3 3433 07574238 1

The Copper House

by Julius Regis

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Digitized by Google
Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

THE COPPER HOUSE

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

NEW FICTION

ANNETTE ET SYLVIE
by Romain Rolland

JEAN HUGUENOT
by Stephen Vincent Benét

DIFFERENT GODS
by Violet Quirk

QUEST
by Rosita Forbes

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

THE COPPER HOUSE

A Detective Story

BY

JULIUS REGIS
AUTHOR OF "NO. 13 TORONI"

NEW YORK
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY
1923

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

133252B

Copyright, 1923,
By
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

First Printing, September, 1923

PROPERTY
OF THE
NEW YORK
SOCIETY LIBRARY

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Digitized by Google
Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

OCT 9 1923

F

CONTENTS

PART I

THE WHIRLPOOL

PAGE

PROLOGUE 3

CHAPTER

I. BARON FREDERICK FAYERLING WAITS IN VAIN FOR THE MOST IMPORTANT DOCUMENT IN EUROPE 7

II. A YOUNG MAN ARRIVES FROM CALIFORNIA, AND HEARS SOME UNEXPECTED NEWS . . . 21

III. WALLION MEETS B. 22, AND CERTAIN REMARKABLE EPISODES IN A GREAT MAN'S CAREER ARE DESCRIBED WITH THE DESIRED EFFECT 37

IV. LEONARD GRATH ACTS ON HIS OWN RESPONSIBILITY AND MEETS WITH A GIRL WHO RUNS AWAY FROM HIM 51

V. IN WHICH IT IS OBVIOUS THAT THE OWNER IS A GUEST IN HIS OWN HOUSE 65

VI. THE PROBLEM-HUNTER 79

VII. THE SLAYERS 94

Digitized by Google

Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

CONTENTS

PART II

THE TWENTIETH OF JULY

CHAPTER		PAGE
VIII.	LONA IVANOVNA ASKS HER FIRST QUESTION .	111
IX.	UNREST IN BOTH CAMPS; AN OUTPOST SKIRMISH AND A WARNING	125
X.	THE SITUATION BECOMES ACUTE . . .	139
XI.	MAURICE WALLION LOOKS ABOUT HIM A BIT AND MAKES A NEW ACQUAINTANCE . .	151
XII.	IN WHICH WE CATCH A GLIMPSE OF THE SHADOW OF NAPOLEON THE GREAT . .	165
XIII.	LONA IVANOVNA ASKS A SECOND QUESTION AND GETS AN UNEXPECTED REPLY . .	178
XIV.	THE STORY OF THE BERNIN FAMILY . . .	192

PART III

GABRIEL ORTIZ

XV.	THE STORM BURSTS	211
XVI.	GABRIEL ORTIZ MUSTERS HIS FORCES AND COUNTS HIS PRISONERS	224

Digitized by Google

Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

CHAPTER PAGE

XVII. LEO AND SONIA DETERMINE TO STEAL A MOTOR-CAR BUT FALL INTO AN UNEXPECTED TRAP 237

XVIII. TARRASCHIN'S MEMORANDUM CHANGES OWNERS 250

XIX. WALLION SPEAKS OUT AND RASTAKOV IS BALKED OF HIS PREY 265

XX. IN WHICH WALLION SHOWS THAT A GREAT DEAL CAN BE DONE IN TEN MINUTES . . 277

XXI. THE END OF A GLORIOUS DREAM 288

Digitized by Google

Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Part I—The Whirlpool

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

PROLOGUE

THIS is the story of a great peril, and how it was averted.

It is surprising to think how few persons were aware of this peril, or had any suspicion of the extraordinary events that were taking place in Stockholm during the fateful year 1917.

Nevertheless, at the beginning of the year, a little weekly newspaper published a very striking open letter, entitled: "Who is the Man in the Whirlpool?"

To whom was it addressed? There was no indication, but the writer was evidently inspired by a deep and growing conviction of impending evil. The article ran as follows:

"Have we lost all power of distinguishing between essentials and non-essentials? Stockholm has become a caravanserai, a link between East and West, a central clearing-house for all those who, under various disguises and with varying aims, seek to enrich themselves in the blood-stained arena of War. Can no one foresee what sort of crop must ultimately spring from this strife-sodden soil? It is tragic, while almost laughable, to see how people persist in labeling as 'espionage' every new development whose purpose is unintelligible to

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

them, in the same way that they would probably account for all unexplained conflagrations with the glib verdict: 'a short-circuit.'

What *is* espionage? Of course, it exists. But is there nothing more?

Chips from many kinds of timber float on the surface of the whirlpool. What a medley of strange faces, which nobody recognizes, bob up from its mysterious depths!

The short-sighted public are content to go on believing that in Stockholm, where secret committees and conferences, planners and plotters from every quarter of the earth, are struggling together for the mastery, these dark deeds are one and all the work of secret agents of the belligerent powers.

Yet it is as certain as a problem of Euclid that at the vortex of the Whirlpool we shall find a group of intelligences working solely for their own interests. Let us suppose that amongst these, *one* alone is to be found who is strong enough to fight his way through chaos, or rather let us say, to *dominate* chaos. Would not such a man establish himself at the very heart of the Whirlpool, to direct the various powers of destruction whither he will?

We need not limit ourselves to supposition: *He exists*. We do not know who he is, and it is possible that his plans are known to no one besides himself. The air is full of rumors, and no one can tell what the future may bring forth. There is enough to show that a

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

powerful will is evidently directing the activities of many of these lawless phenomena. Who is the Man in the Whirlpool?

Can no one answer the question before it is too late? For he certainly exists."

This appeal fell on deaf ears. The few who read it shook their heads, and laughed. The newspaper relapsed into silence with its next number.

To this very day, nobody knows who wrote the article, though Maurice Wallion can make a pretty shrewd guess. The article does not affect our story except as an example of the characteristic and frequently recurring collapse which precedes the fulfilment of a truth, as the prophetic slump gives warning of a financial crisis. It is known now that there *was* a Man in the Whirlpool, and in order to give an account of that daring adventurer's gigantic attempt to organize chaos, the author has had recourse to the evidence of a number of persons, in particular Messrs. Wallion and Raebel, and, above all, Mr. Leonard Grath.

But we must tell our tale methodically, and many things happened before the actual appearance of the arch-villain himself. The story opens, appropriately, with the arrival of two of the principal characters in Stockholm, that is to say, on July 19th, 1917. From that moment, the depths begin to seethe, the catastrophe looms nearer, and a Face appears amidst the foaming waters. . . .

The curtain rises. . . .

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

CHAPTER I

Baron Frederick Fayerling waits in vain for the most important document in Europe

"WELL, what else?"

Baron Frederick Fayerling had a way of addressing his subordinates as though he were cracking a dog-whip. He was standing by his writing table, a strongly-built man of medium height, with cold blue eyes, and a beard in the style that D'Annunzio brought into fashion. As he looked down at the man who sat on a chair close by, he folded his arms, with a look of disgust, as though he were thinking: "What a face! The fellow is a regular freak."

The baron's well-kept teeth showed slightly, and the whip cracked again. "Next! The report on Tarraschin's memorandum."

The man on the chair, who was slowly and sullenly twisting his hat in his fingers, murmured in reply: "You forget, sir, that we are in a hotel bedroom, with all sorts of folk within earshot."

"And *you* forget, that when I wish to hear a report, you have only to obey my orders. What's wrong with

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

a room in a hotel? Stockholm is absolutely full of spies and adventurers: so much the better for you—there is safety in numbers. Go ahead!" The fellow cringed to the lash, and made a start. "The man whom you expect is called Bernard Jenin," he said rapidly and softly. "I made his acquaintance, as you instructed me, and gained his confidence to a considerable extent. He is quite young, and was traveling to Sweden by way of Finland, as we anticipated; I was his only companion in the north-bound train. I am absolutely convinced that he is in possession of the document: but he is cautious. I gathered that he is an ardent admirer of Kerensky, but as a matter of fact, he comes as a hunted fugitive from Russia."

"Did you manage to get a photograph of him?"

"Yes, easily: here it is."

Baron Fayerling took the snapshot and examined it closely. It showed a portion of the gangway outside a railway carriage; a man, wearing a very thin, almost ragged overcoat, was leaning against the iron railing, and gazing dreamily at the landscape through which he was passing; his clean-shaven face, with its broad brow and small mouth, was youthful-looking and attractive, but with a striking expression of calm resignation and patient expectation; his dark eyes were encircled by a network of very fine wrinkles, which might be the result of bodily suffering, or of many years of anxiety and strife.

"He looks weak," remarked the baron, throwing

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

the photograph on one side. "It should not be difficult to—persuade him. Were you able to make any overtures to him?"

"No, he is not to be got at in that way; he is an honest revolutionary."

The baron laughed a little. "Honest? A dangerous attribute in these days of war! Where is he now?"

"As soon as Bernard Jenin and I arrived at Stockholm this morning, Rastakov took charge. Jenin believes that I am associated with his friends; I have no idea who his friends are, I never saw him speak to anybody or write a letter, but I persuaded him to engage a room in this hotel, and to await a visit from a common acquaintance, who will give him some important news."

"In this very hotel?" asked the baron sharply.

"Yes, he is at the present minute in room No. 23."

"Ah, in 23, that's better. Have you arranged that our friends should keep on the adjoining rooms?"

"Yes, all is in order."

Baron Fayerling nodded approvingly, and the man began to twirl his hat a little faster. His employer, who could read the signs of the times, smiled contemptuously, took out some banknotes and threw them down on the table.

"There you are!" said he. "One thing more: you have been in Finland since the beginning of January; what is your number there?"

"B.22," replied the man, gathering the notes together with a sort of enveloping maneuver.

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"That is all right; in other words, we shall not require you here any longer."

B.22 rose obediently and went towards the door.

"Send Rastakov here!" was the baron's parting salutation.

The man disappeared, and two minutes later another person entered, closing the door quietly after him. He was a tall, dark, taciturn fellow, a regular Slav in appearance, about thirty years of age, with bold, resolute eyes, and a touch of self-satisfied impudence in his look.

The baron's expression had altered, and he now spoke in a frank, friendly tone.

"Good morning, Rastakov, did you meet B.22?"

"Yes."

"Did you verify his reports?"

"Yes, they are correct."

"Good; I don't trust the fellow any longer, and for the future he must be under supervision. Bernard Jenin is installed in room 23—with the most important paper in Europe in his possession, and now, Rastakov, the great thing is to get hold of it. If you are prepared to risk something for our cause, that paper should be in our hands in an hour's time."

Rastakov made no reply, but he tightened his thin lips with a look of determination.

"Have you warned all our friends?" inquired the baron.

"Yes, they will keep out of the way till it is done."

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"And you have nothing about you which would compromise us, should you fail?"

"I am not a child!"

"Go in five minutes' time to Jenin's room, introduce yourself as the friend of whom B.22 spoke to him, and talk to him for a bit in such a way as not to arouse his suspicions, though he may feel a little puzzled. Then act as swiftly and silently as circumstances permit. I will give you a quarter of an hour. When you come out of the room, I shall be sitting in one of the wicker chairs near the staircase: you must pass me, and if you have the paper, bow slightly, and walk slowly out towards the Park, where I will join you in an hour's time."

The baron walked up to Rastakov, and looked meaningly at him: "If anything goes wrong, you must look out for yourself," he added: "you know our rules?"

"Yes," replied the other without flinching: "you need not remind me of them." And without another word, he left the room. The baron looked after him; his face resumed its usual cynical expression, and he laughed. "Poor fool!" he said half-aloud.

He looked at the clock: it was half-past twelve. He yawned, examined his finger-nails, and lighted a cigar. Then he took his coat, gloves and Panama hat, and went towards the door, which burst open as he approached it, and a short, stout, and very fashionably-dressed man came in. The two men stood staring at one another, without a word of greeting.

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"Marcus Tassler," exclaimed the baron, impatiently, "what are you doing here? Be quick, I am in a hurry."

"Two minutes, only two minutes, baron," replied the newcomer, in an oily, businesslike voice. His flaccid sallow face, with its thick red lips, was as Jewish as his voice, but his hair was fair and close-cropped.

"I met Rastakov, and I know everything. But let me just warn you. . . ."

"Warn me!" interrupted the baron, "it is too late for warnings. Our preparations are made, and must come to a head shortly; the Tarraschin memorandum will be the corner-stone of the edifice, and then the storm may break! If you are afraid, you had better be silent."

"No, I am not afraid."

"Well, what is it then?"

Marcus Tassler drew an opened telegram from an inner pocket and struck it with the palm of his hand. "I warn you," he said again emphatically. "This bomb business in Christiania has compromised our position, and there is danger in the air. Though no one may have discovered our plans, the Press are on the alert, and sniffing suspiciously in every direction. . . ."

"Much that matters!" said the baron, coolly. "The fools believe that we are working for one of the belligerent powers, as spies and dynamiters: let them think so. The explosions in Christiania were a blunder, but nothing worse; the idiot who managed the affair, acted on his own initiative; I have isolated the conse-

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

quences, and directed suspicion towards a quarter which will make the whole of Scandinavia gasp." The baron laughed contentedly. "We are stronger than any of the Great Powers, and our plan is the most colossal ever conceived by the brain of one man. So why need you worry?"

Marcus Tassler nodded, rubbed his hands, and burst out with a sort of enthusiastic eagerness: "Yes, I admit that Gabriel Ortiz. . . ."

The baron shot a threatening glance at him: "Hush! Never that name, except in a whisper, or when you are alone."

"All right, our Chief, then. I admit that his genius seems able to surmount any obstacle: but, baron, his genius has not yet been put to positive proof. I am of opinion that what is just beginning. . . ."

"Look here, are you ever coming to the point?"

"I begin to suspect that we have an antagonist."

"An antagonist? Are you mad? Since nobody knows us, how can anyone become our antagonist?"

"You think not? How about this wire from our Agent in Göteborg?"

"What does he say?"

"That Leonard Grath, the owner of the Copper House, arrived in Göteborg yesterday, and is already in Stockholm by this time."

The baron looked serious, took the telegram himself, and read it through.

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"You can't think that this stripling will turn out to be our antagonist?" said he.

"No, but the fact of his arriving in Stockholm simultaneously with Jenin, points to a premeditated plan. You know what the Copper House means to us. No one expected that the owner would return, at any rate so suddenly. Do you think, baron, that someone has sent for him to turn us out of the house—that would be a catastrophe, wouldn't it?" The baron returned to the table, where he stood and meditated for a short time. "The Copper House—I didn't expect that news," he murmured, then turned round and said: "We shall find some way out of it. For the moment, Jenin is our chief consideration. Have you taken any steps towards having Leonard Grath met?"

"Yes, of course he is being shadowed, and the first thing to do will be to go through his papers."

"Right, and try to get me a photograph of him."

"I believe that has been seen to already."

"Presumably he will go down to the Copper House; that cannot be avoided, but of course he must discover nothing there."

"That is obvious!" replied Tassler. "But suppose he *should* find out anything?"

"In that case, he need not survive it. He might meet with an accident, the sea is close by—I leave it to you to work out the details."

As if by mutual consent, the two gentlemen avoided looking at each other at this moment.

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"Was there anything else?" asked the baron.

"No."

"Then you had better go. We will meet at four this afternoon in the usual place. Don't come again to the hotel: Rastakov is in room 23 now."

Tassler's complexion looked paler than ever, and he did not wait to hear any more. When the baron turned round, he had left the room.

Baron Fayerling took a good pull at his cigar. The big hotel was very quiet, and the atmosphere felt close and lifeless under the heated sunblinds. Through the open windows he could hear the monotonous hum of the street, impregnated with the warm odor of sun-baked granite and asphalt, and punctuated by the crescendo and diminuendo of the trams, as they stopped, started, and rang their bells; in this third summer of the Great War one heard rather less of the hooting of motor-cars, and of the groaning and creaking of cables, behind the smoke-stained walls of the central depot. The baron listened absently, whilst he bestowed another minute's thought on Tassler.

"They're a cowardly lot," he mused cynically. "Half of them are working to promote their own feeble ideals, the rest care only for piling up their banking-account, and they all imagine Ortiz to be an amiable idiot, whose shekels will further their own ambitions. Let them muddle along—the main thing is that we can make use of them."

He threw his cigar into the ash-tray, and his cold,

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

calculating eyes glittered. "An amiable idiot? Why not? Time enough to decide about that—afterwards."

He left the room abruptly, closing the door behind him, and mounted the stairs to the next floor, stopping on the landing. To the right lay a red-carpeted corridor, similar to that in which his own room was situated, and just at the bend of the passage he could see a door numbered 23. This door, like all those near it, was shut, and the corridor was empty. At the top of the stairs was a sort of recess, with palms, three wicker armchairs, and a table with newspapers. In the chair nearest the banisters sat a gentleman reading one of the papers. The baron frowned: he would have preferred to find the place unoccupied; still, not the ghost of a sound was to be heard from No. 23, and with a comforting recollection of Rastakov's proved skill in transacting his business quietly and swiftly, he sat calmly down on one of the chairs, and resigned himself to wait. He cast a hasty glance at the reader, who appeared to be a middle-aged person, tall, powerfully built, and very well-dressed: his face was buried in the newspaper, and only the top of his sleek head could be seen. Then the baron returned to his own meditations. He was surprised to find himself a little excited: do what he would, his eyes kept straying towards the closed door of room 23. The Tarraschin document would change the whole situation; its possession meant an increase of power, its loss, the renewal of such difficulties as are apt to wreck one's plans at the last moment. To be

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

disappointed now, when everything was ready, and every day invaluable! Unthinkable, unless at great risk of an even greater disaster. Peace overtures were already in the air—who could tell, perhaps this very autumn. . . . The baron felt his excitement increasing, the suspense was beginning to tell on him: what could be the reason of Rastakov's delay! Perhaps Jenin had not the paper after all. And so many precious months had gone by already—what was the date?

The man reading the newspaper opposite to him, looked over the top of it and said in a quiet, pleasant voice: "July 19th, 1917." The baron started, and for a moment he wondered if he could have been thinking aloud: then he said stiffly: "Were you speaking to me, sir?" "Yes," replied the other, as pleasantly as before, "I noticed that you were trying to make out the date of my newspaper, so I took the liberty of supplying you with the information."

The speaker had an intelligent, clean-shaven face, with aquiline features, and smiling gray eyes that beamed with a keen and irrepressible desire for information. Just now they were fixed on Baron Fayerling with a look which that aristocrat endeavored to return with equal self-possession. He said hastily: "I am not aware, sir, that I asked you for any information." The other smiled, and answered slowly: "That is true, but I am delighted to overlook the—the lack of invitation."

The baron suspected a hidden sarcasm in his neigh-

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

bor's voice or expression, but both were irreproachable. Confused by the situation in which he found himself, he colored hotly, and replied sourly: "Sir, you seem to me to be both persistent and inquisitive!" An instant later, he realized that he had forgotten himself; but the other man did not appear to notice what had been said: he struck a match, lighted a cigarette, and returned to his paper as though the baron had ceased to exist for him. The latter's self-control began to give way, and he stared mutely at the newspaper, behind which a thin column of smoke rose into the air. What business had the fellow on this landing? And would Rastakov never come out of the mysterious door of room 23? The silence seemed to become more intense with every moment that went by, and at last the baron could stand it no longer. He got up. The reader did not stir. He walked into the corridor and felt more comfortable now that he was out of the other man's sight. He passed No. 23, turned and walked past it again: not a sound to be heard. The quarter of an hour allotted to Rastakov had expired long ago. The baron looked all round him: not a human being was in sight. He put his ear to the key-hole: deep silence reigned inside the room; he turned the handle: the door was not locked. Finally he decided to enter. On the floor in front of him lay a figure tied up like a parcel, with a handkerchief spread over the face. The baron lifted the handkerchief, and saw Rastakov's bloodshot

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

eyes glaring at him in dumb fury, over a powerful gag. There was nobody else in the room.

A small envelope was sticking out of the prisoner's breast-pocket in a very obvious way, and the baron noticed his own name on it. Ripping it open, he took out a card, upon which a few lines were written in a bold, clear hand: "Dear baron,—Bernard Jenin desires to be remembered to you, and I return Rastakov to you undamaged, having no further use for him. Maurice Wallion."

The baron freed the captive, removing the gag, and cutting the cord into fragments. Rastakov sat up, but did not speak.

"Don't sit there, rubbing yourself like an ass!" exclaimed the baron. "What have you done?"

"Done?—nothing!" sputtered Rastakov.

"So I see. Speak out, man, what have you to say for yourself?"

Rastakov was like a madman: he beat his fists on the floor and shouted: "The devil take the room, and Jenin too! I came straight here, and nobody was about, except a man who was sitting by the staircase, reading the paper. I opened the door, and saw Jenin walking towards the window, and I saw nothing more, for somebody seized me by the arms from behind, threw me on the floor, and had muffled me up before I had the chance to get a sight of him. I am no weakling, but he must have been twice as strong. When he had bound and gagged me, he suddenly threw a cloth over my face,

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

and immediately after I heard him whispering to Jenin. This lasted about a minute, then they left the room together, shutting the door after them."

"And Tarraschin's document?"

Rastakov made an expressive gesture, and the baron seemed to see the most important paper in Europe fluttering away into space, so near, and yet so far. The facts seemed to confirm Tassler's warning: "There are things which make me suspect that we have an antagonist," and as this dawned on him, he dragged Rastakov roughly up from the floor.

"Who is Maurice Wallion?" he demanded sharply. The other made no reply, and the baron rushed out of the room and along to the staircase. The mysterious newspaper reader was no longer there, but on the table lay an envelope similar to that which he had recently taken from Rastakov's pocket. The baron tore it open, and read: "P.S.—I waited to see you in actual communication with room 23. I am indeed *persistent* when I have to deal with those who traffic in criminal mysteries, and *inquisitive* about abuses which I intend to expose. Maurice Wallion."

Baron Fayerling was no coward, but for a second even his blood ran cold, and he felt the first gusts of possible defeat moaning round him. But the blast subsided: he was himself again. Rastakov now joined him and he said to him: "Take the next train to the Copper House. I will telephone further orders this afternoon."

With these words, he too went his way.

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

CHAPTER II

A young man arrives from California, and hears some unexpected news

Mr. Burchardt the lawyer sat as stolidly as a grandfather clock beside his writing-table, and stared over his spectacles at Leonard Grath. It was an odd sort of reception for a lively young fellow who had just arrived from the other side of the globe, and Leonard Grath burst out laughing.

"What's wrong?" he inquired.

There was no harm in Leo, but he was young: to be quite accurate, twenty-six years of age. He was of medium height, well-made, with an honest, sunburnt face, merry blue eyes, brown hair, worn rather long as a tribute to his artistic propensities, and a large but sensitive mouth; to complete the description, he had the restless, flexible hands of an artist, a clear, confident voice, and just the least touch of foppishness in his appearance. The youth was no paragon; he was a happy-go-lucky fellow, not only in his artistic fancies, but in every detail of his daily life.

"Wrong?" echoed the lawyer, and a look of something like emotion flitted over his stolid features.

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"Things are no worse than they have been all along, but they are quite bad enough, Leo."

"Now for a homily!" muttered the young man, "and the title is: 'On the danger of getting into debt.'"

Mr. Burchardt looked pained.

"My dear Leo," said he, gravely, "you have not been much troubled with advice from me for some time: it must be quite six years since I last saw you. I suppose you remember that I have been the adviser of your family for the last thirty years. To all intents and purposes I have stood to you *in loco parentis*. Your only belongings are your Aunt Fernanda, her children and grandchildren in California, where you have stayed for so long that we began to wonder if you ever intended to come home . . ."

"Well, what of that? The Copper House couldn't run away from me."

"The Copper House *has* run away from you!" retorted the lawyer sharply. Leonard looked serious, and settled himself more firmly in his chair.

"That's impossible," he faltered.

"My letter concerned the Copper House," continued Mr. Burchardt. "I posted it to your address in Los Angeles, but you had already left. You have got home in the nick of time—for some things," he added, rather bitterly.

"I arrived in Sweden yesterday," said Leo. "I had a fancy to take a peep at the Copper House, and so I came over."

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"And so you came over," echoed the lawyer, with a wry face. "It is a pity that the fancy did not seize you sooner. I fear that the Copper House is no longer yours, Leo, and that's the truth."

The young man colored up like a schoolboy, and said huskily: "Was that what your letter was about?"

"Yes, I wrote to request your consent to the sale of the Copper House."

"The Copper House for sale?"

"You may regard it as sold, my lad."

"What the devil do you mean?" cried Leo, springing up from his chair.

"What else can you expect, when a property has been neglected for three generations? Your grandfather spent the whole of his life abroad, and married in California, where he settled. When he died, Karka was mortgaged for half its value, although his sister worked herself to skin and bone in her efforts to reduce expenses. Your father certainly remained at home, but he entertained very lavishly, and his tobacco-growing hobby, which started very hopefully, proved a very costly failure. You inherited your grandfather's love of travel, and your idea of managing an estate apparently consists in telegraphing incessantly for money from the four quarters of the earth. During the last thirty years, I have warned first your father and then you how things were going. Then the War broke out, and now matters have come to a crisis. I can assure you, I have done my utmost to stave off the debts. . . ."

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Leo had been drumming on the window-pane, and now he turned round and said: "I know you have; I'm not trying to excuse myself."

The lawyer nodded, and continued in a slightly mollified tone: "I had not put up the property for sale, but at the end of March a purchaser appeared unexpectedly, and made a good—an uncommonly good offer, which we have no choice but to accept. I have drawn up the contract already, and was only awaiting your consent to my signature, but since you are back, you can sign it yourself."

"My signature!" repeated the young man. He was filled with a sullen, boyish despair at the thought that, by a stroke of the pen, he must sign away the property which had been in his family for eight generations, and lose the old home which was the shrine of his childish memories.

"It can't be true, it's impossible!" he burst out.

The lawyer looked at him as though he were taking a careful inventory of the young man's weakness and lack of resource in this unforeseen emergency.

"Unfortunately it is only too possible," he said gently. The official atmosphere of Mr. Burchardt's private room began to irritate Leo like the touch of a hair shirt on a sensitive skin, and as the lawyer turned suggestively towards his deed-box, the young man said hastily, almost incoherently, as if attempting to stave off inevitable doom: "No, not yet! Give me a little time to get accustomed to the idea. I must have one

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

more look at the Copper House whilst it is still mine. . . ."

Burchardt looked thoughtful. Inwardly, he was deeply touched, but his severe expression remained unaltered, and he said to himself: "What a pity the scatter-brained fellow did not make a rich marriage, while there was time."

Aloud he remarked: "As you wish. But I have not told you everything yet. As you know, the Copper House, that is, the house itself, was let in the summer of 1915 to a person named Andrei Bernin. He is a Russian author, though I believe he has naturalized himself as a Swede, and he is living in the Copper House with his sister and his daughter. As regards the rest of the estate, and the woods, Suneson the bailiff continued to look after them, at any rate until last year; perhaps you remember him—a decent, trustworthy fellow. But he left the place very suddenly last autumn without giving notice. Andrei Bernin now rents the whole property, but the land is lying fallow. He's a strange sort of man—shuts himself up altogether in the Copper House; he seems to have plenty of money, and, not content with paying rent for the place, he has now made a very generous offer to buy it. I have never met him personally, as he is elderly and an invalid, and blind into the bargain; but I carry on negotiations with his friend and solicitor Marcus Tassler, who is managing the business with the most amazing energy. . . ."

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"Tassler," said Leo, with a slight grimace, "is he a German?"

"I should say he is of a sort of German-Russian-Jewish extraction, but all the same, he is a Swedish citizen," replied the pedantically-accurate Burchardt. "He is one of those financial experts who have come to the front during this War, and he is the Manager of the Finno-Russian Import and Export Company. Personally, I don't find him particularly congenial, but he certainly looks after his friend Bernin's interests with exemplary zeal. They have not allowed us much time to turn round; I have been obliged to give way a little here and there. A considerable sum of caution-money has been paid down already: if the sale does not go through, the lease holds good, and we are bound to undertake expensive repairs, whilst, over and above all that, we shall be held legally responsible for allowing the land to go out of cultivation. . . ."

Leo turned quickly to the window; the truth seemed to dawn upon him for the first time, and he said: "I suppose the Copper House is filled with these people?"

"Yes, and all the old servants have left. We are absolutely powerless, Leo; the sale *must* take place!"

"Must it?" murmured Leo, still unconvinced. "Have you anything more to tell me?"

"Yes. Bernin, or, more correctly, Tassler acting for him, has bought up all the mortgages, and the largest outstanding debts on the property, and is bringing pressure to bear on us in that way."

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Leo felt as though a net was closing round him: he was furious, and exclaimed: "The cheek of the fellow! So he threatens me, does he? I'll have something to say to him!"

"It is his way, I don't blame him. At any rate, we can't quarrel with the price he offers: it will cover all your family liabilities."

"Will there be any surplus?"

"About twelve thousand kroner, I should think."

"That isn't much," remarked Leo thoughtfully. His anger had evaporated, and he was smiling. "After all, I have always been hard-up, so there won't be a great difference. At any rate, the Copper House still belongs to me—nominally."

Burchardt came up to the young man and laid a hand on his shoulder. He had laid aside his official manner, and said kindly: "Take my advice, Leo. Life is hard on those who make no attempt to take it seriously, and we are living in an age when individuals as well as nations are being tested to the fullest extent of their capabilities. You are young, mentally and physically: that is one asset. You have had a good education: that is another. Face the future boldly, and win yourself a place in the sun: you *can* do it."

Leo looked at him: "Yes," said he, "that doesn't sound bad. But how am I to do it?"

"By working."

"Painting, do you mean?"

"I mean, by hard work."

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

he said, "for this letter has been waiting for you since yesterday."

"A letter!" repeated Leo, taking it with surprise, "so it is, and by the postmark a local one, posted here in Stockholm. Isn't that odd!"

He opened and read it, first to himself, then aloud:

"MR. LEONARD GRATH, c/o Burchardt & Co.,
Stockholm.

Sir,—Should you intend taking any steps with regard to the Copper House, may I beg you to wait for further information from me? The matter is serious. Above all, let nobody know that you are in Stockholm, and on no account go out to the Copper House. Ask Mr. Bruchardt to observe similar precautions. He can tell you who I am.

Yours in great haste,
MAURICE WALLION."

Leo read these lines once again. The lawyer pricked up his ears, as if at the sound of a bugle. "Maurice Wallion," he repeated.

"Yes, that's the name. What's all this about? Who is the fellow, and what does he mean?"

Burchardt took the letter, and read it in his turn, slowly and attentively. Leo, who was watching him, noticed that the lawyer actually looked disturbed, almost alarmed.

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"What is it?" asked the young man, quickly. "Who on earth is Maurice Wallion?"

"Unexpected, perfectly unexpected!" murmured the lawyer. "Serious? Yes, that may well be, if *he* says so. Leo, this message comes from a man who wishes you well. I happen to know him; few persons have met him, but many have heard of him. They call him 'the problem-hunter,' and his nominal occupation is that of a contributor to the *Daily Courier*. But he is more than a journalist: he has a way of turning up on the scene of any crime or mystery, if he thinks there is anything abnormal about it."

Leo smiled slightly: "That sounds very mysterious," he said, "but as I am not guilty of any deeds of darkness, I can't say I feel particularly alarmed. . . ."

"I was engaged on young Ravenscrone's case, when Wallion recovered his estate for him," replied the lawyer gravely; "that problem was a hundred years old: but he solved it in an hour."

"And now I suppose he will offer to recover mine," said Leo. "Why, what business is it of his? How did he know, to begin with, that I was coming here?"

"How, indeed," echoed the lawyer significantly.

They looked at one another, and the young man's smile gave place to a frown. "I call it either great cheek or a very poor joke for anyone to meddle unasked in my affairs," he said, taking up the letter to put it in his pocket-book.

Burchardt shook his head, and at the same moment

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Leo uttered a cry of vexation. "My pocket-book!" he exclaimed, "that scoundrel has stolen it!"

"Who has?" asked the lawyer, jumping up.

"A man who ran into me on the stairs about half an hour ago. It can have been no one else, for I had it in my hand not five minutes before. He was a tall, thin fellow, with black eyes; I thought he was drunk, for he barged right into me, without saying a word; I gave him a good shove, and he lurched out into the street. Of course the beggar was after my pocket-book."

"What had you in it?"

"Not much money, but practically all my papers, passport and everything."

At this minute the door opened, and one of Burchardt's clerks came in.

"A boy has just left this parcel for Mr. Grath," he said, putting down an oblong packet, and departing. Leo tore open the white paper, which bore no address, and looked up with a mixture of amusement and bewilderment in his face.

"What's the date to-day?" he inquired.

"July 19, 1917," replied the puzzled lawyer.

"Make a note of it, as being a day of surprises."

"What is it now?"

"I have got back my pocket-book. It is here, in this parcel."

"You don't say so! Empty, of course?"

"No," replied Leo, after looking through it, "that

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

is the most surprising thing of all. Nothing is missing. He has not taken a single thing."

"Impossible, it's too absurd. Look again more carefully."

Both men examined the pocket-book again, but it was as Leo had stated: both money and papers were totally undisturbed.

"This is certainly a very striking commentary on our friend the 'problem-hunter's' letter," remarked the young man; "is he given to playing such tricks as these?"

"Nonsense," said Burchardt, curtly. "His letter is a warning, and this incident is a case in point. Some person has had recourse to an uncommonly daring way of finding out everything that concerns you, evidently wishing to identify you by the aid of your own papers."

In spite of himself, Leo began to feel rather uncomfortable but he pulled himself together, and said: "I begin to think that there is a general conspiracy to make a fool of me: a profiteering baron wants to compel me to sell the Copper House: a thief steals my papers, and sends them back untouched: a problem-hunter sends me unintelligible warnings—my poor brain is getting quite muddled! I wish I was back in California, there are such a queer lot of folk in Sweden, since last I was here."

"Listen to me, Leo," said the lawyer slowly. "There is something wrong about all this. That fellow Tassler must have some motive of which we know nothing. The

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

first thing for you to do is to find out what Maurice Wallion knows."

"I am going straight to him."

"Now? He is not easy to get hold of, unless he wishes, but at any rate you can try."

"I intend to. So long, sir!"

Leonard Grath left the lawyer's office with his usual impetuosity, and ran whistling down the stairs. Burchardt's office was near the Kungstrad Park, and the young man crossed the road to get into the shade of the lime-trees. It was a beautiful, sunny morning, the beds were gay with flowers, and a great many people were about. A well-dressed man, carrying a small but expensive camera, passed him, turned quickly, and raised the camera; a click, and it was done. So rapid were the man's movements, that Leo did not at first realize that he himself had been the target of the camera. He took the cigarette from his mouth, and shouted: "I say, you there! You, sir!" But at that minute the unknown photographer boarded a passing tram, and was whirled away.

"What next?" wondered Leo. "Another one who wants to know what I look like! I seem to be very much in demand!" He looked round him in perplexity, and was presently aware of an uncanny feeling that he was being watched by someone in the crowd. Yet wherever he turned, he could see no one whom he knew, or who appeared to recognize him. Lights and shadows flickered through the green leaves, and the sunshine

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

lighted up pretty faces and summer costumes. He began to feel dazed, and sat down on one of the green benches. "I must be dreaming," he thought. "This is all too strange to be true. Yes, of course I am dreaming."

He got up, walked on a short way, then stopped again. "If only I had the smallest idea what is up!" He laughed. "I shall go and see Wallion."

Ten minutes later he entered the offices of the *Daily Courier*, and asked for Maurice Wallion, half-expecting to be laughed at for his pains, and informed that no such person was known there. But the young and energetic reporter to whom he addressed his inquiries, looked at him attentively, and said: "Did you make an appointment to meet him here?"

"Not exactly."

"Then I'm afraid it is no use your waiting."

"But I have had a letter from him."

"Ah, that alters the case," observed the reporter, opening an engagement book. "What name, please?"

"Leonard Grath," replied the other in surprise.

"That's good!" said the reporter with a smile, immediately becoming much more friendly in his manner; "my name is Robert Lang, and you are expected."

"Expected!" echoed Leo, more astonished than ever.

"Yes, but I can tell you at once that nobody knows why, except Wallion. I am his assistant, and I believe he is most anxious to see you. Unfortunately he is out

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

at present. I haven't seen him since yesterday evening, but step into his room, and we'll see."

They went into a small room leading off the corridor, and the cheery young reporter went briskly to the telephone. After ringing up several places, he said: "I can't get on to him, he is neither at his house, nor at any of the places where we can usually get word to him. It's always the way! Sometimes he disappears for weeks on end, and we can do nothing but wait until he thinks fit to turn up again."

Leo smiled, but he felt terribly disappointed.

"The worst of it is, that there is no time to lose," he remarked. "I fear it may be too late as it is."

"But you hinted that Wallion knows something about it already?"

"Yes, so I understand."

"Then you needn't worry. He won't let it be too late."

Robert Lang said this with a calm certainty that impressed Leo, whilst it made him feel more curious than ever.

"Do *you* know what your friend the Problem-hunter wants me for?"

"No, but that doesn't matter. I am only his assistant, his sub-lieutenant, so to speak. . . ."

Here, the conversation was interrupted, as Robert Lang was called away. Leo wandered round the room, which was filled with bookcases, files of newspapers, and card-index cabinets. On the large writing table lay

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

manuscripts, photographs, foreign newspapers, and several volumes of works of reference. The young man could see from a distance that one of the photographs was that of a charming girl, whose dark and rather appealing eyes seemed to be gazing right into his own. He could not resist the temptation to pick up the portrait and examine it more closely.

"What a pretty girl," he thought: "brown eyes, decidedly—and black hair:—an Italian, perhaps? Or no, more likely a Russian, with that heart-shaped face, arched eyebrows, and audacious though sensitive mouth."

And here, Leo noticed something which made him open his own mouth, and stare like one bewitched. In the lower corner of the picture was written:

Sonia Bernin,

THE COPPER HOUSE.

Digitized by Google

Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

CHAPTER III

Wallion meets B.22, and certain remarkable episodes in a great man's career are described, with the desired effect

MAURICE WALLION quitted the neighborhood of room 23 rather hurriedly, as soon as the baron had gone in: not from fear—there was no such word in his vocabulary—but because, in consequence of this somewhat unexpected commencement of hostilities, he found himself suddenly involved in a regular network of complicated problems.

Bernard Jenin's unexpected arrival had completely upset his plans, and forced him to show his hand prematurely to a powerful, prompt and intelligent adversary, who would certainly stick at nothing in the way of frustrating him. He did not regret the opportunity of dealing the first blow, for his frankness had probably baffled the baron at the start; but he foresaw that the approaching struggle would be a fierce though brief one—brief, because in the course of a few hours he must either be definitely beaten, or in possession of the information which would make it possible for him to place the matter in the hands of the police. It was, therefore, important for him to get quickly and surely to work,

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

before Baron Fayerling had had time to call up reinforcements.

He slipped out of the hotel, and jumped into a tram, bound for the northern district. He wondered which way Jenin had gone, for it disturbed him a little that he had been able to do nothing for the unfortunate young fellow, beyond hurrying him away, with an urgent warning to keep clear of Fayerling's spies, and in case of need to take refuge in the offices of the *Daily Courier*.

There was undoubtedly something mysterious about Jenin himself, but Wallion consoled himself with the thought that the young man's fate would soon be settled in one way or another, and he decided to mention the matter to Robert Lang. For the time being, he had more important business to attend to. The tram turned into Tegnér Street and he got out. He walked slowly up the street, stopped opposite one of the ugly, gray, five-storied houses, and began, quite unostentatiously, to watch the windows on the first floor.

He had known for the last month, that this was one of Ortiz's headquarters, and he suspected that Ortiz himself had stayed there for some time at the beginning of the year. It was ostensibly a Finnish boarding-house, but it was not advertised as such, and there never seemed to be any rooms to let except to lodgers recommended by the baron or by Tassler. For the time being, the only lodgers were three persons who had recently arrived from Russia, and had some sort of

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

regular work at the Finno-Russian Import and Export Company. Rastakov, too, generally stayed there, whenever he did not happen to be at the Copper House. Wallion took it for granted that the man who was known as B.22, and had shadowed Jenin on his journey to Stockholm, would come here, and he was already considering the advisability of setting Robert Lang to watch the house, when he suddenly saw B.22 himself come out of the door, and go quickly down the street.

The journalist was somewhat taken aback by this unexpected apparition; it was quite obvious that something unusual had happened to the spy, for he kept looking round, and Wallion could see that he appeared very nervous.

The journalist thought for a bit. What had happened? B.22 had evidently gone straight to the boarding-house from the hotel, and had apparently found some trouble awaiting him. Nothing was to be seen at the windows.

Feeling rather puzzled, he began to follow the man, who turned hurriedly down one side street after another, behaving more and more strangely. He stood still now and then, staring anxiously behind him with his large dark eyes, and not taking the slightest notice of the journalist; his hands fidgeted in and out of his coat-pockets, and his lips moved as though he were whispering to himself. Then he darted forward again, through a passage that intersected a corner building, and cut across an adjoining churchyard.

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Wallion, who began to grow tired of this extraordinary game, stepped quickly up, and tapped him on the shoulder: "Good morning, my friend," he exclaimed, "why this hurry?"

The man started so violently that he nearly fell; Wallion caught hold of him. "Now then, no nonsense!" he said sternly. "I know everything, and I want to have a talk with you. If you tell me the truth, I may be able to help you."

He threw out this remark by way of a feeler, but the man took it literally; a look of relief appeared on his haggard face, and he said doubtfully: "Are you one of Jenin's friends? I don't know you, what do you want with me? Are you a detective, by any chance?" he added suspiciously.

"No, I am a newspaper reporter," said Wallion, still keeping hold of his arm. "Come along with me."

They went into a small, empty café, and sat down at a table in an inner room. B.22 remained silent and watchful, but Wallion left him no time for consideration.

"I won't ask you your real name, B.22," said he, "but you had better be quite straight with me, or it may be the worse for you. You have a rotten set of friends, my lad, and it is high time you quit working with them. Now tell me, what is going on at the boarding-house?"

"Yes, I will tell you," the fellow burst out excitedly. "I will have no more to do with them, they are going too far. I don't want to lose my life. . . ."

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

His eyes were bloodshot, and he tugged at his collar as though he felt a halter round his neck already. He flung himself suddenly across the table, and seized the journalist by the sleeve. "Help me," he stammered, "I am afraid of them! Ortiz is coming, and he will ruin us all, if nobody can stop him."

Wallion looked sharply at him. He had already observed him in the hotel, and had formed his conclusions as to the man's character. "Since when have you made up your mind to betray Ortiz?"

B.22 hung his head. "Since yesterday," he replied indistinctly. "When Bernard Jenin told me what Tarraschin's memorandum was about, I was afraid to have anything more to do with it—it is altogether too ghastly. . . ."

He really seemed to be hesitating, and Wallion decided to come to the point quickly, for there was no time to waste in unnecessary preliminaries.

"How much do you know about Ortiz?" he asked.

"I? Nothing. They told me that he was the boss, and that we were paid with his money: and he pays well."

Wallion made a movement of disgust. The payment seemed all that this man cared about.

"Have you ever seen Ortiz?"

"No. Baron Fayerling always gave me my orders, and paid me. They say that Ortiz is a rich and powerful man, and that he will soon be one of the greatest

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

persons in Europe. But I have never seen him, and I know nothing of him."

"Well, I am going to tell you something about him; it is because you know so little that you are so much afraid of him. He is one of the most daring adventurers that ever lived, and anyone who espouses his cause is on the road to ruin."

B.22 shuddered, and Wallion watched him narrowly.

"Did you ever hear of the Emperor of the Amazons?" he asked.

B.22 shook his head in surprise.

"Emperor of the Amazons?" he repeated; "it sounds like a farce."

"It was a farce, too, at any rate the newspapers called it so, and it was played seven years ago. A young Brazilian millionaire who had already made himself conspicuous by his lavish and eccentric propensities, concluded one fine day that he could no longer endure the restrictions of life in a community of law-abiding citizens, and his fertile brain, which was always revolving ambitious schemes, decided to create an absolutely new environment.

"His name was Gabriel Napoleon Ortiz, and he was a reputed descendant of Napoleon the Great; he had already been implicated in a formidable scandal in Paris, where he had attempted to organize a Monarchist rising against the Republic, in the hope of getting himself recognized as Napoleon IV. At that time he was only a youth of nineteen, and it was an easy

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

matter to deport him to Brazil. But the lion's claws were not drawn, and by degrees he gathered round him quite a number of adventurers, who aided and abetted him in his far-reaching plans. One day, early in 1910, he steamed away up the River Amazon in his armored pleasure yacht, and disappeared into the interior of Brazil. It was given out that he was subsidizing an expedition for scientific research, but about six months later, the Brazilian Government was astounded to receive a highly-imposing document, signed Gabriel Napoleon I, Emperor of the Amazons, in which the new monarch stated that he had proclaimed himself Emperor over the tracts of land at the sources of the River Amazon, the country being rich and extensive, but chiefly inhabited by Indians. He demanded, first, official recognition by the Brazilian Government, secondly, free access to the River Amazon, and thirdly, an immediate and definite revision of boundary questions. At the same time, through the medium of the South and North American newspapers, he invited enterprising and energetic people to settle as colonists in his dominion, declared his intention of founding a capital, and purchased six liners for passenger traffic down the great river. Of course, the whole thing was impossible; nobody took the man seriously, and the papers treated the matter as a huge joke; it was altogether too far-fetched! Before many months had gone by, the Emperor of the Amazons was taken into custody by Brazilian troops: he was found at the head of an army

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

of a hundred and twenty men, which immediately took to flight. He was handed over to his relations, amongst whom was the famous aëroplane-constructor Ortiz; feeling rather crestfallen, he was obliged to consent to leave the country quietly, and nobody gave another thought to the Empire of the Amazons."

"Emperor of the Amazons," muttered B.22 with a laugh. "I do seem to have a hazy recollection of it now. And so that man was Ortiz! I begin to understand. . . ."

The journalist saw that his story had made an impression, and he continued: "You will notice that this Brazilian millionaire-adventurer was not without certain elements of greatness. Such causes as his have prospered before now. It was only that he lived in an age when, under normal circumstances, adventures of that kind are absurd. Public opinion is formed by the Press, and the Press laughed the Empire of the Amazons to scorn. Fifteen years earlier, the man might have succeeded, but, as it was, he had learnt a dearly-bought lesson—till next time! He had not abandoned a single detail of his great project, but he could bide his time: he could go on with his preparations. The next act in the drama was played in New York. Ortiz proved himself a financial genius of the first order, floated one gigantic speculation after another, with truly Napoleonic strategy, and was acclaimed before long as one of Wall Street's brightest stars, or, more correctly, meteors. Finally, he 'swung' a 'corner' in

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

coffee with unscrupulous skill, increased his already colossal fortune tenfold, and gained the nickname of 'The Coffee King.' The Emperor of the Amazons had become a Coffee King! At any rate, you can see what he was aiming at. As 'emperor' he had brought imprisonment on at most forty persons; as 'king' he had ruined thousands. His power for evil had increased, but it was not yet fully developed, and the great opportunity was still to come. He does not advance step by step, like other men. No, his ambition demands constant movement, culminating in some tremendous display of strength. His motto is: 'Better a grand catastrophe than a meagre victory.' Laws do not exist for a man with such ideas, and what can those persons expect who are bold enough to follow him as assistants or subordinates, but a prison cell, or something even worse, for their pains?"

B.22 was listening as though he had been hypnotized, and Wallion went on: "After his 'coup' on the coffee market, Gabriel Ortiz disappeared from New York. He realized his assets, and was seen no more in Wall Street. He had attained his primary aim, and provided himself with the means of carrying out even the wildest and most ambitious of his dreams. The episode in the Amazons had taught him experience: in New York he had acquired millions. He was now fully equipped, and only waited for a favorable opportunity. In August, 1914, the Great War broke out."

The journalist sat silent and thoughtful for a little

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

while. Then he continued: "It is horrible to think that a Brazilian freebooter should find the great chance of his lifetime in the grimmest tragedy that has ever befallen the human race. It is true that in this war, as never before, there have been openings for adventurers who are ready to sell their swords or their skill to the highest bidder.

"Within the war-area, where, as in an earthquake, all the powers of darkness rise to the surface, Ortiz found the desired field of operations, where he might sow his millions, and reap an abundant harvest of power. After due calculation, he fixed upon Russia as his objective, and Stockholm as his starting-point. How long have you been in his service?"

"Since October, 1915."

"Nearly from the beginning, then. I can tell by your accent that you are a Finn. I suppose they made you believe that you would be working for the liberty of Finland?"

"That was so," said B.22 in a low voice.

"Do you still think so, now that Finland is really free, in consequence of the March Revolution? Was that Ortiz' work?"

The man crimsoned with rage and shame. He struck his hand on the table, and said: "No, since I got to know the contents of the Tarraschin document, I can see that Ortiz is neither working for freedom nor for the Tsar: he thinks only of himself."

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"Exactly," said Wallion, coldly, "and you should have realized that long ago."

"How could I?" replied B.22 piteously; "I knew nothing of him, until you told me all this. What shall I do?"

"Don't take it so hard. You have been too easily tempted by the thought of quickly earned money, that's all, and now you're in a fix. You haven't told me yet what happened in the boarding-house."

"I had only just got there," said B.22 excitedly, "when I heard the telephone ring. One of the Russians answered it, and I was in the room alongside. I guessed that Rastakov had rung up, and I heard the Russian say: 'Yes, he has just come in.' They were speaking about me, and I was alarmed to hear the man say: 'We had better shadow him; it would be easier to get rid of him in Finland than here. Yes, we will keep an eye on him; if he gives any trouble, we will find a way which won't attract attention. No, he hasn't spoken to anyone yet. . . .' Then I was sure that my fate was sealed, and at first I felt paralyzed with fear, but I knew that they would be after me in a few seconds, and, without even stopping to get my knapsack, I crept downstairs, and out of the house. . . ."

Wallion could not help pitying the poor fellow, who looked like a man sentenced to death, and could hardly speak coherently.

"Was that all?" he asked.

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"It was quite enough for me; they mean to do something dreadful. . . . I am not the first . . ."

"I know. I will help you on one condition: has our conversation convinced you how necessary it is for you to tell me honestly and openly everything that may lead to the annihilation of Ortiz and his gang?"

"Yes, yes, only tell me what I can do."

"You won't only think of saving your own skin? You promise to help me to the best of your ability?"

"Yes, yes, that's just what I want to do; only save me!"

The man's sincerity was undoubted; Wallion's earnestness had entirely conquered his feeble will. He gazed at the journalist with doglike submission, whilst the latter wrote a few lines, and his address, on a card.

"Take this," he said, "go straight to my house in the Valhalla Road, and hand the card to my housekeeper. Stay there till I come. Just wait a minute, while I telephone to her."

B.22 seized the card with an audible sigh of relief and gratitude. The journalist went into the outer room, and rang up his house. The housekeeper answered, and he informed her briefly what she was to do with B.22, and what further precautions he must observe. Then, after a little consideration, he rang up the offices of the *Daily Courier*, and asked for Robert Lang, who came at once to the telephone. "Has anyone been to ask for me?" said Wallion. "What? Leonard Grath?

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

He's just gone? What a nuisance, I wanted particularly to see him. Don't you know where he has gone? He really is far too headstrong to be allowed to go off by himself, you should have kept him. No, I can't come up at present, I must go and see what the baron and Tassler are up to, but I want you to come at once to Tegnér Street, and find out what is going on at the boarding-house there, if you can. It is probable that we shall soon have to give official information to the police; we ought to have sufficient proof in our hands in a few hours' time. Look here: before you leave the office, arrange for somebody trustworthy—say, Steno Beyler—to receive a young man named Bernard Jenin, who may turn up there in the course of the day, and not to let him out of his sight before I have had a word with him. Yes, that's all, I can tell you more later; I've a big job on hand at present. . . ."

He put down the receiver, and returned to the other room, but he stopped short on the threshold: B.22 had disappeared. A door leading to the passage stood open, and on the table lay a paper, with a few hurried lines scrawled upon it. Wallion snatched it up, and ran into the passage. After glancing into the garden, which was surrounded by a high wall, he went out into the street, but B.22 was nowhere to be seen. Feeling very anxious, the journalist read what was written on the paper: "I must go. One of them is outside in the churchyard, and I am sure he has seen me at the window. If they get to know that I have anything to do with

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY