had not the courage to protest. He had got himself into a rare mess truly, by his trafficking in dishonourable secrets, and here he was to pay the price of it. No crusted port in this mean house; no soothing cigars o' nights in a pleasant room, with the vista of river and park to make looking out of the windows a delight. Nothing of the kind—here

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he must lie next door to starvation and still speak of the police. For a fat man thinks first of his food—a thin man of himself.

"I'll do my duty willing, sir, if you'll make it clear what that duty is," he said at length. Maurevale hesitated to respond to that.

"You will report any circumstance to me immediately, however trifling it may seem. Directly the affair is arranged with Captain Ferman, I will see that you have some one in the house with you and a trap. Meanwhile we shall take charge of the commissariat. Watch night and day, Blandy, and let me know who comes. Some one, you see, has been here already. Now I would pay a hundred pounds if you could tell me who that person was."

"I'd be glad to earn it, Highness. He seems to have been a-rooting everywhere, even in the garden. There's the marks of his fingers all over the place."

"Indeed! but that is very interesting, Blandy. You are becoming quite a detective. Let me see these wonderful marks you speak of."

"They're in the kitchen mostly, sir. His footsteps are also in the garden; I'll show your Highness."

He led the way to the kitchen, and showed exactly what he meant. Some one had been busy in this place, had even lighted a fire, and left a fine imprint of his fingers upon the spotless white dresser and the cupboard beside it. And as though this were not enough, he had stepped out of the kitchen window, across a tangled flower-bed, and so made his way to the very bottom of the garden, by which the dyke ran. Maurevale wondered that he had neglected it at his first

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visit, for now, when he approached the dyke, he perceived that some one had built a wigwam of reeds at the water's edge, and had lined it within as children line a nest they make in a hayfield.

"Oh," he cried, "but this is very interesting, Blandy; we seem to have come upon a playground, do we not?"

"I raythor think the young lady has been a-using of it, Highness."

"And what makes you think that, Blandy?"

"Why, Highness, I had a mind to peep inside of it this morning, and what do you think I found? Why, these here bits of gold chain, I did."

He handed the prince three tiny golden links, with a broken split-ring at the end of them, and watched his master's face curiously as he did so. Maurevale, indeed, made no attempt to conceal his astonishment.

"You found these links! Now where did you find them, Blandy?"

"I found them among the hay at the bottom of that shanty, Highness."

"Were you looking for anything?"

"Well, I just rooted about; I don't know why it was—a sort of feeling, Highness, that luck might be in my way. And there they were—shining bright as anything in the sunlight."

"I commend your diligence; I am very pleased with you, Blandy. Can you imagine what purpose these links served?"

"They've come off a lady's bracelet. I'm ready to swear it, Highness."

"Undoubtedly they did; your powers of perception are excellent, I see. Continue to employ them in my

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service, and I can even forget that you contemplated robbing me."

"Highness, I ought to be whipped for that. I can't think what I was doing of."

"Nor why you visited Lady Anna's bedroom upon the night of her death—shall I tell you why, Arthur Blandy?"

"I was a very foolish man."

"An exceedingly foolish man—who went to her room to read the names of the horses I wrote on her menu at dinner-time. Was it not that, Blandy?"

"It were, Highness—and God forgive me, every one of 'em lost."

Maurevale smiled.

"I meant them, too, Blandy. I wrote them down for that poor lady because she asked me not for winners, but for losers. Your informant, Child, should deal more fairly by you. He is a bad listener, Blandy, remember it."

The jest came lightly enough, and testified, perhaps, to the emotions which the discovery of these few links of gold had awakened. In truth, they filled the mean house with visions, and served instantly to build a bridge between its poor rooms and the wide terraces of Highlands Castle, upon which Lady Anna had walked so proudly. He had no doubt whatever that this chain had linked the heart of jade to her white wrist, and that she herself had stood in this very garden many a day and had not complained of its loneliness. Sentiment of another kind reminded him of her prayer that the heart might hide her when "the day should come," and he fell to wondering if death after all had not been

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very kind to her. This thought, however, was quickly replaced by a remembrance of his oath and the duties it put upon him. He would avenge her though he gave all that life held dear to the task.

And this was in his mind when he climbed into the buggy and quitted the House of the Five Green Shutters. Not in England might the truth be found—perhaps not in Europe. But he, Maurevale of Dara, would find it whatever the penalty.

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CHAPTER XIV

SIR HORACE RUPERT ASKS SOME QUESTIONS

SIR HORACE RUPERT, who had saved enough heads from the executioner's maw to make a pretty row upon Temple Bar, sat in the library of the little house at Park Lane waiting for Prince Maurevale's return from Ely, and by no means discontented either with himself or the world.

A dainty cup of tea stood at his elbow; he smoked a cigarette of fine fragrance, and looked through the open window upon that vision of fair women which Hyde Park can disclose even when the society journalist has told us that Goodwood sounds the knell of the departing season.

Sir Horace could indeed afford to look upon society with a benign interest: he carried so many of its secrets in his far from capacious bosom that hardly a man or a woman did not regard him in some way as a species of family confessor who saved aristocratic heads from indiscretions and the heads of the vulgar from the rope.

He was entirely unconventional as an advocate; slim and Eastern in countenance; possessing a wonderful head for the intricacies of figures and a mastery of facts no less astonishing. Juries, as one scribe declared, were shaken to their foundations by his eloquence. He had the ears of judges and the confidence of lawyers; knew all the pretty women in London and

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made love to most of them; could tell you exactly what the Duke of Dundee owed to Moss, the money-lender, and why Lord Swansdown married Bella Bolton, the actress. In short, a very great counsel, and the hero of more famous cases than any advocate of his time.

Such was the man who waited for Prince Maurevale in the little library in Park Lane, and started both with expectancy and pleasure when he heard the well-known step on the stair. He had taken quite an unusual course, and was not indisposed to admit as much. This case of cases, the meteoric crime which had astounded all London and put that very social hero Jack Ferman into the dock, might it not be the final rung in that ladder of success by which he, Horace Rupert, should scale the loftiest pinnacles?

He believed that it might be so, and yet there were ugly depths before him. So far his keen eye discovered no light. He had come to the conclusion that nothing short of a miracle would save Jack Ferman from the scaffold, and in miracles he had no faith. So here he was in Park Lane, a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles, a very beggar at the feet of one in whose acumen he had the highest confidence.

"Sir Rupert, I am glad to meet you."

"My dear Maurevale, you are always kind to me."

"Have you been waiting long for me?"

"Twenty minutes, agreeably passed in a survey of other people's misfortunes, to wit, their wives, and in the consumption of some excellent tea."

"I am glad of it. The train from Ely was very late."

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"Ecclesiastical dignity, prince. Did you ever hear of a dean who hurried? A little haste at the dinner-gong perhaps—but otherwise! Life would be a delightful experience if no man cared where he was to-morrow."

"I admit it—but your epigram must concern yesterday also. My dear Sir Rupert, if we had no yesterdays!"

"A true Eastern, I perceive, who has learnt to lisp 'Kismet.' Well, you know why I am here."

"To speak to me about poor Ferman? There could be no other reason so good. Take a cigarette and let us make ourselves comfortable. Have you seen him to-day, by the way?"

"Yes, to the disgust of his solicitors. They tell me nothing in their brief, and *ex nihilo*, you know. So I must fall back upon myself—and be thankful that I am a light weight."

"He is a lucky man to find so much devotion. Do you make anything of the case yet?—have you really gone into it?"

"To the last line."

"And you think——"

"That he's an innocent man. His manner tells me that. I have seen too many murderers to be mistaken. Anna Maclain was never killed by Jack Ferman, believe me."

"I do believe you—and then?"

"Ah, and then. Well, of course, there's another man or woman in it somewhere."

"Does Ferman himself tell you nothing?"

"On the contrary, he appears to tell me everything

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that is vital. I can't persuade him that it wasn't suicide."

"Oh, he is of that opinion, then—since when?"

"All the time, I should say. He admits she had some trouble of her own. It came out by accident, and I held him to it."

"Would he not indicate the nature of it?"

"Not a word—most of the time he spends praising your generosity; that's touched him deeply."

"Why should he call it generosity? He was an English soldier, and they have given him Secret Service work to do. He knows that I could help his country greatly—and Secret Service people are taught first to help themselves. I despise the profession he follows, but do not judge him."

"That's fairly put. Do you think the maid Berthe had any grudge against him?"

"Ah, there you ask me a wise question. It was almost the first I asked when the story came out. We are confronted by the immediate difficulty, however, that there is absolutely no evidence at all to connect her with it—at least the police say so."

A curious smile accompanied the assertion, and was not lost upon Sir Horace.

"You don't agree with them, Maurevale?"

"I? Oh, I agree with everybody—but I really know nothing about the woman."

"And attach no importance to her evidence?"

"Absolutely none whatever."

Sir Horace sipped his tea and reflected a little while. Presently he said:

"Ferman thinks the old Frenchman is in it."

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"He does—I am surprised at that."

"You know that the count is supposed to be working diplomatically for the French Government?"

"Yes, I understood as much."

"Well, I don't suppose he'd be more scrupulous than the rest. That button of the Legion of Honour may serve my client well. No jury will convict if it is but put properly to them."

"And you will put it very well. By the way, does Ferman treat you better than he treats me? Does he tell you anything of Lady Anna's story?"

"I didn't know she had a story; but, of course, all women have. Well, he said nothing about it."

"And yet I assure you that if you had mentioned a certain name to him, an Egyptian name, you would have made him very angry."

"That's very interesting—may I hear the name?"

"Certainly; it is the name of one who was *persona grata* to Kitchener before the Young Egyptians got hold of him and bought him body and soul—they call him Tahir Pasha."

"And where is this pretty traitor now?"

"Tell me and I will win your case for you. The last I heard of him was in an opium den in Paris. My men were too late by an hour. But they are still hunting."

"We must find that man, Maurevale; Ferman will hang if we do not."

"He may hang if we do—I don't know—it's a great question to me whether we should find him or no."

"It is! Then you think—ah, I see, there is an old

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quarrel—but this is very interesting; and Tahir in Paris. Since how long, I wonder?"

"We know that. He came to Paris from Corfu three days before the affair. He was at the châtelet upon the night Anna was murdered."

"Has he friends in England?"

"I am not sure of it. I think there may be one—if there is, I have seen him."

"Seen him—where?"

"In a summer-house at Wargrave rented by my friend Lady Constance Heliers."

Sir Horace did not speak for some minutes. It was plainly to be seen that the mysteries of this most mysterious affair baffled him utterly.

"Well," he exclaimed at last, "I am very much in your hands, prince."

"Ah, but you make my task very difficult. What right has this young man to turn to me?"

"None whatever. That's why you are working for him."

Maurevale shrugged his shoulders.

"You are quite wrong," he said; "I am working because my vanity bids me."

"But in any case you are working, and that's a great deal. God knows what the brief will be like unless you write it."

"You compliment me prematurely. I may write what none can read."

"And if you do Jack Ferman will hang. The greatest case of our time, prince, the very greatest."

"And the greatest advocate," said Prince Maurevale.

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Sir Horace was not averse from flattery, and for a little while he smoked a cigarette with some satisfaction. It is quite true that neither he nor his solicitors knew anything whatever about the case, and that if he lost it the affair might work him an irreparable mischief; but his confidence in the prince remained supreme, and he staked all upon it. This man would save Jack Ferman for Anna Maclain's sake. The conviction had been with him from the first, and this interview confirmed it. His own part would be to receive the popular applause which would attend a verdict of "Not guilty."

"Well," he said as he rose to go, "we will all do our best. Did you tell me you were going to Paris?"

"Yes, upon my way to Lausanne to the Congress."

"Ah, the Germans are hoping to keep you out of that. Do you understand their object?"

"Perfectly; they fear that I shall stand for an agreement between the Powers. If they keep me away from Lausanne the Governments will say, 'This man has nothing to teach us—he is an impostor and afraid to show himself.' Then Germany will make me offers."

"Which you will not accept. But I have no right to say that. You may not love this country as much as we flatter ourselves that you do."

"Say rather that I love no country more than the common humanity I would serve. Is it not the greatest wonder of this twentieth century, my dear Sir Horace, that men still murder each other at the bidding of other men they call politicians, and pay for bringing devastation upon their homes? You, for instance, would murder me under certain circumstances and consider your-

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self a patriot for doing so. I can see you with a rifle in your hand."

"I would much prefer a brief, Maurevale."

"And you have one. The greatest, I think, of our time."

"Undoubtedly the most perplexing—and that reminds me. Is the Earl of Farrard expected home immediately?"

"I wish we knew. He was on his yacht when last he wrote to Anna. We have sent him all the cables possible telling him of his sister's death. I should not be at all surprised to hear that he is still on the high seas, somewhere between New Zealand and Valparaiso —but, wherever he may be, we can do no more."

"Do you think he would help us?"

"Ah, that is what I should very much like to know."

"But we can get his evidence if we think it necessary —we can get an adjournment."

"My dear Sir Horace, I will answer 'Yes' or 'No' to that when I have found Tahir Pasha."

The great advocate smiled.

"You will have to take to opium, prince," said he.

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CHAPTER XV

THE SEARCH IS BEGUN

MAUREVALE left for Paris upon the following morning, being followed to Victoria Station by his secretary, Paul.

This was the beginning of the holiday season with its attendant discomforts.

Families which would have been much happier in England struggled with adversity and a desire to be in France. Children clung together, obsessed by the fear that they had been forgotten and would be left behind. The guards ran to and fro incessantly, dropping exclamations as princes drop their favours. Those who could, by any chance, take a seat in the wrong train did so immediately, and sat there in banal content. The experienced traveller wondered, on the other hand, why experience sent him across the Channel at such a moment, when there were fifty-one other weeks of the year during which he could have travelled.

Maurevale had reserved a carriage in the Paris express, and here, at some five minutes to eleven o'clock, Paul handed him his letters and received his instructions.

The Russian was very much in earnest, and excited beyond his wont. An admission that he had reached the station with difficulty caused Maurevale some surprise, but was quickly explained.

"A very extraordinary thing has happened, High-

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ness," he began; "had it occurred ten minutes later I would have been compelled to follow you to Paris."

"Well, Paul?"

"It concerns the maid Berthe, Highness."

"Ah, I have been expecting something of this sort. She is in London, is she not?"

"She came just three days ago."

"And her occupation?"

"Apparently the discovery of the person for whom she waited at Pangbourne."

"You interest me very much, Paul—go on."

"As you know, sir, she has been under close observation since the beginning. Yesterday—to be precise, last night at nine o'clock—she met a man near the Criterion grillroom and walked some distance with him in the direction of Piccadilly. They appeared to be quarrelling, and separated at Downing Street. This morning she met the man again, at twenty minutes past ten, near her lodging, which is in Ayr Street. The pair entered a cab and drove to St. Pancras Station, where they have been followed by the cleverest of all my assistants, who will make his report to me tonight."

"Have you any description of the man meanwhile?"

"He is five foot ten or so in height, wears a dark serge suit, and is apparently a Spaniard or an Italian. We find that he is at a hotel in Leicester Square—but that he has been in England since the first week in June. His name in the books is Jules Farmot—but I imagine it to be assumed, and that is the opinion of the hotel people."

"Has he been with them from the beginning?"

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"No, Highness, for three days only; but they gather from his conversation that he came here from Paris on the day I have named. This morning my colleague was clever enough to snap a picture of him—I have the film with me here, but it is undeveloped. Should your Highness wish——"

"Certainly, I will take it with me, Paul. Let your colleague hear that I commend his diligence. It might be worth while to let Sir Malcolm know of this—but not until I have debated it. You will find me at the Ritz Hotel for three days. After that I am at Lausanne."

Paul looked a little anxious.

"This visit is very daring, Highness."

"I am aware of it, Paul—but do you not say that Gustave Faber is an excellent man, and that he is to take care of me?"

"Ah, sir, but I am jealous. Nevertheless, I trust Faber."

"And feel confident that he will discover for me this very mysterious Egyptian Pasha, upon whose existence an honest man's fate may depend?"

"I believe that he will do so, Highness, though I am unable to agree with your conclusions."

"Your own view being, Paul——?"

"That this is a mystery which no man will ever solve, Highness."

Maurevale sighed, but did not contradict him. Perhaps he was coming to that opinion himself, but his indomitable will refused to hear any such story, and the last words he spoke to his servant were the command that every post must bring an account of his

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achievements and his failures. Then he took his letters and wondered why he had omitted to notice that the first of them was in Stella Insole's well-known hand, and that it had arrived in London by the morning mail.

For a little while this note remained unopened, while Maurevale recalled a picture of the old French château of Aizy-la-Belle, and of its gardens. He doubted not that the Count and Countess of Fours would have many guests, and he could conjure up an *al fresco* scene with the English sisters for its chief ornament. Stella's girlish beauty would win many admirers in that artificial atmosphere of "Paris à la campagne," and could not fail to provoke some jealousies. He was not unwilling that it should be so—for he remembered that the boy, Otto Walther, had already declared his love for her, and that she must know many lovers before the true story of her life could be written.

She wrote freely an intimate confession of her hopes and her doubts. So newly arrived at the château on the Loire, she spoke of its splendours, ancient and modern, of its great rooms, wherein the kings and queens of France had moved, and of its gardens, wherein already you might espy the monoplane of Monsieur Henri, the count's second son.

"The house is superb," went her words, "a gabled building of stone, with a façade made familiar to me by twenty writers. One wing of it is carried right across the river upon Norman arches, above which is the ballroom, with the very sedilla upon which the mad Louis played with his images and Charles heard the rhapsodies of the Maid who saved him. Now we set the gramophone upon this ancient bench, while Mon-

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sieur Henri tells me that he would fly with me to the world's end if his machine would carry the spirit—of which I am delighted to say there seems no possibility whatever.

"The other guests are chiefly relatives: the Chevalier Maurice, who makes love after dinner to the count's niece, Olive, but becomes a philosopher of a depressing school in the early morning hours; Monsieur Gaspard, madame's brother, who still believes that France is waiting for a king; and the Bishop of Loches, who is a dear old gentleman with one foot already in Paradise and the other in a poultice. I fear the gout afflicts him sorely—but what is nearer to his heart is the trouble which hovers about this house, and his own difficulty in understanding it.

"You asked me, prince, to visit the château and to give you my impression of its people. You told me that this was a duty I owed to Lady Anna and to my sister. Believing as you do that this visit is a true service to the dear old count, and must make eventually for his happiness, you establish me at once in a position of responsibility and of charity to which I must bring all the devotion I can command.

"Let me, then, speak very frankly to you of my difficulties. When I set out from England I believed with you that nothing but a series of coincidences had connected the honoured name of the Count of Fours with this terrible crime. If I believe it no longer, if I am alarmed and dismayed, let circumstance, not judgment, speak for me.

"The count went to your house frankly and openly to negotiate with you, as you have told me, on behalf

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of the French Government. His friendship for dear Anna quickly became notorious—provoking the jealousy of Madame, his wife, and perhaps not unjustly. When the dreadful day came, his stick was found in the boat and a button of his order in the very dressing-room. He gives us an open answer to these unhappy witnesses, and we, perforce, are content with them. We assume that he will return to France, and forget the misfortunes to which he was subject in England. But is that the case: do I find evidences of it here in his daily life at Aizy-la-Belle? I am compelled to answer 'None.' I am driven to tell you that every day adds its burden to my doubts.

"Do you remember, sir, that when I was travelling from Paris here I made mention of the fact that the count stood in evident apprehension of meeting some person, and that particularly the approach of a little Egyptian boy troubled him beyond all reason?

"Then at Aizy-la-Belle this curious and quite unlooked-for impression is deepened every hour. The count never leaves his wife's side when he can find an excuse for remaining with her. Madame, upon the other hand, treats him with a disdain which is cruel, and delights, it would seem, in provoking the maddest suspicions.

"Such is the scene, dear prince, to which I am called and upon which my work must be done. I have written this general account of it that you may judge how far I have been influenced by an atmosphere of suspicion, and how far by the realities in the story that is to come.

"For there is a story, and it, I believe, is as strange

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a story as even you have heard in all the dark hours of this terrible affair.

"Yesterday Monsieur Henri took a party of us to the old palace of Chinon, which, as you will know, is the most splendid ruin in all this château land. More correctly, perhaps, it should be said, that we made a little tour, searching out Amboise and Chevarney and fixing upon Chinon for our *déjeuner*. I am so much in love already with this fascinating country, its exquisite forests, and echoes of five hundred years ago, that I would refuse none who offered to show me more of it; and I felt quite grateful to Monsieur Henri for taking me away from Madame and her petulant ways, and the 'dear old bishop,' who is forever complaining of the gout.

"Our party was a merry one. The Chevalier Maurice rode at the back with Kitty and Olive, to whom, upon this occasion only, he consented to make love before lunch. I went in front with Monsieur Henri, and listened to his absurd stories of what the world would be like when every one rode in aeroplanes, and even love in a forest would be by no means pastoral. Our journey carried us for a while by the banks of the Loire, that dreamy river from which all life seems to have fled; that wide lake of idle waters, lapping the sandbanks and telling them stories of the mediæval age. Thence we turned to the forests, and were soon amid those woodland scenes which are more beautiful, surely, in France than in any country of the world.

"So far, be it admitted, the venture had nothing out of the charming commonplace which makes a day in château land. You shall soon hear how the aspect

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of it was to change. We rambled about the château of Chinon, and then returned one by one down the steep road toward the town. Kitty had been with me at the start, but I stopped from time to time to gather the roses from the crumbling wall, and was quite alone when I descended the narrow stone steps and entered the street of ancient houses which lie immediately beneath the citadel. Here the strange thing happened. Thinking nothing of the matter, and forgetting for the hour all that had sent me to this wonderland, I came face to face with the little Egyptian boy who had so frightened Monsieur le Comte upon our journey from Paris, and who recognised me immediately. Indeed, he spoke to me in quite passable French; asked me very cheekily how the angry old gentleman, whom he called 'my father,' was doing.

"You may be sure, sir, that this encounter both surprised and interested me beyond my power to tell. The lad sat astride of a low wall, running round the garden of a grey stone house, such as might have been occupied by any artisan or petty clerk of Chinon.

"His attitude was neither one of concern nor even of curiosity, and I perceived that he addressed me without any other object than that of reminding me that we had met before. When I answered him in the same spirit, and asked him how long he had been living at Chinon, he replied, with just as much self-assurance, that he had been living there just three days; so that it was evident he had come with us, step by step, from Blois, and that his family had installed themselves in this humble dwelling at the very moment the Count of Fours returned to his home at Aizy-la-Belle.

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"I have said that I was alone during this conversation, and very fortunately I remained so. An inquiry as to whether the boy had long left Egypt obtained the response that he had been five years away from his own country; but while I was asking whether he wished to return, a woman came suddenly to the door and demanded to know who I was and what I wanted. To her I responded immediately that I was the friend of Monsieur le Comte de Fours, whereupon she immediately invited me to enter the house, and sent the Egyptian boy upstairs upon an errand of whose nature I remained in ignorance.

"Admit, dear prince, that this invitation was exceedingly fortunate. Had I remained at the gate another five minutes, Monsieur Henri and the Chevalier Maurice—whose charming occupation had been that of twining red roses into Olive's black hair—would have overtaken me, and the whole episode ended in that *frivolité de voyage* of which the Frenchmen have such a ready command. As it was, I entered the cottage just as they passed, and thinking that they must wait for me, and would not resent the delay while coffee and cigarettes were to be had at the inn, I gave no thought to myself but only to the woman before me.

"Let me describe this remarkable person for you with what skill I can command. She is, perhaps, fifty years of age: her skin so browned by the sun that she might be an Eastern woman wearing our dress and habits with difficulty. Her eyes are unforgettable, very large and of a bluish grey, and seeming to reflect an unstable mind and one dominated by fear. In her hands there is some character; they are round and

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puffy, and the nails very white. She is of middle height, but a little lame; her hair is so wonderfully white that it is quite impossible to imagine her as a girl or even as a woman in the middle life. Beyond this, I can tell you only that her voice is very soft and pleasing when she is not agitated—but the slightest word of opposition provokes her to a shrill outburst which a true virago could not surpass.

"This person I followed into the parlour upon the right-hand side of the narrow hall. It was very sparsely furnished and without evidence of daily occupation. A Madonna upon the mantelshelf stood in odd contrast to a model of the Sphinx standing upon a little oak table in the window. There were two or three English books upon the ledge by the fireplace—and more remarkable still, a large framed photograph of Farrard Court above them. So astonished was I to discover this that my amazement was evident to the woman, and she began at once to speak of it.

"'Mademoiselle knows that house. It is of the English Earl of Farrard—a great nobleman, mademoiselle, where my sister was maid. Mademoiselle is English, and will like to see the English pictures here in our country—is it not so, mademoiselle?'

"I replied as graciously as I could that nothing gave me greater pleasure; but a further reference to Farrard Court would have been indiscreet in the face of her evident desire to avoid it.

"'My sister has been dead many years,' she said, evasively, 'and I, mademoiselle, I have come back to my dear France to die. Here at Chinon I was born, and here will I end my days. There is only one coun-

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try for each of us, and we are faithless children if we forget. Your own land is very beautiful—but, mademoiselle, it is so lonely—the solitudes, the wide, wide marshes, the dykes anywhere. And the people so strange, so sullen. Oh, I do not like your England, and I am glad that I have left it.'

"I concealed the interest I felt, and feigned indifference with what composure I could command.

"'You must have been in our fen country,' I said at hazard. 'England is not all like that, and you were not fortunate, madame.'

"She waved it aside with a gesture; but I thought her grey eyes were alert none the less, and watching me as shrewdly as I watched her.

"'Ah, mademoiselle,' she exclaimed, 'we poor people cannot pick our comings and goings as you others. I have been in many countries, but there is only one country for me, and I pray God I may never leave it more. Here in France one knows how to live—it is so difficult among strangers.'

"'And you have travelled far,' I said, 'for the little boy who spoke to me is an Egyptian, I think?'

"She made no attempt to deny it. I was surprised that she answered me so readily.

"'Yes, yes, an Egyptian, a little orphan, mademoiselle, to whom I have been very kind. He tells me that he has seen you before—was it not at Blois?'

"'Certainly, with Monsieur le Comte de Fours—upon my journey from England.'

"'Ah, Monsieur le Comte! How many years since I—but you know him well; he is an old friend of yours, mademoiselle?'

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"'He was a great friend of a dear friend of mine—the sister of the English nobleman who owns that house. Your sister would have known the Lady Anna Maclain, I am sure. She must have seen her often at Farrard Court.'

. . . . . .

"I confess, prince, that I remained in some alarm at the effect these simple words produced upon this kindly old Frenchwoman. Had I come to rob her house she could not have regarded me with more concern or with an apprehension less concealed. Changing colour at the rapid beating of her heart, the white cheeks flushing in spots of crimson and then assuming pallor quite unnatural in its hue, she pressed her trembling hands to her breast and for quite a long while did not answer me a word.

"'Ah,' she exclaimed at last—and I could see with what difficulty she spoke at all—'then you knew that unhappy lady?'

"'So well,' said I, 'that her death was the greatest sorrow my life has given me.'

"She lifted her eyes, and they glistened with warm tears. It was plain that she suffered much.

"'Ah, mademoiselle, what a story—and what a crime! The dearest lady that ever lived. And the assassin undiscovered! Oh, it is terrible, terrible, and it makes my heart bleed.'

"'You speak,' said I, 'of a dear friend, and it is evident you knew her very well.'

"She hesitated at this, and the look of reserve and of question which I had already remarked passed again into her eyes. Evidently she regretted the weakness of

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her confession, though the truth of her emotion could not be questioned.

"'My sister knew her very well, and I, mademoiselle, I have seen her—it is long years ago since we first met, and she—ah, dear God, she is dead.'

"And then she said:

"'How strange that you should have come to my house—by accident, mademoiselle.'

"'Indeed,' said I, 'it could hardly be called accident at all, for I saw your Egyptian lad at the gate and remembered him immediately as one who attempted to speak to Monsieur le Comte upon our journey from Paris.'

"This, prince, I said with some deliberation, meaning it for the challenge I would now throw down. Its effect upon the dame was altogether curious. She did not turn upon me passionately, as I feared would be the case. There was no meaningless denial or even an explanation—but she simply sat rocking to and fro as one who debated a matter very seriously and could come to no resolution. When this silence had lasted perhaps a full minute she appeared to make up her mind suddenly, and at once began to speak to me confidentially.

"'Mademoiselle,' she said, 'are you the true friend of Monsieur le Comte?'

"I said that I was.

"'Then you shall tell him from me that he must come to my house without delay.'

"'To your house, madame? Why so?'

"'That he may save himself and others from the tongues which speak against him.'

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"I looked at her in wonder.

"'Are you thinking of the death of the Lady Anna Maclain, madame?'

"She rose at once from her chair, and her manner became almost angry.

"'I say nothing more, mademoiselle. Give the count my message if you are his friend. Let him come to this house without delay—that is all.'

"And then almost solemnly she added:

"'He will be very wise to come, mademoiselle. Please to insist upon it, for I perceive that he will listen to you.'

"I knew not what to say, prince. It was impossible to argue upon such an invitation, and even had I the desire to do so the good woman's manner would have forbidden it.

"But there was something even more engrossing than this enigmatical conversation, and of that I shall tell you in a word.

"As the old lady rose to bid me farewell she disturbed a paper almanac hung upon a leaf of the picture frame by the chimney, and when the paper swung aside I saw, as clearly as ever I saw anything in my life, the heart of green jade which the Lady Anna used to wear.

. . . . . .

"You will imagine, prince, in what mood I found myself for the homeward journey, and how much my confusion added to the gaiety of my friends who had waited for me at the inn. The few wild roses I carried were but a poor excuse for so long a delay, and my assurance that an old Frenchwoman had detained me

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by her gossip proved as unkindly an ally as the truth is apt to do. We made the journey to a salvo of droll innuendo quite ridiculous in its childishness, and immediately upon our return we found the grounds of Aizy-la-Belle prepared for one of those garden fêtes which are such a solace to Madame the Countess.

"For these, as I have already hinted, she leaves her 'sick bed' and condescends to come among us. If no impartial observer could by any chance mistake her for an invalid that is her misfortune, which should or should not invite our pity. Certainly no country girl at a fair dances with more zest or is more solicitous of the favours of flattery. Last night she surpassed herself—and in common charity it should be said that her fête was magnificent. Not until this moment, perhaps, had I understood how admirably are these old châteaux adapted for the *al fresco* life, or what wonders can be worked in their grounds if money and lights be not spared.

"It was, sir, a veritable scene from the fables of the ancients. We moved in a forest of silver lamps, the most delicious music bewitching us, and countless sprites raising their mocking laughter beneath the stately trees. The river itself had become a stream of magic fire, blue and golden and deeply violet; boats shaped as monstrous birds moved upon it, and the masqueraders were winged things who flitted over the sheen of the waters as giant fireflies from a world of spirits. Such a pageant, lavish in its execution and without restraint in its idea, is after Madame's own heart, and reconciles her to the solitudes of Aizy-la-Belle. From Paris, from Tours, and even from our own London, our guests have

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come. And you shall imagine what an opportunity I found therein for the delivery of the old dame's message to the count, or even for any private speech with him whatsoever.

"He, sir, I confess, is the enigma in this doubtful hour. It seems to me, I know not why, that the 'English sisters' and this dear old gentleman stand apart from all the gaiety round about and are the sadder because of it. At one moment, indeed, I came upon him in a grove of the woods by which the band of the African Chasseurs was playing, and discovered him to be weeping. He took my arm when we met thus and begged me to accompany him to the house—but immediately we were joined by the old Bishop of Loches, and any confidential talk was denied to me. Had it been otherwise I doubt if I could have spoken to him—my heart was heavy and the shadow of death stood about me. But I shall take an early opportunity of speaking to him—and meanwhile, prince, the unforgettable thing remains. The heart of green jade is there in that lonely house, hung as though by a child's fingers where all the world can see it."

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CHAPTER XVI

THE DEN IN THE RUE MONTSERRE

GUSTAVE FABER proved to be a sedate-looking Frenchman of some fifty years of age. His appearance was quite without distinction: a fact, perhaps, to which he owed success in his profession. Of the middle height, his hair was already sown with grey, but a suggestion of youth remained in his clean-shaven face. An observer might have said that he was a retired soldier, had been a *sous officier* or a servant of a Government Department—but few would have named him for a policeman. When he entered Prince Maurevale's room at the Ritz Hotel in Paris he bowed formally and introduced himself in the briefest words.

"Gustave Faber, Highness—by the instruction of your secretary, Paul Gregoriev."

The prince nodded and bade him seat himself.

"I had expected you," he said, "but not so soon. I am but just arrived. My secretary speaks highly of you, Monsieur Faber, and I see that I must confirm his opinion."

"Your Highness is very good. I fear this is an intrusion at such a time, but naturally I was anxious, especially under the circumstances."

"Which are, Monsieur Faber?"

"That the man, Tahir Pasha, is still in Paris, though I cannot say how many days he will remain here."

"Then you have traced him, after all?"

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"Yes, Highness. He has lived for some time in the Rue Dauphine. At the same time it is not always possible to say that he is alive."

"Ah, I have heard of that. He is a victim to drugs?"

"To opium, Highness; a habit he acquired in the East."

"Then he should serve our purpose the better for it. Do you say he is in Paris at this moment?"

"He is living in the Rue Dauphine—at a house which I have reason to believe is rented by the Young Egyptian Party—a dangerous house, Highness, and one which we may not hope to visit."

"Possibly not; I will consider it. You will remember, however, that I am come to Paris to see this man."

"I am perfectly aware of it—if your Highness so pleases, you may see him this night. But the circumstances would be remarkable—and not altogether pleasant."

"You mean that he is in an opium den, I suppose."

"Yes, Highness, in the Rue Montserre, No. 29. There are many scoundrels of all nations—I hesitate to advise your Highness."

"Nevertheless, I will be with you—does our dress matter?"

"It is a matter of indifference, Highness, since these people's customers are drawn from many ranks, and you will find members of the Chamber of Deputies lying side by side with the assassins from the Halles. I should prefer, however, that you should go armed."

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"As you please, Monsieur Faber. Let us see, it is now half-past seven. I will be ready for you precisely at nine o'clock."

Gustave Faber withdrew, and Maurevale went down to dinner in the restaurant. Here he met many acquaintances—women who had made love to him during decades; bright-eyed girls not unwilling to make love to him at this immediate moment; a dean who had forgotten the Fathers that he might conduct the daughters to Switzerland; an aeronaut whose machine had been smashed at Issy that morning, but who had already planned a new one; an actor from London who had come to buy French plays and had found none—a heterogeneous throng dining famously, and asking nothing else of destiny but that to-morrow should be as yesterday.

To Prince Maurevale such puppets as these were amusing enough in the common way, but to-night he could play no part with them. His own destiny appeared to be forcing him along a path so obscure and unwelcome that he wondered sometimes if he did right to follow it at all.

He had served great ambitions, and whither had they led him? To a woman's grave; and thence?—but beyond the grave he had no vision save that which recalled Stella Insole and the gardens of Highlands Castle in which she had walked.

And this vision the glass had mocked and the years cried out upon.

"Youth is dead," the voices cried—and then as ironically, "youth is eternal."

He shut his ears to the voices, and declining invita-

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tions alike to the table of the actor and the dean, he dined alone, and was ready for Gustave Faber punctually at nine o'clock.

A long Newmarket overcoat covered him to the heels; he wore an opera hat and carried a heavy stick in his hand. A believer in wit rather than in force, the detective's alarms appeared to him to be somewhat unworthy, and the evil reputation of the house in the Rue Montserre did not deter him in any way.

So much he admitted at the start, but hardly had he entered the house when he would have retracted the words and granted something to Gustave Faber's prudence.

Such a den of iniquity as the Café Vert, in the Rue Montserre—for thus was the place called—hardly exists, perhaps, in any other city in the world, unless it be in Cairo or Port Said.

There is a common café upon the ground floor, the chief room of which is shut off from the pavement by a partition of wood and glass. Here sufficient business is done to satisfy the police; but those who descend a single flight of stairs which lead down, not from the Rue Montserre but from the Rue St. Dominique behind it, are admitted to as strange and gaudy a cellar as the mind of man has yet conceived.

Here are a series of circular and oblong rooms built beneath the house above, and even beneath the street. Domed ceilings show faded, if fantastic, allegories of the grossest debaucheries to which the drug-drinker is prone. There are cabalistic signs in mildewed gold; odd figures of Chinese gods and the fables of the Ming dynasty; strange lamps, which exhale strange odours,

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and little flames of fire whose breath is the dreamer's paradise and the dreamer's death.

Orientals in robes of far from spotless white attend the unhappy victims of this foul den, and help them to that insensibility which is their heart's desire.

Men of all nationalities lie upon the narrow benches and cry a satire upon their gift of life.

Here are Christians and Jews, Europeans and Chinese, men from the Indies, East and West, adventurers from many climes; even women prostrate before the great God of Dreams they have chosen to worship.

Prince Maurevale entered this den by the narrow stairway from the Rue St. Dominique. A fat Turk, who wore a fez, answered to Gustave Faber's knock, and bowed deferentially, as the East bows to the West when the West carries a truncheon. An inner door admitted the visitors to a mosque-like apartment, in which were those victims to hashish, mad-eyed creatures, who would have sprung at any human throat for a nod, and sat, meanwhile, straight-backed and stiff against the frowsy red cushions which nursed them. Beyond, in a larger chamber, were varieties of the order of insensibles—creatures who laughed and sang and danced, and from that would turn at any moment upon their neighbours and crush the lives out of them but for the iron hands of the Nubians who kept order here, and knew no argument but that of the monstrous fingers which could hold a neck as in a vice.

The general apartment for those who smoked opium lay beyond this, and was oblong in shape and of some size. The many bunks in it were ranged about the

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marble walls in two tiers, and each was curtained from observation. Beyond it, and shut from it by heavy draperies, stood a smaller room, quite circular and having a ceiling richly gilded and coloured. This appeared altogether a different stamp of apartment from the others which they had passed, and the boy attendants who carried the little pipes of opium and lighted them, were dressed in long white robes to which the term spotless might have been fitly applied.

It was in this room, before a low bed of red velvet, that Gustave Faber stopped at last, and indicated that the object of their quest had been found.

"Highness," he said, "that is Tahir Pasha."

The man lay quite insensible and dreaming. His age appeared to be about thirty-five years, and even in such a light the remarkable beauty of his countenance could not have escaped the most unobservant of visitors. Very dark, with black hair which was bunched about his ears and temples after the fashion of the older Egyptians, his countenance had Grecian rather than Oriental characteristics, the forehead being open and pleasing, the nose such as one may see in the statues of the early Greek masters, and the mouth delicate and rosy as that of a woman. In contrast to this was the truly manly figure, square and browned, the arms almost of a mahogany tint, and the chest that of a soldier. More interesting, however, than the purely physical attitude was the mental—for the man dreamed as he slept—and it was as though every line of his thoughts was written upon his face that all who passed might read.

There were but two occupants of this particular den,

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and the other was a very old man, apparently a true Chinaman, who slept at the drug's bidding, with the face of a child who is tired.

He, happily, might be ignored, and when the prince had ascertained that none watched him in the room, he bade Faber bring chairs and placed them at the head of the bunk which Tahir occupied. Here there was a curtained recess, disclosing a door which had been locked; but as the curtain hid it completely, Maurevale merely remarked the circumstance and fell to watching the sleeper closely, even to touching his hand and letting his fingers rest upon it a little while.

He was a student of telepathy, and a convinced believer in the power of one brain to influence or dominate another and a weaker brain. No better opportunity for an experiment could possibly be found than in this den of iniquity, where the silence reigned supreme and the sleepers sought but dreams. Sitting by Tahir's side, the prince began to speak in a low voice, as though he questioned an intelligent auditor, and waited for a natural answer.

"You are the Bimbashi Tahir, and you left Egypt five years ago?"

The prone figure stirred slightly, but the face remained without interest, and the question was repeated.

"You are the Bimbashi Tahir, and you left Egypt five years ago?"

The head was turned now and the eyes were staring wildly. Fear had become the dominating impulse, and one might have said that the figure was about to rise.

"You left because of certain charges made against you by the authorities at Assouan, where your regiment

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was stationed. You were expelled from the army and you fled the country."

The question received no response. A stolid look of indifference passed across the sleeper's face and was not to be moved. The prince, however, was not to be discouraged, and he shifted his ground immediately.

"When did you first hear the news of the Lady Anna Maclain?"

The prone figure stirred and shuddered. For a little while afterwards it remained quite still, then was turned about as though to hear the words anew. Before, however, the prince could speak one of the little lads arrived at the bed with a pipe of opium, but, seeing there was no call for it, went out immediately through the curtained recess. This was the moment for Gustave Faber to intervene.

"Sir," he whispered, as the lad went out, "there is a woman behind that door."

Maurevale nodded his head. He had been putting his questions to the sleeper in a low tone; but now he ceased to put them at all, and contented himself instead with a touch of a finger upon the hand which fell limply from the bed. When a few moments had passed, Tahir Pasha stirred and opened his eyes—and immediately those who watched him drew back.

If the Egyptian had seemed to be a fine man when asleep, assuredly waking did not destroy the impression. Of tall stature and immense physical strength, the face appeared to lose its feminine characteristics when the eyes were open, and courage and resignation to take the place of fear and submission. The loose dressing-gown he wore showed the developed muscles of the neck

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and chest, and when he lifted a hand even the languor of the gesture was forgotten in the admiration of the tremendous forearm which the falling sleeve disclosed.

A boy now advanced to offer the awakened sleeper a new pipe of opium; but he waved him off with an angry gesture, and turned about as though aware that some one stood at his bedside and that he was watched. Perceiving Maurevale, he rested his hand upon his shoulder and surveyed him with the profound gaze of one who makes an appeal to memory but cannot command it. In his turn, the prince apologised with charming frankness for his intrusion, and begged the Egyptian not to disturb himself.

"I think we have met before, sir," he said, "though I cannot recall the circumstances."

"We have never met," was the response, blunt and without qualification.

"And yet," continued the prince, very quietly, "I seem to remember that you are the Egyptian officer named Tahir Pasha, who was very well known to one of my dearest friends."

He waited for an answer, watching the set face closely. Tahir upon his part deliberately lay back upon the cushion as one who had no interest in the question. Nevertheless, he admitted something utterly unlooked for even by so shrewd a thinker as Maurevale.

"You are Maurevale of Dara," he exclaimed—and then, "I know perfectly well why you come to me. But I cannot help you. Seek others and beware of them."

"Ah," said the prince, "I feared as much. But you would not be unprepared to help me if you could, sir?"

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"If I could do so safely, sir—but I cannot. It is not wise for you to come to me. It is most imprudent."

"Why should it be imprudent, sir? Do I not come in the name of one with whom you were very well acquainted?"

"It is possible—I do not wish to be reminded of it."

"Then I am wrong in assuming that you had some friendship for my friend—the Lady Anna Maclain."

The Egyptian started up. His attitude had been entirely passive until this moment—an attitude which the drug might have influenced. Now, however, he began to show some signs of impatience, and he turned upon his interrogator sharply.

"Who is it that has sent you, sir—is it your friend Captain Ferman, the assassin?"

"If it should be, you will desire, I am sure, to serve an innocent man."

"An innocent man! I do not believe it, sir."

"You do not believe it?"

"Certainly not, since there is every reason to say that he killed the lady you have named."

"But, sir, this cannot be said lightly."

The man's eyes blazed.

"Lightly—am I of a race that speaks lightly? Hear me now—if your law spares this criminal I myself will kill him whenever I shall find him."

"Then you hold him to be guilty?"

There was no answer. The Egyptian had become as one possessed. Rocking to and fro upon his haunches, his eyes blazed fire, and froth came to his lips. Presently he raised his arms high above his head and uttered a shrill cry in a tongue that neither understood—then

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he fell back heavily upon the cushions and lay insensible.

"Ah," cried Maurevale to his companion as he stooped over the prone figure and lifted one of the sleeves of the Eastern robe, "he wears an amulet, I perceive. Do you know what this is, Monsieur Faber?"

But Gustave Faber made no reply. A movement quick as light had carried him to the curtained door, where he tore the drapery aside and caught at the figure of a woman ambushed there. She, however, flung herself from him, and the knife she carried fell with a clang upon the marble pavement. In the same instant the door was forced back and locked from the far side.

"A she-cat truly," remarked the detective as he picked up the dagger and examined it. "In another moment, Highness, you would have felt the temper of this."

"For the sake of an Egyptian who wears a heart of green jade," rejoined the prince quietly.

He looked again at Tahir Pasha and at the very curious ornament to which he had referred. Convinced that he had made no mistake, and that it was indeed a heart cut from a solid block of that beautiful jade the Chinese work so finely, he covered the sleeper's arm again and bade Gustave Faber follow him.

"We shall learn nothing more here," he said. "Let us go now to the Rue Dauphine."

"To the House of the Green Lantern—ah, Highness, that will be a dangerous journey."

Maurevale made no reply. He had long ceased to consider danger where it stood between him and the mystery it was now the purpose of his life to reveal.

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CHAPTER XVII

THE GREEN LANTERN IN THE RUE DAUPHINE

THEY took a cab at the end of the street, and crossing the river they came to the Pont Neuf, beyond which lies the old Rue Dauphine.

This is an ancient street running from the quay to the Boulevard St. Germain—a monument to the social history of Paris, which time and fashion have defaced beyond all knowledge.

Formerly the home of princes, it is now peopled by thriving tradesmen and worthy merchants. Students from the Quartier Latin hire apartments in its once glorious houses, and priests from the colleges enjoy the splendours of its faded rooms.

Maurevale knew Paris well, but he did not know this gloomy thoroughfare, nor did he remember to have entered it before. Gustave Faber, on the other hand, was very well acquainted with it, and could have told him grim stories of its once splendid mansions.

To-night he forbore to be anecdotal. Perhaps the mystery attending Maurevale's appearance in Paris had engrossed him also, despite official immunity. He imagined rightly that some matter of deep import was responsible for this curiosity concerning the Egyptian and his life, and he did not disguise in any way the danger of the quest upon which they were embarked.

The latter consideration held him silent as they crossed the Pont Neuf and looked down upon the dark

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waters of the swift river. The great bell in the Palais de Justice had struck eleven o'clock, the hour at which "life" begins to be worth living on the south side of the Seine. Even the Rue Dauphine could show them a café, brightly lighted and teeming with long-haired students from the colleges. These listened to the strains of "Hungarian" musicians, born somewhere in the neighbourhood of the "Midi." But none the less the music was bright and catchy, and many feet beat time to it.

Next door to the café were two or three shops, one a bookshop kept by a white-haired old man who must have been an optimist, for his shutters were still down, while he smoked a cigar at his door as though some laggard, intoxicated not by good wine but by learning, might yet buy a volume of him before he went to bed.

Maurevale, who had eyes for everything in the street, stopped the cab directly he espied the old bookseller, and immediately entered into conversation with him. He proved to be a vain and affable man, who spoke freely of his neighbours and seemed pleased at the unexpected opportunity of discussing them. When, however, the prince pointed out the green lantern above the door of an ancient mansion some fifty yards down the street, the old fellow became a little suspicious, and showed some disposition to retire into his cell.

"The House of the Green Lantern—ah, monsieur, none of us know much about that. But I will tell you one thing—the lantern is sometimes of another colour—and that is curious, as you will admit."

"Or merely a question of taste," said Maurevale; "we change the colour of our doorposts, why not of our

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lanterns? No doubt the house has a history with which you would be familiar; is it not so, monsieur?"

An appeal to his learning flattered the old bookseller and loosed his tongue.

"It was formerly the house of the Marquis of Servaux," he said immediately; "the ceilings are by Horace Vernet—though that is a fact that will not concern the riff-raff who now occupy it. If you are interested in this quarter of our city, I would recommend to you the volumes of Saint-Beuve, of which I have an excellent example in my possession at this moment."

The prince asked to see the books, and they were brought out at once. An offer to purchase them delighted the old man and gained upon his confidence.

"The history of the Servaux family has been treated also by Lamartine," he went on. "Unfortunately, I have sold the book to the Egyptian lady who came to see me yesterday. But I do not doubt that I could quickly procure another copy if your Excellency desires it?"

Maurevale desired him to do so—then he said:

"Do young Egyptian ladies take an interest in the story of French houses? Surely that is something new."

"As your Excellency says, both new and remarkable. I make nothing of it. Why should I? It is my business to sell books. But I have eyes like my neighbours, and when I see a dead man carried into a coach at midnight, and then a red lantern where a green lantern had stood, why then, as your Excellency will imagine, I am not less curious than others would be."

"It would certainly be very wonderful if you were

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not—especially if the young lady were sufficiently pretty. I am assuming that she was so, monsieur, or you would not have spoken of her in such flattering terms?"

The old man responded to him a little tartly.

"My personal opinions are of no importance to any one, monsieur. Moreover, this is a case for the police, or will be, before we are many days older."

Maurevale now perceived that he had gone a little too far, and that the bookseller was alarmed and would say no more. Laying a hundred-franc note upon the counter, he declared that he would call for the book in a few days' time, and so made as though to leave the shop. Just, however, as he was crossing the threshold a carriage drew up before the House of the Green Lantern, and a young Egyptian woman stepped to the pavement.

"There she is, Excellency," the old bookseller cried, "that is Mademoiselle Zaida. Is she not beautiful?"

As it was quite impossible to see the young lady's face, Maurevale might have hesitated to reply to the question; but, wishing to draw the old man out, he answered that her beauty was amazing. And then he said:

"She is quite alone, I perceive."

"Always alone, monsieur, except when the brother comes home. But that is not a lucky day for her."

"Is she not fortunate, then, in her brother?"

The bookseller shook his head.

"I do not know what it is. There are some who say absinthe; others who tell a different story. But he is very rich, this Tahir Pasha, and what does it matter what we do while we are rich? The world likes

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our vices all the better; for then people have something to talk about. Does your Excellency now perceive how very beautiful the young lady is?"

He had laid a hand upon the prince's arm as though to call attention to the opportunity. Standing for a moment to say a word to the coachman, the Egyptian woman permitted the light from the lantern of the carriage to fall full upon her face, and now for the first time Maurevale saw it clearly—and with an astonishment he could hardly conceal.

Immediately he recognised it for the face of the picture in the House of the Five Shutters near Ely. There was no possible doubt. Nor could he forget that some unknown miscreant had entered that house and slashed the picture with a sword. Verily were the mysteries shaping anew.

"As beautiful as she appears to be fascinating," he said to the bookseller. "Does she speak French, by the way?"

"With an accent, monsieur, which is pardonable to such a lady. I believe also that she speaks English very well—for I have heard her in conversation with no other than the Count of Fours in this very shop."

"The Count of Fours—but this is very interesting. Is he also a client of yours?"

"For many years I have sent books to Aizy-la-Belle. Certainly I have a great respect for the count, and he, I think, for me."

Maurevale was about to make some answer when Gustave Faber, who had been walking up and down the street, returned to the shop and made a sign that he had something to report. Wishing the bookseller

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good-night, and promising to return upon an early day, Maurevale linked his arm in that of the detective and went off with him. The Egyptian girl had re-entered the house by this time, and the carriage was driven away. There were but two lights visible above the lantern, and one of these shone dimly from the cupola of the hall.

"Well," exclaimed Maurevale, "I really think we have done a very good night's work, Monsieur Faber."

"If your Excellency thinks so!"

"But I do think it. Trust a bookseller if you would have the news of the street. Did you not tell me, by the way, that this house was supposed to be owned by the Young Egyptian Party in Paris?"

"The police believe so—and mark it dangerous."

"And yet it appears to be quite unworthy of such a description. Why, my dear Monsieur Faber, the good folks are already going to bed."

"Ah, sir, but not all of them, for here is another carriage."

It was quite true, for a second carriage, drawn by a fine pair of black horses, now appeared in the street and drew up by the green lantern. Of its three occupants two were men, Eastern certainly, and possibly Egyptian. The third was the woman whom Gustave Faber had discovered in the opium den of the Rue Montserre—a fact which he hastened to point out as he drew Maurevale back into the shadows and lowered his voice to a whisper.

"Do you see—the lady concealed by the curtain, monsieur?"

"Another object for the admiration of our friend

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the bookseller. She is perhaps a little forbidding, but then booksellers should be catholic in their tastes. Is anything else apparent to you, Faber?"

"The men have been quarrelling, Excellency."

"And one of them is not permitted to enter the house. For a truth we are fortunate—and there is a man who must sup with us."

"Excellency—that is risking too much."

"Which I am here to risk. Now please to follow me."

He crossed the street and followed the young Egyptian who had been dismissed a little summarily at the gate. Jostling him as though by accident when they were almost at the Boulevard St. Germain, Maurevale apologised with his accustomed courtesy—and then, feigning astonishment, he explained:

"But, monsieur, we have met before."

"Indeed," exclaimed the young man, in very passable French, "I am not aware of the circumstance, monsieur."

"But it is so, for I never forget a face. I am Maurevale of Dara—perhaps my name is known to you?"

"It could not be unknown to any one in Paris. Still I do not remember how we met."

"But you will do so presently. And as we both appear to be without a destination, who do you say, monsieur, to a little supper at the Café Heinrich?"

The young man twirled a fierce moustache and seemed to hesitate. Possibly he would have declined even yet but for a word at hazard—thrown down by the prince as a gambler throws his last card.

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"Where, sir, we could speak perhaps of Mademoiselle Zaida."

The Egyptian started, and looked the speaker full in the face.

"Oh, yes," he said quickly, "I will come with you, prince, in that case."

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CHAPTER XVIII

THE YOUNG MAN SPEAKS

THEY had turned into the Boulevard St. Germain by this time, and there Maurevale called a cab and bade this young Egyptian enter. Gustave Faber meanwhile continued his journey on foot, for he had other work to do. A few whispered words confirmed an early appointment with the prince for the morrow, and so the two parted and Maurevale entered the cab. Precisely ten minutes later he had ordered a well-chosen supper at the Café Heinrich, and was there conducted to a private room invariably reserved for him while he was in Paris.

He found the young Egyptian both an agreeable companion and a willing one. An early exchange of confidences established the fact that the young man had served in the Egyptian Army, and that his name was Allulah. Very frankly and without passion he declared his sympathies with the National Party, but deplored the methods they had begun to adopt. Maurevale, upon his side, encouraged him to talk, serving him meanwhile to rare dishes and filling his glass with the choicest wine of the Bordeaux country.

"You have been some time in Paris, sir; I gather as much from your conversation," said Maurevale, when the waiters had left the room. Allulah replied that he had been there just six months.

"More than sufficient to pass for a Parisian if you have the disposition," said Maurevale. "I would make a true Parisian of some men in three days. But I

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should not take them to the south side of the river."

Allulah looked up, shrewdly perceiving the meaning of the question. He had known very well from the beginning that such a man as Maurevale of Dara would not invite him to supper upon the mere score of conviviality, and was not surprised that the conversation should take such a trend.

"Unless," he said, "there were reasons for your choice. I can well imagine, sir, that the south side of the river is more agreeable to some of us than the other."

"Or more convenient," said Maurevale, with a laugh, "in relation to the Embassies."

The young man did not make an immediate reply; but, when he had drunk another glass of champagne, he asked:

"Does your Excellency refer to any particular Embassy?"

"Most certainly, I am thinking of our good friends in London."

"Would you expect to find them my good friends also?"

"That would depend upon your wisdom. If the Rue Dauphine holds them of small account, it does not follow that the Rue Dauphine is an oracle. You, I am sure, do not think of it as such."

"What leads your Excellency to such an opinion?"

"The fact that you accompany me to supper tonight. Had it been otherwise you would have entered the house with the others—whereas I plainly perceived that you were not welcome."

Allulah sighed and ceased to eat. His thoughts had been carried in a moment to the image of the woman

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he worshipped, and if he had confessed the truth aloud it could not have been more unmistakable. Maurevale, however, who had been convinced of the fact from the beginning, now hastened to push his advantage home.

"You are not welcome except to one. Forgive my frankness, for possibly I can help you. And permit me to congratulate you upon so charming a friend as Mademoiselle Zaida."

"Then you are acquainted with her, prince?"

"Indeed, no—but I hope to be shortly. Her picture, however, is well known to me, and I have been privileged to see her to-night for the first time."

"You agree with me that she is a beautiful woman?"

"It would be impossible to differ."

"And one worthy of sacrifice?"

"Such a sacrifice, shall we say, as would lead a man to resign a king's commission and to number himself among the rebels. I am speaking in parables, and you shall correct me. Is it not so, sir—and do you find fault with me?"

"Impossible to do so. I have heard you named for a wizard, and I begin to believe rumour. Tell me, for charity's sake, how you came to know of my affairs."

"With every pleasure. There are certain elemental facts of life which no country changes. I desire to be of service to Mademoiselle Zaida, and I argue that I may help by the instrumentality of the man who loves her. Fortune or opportunity sends you in my way at the very moment I am determined to find you. So our interests, being common, can be safely discussed."

Allulah nodded his head.

"I should have every confidence in your judgment,"

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he said. Maurevale knew too much of men to doubt the candour of it.

"You are wise to accept my advances," he continued, "for they may mean much to you. In the first place, I may save you from the English Government, should you desire to return to Egypt."

"Then you accuse me of a desire to return?"

"I must do so. The man who does not desire to return to his native land is either a coward or a villain. You are neither, and the day will soon come when you would give ten years of your life for a safe conduct to the barracks at Cairo. If you went there to-day you would be arrested—it might be you would be shot. But you will desire to take Mademoiselle Zaida to Egypt ultimately, for she would not be happy in any other country. And so I say that you are wise to confide in me and to speak of your difficulties. Who knows that I may not be the very friend for whom you have been waiting?"

A light of pleasure entered the young man's eyes at these words, and he regarded Maurevale wistfully, as though he were listening to a fairy-tale in whose promises he did not dare to believe. Presently he said:

"But why should you help me? What is your obligation that you wish to be my friend?"

"Absolutely none. I am here for the most selfish of interests—to save the life of an Englishman who is in danger. And so I come to you——"

"To me, prince?"

"Yes, to you and to your friend Tahir Pasha."

The Egyptian paled at the words. He was obviously much agitated and not a little alarmed.

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"How can Tahir help you? Is he not himself in danger?"

"Of what?"

"Of his friends."

"Because of his English sympathies—is that why he is in danger?"

It was a word at random, but the shot went home.

"I do not say so."

"But you wish me to infer as much. Very well, we will begin with that. Tahir must be saved for his sister's sake. You must be saved—from yourself, my friend—because you are the lover of Mademoiselle Zaida, whose sympathies are English also, I imagine."

"I will not try to deceive you, since you know so much. Both Zaida and I regret much that is done in the Rue Dauphine. But we are helpless, and Tahir is worse than helpless."

"I can well imagine it. A man who finds inspiration in an opium den is not likely to be the lusty soldier of any cause. Well, then, must we not rely upon ourselves to give this excellent soldier his liberty?"

Allulah shook his head.

"I wish you success," he said quietly; "but you will be lucky to save his life."

The prince looked up.

"From his friends of the Green Lantern. I see, I see—our arrival upon the scene is at a late hour. But we must do our best—and quickly. Are you aware, by the way, to what your friend Tahir owes his English sympathies? Do you know much of his story?"

"Very little—except that he was dismissed from the Egyptian army for so-called treachery some six years

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ago. After that he went first to Tunis and then to Athens. He has been but a few months in Paris."

"And you know nothing of his private affairs—of his wife or children?"

"Of his wife, certainly—she is Madame Sabine, Ghika's sister. But he has no children."

"How long has he been married to this lady?"

"I would say for some years; but I have not known them very long—not personally, that is. We were not in the same regiment, Tahir and I."

"And yet I understand that he was a man about whom Cairo gossiped some years ago?"

"Oh, that is true. The women ran after him very much—even the French women as well as the Egyptians. I have heard it said that the wife of the Count of Fours was very much in love with him."

"To the great entertainment of the city, no doubt. I have heard the same thing from the Nile boatmen. The English women fall in love with them and write them letters they cannot read. Did the old count approve of the adventure?"

Allulah smiled archly.

"There was some talk of a duel; but the city laughed so much we heard no more of it. I think also that Mademoiselle Zaida interfered, for she knew the family very well. It is said that she corresponds with the count still—but I do not know the truth of that."

"Perhaps she would tell it to me if I visited her at the Rue Dauphine?"

A startled look passed into the Egyptian's eyes.

"They would kill you if they knew why you went," he said.

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Maurevale lighted a cigar; he seemed quite indifferent to the information.

"I shall not tell them," he remarked smilingly; "besides, I am not the kind of man that such people as these are wise to kill."

"Your intention of going, however, is not quite serious."

"It is perfectly serious. I am going to Mademoiselle Zaida—first that I may save her brother, and after that, to marry her to one of my guests."

The youth coloured deeply.

"I may not stop you," he said, "and yet I think such a journey to be madness."

"But you will help me to make it none the less. At what time should I be likely to find mademoiselle alone?"

"Between four and five in the afternoon, if you must really go."

"I will call there between four and five o'clock to-morrow. May I use your name in this matter?"

"You have my cordial permission; but once more, I beg you to reflect."

"My dear sir," said Maurevale quietly, "I spend most of my life reflecting. It is the only amusement for a man of sense."

It was now very late, and most of the people had left the café. With a promise to Allulah to meet him again at the same place on the following evening, and disregarding his renewed warnings concerning a visit to the house in the Rue Dauphine, Maurevale returned to the Ritz Hotel and to his bed. The day's work had been profitable beyond all hope, and yet, when he came

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to sum the total of its achievements, even he might have despaired.

For what had he learned, and what did the knowledge contribute to the solution of the supreme mystery?

He had come to Paris believing that the city might add some pages to the story of Lady Anna's death, might throw some new light upon those amazing perplexities to which the crime at Pangbourne had given birth, and help him to send a message of hope to Jack Ferman and his friends. So far these objects were utterly defeated. He found himself in the heart of a new intrigue which might ultimately disclose an amazing story, but not one, he feared, which would help him to redeem his promise to Kitty Insole.

Vaguely he began to think that the old Count of Fours might yet be called upon to answer in a way which would surprise the world. The one idea, the inspiration he had desired so ardently, refused obstinately to come to him. He was still as a child groping in the dark, though the objects about him were becoming more familiar.

It was late when he awoke next morning, and Gustave Faber already waited for him. The detective had much that was interesting to tell, and one piece of news that was unexpected. Tahir Pasha had spent the night at the house in the Rue Montserre, and had not yet left that den of iniquity. He had been visited there, however, by two men, apparently Egyptians, and these had been followed to the Rue Dauphine, whence one of them had gone on to a little hotel in the Rue St. Honoré. Here he had found no other than the Englishwoman, the Lady Constance Heliers, who had

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arrived in Paris the previous day, accompanied by Dr. Frederick Walther and Mr. Archie Kerrington, which story Monsieur Faber recited stolidly, as is the habit of the professional policeman.

The prince heard him without remark. That the fascinating Constance Heliers should have come to Paris at such a moment surprised him very much, though, when he came to reflect upon it, he did not know why he should be surprised. Walther's presence was another matter, and must be read as an intimation that the conspiracy had now come to a head, and that the last cards were to be played. Herein amusement rather than danger was to be detected, and, when he had put a few questions to Gustave Faber, the prince began to speak of other matters.

"You say that Tahir Pasha is still in the Rue Montserre. I am glad to hear it, Monsieur Faber, for I wish you to carry a letter to him."

Gustave Faber's eyebrows went up.

"A letter, Excellency? I doubt if he is in a fit state to read a letter."

"Then you will wait until he is so. Meanwhile, do you know of any house in Paris where this man would be safe from his friends?"

"There are many such houses if he would consent to go."

"I think he will consent when he has read my letter. Should he do so, please to see that he is watched night and day—and in case of necessity do not hesitate to communicate with the Prefect. I myself am going this afternoon to the Rue Dauphine. I shall know more when I have been there, and can then make my plans.

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You meanwhile will not lose sight of Tahir. I consider this most important."

Faber promised not to do so. At the same time the intimation concerning the house in the Rue Dauphine alarmed him very much, and he did not hesitate to say so.

"Your Excellency is running a grave risk. I really think it would be well to reconsider your determination. These are not Frenchmen, and the Prefect has little authority. If any harm happened to you in the house they would disappear immediately, and we should never trace them. Besides, it is very difficult to watch the place."

"I can quite imagine that. But do not give yourself any concern in the matter. Nothing will happen to me in the Rue Dauphine. I travel under a lucky star, Monsieur Faber—you may be quite at your ease."

Faber said no more, and Maurevale went down to breakfast. When he had attended to his correspondence and written a letter to the young man Allulah, which he sent by a special messenger from the hotel, he left cards upon the amiable Constance Heliers and then drove for an hour in the Bois. It was four o'clock precisely when his car set him down at the door of the house in the Rue Dauphine, and he told the man to wait for him.

This had been spoken of by the young Egyptian as the favourable hour. Maurevale wondered if it were so. The green lantern was still lighted despite the time of day. He reflected that Gustave Faber was a man of wisdom, and that he had spoken of danger.

But he rang at the bell nevertheless, and had never been more at his ease than when he waited for an answer.

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CHAPTER XIX

THE GARDEN GATE

A French servant answered the ring and received the visitor with the common formalities. In answer to Maurevale's inquiry whether Mademoiselle Zaida was at home he said that he would see, and begged the prince meanwhile to wait in an anteroom of the hall. This was quite a simple apartment, furnished with a few stately chairs of a very ancient epoch, and a large oil painting by Horace Vernet in that painter's usual florid manner.

The great hall, one of the finest in Paris, was entirely unoccupied as Maurevale crossed it. Two splendid staircases led up to a domed landing; the walls were in mosaic; the ceiling magnificently painted in the Italian manner. But of evidence of human occupation there was none whatever. The stillness of the whole place affected the prince in an odd manner, accustomed as he was to the power of silence and to its suggestive-ness. He knew the house as a very nest of all the conspiracies against British rule in Egypt. But for what the house told he might have been a caller in the dog days, when the old Marquis of Servaux had gone to the Pyrenees and the *concierge* had fallen into a nap.

Some minutes passed before the servant returned. The prince perceived that his manner was no less correct than before and that the appearance of a stranger

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in no way embarrassed him. Very civilly he said that Mademoiselle Zaida was not at home—"but," he added, "Madame Sabine will see your Highness if you so desire."

This was a disappointment, though Maurevale had hardly hoped to see Mademoiselle Zaida when he went to the house. The young man, Allulah, was a very simple fellow and had made light of the difficulties; but the prince knew very well that such people as these would not be caught napping, and he replied immediately that he would be glad to see madame. Then the Frenchman bade him follow, and they went up the great staircase together.

It really was wonderful that so large a house should harbour so many people and yet conceal all traces of them. As in the hall below, so here beneath the cupola, not a sound might be heard, not a human voice, nor a human footstep. They passed down a long corridor, glowing with treasures of painting and sculpture, and the same impression remained. The dead ages had their grip upon this splendid habitation, and the green lantern burned but in a mockery.

Maurevale remembered the lantern, he knew not why, as the servant opened a door at the far end of the corridor and informed him that madame would be down immediately. The room into which they had shown him was quite Eastern in its tapestries and ornaments, if not in its paintings. Brightly coloured stuffs decorated the walls; there were low ottomans and cushions of the Turkish fashion; the windows gave upon the roof of the ballroom below, of which a miniature winter garden had been made. Moreover, there were lamps

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of an Eastern fashion, and one of them in the corner burned before a Christian ikon.

This was a little surprising and added to the prince's perplexity. But as though it was to be a day of perplexities, he had waited but a little while when a man entered the room quite unexpectedly and appeared to be astonished that a stranger should occupy it. He was a very old man, with a white beard of prodigious length, and a robe to match it falling to his slippered feet. Bowing gravely, he saluted the prince, and for an instant fixed curious eyes upon him. Then he withdrew as silently, and no echo of his footsteps could be heard from the corridor.

The intrusion was unlooked for, but a second of the kind capped it more dramatically. This was nothing else than the opening of a door in the wall, so deftly concealed that Maurevale had been ignorant of its existence until the tapestry fell back. Then he perceived that the hidden door gave upon a smaller apartment, which was occupied by some half-a-dozen men in Eastern attire—but chiefly by Turks and Egyptians, who wore their native dress and were armed to boot. The men appeared to be engaged in earnest argument; but it was a woman who had opened the door, and she now shut it as softly and bowed coldly to Maurevale. He, however, remained too astonished to return her salute—for he recognised her instantly as the woman who had tried to stab him the previous night in the opium den in the Rue Montserre.

"If you please, monsieur——"

She spoke execrable French, as Easterns are wont to do, but Maurevale detected her nationality instantly,

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and knew that she was no Egyptian. A tall woman, of savage mien, some would have called her handsome, others merely masculine. Her dress was French and costly; she had a number of bracelets upon an unshapely brown arm, and her raven black hair was caught up by an ornament of diamonds. At hazard, some five feet ten in height; the contour of the face interested the prince greatly and forbade him to divert his eyes. Where had he seen such a face before?

"A thousand pardons, madame," he exclaimed at last, "but I do not think you are the lady I have called to see."

"My cousin Zaida is out," she rejoined, and then, "but as I have no reason to think that you are acquainted with her, I shall take the liberty of asking you your business."

Maurevale bowed and began to feel more at his ease. A contest of the wits invariably stimulated him, and he understood that this must be such a contest, whatever its dangers. Besides, he stood already at an advantage.

"My excuse might well be that I am a fellow-countryman," he said; "did not the name of Sabine speak to me of Sistova, then, assuredly, the ornament you wear so well, madame, would do so. They have other arts in the West, but the art of the gold workers of our native land——"

He indicated with a gesture the heavy bangles she wore, and pursued the deduction in the same spirit of raillery which had so often served him well.

"A common bond of the exile we suffer so bravely. Here am I ten years out of Dara and yet able to sup-

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port existence. You, madame, I do not doubt, are in the same happy position. You hymn your native land in the suns of Egypt, and when Egypt wearies, you continue the chant in the Bois de Boulogne. That is both philosophic and patriotic, for how can one remember one's country so kindly as when one is banished from it?"

The woman smiled, but did not make an immediate reply. She still held Maurevale's card in her hand, and it was plain to be seen that she would weigh her words as a miser his gold. Had the prince desired an image he would have thought of her as some magnificent animal trapped and at bay, but hesitating at the moment of attack. In the end she appeared to think that civility would serve her best, and she bade her guest be seated.

"You have not come to the Rue Dauphine to speak to me of patriotism. What then, sir?" she asked. Maurevale, without any hesitation whatsoever, replied:

"To speak of an affair in which I believe that your cousin, Mademoiselle Zaida, would be greatly interested."

"Am I not to share this interest?"

"Possibly. You alone can tell me. It concerns a dear friend of mine, the Count of Fours."

The woman nodded her head. She had been waiting for another story.

"I am not acquainted with him," she rejoined abruptly.

"No, but your cousin is, and so I came to her. You see a most ridiculous thing has happened. There has been a crime committed near my house in England, and

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those foolish people, the police, insist that the count had some knowledge of it; while I know that he is altogether innocent."

"You know it, prince?"

"Absolutely. And that permits me to ask you if, during your residence in Cairo, you were acquainted with an Englishwoman, the Lady Anna Maclain."

"I have never heard such a name. Why do you ask me?"

"Because, my dear madame, it would have been a fortunate thing for your husband had you done so."

He uttered the words lightly, but they were unmistakably a threat, and the woman understood them to be so. Trembling with anger she looked Maurevale full in the face with the eyes of one who challenged and was not afraid.

"In what way is my husband concerned?"

"Ah, there I cannot help you. But I may tell you this, that there are persons of influence in London who believe that your husband could tell the whole story of this crime, and who will stand at no risks to procure his evidence. For your own sake, then, you should be warned." She laughed derisively.

"Am I to suppose that they will take him to London by force?"

"It is not impossible. They may even arrest him in Paris."

"In the name of a woman he has never seen."

"Madame, you know that it is not true."

She began to breathe quickly; her hands played nervously with the card she held. Here was a man who flung the gauntlet into her very face.

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"Had you not better tell me at once that my husband murdered this lady?"

"It would be utterly false to say so. But I think that he knows the name of the assassin. Or if he does not, he could help us to discover it. That would serve him well. It might also be the means of permitting him the continued use of this house. I have some influence with the authorities here, and would not oppose a bargain. Let your husband tell me all that he knows of the Lady Anna, and I will see that he is not molested in Paris."

"You will see—what affair is it then of yours?"

"So much my affair that I am resolved to consider no other until my purpose is accomplished."

"A noble ambition. It justifies you, it would seem, in coming to this house to affront its mistress."

"My dear madame, nothing is further from my thoughts. I come to you frankly as to a friend. Surely I must not suppose that this act of justice, this testimony which might save the life of an innocent man, is regarded by you as an affront?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I know nothing of it—and I have said that I cannot help you. Is it not time that this interview should terminate?"

She stood up and put her hand upon the silken cord of a bell-rope, but she did not pull it. Resting thus an instant, she exclaimed:

"I think you had better see my friends—this is no subject for a woman to discuss. If my husband were here——"

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"Ah," said Maurevale quietly, "but that would be a long delay."

She let the bell-rope go and advanced toward him.

"What do you say, monsieur?"

"I say it is most unlikely that your husband will return to this house at all. Indeed, I should not be surprised to hear that he had left Paris."

She uttered a low cry and stood swaying in a tempest of anger she could not control. Maurevale understood that he had committed a grave imprudence, but he wished to force her to a confession, and believed that the threat alone could do so. Now he saw his mistake. She was about to summon her friends from the adjoining room, and he had no doubt what their argument would be.

"Where is Tahir?" she asked, recovering herself with an effort. "What have you done with him?"

"My dear madame, are you really supposing that this is an affair of mine? I come to help you, and you shut the door in my face. Really, it is not I who am to blame."

"I believe that you are lying to me," she cried; and with that she turned about and took the bell-pull again in her hand. The critical instant had arrived. Maurevale waited for the men and wondered how he would meet them.

Madame, however, did not pull the cord. It was as though an unseen hand held her back, and she stood swaying by the chimney as though to rid herself of a spell. When some seconds had passed thus, the cord dropped from her hand and the door opened. Maurevale turned about to see the old man upon the

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threshold and to understand why madame had not summoned her friends. Here was the "influence"; there could be no doubt of it.

Entering very silently and with stealth, the priest crossed the floor and spoke softly to the woman. Her protests, her vain efforts to rise and cry out, were a strange tribute to his power. Apparently he argued with her, but to argument he added a hypnotic suggestion which was unmistakable. Then he turned to Maurevale and spoke in broken English.

"Go," he said; "you have no time to lose. Go, friend, in the name of God."

Maurevale looked at the woman, but did not hesitate. She had fallen almost into a state of coma, and rocked and swayed in the chair by the chimney. The old Egyptian stood by her side still speaking softly in an unknown tongue and chafing her hands. And this was the last the prince saw of them as he left the room and found himself again in the corridor. Here, to his surprise, a young woman waited for him. He recognised her in an instant for Mademoiselle Zaida, whom he had come there to see.

She did not speak, and her slippered feet fell so lightly upon the carpet of the corridor that not a sound could be heard. Plainly she expected Maurevale to follow her, and he was but too ready to do so. A winding iron staircase carried them down toward the back of the house and the garden, but they had hardly begun to descend it when the shouts of angry men were to be heard and the rush of their footsteps as they burst out upon the corridor above. Mademoiselle meanwhile began to tremble, and when she turned at the

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foot of the staircase to see if the prince were following her, her white face spoke eloquently of the house and of its people.

"By the garden gate, sir," she cried, thrusting a little key into the prince's hands. He took it readily and pressed her fingers in thanks.

"And you, mademoiselle?"

"Mahomet will protect me."

"But I shall send for you, and this key will open the door. May I tell Allulah that all is well with you?"

She flushed crimson.

"He must not come here——"

"We will come together," Maurevale said, "at ten o'clock to-night, mademoiselle, in the garden you speak of."

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CHAPTER XX

AN ACCUSATION IS MADE

THE corridor of the Ritz was crowded by "five o'clocks" when Maurevale reached the hotel, and he stood a moment to wonder at the adaptability of the French, who have taken to the tea habit as ducks to water. Here in the crimson corridor a bevy of smartly dressed folk sipped the delectable beverage which they hardly ever saw ten years ago, and the dresses were wonderful enough to arrest even the attention of man.

Many people were there whom he knew: many recognised him. He had expected to find Lady Constance at such a time; but while the porter informed him that she had paid a brief visit to the hotel, she appeared to have taken her departure without letter or message. And for this Maurevale was grateful because he knew that her hour was not yet.

He had despatched a message for Gustave Faber directly he returned, and this ready personage made his appearance some quarter of an hour later. Excited beyond his wont, he declared immediately that he had news and that it was urgent.

"I was just coming along to your Excellency—naturally I should come after your threat to visit the house in the Rue Dauphine. Of course, you did not carry that out?"

Maurevale bade him be seated, and offered him a cigar.

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"I am just returned from the very place," he said, with pretence, and then he asked, "Did you really believe that my intention would not be carried out?"

Faber did not know what to say.

"I can only consider your Excellency's return as a miracle," he stammered.

"Come, come, my friend, why should it be that? Crimes are of two kinds—those which imply brains of a kind and are premeditated, and those which temper provokes and are merely passionate. I did not fear the first, for no one in the Rue Dauphine knew that I was about to visit the house. Against the second I felt able to protect myself."

Faber said that he could not understand it.

"Something happened in the house, I can see," he said at last. The prince admitted it.

"You will laugh, however," he added, "when you hear that my immediate purpose is to marry the young lady of the Rue Dauphine to the youth who supped with me last night."

"To marry the lady—your Excellency is not in earnest!"

"You shall see how earnest I am when you have heard my instructions. I shall require some help, Faber, that of at least half-a-dozen men. Can you assure me as much?"

"If your Excellency really means—but I must assume that you are serious."

"As serious, Faber, as the passion of a man for a woman will ever permit a third party to be. Now please take down my instructions, and then act upon them immediately. I must see Tahir without delay."

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He said no more upon the matter, but began at once to dictate his commands as he had promised: and he was still engaged in this exciting task when a servant of the hotel entered the room and handed him a telegram. Tearing the envelope without remark, he said nothing of the grave tidings which he had just received.

"You are to be outside the garden gate of the Rue de Nevers precisely at ten o'clock—but at half-past nine o'clock you will send three men to the door of the house in the Rue Dauphine, and they will watch it in such a way that any one within the house will be aware of their presence. Do you understand that, Faber?"

"Certainly, Excellency."

"Then ascertain for me, I beg of you, when the evening train from Blois reaches the Quai d'Orsay."

Faber ceased to write. The digression appeared to him to be extraordinary.

"It arrives at eleven o'clock; but, Excellency, is the Quai d'Orsay in the matter, then?"

"So much in the matter, Faber, that I would give a thousand louis to know why a young friend of mine will be there this night."

He crushed the telegram in his hand as though he regretted the expression of impatience, and then fell to pacing the room again as one plunged suddenly into an abyss of his thoughts and totally without enlightenment. This mood endured for some minutes, and when it passed Faber perceived that the difficulty had vanished also and that nothing but an intense purpose remained.

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"Have you any agent in Chinon?" he asked presently. This was a question which surprised the detective very much.

"In Chinon, sir?"

"I said so; but it appears that you have not. We must have one, however, and the best you can engage. Let him go to a house I will describe and ascertain if it has been visited within the last forty-eight hours by a young Englishwoman, whose portrait I will give you. In any case let him spare neither expense nor trouble to trace this young lady, who, until to-day, was the guest of the Count of Fours at Aizy-la-Belle. You understand, Faber—the lady is missing, and it is feared that she has been decoyed from the count's house."

"That is very serious, prince."

"As serious as it was inevitable. And yet I had not thought of it. Even the best of us is an optimist sometimes, Faber. We think that our brains are infallible and wake up to discover that a fool has outwitted us. So it has always been. I am no different from the others."

"Do you believe, then, that the story of an abduction is true?"

"I believe nothing until it is proved. You will tell me whether this be true or false. Lose no time, I beg of you—for the lady's safety is more precious to me than my own life."

He terminated the interview with the words, and immediately left the Ritz in his own car to visit Tahir Pasha at the Hôtel Beau Seigneur. Never, perhaps, from the beginning of this stupendous task had the

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meaning of it or the nature of the stake he played for been so well understood. That the truth might be in the end a story of shame and humiliation; that his pursuit of it might bring ruin to some and social ostracism to others, he had not doubted—but that little Stella should suffer, that harm might come to her, had never been in his thoughts.

And now the blow had fallen, and Kitty Insole had telegraphed from Blois the momentous announcement that Stella was missing from the château, and that she herself was coming straight to Paris. Such a turn had not been imagined by the prince in the most profound of his many anticipations.

Oh, it was all plain enough, and for that matter a clever move. Maurevale never doubted that Frederick Walther and Constance Heliers were at the back of it, and that they had contrived it to keep him from the Peace Conference at Lausanne. Very probably old Walther had been offered a substantial sum by a Continental Power if he succeeded in silencing the most feared advocate of peace and the one to whom the other Powers would most readily listen. And he had struck, not at the man, but at the woman—a clever trick and one which earned his adversary's admiration.

That actual harm would happen to Stella, Maurevale could not believe. None the less, it was possible that evil might come to her, and if it did he must set it down to his own overweening confidence and to his imprudence. Bitterly now he blamed himself that he had permitted her to go to the count's house at all. Had he not known it for a nest of intriguers, and was it not possible that after all this smooth-tongued

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Frenchman had killed Anna? He had come to think that it might be so, but he reflected that this idea was subsequent to Stella's departure from England. He would not have let her go had it been otherwise.

It was astonishing how all he had planned now seemed impotent and vain in the light of this unlooked-for intelligence. What mattered the truth if Stella Insole were not the first to hear it? He thought of her as he had seen her at Pangbourne during the summer—the simple, shy, little girl, whose wit and cleverness few would have guessed. Truly would he have given half his fortune to have known that all was well with her this night.

These reflections had carried him to the Avenue de l'Opéra, and his car now drew up before a quiet little hotel which almost faced the great opera-house, and was next door to a café largely frequented by Germans. An inquiry of the *concierge* whether Bimbashi Tahir was in the house resulted in an affirmative answer, and to Maurevale's surprise the Egyptian consented immediately to receive him. Following a page upstairs to a private room on the second floor, he found Tahir sitting at a little writing-table, though it was not apparent that he had been writing; and when he rose Maurevale perceived how marked were the ravages of last night's debauch, and how truly Faber had spoken of his weakness.

The Egyptian was dressed in a black frock-coat with dark trousers, and wore the button of his order. An amazingly handsome man, his carriage was dignified and his air that of an aristocrat. With a gracious wave of his hand he indicated an armchair by the table,

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and bade the prince take it. Then he called for the eternal coffee and cigarettes.

"Your Excellency has been good enough to take an interest in my affairs," he began. "Since I may not doubt the friendly nature of your intervention, I beg to thank you. Be sure that anything you may say to me will have a careful hearing."

"I was sure of it," said Maurevale as he lighted a cigar, "otherwise the letter would not have been written. And as we have no time to lose I will come to the point without delay. In a word, it concerns the house in the Rue Dauphine."

Tahir turned in his chair that he might listen more carefully.

"Yes," he said slowly, "it would be about that; though what your Excellency knows of such a house I am quite at a loss to say." He waited for an answer, as though unwilling to commit himself until the whole position were declared. Maurevale, however, was frankness itself.

"You shall have the whole story," he said, with an assumption of candour he could at all times command. "The French Government knows of this house, and in the present state of international politics will not permit it to exist. The rest is in the hands of the police, who, I am given to understand, will visit the Rue Dauphine at ten o'clock to-night."

Tahir nodded his head. A man of phlegmatic temperament, he betrayed no sign of emotion whatsoever. And it may be that he and his friends had been expecting some such tidings.

"What affair is it of the French Government," he

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