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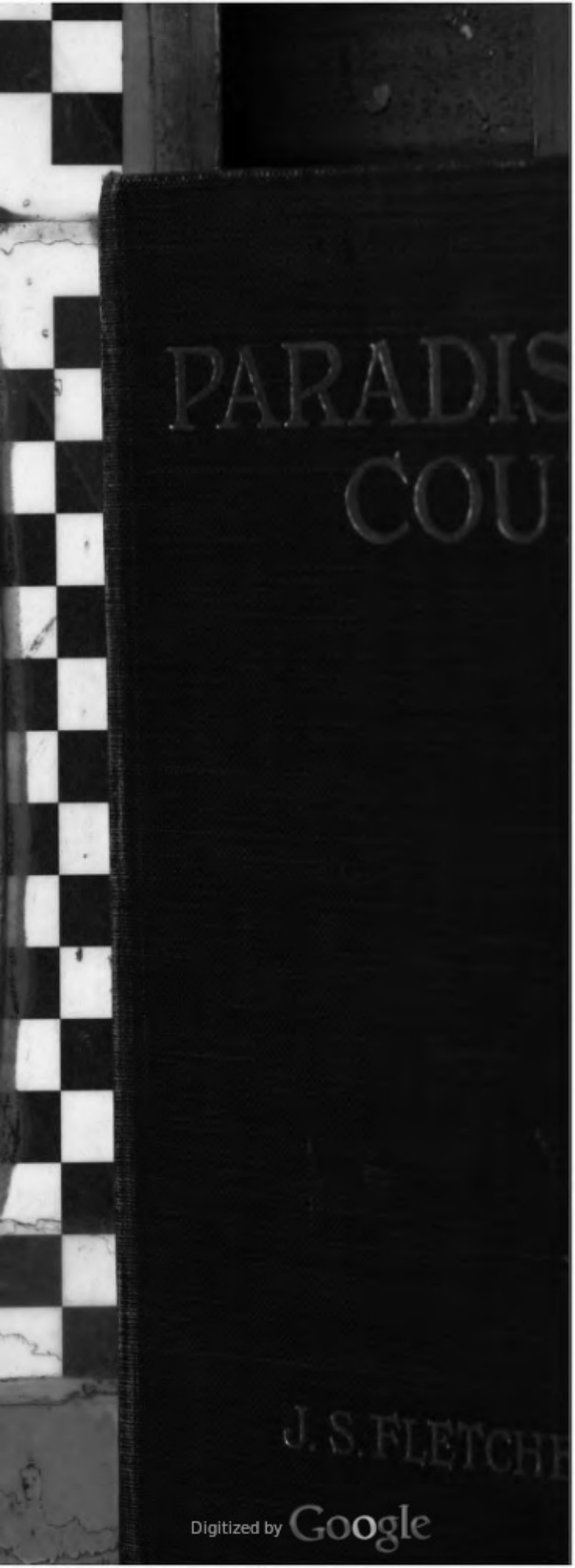

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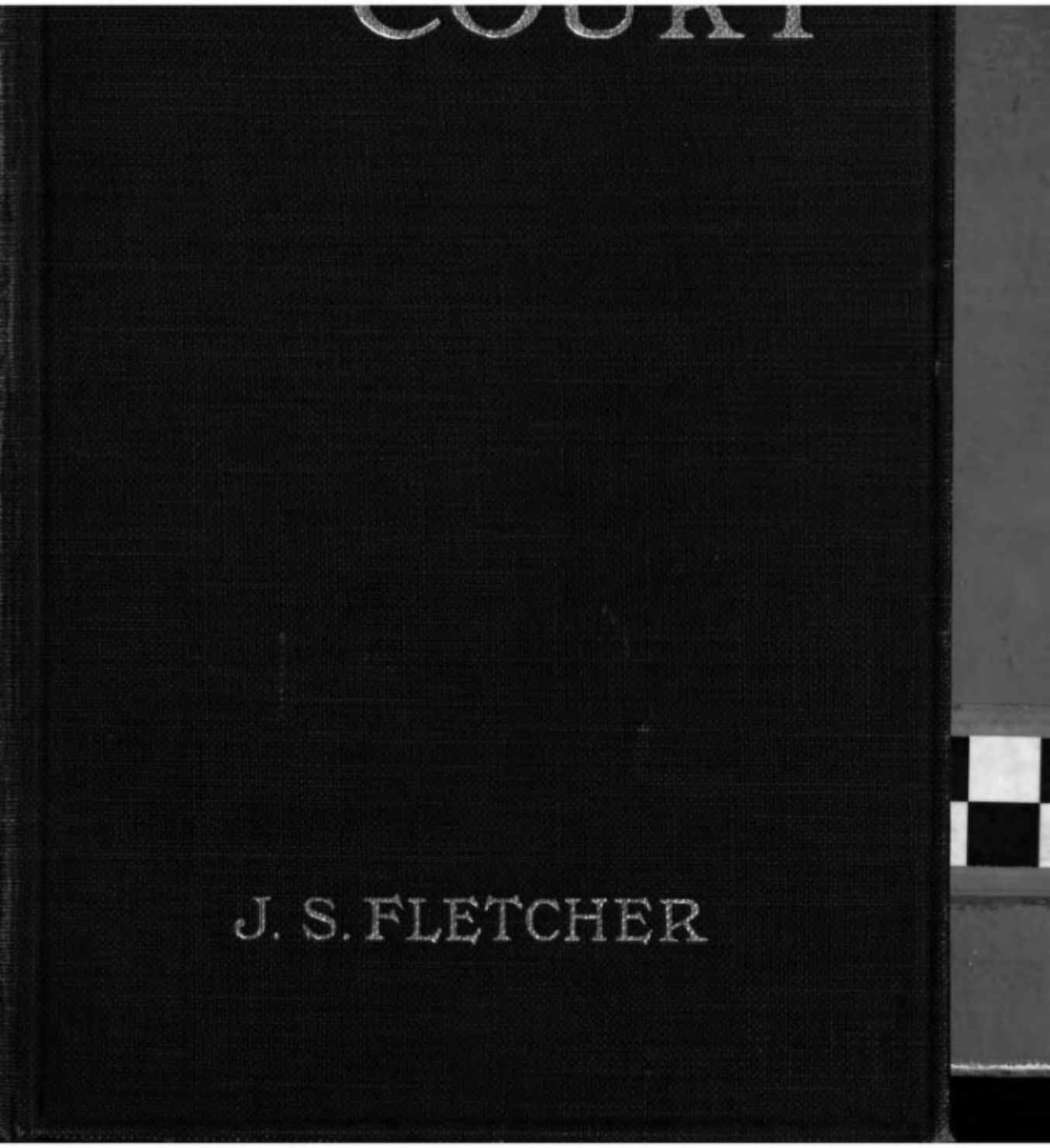

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THE QUEEN OF A DAY.

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PARADISE COURT

By

J. S. FLETCHER

London

T. FISHER UNWIN

1 Adelphi Terrace

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PARADISE COURT

CHAPTER I

THE MYSTERIOUS LETTER

About eleven o'clock on the night of the twenty-seventh day of May in the year of grace one thousand nine hundred and six, two very dear friends, one, Mr John Aubrey Rivington, the other, Mr Richard Grenville Wells, united again that afternoon after a separation of three years—necessitated by Mr Wells's absence, on foreign service, in the Pacific Ocean—came out of the Criterion Theatre into Piccadilly Circus, and, after lighting cigarettes, strolled slowly away, arm-in-arm, in the direction of the Albany, where Mr Rivington had recently begun to keep house after the fashion of wealthy young gentlemen who, for a time at least, are disposed to lead bachelor lives. It was a beautiful night, and there were many people about, and there were laughter and jest

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and the sounds of the voices of many nations in the air, together with much to notice and many scenes to see, which only Piccadilly Circus in the hours immediately preceding and immediately following midnight can show, and both Mr Wells and Mr Rivington were quite happy. Neither had the slightest notion —would not have believed an angel from heaven had he warned them of it—that their feet were on the threshold of a new experience, that within a few minutes they were about to hear the curtain rung up on a strange, a startling drama in which they themselves were destined to play no inconsiderable parts.

Let us look at these two young gentlemen as they pause in the full glare of a powerful lamp, waiting, as leisured folk will wait, for an opportunity of crossing Piccadilly without haste or trouble. Beyond the fact that each is youthful there is no similarity between them. Mr Rivington is tall; Mr Wells is—somewhat stumpy. Mr Rivington is slender and willowy; Mr Wells is stoutly built and looks as if nothing could break him. Indeed, the two, seen together, form a notable contrast. Mr

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Rivington is one of those fortunate individuals upon whom Nature lavishes all that she can give, and lavishes it royally. He has a beautiful figure, a beautiful face, beautiful eyes, beautiful hair. The oval face, lighted by the deep dark eyes, in which there is something of sadness, or at least of pensiveness, causes even the ribald street boys to look at it a second time, and the flower-girls to sigh involuntarily. If Mr Rivington had had the chiselling of his own features he could not have chiselled them more perfectly, had he been as great a master as Praxiteles himself. If Mr Rivington had had the colouring of himself he could not have coloured himself more delightfully — the perfect olive of his complexion, the faint suspicion of pomegranate colour breaking through it, the dark line of his level brows, the darker aureole of his blue-black hair on which there was a sheen like that on a raven's wing—these things were the admiration of many. To see him as he stands now in the full light of the lamp, toying with his jewelled cane, smiling indulgently with those beautifully-curved lips of his at some

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joke of his companion's, is to see a young Greek god, ambrosial, gracious—clad, it is true, in the conventional garb which gentlemen wear of an evening in civilised lands—and yet god-like.

There is nothing of the Antinous in his friend, Mr Richard Grenville Wells. Mr Wells's complexion is sandy and his homely face is liberally sown with freckles. His nose is a snub, and his mouth is much too wide. If he took off his hat you would see that his hair is decidedly carroty in hue. His eyes are small and the eyebrows and eyelashes are of a pale straw-colour. All about his mouth, on either side, are innumerable little wrinkles and lines which seem to denote that Mr Wells is fond of laughter. Indeed, as he stands by Mr Rivington's side at the edge of the curb, he is perpetually smiling or laughing. If you were close enough to hear it you would find that his tongue is as restless as his mobile mouth, and that everything he says is in the nature of a jest. For of late Mr Wells's shrewd eyes have been looking at vastly different things—on long vistas of solitude, on vast stretches of

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the things-which-never-seem-to-cease, and his ears have heard silences that you could lay hands on—and to him, philosophic in a dry-humoured fashion, because of these influences, the kaleidoscope of London seems infinitely amusing.

These two young gentlemen, presently leaving Piccadilly and traversing the courtyard of the Albany, passed under the clock at its northern side and, following the covered way which leads to the Burlington Gardens end of that select preserve, turned into one of the entrances on the right-hand side. There Mr Rivington producing a latch-key, they suddenly passed from bare walls and a rather bad light into a paradise of bachelor comfort. It was only necessary to give one glance at Mr Rivington's entrance-hall to know that you were in the chambers of a person of taste. Here was no hat-rack, umbrella-stand, hall-table, no worm-eaten fox's mask or dilapidated stag's head ornamenting walls covered with paper manufactured in imitation of stained oak —here, rather, were delicately-tinted walls whereon were charmingly-framed old prints,

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delicate china, a case or two of rare glass, a hanging-lamp which had illumined some Florentine chamber in long-dead days—here was the scent of flowers mingling with the indescribable atmosphere of warmth, luxury, wealth. Mr Wells sniffed at this combination of aromas and compared it with the scent of the sea.

As Mr Rivington and his guest walked into this refined and artistic entrance-hall by one door there came into it by another a person whose face, figure and general air proclaimed him that most wonderful product of these later ages—the perfect manservant. He was a man of presumably forty years of age, of medium height, slim and wiry, adroit and subtle in his movements, the sort of man who never seems to be looking at anything, but who sees everything; who never seems to be engaged, but is always busy. Everything about him, the neatness and correctness of his attire, the scrupulous cleanliness of his soft white hands, the mathematical accuracy of the almost imperceptible triangle of whisker on each cheek, denoted care and attention to

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detail; the softness of his footfall on the thick carpet promised well for the nerves of whoever might be fortunate enough to employ him.

"Any letters, Etheredge?" inquired Rivington, as the man took his master's cloak and Wells's overcoat.

"None, sir, with the exception of those to which I drew your attention this evening," replied Etheredge, in a soft, even voice.

"Oh, to be sure. Well, now, it's getting late and I don't think we shall want you any more. I suppose everything is all right in Mr Wells's room?"

"Everything is perfectly in order in Mr Wells's room, sir."

"All right, good-night, Etheredge."

"Good-night, sir."

The man, carrying the coats, hats and sticks, disappeared through the door from whence he had emerged—Rivington and Wells passed through an open doorway on the right of the hall.

"Invaluable chap, Etheredge," said Rivington, carelessly, as they entered a brilliantly-lighted room. "If doing whatever you can do

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really well is a mark of greatness, Etheredge is a great man. Now, Dickie, my dear, dear boy, here we are at home and we'll have a good talk. But first just let me glance through these letters—look here, get yourself a drink and find a cigar, there's everything there, Etheredge always sees to that."

"All right, Jack," said Wells. "Read your letters."

He went over to a side-table whereon the capable Etheredge had set out such small creature comforts as young men who have already dined very well earlier in the evening are in need of somewhere about midnight, sandwiches of various sorts, whisky, mineral waters, cigars, cigarettes. He selected a cigar, mixed himself a peg of whisky-and-soda, and stared around him as he raised the glass to his lips. He was contrasting his ship's quarters with his friend Rivington's rooms. If the entrance-hall without had been an approach to paradise the room in which he stood was paradise itself. Here were the things that most appealed to Rivington, as Wells knew—rare prints, rare china, rare glass, rare books, all

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things delicate, beautiful, instinct with art. The room breathed art. There was not an object in it that did not represent some triumph of the artistic mind, not even a chair that was not without some peculiar beauty of its own. But to Wells, who knew next to nothing about either pictures or books, the objects which most appealed were two Japanese spaniels lazily reclining in a square basket in the centre of the hearth, their green-jade eyes blinking at the soft flames.

Holding his glass in his hand Wells began to examine some prints on the wall behind the little supper-table. He was wondering vaguely how fellows like Rivington managed to spot the beauties of these things, how they—

"My God!"

He turned sharply. Rivington, who had been standing at an escritoire, turning over some letters, was now turned from it as if some sudden shock had spun him round. He grasped a sheet of notepaper in one hand; the other hand was running its long fingers through his hair. He looked the incarnation of astonishment, of perplexity, almost of horror.

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Wells crossed the room at two strides.

"What's the matter, Jack?" he said sharply, laying his hand on his friend's arm.

Rivington shook the hand off. He stared wildly about him.

"No—wait—wait!" he said. "I'll—Etheredge—Etheredge!"

He struck a bell twice as he shouted the man's name—before its silvery sound had died the servant was in the room, cool, self-possessed.

"You rang, sir?"

"Etheredge!—you see this letter—look, it was posted in the West Central District this morning — look at the office-mark — before eleven o'clock. When did it come?—How is it I have only just received it?"

The man looked at the envelope which Rivington held out to him. He handed it back politely.

"Yes, sir—that letter was delivered here at two o'clock this afternoon," he said quietly. "You will remember, sir, that you lunched out, and that when you returned you had very little time to get down to Victoria in time to

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meet Mr Wells. I drew your attention to the letters then, sir, and you replied that you would read them after. Later, following Mr Wells's arrival, you and Mr Wells, sir, went out, and when you came in again you were pressed for time in dressing for dinner. I again reminded you of the letters, and you replied that you would attend to them to-night. I did not know the handwriting on that letter, sir," concluded Etheredge, with almost imperceptible significance, "or I should have drawn your particular attention to it."

Rivington uttered an exclamation of chagrin.

"Quite right, Etheredge, quite right! My fault entirely—entirely! Thank you, Etheredge. I say, Etheredge, though, I wish you would not go to bed just yet—it's more than likely that I may want you."

"Very good, sir."

The man went out of the room as quietly and unobtrusively as he had entered it. A deep silence followed his going, broken at last by one of the Japanese spaniels, which rose, stretched itself, and uttered a little cry of

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sleepiness ere it settled down again. Wells waited, watching.

"Look here, Dogger!"—

Wells knew that something big was coming. In the old schooldays he, from a certain bull-dog-like pertinacity, had always been known as Dogger Wells; just as Rivington, because he was always painting—himself much more than his canvases—was popularly styled "Daubs." Rivington, in this moment of evident trouble, had gone straight back to the old sobriquet. Wells argued from that that the trouble must be serious. He followed the unconscious lead.

"All right, Daubs, old boy—out with it," he said.

Rivington tapped the letter which he still grasped.

"Dogger, I'm in a hole! Look here—I must tell you—there's no one else—at least no man. Listen carefully—sometimes during the past year or so I have gone to a sort of salon, a reception you know, at Madame de Marlé's, a very accomplished Frenchwoman, who likes to get round her clever young people, artists of all sorts—authors, musicians, painters—you

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know. There, some months since, I met a girl—Yvette de St Evreux."

Rivington paused and drew his finger slowly across the line of his lips.

"Go on, Daubs," said Wells.

"I—well—I fell in love with her. Never mind how or why—I am in love with her. I want to make her my wife—will, must make her my wife! I found out that she was a governess in some City man's family in Regent's Park—and once or twice I have met her alone. To-morrow I was going to meet her again and ask her to marry me. I meant you to be best man, Dogger, for I swear she loves me! And to-night comes this note from her. Listen"—

"I am obliged to leave England at once, never to return. Since we shall most probably—no, certainly—never meet again, I wish to tell you that while life lasts in me I shall never cease to think of you and to pray for your happiness and your prosperity. Since it must be so—good-bye. YVETTE."

"Do you hear, Dogger? 'Never to return'—'never meet again'! What does it"—

The sharp ringing of a bell in the entrance-

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hall interrupted Rivington's eager inquiry. The bell rang again and yet again. Then they heard the outer door open and Etheredge's voice mingling with first one then two strange voices in seeming altercation.

Rivington, still grasping the letter, strode towards the door. Before he had taken two steps across the room the door was flung open from without.

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CHAPTER II

WHERE IS MISS DE ST EVREUX?

If Wells had not known that this was an affair of serious importance to his old schoolmate he would have burst into hearty laughter at the scene which revealed itself when the door was thrown wide open. Framed by the white and gold of the doorway stood an elderly gentleman, who was not only somewhat full of habit but very red of face, and, at the moment of his entrance, in an obviously choleric state of temper. He was a shortish, stout man with a bald head, a hanging under-lip, and a double chin; there was a distinct stain of wine on the front of his highly-glazed shirt, and he had evidently come away from whatever place he had left in such a desperate hurry that the light overcoat which he had shuffled on over his evening clothes was all on one side, and gave him a dishevelled and even a dissolute appearance. But all this was lost in the fierceness of the gaze which he directed upon Riving-

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ton. On him the new arrival's eyes fastened as tigers set their regard on a quarry implacably pursued and at last run to close quarters. But this gentleman was not alone. A little in his rear, and a little to the right, hovering uncertainly, as small boys move on the edge of a crowd, seeking a favourable opportunity for dodging into place and prominence, was a lady, middle-aged, matronly, determined-looking. She, too, gave the impression of having risen somewhat hastily from dinner, and of having been too much concerned with the business in hand to do more than throw a very light shawl around her plump shoulders in a careless fashion. In her face, as in the stoutish gentleman's in the doorway, there were written all the laws and conventions—together with a certain titillating delight at being mixed up in even an outside fashion with something unusual and wicked.

Behind these two persons stood Etheredge, very quiet and composed, but secretly foaming with rage. These late visitors had beaten down his suave words, his expostulations, finally, his point-blank denials, and had forced

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an entrance. He, Etheredge, felt himself disgraced.

Rivington drew a step nearer the door. He gazed inquisitively at the rotund figure before him, and quite unconsciously to himself his face assumed the smile of polite, tender interest which won him a welcome anywhere.

"I think I have not the pleasure—" he began.

The stoutish gentleman glared as a lion might glare at soft words spoken to it at the wrong time. He spoke—firmly and pointedly.

"Sir, I believe I have the honour of addressing Mr John Aubrey Rivington?" Rivington bowed and smiled. The irate gentleman went on—

"Sir, I shall not stand upon ceremony; we crave no pardon for an intrusion which is warranted. Sir, I am Mr Wisden Willoughby of Cumberland Terrace, Regent's Park, and of Willoughby, Crampson & Porterway, of Leadenhall Street. Sir, allow me to introduce my wife—Mrs Wisden Willoughby!"

Rivington bowed and smiled once more—the tender, sympathetic smile of one who says, "Yes, I am trying hard to understand you,

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but take your own time—take your own time." He handed a chair in Mr Willoughby's direction. Mr Willoughby stretched forth a fat white hand whereon a fine diamond sparkled. His full voice rose again.

"Sir, no ceremony, I beg. Sir, Mrs Wisden Willoughby and myself are here on a matter of the gravest importance. You see before you, sir, the employers of Mamzel Yvette de St Evreux."

Rivington uttered a sharp exclamation. He turned instinctively to Wells. Wells, who had been keeping a keen eye on him, gave him a look that acted upon him like a douche of cold water, and sent him round again to his visitors, pulled together.

"The employers of Miss de St Evreux?" he said. "I am glad to see you, Mr and Mrs Willoughby. Will you not be seated?"

Once more the thrusting forth of the virtuous hand—once more the action suggestive of keeping apart from questionable things.

"I beg, sir—no ceremony. Sir, Mrs Wisden Willoughby and myself are here to discharge

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a painful duty. In the discharge of that duty, sir, I ask you to tell me—where is Mamzel de St Evreux?"

Rivington lifted his hand to his forehead and drew his fingers wearily across it from temple to temple. He sighed.

"I do not know!" he answered. "I wish—I wish I did!"

"Buck up, you damned old ass!" whispered Wells, hovering in his rear. "Chuck the sentimental, quick!"

Mr Willoughby glared more fiercely than ever.

"You do not know, sir? You—you dare to stand there—you, a young man, a young gentleman of—of quality, of—of position—and tell me that you do not know what has become of Mamzel de St Evreux? Sir, I *demand* to know what has become of Mamzel de St Evreux. I *will* know what has become of Mamzel de St Evreux! Mamzel de St Evreux, sir, is the instructress, the guide, the—the friend and philosopher of my—my progeny, sir, and I stand to her, sir, in the light of guardian and protector, stand to her, sir, *in loco parentis*. Mamzel de St Evreux,

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sir, has quitted my roof, and I have every reason to believe—founded, sir, upon the most convincing evidence—that she has done so at your instigation!"

In the silence that followed Wells found himself swearing hard under his breath. What was the matter with Rivington? Why, instead of speaking it right out, did he stand there, propping his willowy figure up on the back of a chair, making faces at the ceiling, the walls, at the Willoughbys, at him, even at Etheredge, who stood a picture of dismay and blank amazement in the doorway? He looked like a man who is suddenly floored, suddenly confronted with a question which he cannot answer. And why did he, at intervals, laugh so strangely?

"I demand, sir, an answer to my question," thundered Mr Willoughby. "Sir, I will *have* an answer to my question!"

Rivington suddenly pulled himself up. He was trying to steady himself, but his face twitched a little.

"Yes—yes," he said hesitatingly. "I—I —am sorry, Mr Willoughby, that I have

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been so—so long in answering your question, but the truth is I am—upset. The truth is also, Mr and Mrs Willoughby, I do not know where Miss de St Evreux is—would to God I did!"

"Buck up, you damned idiot!" whispered Wells in the rear. Then, taking matters into his own hands he bustled forward and said, "I say, look here, don't you know—Rivington's a bit bowled over, don't you see? Won't you sit down and have a drink and just hear what he's got to say, quietly?—Etheredge!"

"Sir?"

"Give your master a brandy-and-soda. Won't you have a drink yourself, sir?"

Mr Willoughby lifted the fat white hand once more.

"Nothing of the sort for me, I beg," he replied stiffly. "My business here"—

"Mr Willoughby," said Rivington, recovering himself, "I will settle your business quickly. I know nothing of the present whereabouts of Miss de St Evreux; it was not until this evening—not until a few minutes

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ago—that I heard of her departure from England."

Mr and Mrs Willoughby spoke in chorus.

"Departure from England!"

"Of her departure from England—on her own confession. Here, Mr and Mrs Willoughby, is a letter which I received from Miss de St Evreux to-night—it is the only letter I have ever had from her, and you will see that she speaks in it of a final farewell to England—and to me."

The two faces which were turned upon Rivington when the letter had been perused were full of surprise, astonishment, incredulity. Rivington growing more and more in command of himself, went on—

"Now that I know who you are, I will tell you all. It is now some months since I first met Miss de St Evreux at the salon of Madame de Marlé, of whom you have no doubt heard her speak. I was at once attracted to her—and grew to love her. I used to see her there constantly. It was by pure accident that I discovered that she was employed as governess in a family in Regent's Park. I

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happened to be walking through the Park one day and met her, I believe, with one of your children?"

"My eldest daughter, Georgina Alberta, sir," said Mrs Willoughby, rapping out the words like a postman's double knock.

"I will not deny," continued Rivington, "that I have twice seen Miss de St Evreux—alone. I—I invited her to inspect the collection of the Zoological Society in my company. We spent, perhaps, two hours in the Gardens on each occasion. Nor will I deny that I had arranged to meet her there again—to-morrow. And now, Mr and Mrs Willoughby, I will tell you the last that I can tell. It was my intention, when I met Miss de St Evreux to-morrow, to ask her to become my wife. For I can tell you, what I may, perhaps, never be able to tell her, that I love and honour her with my whole heart! If I seemed strange to-night when you entered it was because I had just received the news of her—what shall we call it?—flight? abduction? disappearance? and that my heart was bleeding and my brain whirling, because I

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had lost the woman I love with such devotion."

Mr Willoughby, who during this speech had sat with inflexible mouth and wide-opened eyes staring at the speaker, now suddenly shot out his arms, flapped them vigorously against his sides and making a sudden dart at Rivington seized his right hand and shook it vigorously. Then pulling a large bandana handkerchief from his overcoat pocket he blew his nose very vigorously and fell to polishing his spectacles.

"God bless my soul, sir!" said Mr Willoughby. "God—bless—my—soul! Sir, I beg your pardon. Sir, I beg your pardon most humbly for Mrs Wisden Willoughby and self. Sir, you will understand how easily one may be deceived. The unthinking remarks of a child, the suspicious sayings of a servant, the finding of a few words on a scrap of paper—one thing, sir, leads on to another, until innocent parties are suspected. Sir, I believe you are an honourable gentleman. Marriage, do you hear, Maria, do you hear? It was this young gentleman's earnest desire

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to marry Mamzel! Do you hear that, ma'am, do you?"

"And here," said Rivington, smiling at Wells, "is an old school friend of mine—Lieutenant Wells, of the Royal Navy—whom I had designed for the office of best man, and"—

"I say, old chap," said Wells, when he and Mr and Mrs Willoughby had shaken hands, "if you'd tell Etheredge to give us something to drink and to hand cigars to Mr Willoughby, don't you think we might employ our time to better advantage by talking over what's to be done about Miss de St Evreux? If she's to be found, you know"—

"She must be found," muttered Rivington, as he helped Etheredge to provide his unlooked-for visitors with refreshment. "She shall be found—I will move heaven and earth to find her!"

"Well, but you know, dear old man, you'll have to have something to go on," urged Wells. "This world's a big place after all. Why not get at the bottom of the mystery of her disappearance if you can? Where's she

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gone, and what's she gone for? People don't go off in that sudden fashion without some cause, you know."

"Sir," said Mr Willoughby, "you are quite right. Sir, your discernment and penetration do you great credit. Mr Rivington, this infern—this deplorable business must be inquired into. We loved Mamzel de St Evreux as if she had been our own, and that she should disappear in this fashion from the roof which had so gladly sheltered her—but I am a tender-hearted man, gentlemen, and shall say no more. Maria, my dear, tell Mr Rivington what you know."

"But I know so little, Wisden, my love," said Mrs Willoughby. "Everything was all right this morning until half-past nine o'clock when Ma'a'mselle came to me and asked if she might go out for an hour or two on particular business. I did not notice anything unusual in her manner, she seemed quite calm and collected. But she did not return at noon, nor during the afternoon, and we had heard nothing of her by the time Mr Willoughby came home from the City. Then came a tele-

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gram—here it is—saying that she had left England for ever "—

"Had left?" exclaimed Rivington. "Had left?"

"Had left," repeated Mrs Willoughby. "Had left England for ever and thanking us most warmly for all our goodness to her, and sending her sincere love to all "—

"And therefore, sir," broke in Mr Willoughby, "we began the inquiries which led us to your door, where, I am glad to say, we have been received frankly and honestly and in a manly fashion. Sir, my daughter had seen you speak to Mamzel—a parlour-maid had seen you with Mamzel at the Zoo—finally, Miss Latouche, a friend of Mamzel's, told us who you were and where you lived. We came—we are satisfied. And now, sir, what is the next thing to be done?"

Rivington was studying the telegram which Mr Willoughby had put into his hand. His brows were working and his eyes moody.

"She says, 'I have left England,'" he muttered. "And yet this was not despatched from the West Central Head Office until half-

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past five. Strange! Well, Mr Willoughby, it is just possible I may be able to give some news of Miss de St Evreux to-night. I am going to see Madame de Marlé, under whose roof I first met her. To-morrow I may have something to tell you. Till then"—

Rivington went with his visitors to the outer door. Coming back he took Wells by the arm.

"Dogger!" he said, "are you going in with me in this—right through?"

"Right through, Daubs," answered Wells. "As far as ever it goes."

"Then come on!" said Rivington. "We're for Paradise Court. Etheredge—a hansom!"

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CHAPTER III

THE LIGHT IN THE TURRET WINDOW

As they got into the cab which Etheredge had in readiness for them at the Burlington Gardens end of the entrance to the Albany, Rivington turned to his man and spoke in a low voice—

"It's quite possible, Etheredge," he said, "that I shall leave for the Continent to-morrow morning, so you had better get things ready. If I go, I shall want you to go with me. Until I return from Madame de Marlé's I can't say anything definite, but as we may go and may be pressed for time"—

"I understand perfectly, sir," answered Etheredge. He closed the door of the hansom upon Rivington and his companion and turned to the driver. "Go up Tottenham Court Road until you are told to stop," he said.

As the horse fell into the peculiar jog-trot so characteristic of London cab-horses, Rivington drew out a cigarette-case.

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"Smoke, Dogger, smoke!" he said. "There's nothing like tobacco for helping one to think. And we've got to think—to think pretty hard!"

"There are things I should like to know," said Wells, slowly, after he had lighted a cigarette. "You must remember, Daubs, I'm all in the dark. Except for the fact that I know now that there is a Miss Yvette de St Evreux, that you're madly in love with her and want to marry her, that she has been a governess in the family of Mr and Mrs Willoughby, whom we have just seen, and that she has disappeared suddenly, and in a most unaccountable manner, I am as much at sea as if I'd been cast adrift in the Pacific! Tell something more as we trot along. For example—has Miss de St Evreux no friends, no relations, no family? Must have, you know, old chap—somewhere. And who's this Madame de Marlé that we're bowling off to see? Bit late at night to call, isn't it?—it's close on twelve now."

Rivington laughed.

"Not too late for Madame de Marlé," he

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said. "I've often wondered whether Madame ever goes to bed. She's a woman of tireless energy and usually most brilliant about two o'clock in the morning. Madame is—but you want explanations, Dogger, don't you? Well, suppose I begin at the beginning—there's a good deal of personal history mixed up in this. And to be sure I haven't had much time to tell you anything—we were going to have a good talk, weren't we, when this came. And yet I mustn't weary you with detail, and I'm so bothered and troubled that it is difficult to think clearly about anything, but"—

"Spin us a short yarn full of main points," counselled Wells. "Just the outlines of the thing."

Rivington drummed his fingers on the door of the hansom. It was not so easy for him to compress a story into a few words as Wells seemed to think it might be. His way was to tell a story if anything from its very beginning, to start it out from origins which, absolutely uninteresting to the hearer, were yet so full of keen interest to him that to leave

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them out was to emasculate the thing, to rob it of most of its charm, of its vigour, its vital importance. Now, as he sat by Wells's side, half smiling, he was seeing the possibilities of the story which he had to tell, seeing the latent activity in it, realising how, were it only fiction, a subtle hand could weave things into it and evolve things out of it, and throw all over it a glamour, an atmosphere. A short yarn full of main points? That might be the method of legal folk, or of what were commonly called hard-headed, common-sense folk, but so far they had not been his who had trained himself all his life to wrap up even ordinary things in a gauze-like veil of romance, and could always see at least half a dozen ways in which any fact or truth might be understood, even as there are a hundred points of view from which one may gaze upon and realise such a fact as, say, the Venus of the Capitol.

"Let's have the hang of it, Daubs," repeated Wells.

"I should have to go back a long way," began Rivington, dreamily. "You remember,

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Dogger, that it was my ambition to become a great painter?"

"I remember that you used to make a most awful mess with your painting things," said Wells, ungallantly. "But what's that got to do with"—

"I get muddled if I don't tell things in my own way," said Rivington. "Besides, this is apropos of what I am going to tell you. After I came down from Oxford I did try to do something in painting—and worked very hard. And then I realised, perhaps a little slowly, that after all I was not cut out for the life and course I had dreamed of—that it wasn't in me to achieve it. I had all the desire, the wish, the ambition, but I hadn't the inborn power, without which the other things were valueless. It was just about that time that Uncle Gervase died and left me a hundred and fifty thousand pounds."

Wells groaned deeply and said something under his breath.

"Yes, I know I was lucky," continued Rivington. "And yet I believe I'd rather have been a great painter. However, I said

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to myself, 'If I can't be a master in Art, I can enjoy Art—if I can't create great things myself I can derive infinite pleasure from the work of those who can, and what's more I can help people who can do what I can't do, and who are not so well off in this world's goods as I fortunately am.' Do you understand, Dogger?"

"Perfectly — sort of Mæcenas business, eh?" answered Wells.

"Scarcely anything so important," said Rivington. "However, all this leads on. There was a man—no, little more than a boy—whom I was able to help a good deal some eighteen months ago. He is a young Neapolitan, Carlo Marini, full of genius and promise, but, when I met him, desperately poor. I bought some of his work—you shall see it—and got others to buy it. He has a studio now, Master Carlo, and is doing well and will do better. It was through him that I became acquainted with Madame de Marlé."

Wells lighted a fresh cigarette with a feeling of relief. Now they were getting to something

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like business. The name of Madame de Marlé was by this time quite familiar.

"Carlo Marini," resumed Rivington, "knows a good deal of the under-world of art, music, letters. One day, some nine months ago, he asked me if I knew Madame de Marlé. I answered that I had never even heard of Madame de Marlé. Then he told me that this lady was one of great accomplishments; that she herself was a professor of the art of pianoforte-playing, but cherished a vast regard for Art in all its forms, that she was immensely fond of the society of clever young people, and had a salon every Sunday, whereat she was always pleased to see her friends. There was good talk there, said Master Carlo, of music and books and paintings—would I like to go? Of course I replied that I would, and a few days afterwards I received a card from Madame de Marlé. On the following Sunday I went—to find myself one of a crowd of young people about my own age."

"Lots of chaps with long hair and girls in green-and-yellow gowns, I suppose?" interjected Wells. "I know, old chap!—once went

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to one of those sort of does with a cousin. Awful business! Never mind—awfully sorry —go on, Daubs—full speed ahead."

"Well, I suppose there were some men whose hair was a bit long," said Rivington, "but I never met any young women there who were dressed in any exceptional style. In fact, my dear Dogger, it was a very ordinary sort of business, so far as outward appearances went. Everybody was clothed, and in his or her right mind. There were tea and coffee and cakes and things, and conversation—very good—and music, and Madame de Marlé impressed me as being a remarkably kind, clever, shrewd woman of the world, who liked to see talented young folk"—

"Were they all talented—eh?" asked Wells. "By Gad!—what a crush!"

"Oh, well, we won't quibble about words! What I mean," said Rivington, "is that here was a painter and there a poet; here a promising young actress and there a coming violinist —you know what I mean—all young folk who had done something or were going to do something."

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"Awful mistake," said Wells. "Far apart as sheep from goats, I should think, those two lots. Didn't the Have-Done-Somethings turn up their noses at the Going-to-Be-s?"

"Well, well!" laughed Rivington. "Never mind—we can't all be admirals straight off, you know. But let me get on with my story. It was at Madame de Marlé's that I met Miss de St Evreux. I had been there twice then, for I found the place and people interesting. Miss de St Evreux had not been there on the occasion of my previous visits, but I soon found that she was a *habituée*—had been so for some time. There were a great many people—perhaps twenty-five or thirty—in Madame de Marlé's room that evening, and my attention was first attracted to Miss de St Evreux by her voice. Madame de Marlé and I were in conversation, discussing some point in connection with our joint protégé, Carlo Marini, when a girl's voice—a beautiful, clear, true soprano—suddenly broke in upon us. I was entranced, and showed it. 'Ah, that!' said Madame, 'that is Yvette de St Evreux. She has not been to see me for three Sundays. She

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is singing her best to atone to me for her naughtiness.' And later I was presented to Miss de St Evreux—and I fell in love with her."

"Look here, Daubs, old chap," said Wells. "You're an awfully clever chap at slinging words together, even if you can't paint pictures. Just describe Miss de St Evreux, won't you? Pen-portrait—word-portrait—what do you call it? You know."

Rivington laughed gently.

"You ask much, dear, dear boy!" he said.

"Well—she is—no, she is not tall—she is nearly—very nearly tall. She is slender—and yet I do not like the term willowy—it reminds me of the blades of cricket-bats rather than of something supple and graceful. Her figure is as near perfection as a woman's can be. She is dark as—no, I shall not say as dark as night—I shall content myself by saying that her hair and her eyes are mystifyingly dark—ah, I have it!—the darkness of a clear night in spring. She is full of grace—her features are regular—she is pretty, beautiful and handsome all at once. Moreover she has wit, spirit and a

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most enviable quality of frank candour. In everything that I have seen of her she is sweet, modest, womanly."

"A prize not to be lost sight of," said Wells, laconically.

"Exactly. I do not intend to lose her," agreed Rivington. "I shall never be happy again if I do. But I won't lose her, Dogger! However, I was telling you—I fell in love with Miss de St Evreux at first sight. Every Sunday after that I attended Madame de Marlé's receptions regularly—I never missed one. I endeavoured, without, of course, attracting undue attention, to cultivate the society of Miss de St Evreux as much as I could. I knew little of her: it is tacitly understood at Madame de Marlé's that private affairs are not talked of. There one meets other people, not to talk of oneself, but of things outside oneself—but I gathered from a chance word which she uttered in my presence one day that she was a governess. I wondered a little at that, because of all the women there she was always the most perfectly, the most daintily gowned, and governesses are not

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usually supposed to be too well paid. However, I came to the conclusion that she might be governess in some very wealthy family. I confess all that mattered nothing to me. Had she gone in rags, like Cophetua's beggar-maid, she would have been as lovely. But the question was solved accidentally. I met her, as I say, by accident, walking in Regent's Park one morning in company with a child of nine or ten years. Of course I spoke to her—we conversed a little. The next time I met her at Madame de Marlé's, she told me that she was a governess in a family in that neighbourhood, but told me no more. It was only after some little time that she consented to visit the Zoological Gardens in my company. We have been there twice. I made no attempt to conceal my affection and admiration. We were to have met there to-morrow once more—and it was my intention to then ask her to marry me. That, my dear boy, is all I can tell you."

The hansom had now come to a halt amongst the press of traffic at the Oxford Street end of Tottenham Court Road, and Rivington, who seemed desirous of action and motion, bade

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Wells dismount, saying that Madame de Marlé's place was only a few minutes' walk away, and that they could reach it while the cab was getting free of the thing. He presently drew his companion out of the main road into a side-street, from which they turned into another—a quiet street, ill-lighted, the houses on one side of which appeared to be in course of demolition.

"They are pulling everything down hereabout and building huge barracks of flats," murmured Rivington, as they strode along. "It is in one of those said barracks of flats that Madame de Marlé has her abode—Paradise Court, as she calls it."

"Why Paradise Court of all names?" inquired Wells.

"Either a mere whim on the part of Madame, or because it is the last thing between earth and heaven—a sort of courtyard to Paradise," answered Rivington. "Madame's flat is 'way up,' as our American friends would say—it is on the very top of the building. She would have it so for the fresh air."

At the head of the street they crossed another,

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at the end of which, bulking vast and massive against the midnight sky, rose a huge building in the myriad windows of which were many lights. Rivington suddenly paused and laying his hand on Wells's arm pointed upward.

"You see that light, right at the top, Dogger?" he said. "That curiously-coloured light, something like the glittering of an opal, yet deeper and fuller in tint—there?"

"I see it," answered Wells.

"That is Madame de Marlé's signal light. So long as it burns in the turret Madame is accessible. When Madame retires, out goes the light. The light is in—Madame is at home. Come!"

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CHAPTER IV

PARADISE COURT

LEADING the way, and closely followed by Wells, who was by this time sure that he was already in the first stages of a rapidly-developing mystery, wherein there might be succeeding stages still more productive of interest, Rivington advanced to the principal entrance of the vast block of buildings which he had indicated from the end of the street. Now that this block was reached Wells perceived that it had a name, the name stood out in bold letters over the door—Minobar Mansions. Although it was already midnight there was plenty of evidence of life about this principal entrance to Minobar Mansions. As Rivington and Wells came up, two motor cars were setting down people who had evidently been to the theatre—men and women in evening dress; the men handsome, well-groomed, well-to-do, the women smart, pretty, elegant in their finery.

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From a *coupé* brougham, which had drawn up a yard or two behind the motors, descended a woman whom Wells immediately connected with the stage. This, he said to himself, is some actress home from her evening's engagement. There were hansoms, too, crowding up to the entrance. It seemed as if the inhabitants of Minobar Mansions had been to the theatre or to supper *en masse*, and were now flitting home like rooks to a rookery.

"There are a thousand souls living under this roof," said Rivington as they walked along a thickly-carpeted corridor. "The old English notions of privacy are fast dying out, Dogger, and yet you can keep yourself to yourself very well indeed within these flats. Madame de Marlé's flat, for example, is a castle."

"Shouldn't care very much about living barrack-fashion, myself," said Wells. "Must meet such an awful lot of people you don't know on the stairs, I should think."

"I don't think these people trouble the stairs much," said Rivington. "Lifts are more in their line. I shouldn't like to climb the stairs to Paradise Court anyway. One might as well

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climb the Monument just for exercise. Here's the lift."

The man in charge of the lift was having a busy time, as was usual with him about midnight, and some minutes elapsed before Rivington and Wells could find a place in the moving pen which continually rose with cargoes of humanity and fell empty to swallow up more. It seemed to Wells that they climbed as high as the top of a ship's mast before the lift stopped and the attendant flung open the gate with a metallic clang. "Top floor," he said and shut them, and sped noiselessly away into the depths below.

"This way, Dogger," said Rivington. "Follow me; we have a little way to go yet ere we reach Paradise Court."

He led the way along a corridor, whereupon opened many doors; then along another, whereupon opened still more; and finally, turning to a third, pointed to a door which closed it in at the end.

"Beyond that door," he said, "lies Madame de Marlé's castle. You will see how she shuts herself off from the world."

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"She's high enough above it, anyway," said Wells, who was a little out of breath because of Rivington's hurrying pace. "Glad we're there, anyway."

Rivington opened the door at the end of the corridor. It admitted to a square space, plain, unornamented, which had evidently been taken off the corridor and painted to resemble a lobby of plain dressed stone. At the further side of this, instead of a wall, however, was a grille of wrought iron-work of very substantial quality, which stretched from floor to ceiling and effectually shut off anything that lay behind. In the midst of this grille was an ornamental iron gate, solid and practical, and secured by a business-like looking lock. And over the gate, in quaintly-designed letters was the legend "Paradise Court," and beneath them in smaller letters the word "Salve."

Rivington, with his finger on the button of an electric bell, motioned Wells to look through the grille at the scene beyond. But Wells had already noticed that beyond the grille lay something of an unusual nature. He drew nearer to the gate and looked through the

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open spaces in the wrought iron-work. The grille shut him and Rivington off from a garden—a small garden, it was true, but still a garden—bright and gay with flowers, the scents and perfumes of which came refreshingly to their nostrils. There was something mysterious and almost uncanny in the presence of this garden in such an unlikely spot, and Wells was suddenly struck with the extraordinary quietude which hung over it. That it was open to the sky he could see—there was the faint glimmer of stars in the half blue of the springtide midnight, and yet the roar of London came to his ears so faintly, so vaguely as to resolve itself into no more than a drowsy murmur. Above that drowsy murmur sounded the musical tinkle of a fountain; its very sound suggested soft mosses glistening with diamond-like drops falling from lichened rocks. This gentle singing of water seemed to be the voice of the siren in whose honour the roof-garden had been made. The siren herself stood in full view — a superb female figure, nude, perfect in conception and outline, standing with outstretched and invit-

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ing arms on a pedestal that rose from a circular stretch of vivid green turf immediately before the entrance gate.

"By Gad! I say, Daubs!" exclaimed Wells. "What a remarkable place! You're sure your Madame isn't a witch or anything of that sort?"

"Why should she be?" laughed Rivington. "Madame is, as I told you, a lady of vast taste. She loves beauty. Pretty notion this, isn't it? To turn the leads of a place like this into a perfect gem of a garden as an entrance to your rooms—that was a stroke of genius. But—the bell."

He pressed the button as he spoke. Somewhere across the garden a silvery peal of sound answered his summons.

"It's a bit mystifying, though," said Wells, as they waited. "The situation, and the scent of the flowers, and the ripple of that fountain, and the figure there. What's the lady signify, Daubs. Something classical—eh?"

"That," replied Rivington, "is the Spirit of Art holding out hands of welcome to all who worship her. That was Madame's own con-

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ception, and the sculptor is a very clever young Italian who comes here much of a Sunday. But here is Madame's manservant Fritz, and as perfect a genius in his way as my man Etheredge is in his."

There was a curiously-tinted light over the garden, and by its aid Wells saw advancing towards them a tall, well-built young man in the conventional garb of the male servant, who walked with a solid, smart tread and carried himself in a singularly erect, soldierly fashion. "That chap's been drilled," said Wells to himself, and he watched Fritz narrowly as he came up to the gate. "German army, for a pony!" he said, again to himself, and he looked still more narrowly at the man's flaxen moustache, which was very fierce and aggressive, at his square chin, steel-blue eyes, and expression of stolid resolution. "Um!" he thought, "this grows still more interesting. What shall I see next?"

"It is I, Fritz—Mr Rivington," said the leader in this midnight expedition, as the man came up to the gate and inspected the two companions. "I am anxious to see Madame

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de Marlé on important business for a few minutes. Is Madame engaged?"

At the sight of Rivington's face and the sound of Rivington's voice Fritz had immediately opened the gate, opened it so swiftly and noiselessly that Wells found himself wondering how it was done, and he now drew back, waving his right hand towards the garden and bowing in most polite fashion.

"No, I do not think Madame is particularly engaged, sir," he said. "That is to say, Madame has a friend or two conversing with her, but I do not think she will have any objections to seeing you. I shall take your name to Madame, sir, at once. If you will please to follow me, gentlemen?"

He had closed the gate behind him as he spoke and now marched away towards the house, head and shoulders stiffly erect. Wells, turning, saw that the gate was closed—had been closed as it had been opened—swiftly, noiselessly. He was wondering what the opening and closing process was as he followed the manservant and Rivington around a neatly-gravelled path to a door which was so arranged

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as to be in keeping with the garden—a door enamelled in pure white, and set under a classical porch around the pillars of which roses, clematis and honeysuckle were twined. From this point, glancing around him, Wells saw that the three sides of the garden other than that fenced in by the grille were covered with foliage, and that there was not even a chimney-stack to be seen from it. It struck him that the mind which could accomplish these things on a London roof was capable of a vast amount of ingenuity.

On the manservant opening the white door Wells found himself gazing around a trim little hall, all white and red. There was a white wainscotting half way up the walls, and a soft red paper from the wainscotting to the ceiling; the floor was laid in red and white tiles. A few old prints in dull black frames hung here and there; a couple of quaint, high-backed Flemish chairs served for furniture. But Wells had only time to glance at this in passing through. He found himself following Rivington into a small apartment which opened off a corridor leading from the hall—an apart-

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ment tastefully and snugly furnished, and with a certain air of homeliness about it.

"If you will please to be seated, gentlemen," said Fritz, bowing right and left to easy chairs, "I shall inform Madame that Mr Rivington is here."

"Stay, Fritz," said Rivington, detaining the man. "Tell Madame," he continued, "that Mr Rivington and a very dear friend of his would like to see her alone for a little time on a very important matter. Tell Madame that I crave a thousand pardons for intruding upon her at this hour, but I will give her the best of reasons."

"I shall deliver your message, sir," said Fritz, and bowed himself out.

"Madame appears to keep up an establishment," remarked Wells.

"A man, two maids and a companion, who, I think, plays the part of housekeeper," replied Rivington. "I am anxious to see what effect Madame has upon a practical young Briton like you, Dogger, old boy. I think you will see things in her that will interest—and perhaps surprise you."

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Wells was about to say that he had already seen a good deal that had both surprised and interested him, but he kept his thoughts to himself. In reality he was wondering how it was that a fine, strapping, well-set-up fellow like the manservant Fritz, who, without a doubt, had undergone a thorough military training, should be found doing menial tasks in a place like this, where there could surely be little more than nominal work to perform. Besides, he did not look the sort of man who turns to such work as valeting, footmaning or anything of that sort. That he was a German, in spite of his excellent English, Wells was as certain as he was of his own nationality.

Thinking these thoughts he glanced round at Rivington who had become absorbed in an engraving at the other side of the room. He knew that Rivington from boyhood had been a dreamer, a dilettante, that with all his good-nature, his kindliness of heart, his excellent qualities, he was not too well fitted to cope with the practical affairs of this world, and that in many things a child might cheat him with impunity. And he began to wonder, piecing

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together bit by bit the things he had heard and seen within the last hour and a half, if Rivington was not being deceived at the present time, if he might not be the victim of some strange conspiracy. For what impression, he asked himself, his shrewd brain working rapidly, would any practical man form of what he, Wells, had already heard and seen. This Yvette de St Evreux—what, on his own confession, did Rivington know of her? And this Madame de Marlé, whom they were, he supposed, about to see? Certainly to him, Wells, the outer walls of her castle suggested a good many thoughts. It was true, of course, that an Englishman's house was his castle, but did the ordinary Englishman, if he took a flat in the common-place neighbourhood of Bloomsbury, fence himself and it with an iron palisading and a gate which certainly locked itself in some curious fashion? Did he set up a janitor who might have been a drill-sergeant? Did he—

The fiercely-moustachioed Fritz returned with more bows. Madame would be delighted to see Mr Rivington and his friend. Would the gentlemen follow him?

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Rivington followed the man with the air of one who treads a well-known path; Wells, following him, took sharp observations of all he saw. It was evident to him that Paradise Court was a flat of some considerable size. From the little entrance-hall to the door to which Fritz led them, a door at the extreme end of the corridor and facing it, the distance was quite twenty-five yards. There were four doors opening out of the corridor on each side —each was closed. Everything along the corridor was in keeping with what Wells had already seen. Madame de Marlé was certainly a person of taste, and apparently of sufficient wealth to enable her to make her taste evident in her surroundings.

Opening the door at the end of the corridor Fritz ushered the two friends into an apartment of considerable size—a drawing-room which Wells at once fixed upon as the scene of Madame de Marlé's Sunday receptions. It was empty of life when they entered, and Wells examined it with some curiosity. He did not know what he had expected to see. In point of fact, he saw nothing more than a large, com-

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fortable, tastefully-arranged room. There was a grand piano, there were numberless lounges, sofas, easy-chairs, conversation-chairs, cosy nooks and corners, there were pictures, there were flowers, there were books, magazines, newspapers—it was a bright, tasteful, pretty, but eminently home-like room. And yet, some thirty yards away that curiously-locked gate.

A sudden rustle of drawn curtains, the scene of a new presence.

Wells turned sharply and found himself looking at the most remarkable woman he had ever seen in his life!

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CHAPTER V

MADAME DE MARLÉ

THE most remarkable woman he had ever seen in his life! This dominant idea beat itself in upon Wells's consciousness with sledge-hammer-like blows during the moments which immediately succeeded Madame de Marlé's entrance. Something seemed to confuse him. He was vaguely aware that Rivington presented him to Madame with all due formality; that Madame smiled graciously and spoke graciously; that they were all presently seated and that Rivington was apologising for the lateness of his visit. He was much more aware, however, that he was staring with all his eyes, and in spite of himself, at the mistress of Paradise Court. And deep down, far under this mere surface inspection, he was realising that it was not just Madame's exterior presentment of herself which made her remarkable, but something which could neither be seen nor touched, but *felt*.

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Madame de Marlé was neither a handsome nor a beautiful woman in the strict meaning of these terms. She was tall, of an excellent and well-preserved figure; she had much dignity and grace, and was gowned in perfect, if quiet, taste. It was difficult to make an accurate calculation of her age. Her complexion, obviously natural, was pink and fresh as a girl's, but her hair, of which she had great masses piled high above a well-shaped, well-carried head, was snow white. The clearness of her complexion, the snowy whiteness of her hair, served to accentuate the blackness of her large eyes. It was these eyes, so large, so dark—black with the blackness of pure jet—so penetrating, so quick, so subtle, and withal so commanding, that enchained Wells's faculties of observation. He had a direct fashion of staring straight at people when he spoke to them, and for the second or two he and Madame had looked into each other's eyes as they were introduced, it seemed to him that hers were the sort that could see into the niches and crannies of the human brain, or even wither a less mentally endowed being with one swift

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look. Those black eyes under those level, unruffled brows and that mass of snow-white hair! Certainly he had never seen so remarkable a woman in his life.

". . . for indeed, Madame de Marlé, I cannot think of anyone but you who can give me any help or information," Rivington was saying when Wells came out of his abstraction and found that they were all three sitting in close proximity — the lady on a lounge near the hearth and her visitors in chairs opposite her. "If you can tell me nothing, I do not know where I shall go!"

"But what is it that you wish my help in—what information do you seek, my friend?" inquired Madame de Marlé. "Ah! I begin to know you, Mr Rivington. You have a story to tell and must tell it in your own way."

She possessed a remarkably sweet, telling voice—a voice which sounded more like that of a young woman than of a presumably middle-aged one. It was clear, silvery, with a liquid note in it, but it was also full and commanding and imperative.

"What story I have to tell, Madame," re-

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plied Rivington, "can be left until afterwards. I came here to-night to ask you if you can tell me anything—if you know anything of Miss de St Evreux."

"Of Yvette de St Evreux? But in what way, Mr Rivington? Your question is too vague."

"Then I will try to make matters plain, Madame de Marlé. Miss de St Evreux has quite suddenly left London — left England. She quitted her employer's house early this—no, I mean yesterday—morning, making the excuse that she wished to go out on business for an hour or two. She never returned. Late in the evening Mr and Mrs Willoughby received a telegram which informed them that Miss de St Evreux had left England. Still later I received a letter from her to the same effect."

"You received a letter?"

"I, Madame. Here it is."

"But why should you receive a letter from Yvette de St Evreux? You had, I think, only met her—here—a few times?"

"A great many times, Madame de Marlé,

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during the past few months—thanks to your kindness and hospitality. And"—

"Ah, you have been meeting her elsewhere! Well, well, it cannot of course be helped, but do you know, Mr Rivington, the last thing I wish is that love affairs should spring out of my little Sunday evening parties. They are so embarrassing and discomposing, those love affairs, and give so much trouble to more than the people most closely connected with them."

"Did I say anything of a love affair, Madame?"

"A great deal, my friend, though not in words. Do you think I have no eyes? And so you are really in love with Yvette de St Evreux? How romantic, and how very English! Do you know anything of her, Mr Rivington?"

"Madame de Marlé, I know little of Miss de St Evreux. How should I?"

"Exactly."

"All that I know is"—

"That you love her, eh? A good capital to begin working upon, Mr Rivington, of course, but I always understood that here, in your cold

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England, where respectability and convention govern things so largely, it is a recognised thing that young gentlemen do not fall in love until the object of their passion has established her right to be considered—what shall we say? I leave you to find the word, for indeed I don't know of one."

Rivington's brows drew themselves together. He glanced uneasily from Madame de Marlé to Wells. That ingenuous young gentleman, with a vacuous face and innocent eyes, was steadily regarding a plaster cast of Psyche which stood on a pedestal at his elbow.

"Madame," said Rivington, "you will perhaps understand better what I mean, and what I feel, when I tell you, on my honour as a gentleman, that I love Miss de St Evreux with all my heart and soul, and that it was my intention to ask her, this very day, to become my wife."

In the silence which immediately followed this confession Wells, looking slowly round, saw that Madame de Marlé was genuinely astonished. She was gazing at Rivington as if she could scarcely comprehend what he had

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said, and for a moment a certain hardness which was in the bright black eyes went out of them.

"I am very sorry for you, Mr Rivington," she said. "But—you say that Yvette de St Evreux has suddenly left England?"

"Here is her letter, Madame de Marlé," answered Rivington. "If you will do me the kindness to read it"—

Madame de Marlé took the letter from Rivington's hand and bent over it. Within a moment she handed it back.

"Yes," she said. "That is quite clear. But how can I help you, Mr Rivington? I am not in Miss de St Evreux's confidence."

"Can you tell me nothing, Madame?"

"Little more than you already know. You must remember, Mr Rivington, that a great many young people come to my Sunday receptions of whom I really know very, very little indeed. I can tell you how Miss de St Evreux first came. As you are aware I am a teacher of the pianoforte with a most excellent connection. Because of that I meet a great many members of my own profession and the

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kindred professions. I chanced to hear Miss de St Evreux sing one afternoon at a friend's house, and hearing that she was governess in an English family, and knowing what a very *triste* life that is in most cases, I invited her to come to me on Sundays whenever she liked. She came—she was charming—she sang delightfully—that is all. Who she is I do not know. She might be a Russian princess for aught I could tell you to the contrary. Why, so little do I care about the private affairs of my guests—my general guests—that I was not even aware that Miss de St Evreux was domiciled with the respectable Willoughbys whom you have just mentioned. No, I cannot tell you anything, Mr Rivington."

"Madame," said Rivington, "why should she leave England so suddenly—with such short notice to me? For I am sure she knew what was in my mind."

Madame de Marlé turned an astonished face upon her questioner. Then she laughed—a peal of silvery laughter which voiced incredulous surprise.

"My friend," she exclaimed, "you must

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be truly idyllic in your simplicity if you do not see that you yourself have just supplied an excellent reason for Miss de St Evreux's sudden departure. You say that you are sure she knew what was in your mind—well, perhaps she ran away to avoid a declaration."

"Why should she do that?" asked Rivington, frowning.

Madame spread out her delicate hands.

"Who can tell what is in a woman's mind?" she said. "It may have been that it would have proved inconvenient. It may have been that she did not choose to hear it. It may have been that"—

"No!" interrupted Rivington, stoutly. "Forgive me, Madame de Marlé, but it could not have been any of these things. As you inferred just now, I have met Miss de St Evreux—though only twice—and I am certain that the reason of her sudden departure from England is not to be found in anything that I have said or was about to say. I would stake my life that Miss de St Evreux had no idea until yesterday morning that she was about to leave London so suddenly. But that there is

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someone in London who is aware of her departure and could give some reason for it I am certain."

Madame de Marlé showed renewed interest.

"Yes? Why, Mr Rivington?"

"Because in the telegram received by the Willoughbys she uses the words, 'I have left London,' and yet that telegram was not despatched from the West Central Head Office until very late in the afternoon. She must have handed the form to some friend with a request that it should be wired at some specified time."

"I do not follow," said Madame de Marlé. "Indeed, you have shown me no proof as yet that Miss de St Evreux has left England. For anything I know to the contrary—and I only know what you tell me, Mr Rivington—Miss de St Evreux is as much in London as we three are."

"But her letter—her letter to me, Madame!"

Madame de Marlé rose, smiling.

"Never attach too much importance to a woman's letter, my friend," she said. "I should attach none to that, nor to the telegram

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received by the respectable Willoughbys. It is possible that for reasons of her own, with which no one else—no, not even an impetuous lover like yourself!—has anything to do, Miss de St Evreux desires to remain *perdu* for a time. Just now, while we are agitating ourselves about her, she is probably enjoying her beauty sleep within a mile of me. Who can tell?"

"But this is a matter of the most serious moment to me, Madame de Marlé," said Rivington, with some show of impatience.

"Oh, I am not jesting, I assure you, my dear friend," answered Madame de Marlé, reassuringly. "I am merely endeavouring to keep a cool head. As things are, I say there is no proof that Miss de St Evreux has left the shores of this country, or even left London, though it is quite evident she has quitted her employer's house."

"I believe her letter," said Rivington, stubbornly.

Madame de Marlé sighed.

"Precisely," she answered. "You were certain to do that. Well, then, what do you propose to do, my friend?"

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"I had hoped that you would have been able to give me some information about Miss de St Evreux," said Rivington. "She must have friends, relations"—

Madame de Marlé laid a hand on his arm.

"My dear friend," she said, "if you had seen so much of life as I have, you would know that in great capitals we come across a vast number of young people who appear to have neither relations nor friends. I myself, when I was much younger, have mixed largely with young people in more than one great city, without even becoming intimate with them. If I were to put all the young men and young women who attend my Sunday receptions through a form of examination such as: Who are your parents?—what is your father?—where do they live?—how much money have you got?—I should ruin everything—especially my own serenity of mind. Now, for example, how much do I know of you? Little more than that you are a most amiable young Englishman, well-disposed towards art and artists, and wealthy enough to patronise promising men like Carlo Marini—who, my friend, will do

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your penetration justice, for he will be a great man. But apart from that, I don't know you. I certainly do not know whether your father was a wine-merchant or a man of quality, a pork-butcher or a peer. I take my Sunday guests as I find them—of their private affairs I know nothing. Therefore, I know nothing of the private affairs of Yvette de St Evreux."

Rivington rose. Wells rose with him. Madame de Marlé rose too. She stood looking at Rivington with a slight smile.

"I am sorry that I am powerless to help you, Mr Rivington," she said. "But—you see?"

Rivington bowed.

"I am sorry, too, Madame de Marlé," he said gently, "because I must find her. And I shall find her. You will forgive me for this intrusion, knowing what I feel?"

She smiled and gave him her hand—turned from him and gave her hand to Wells. It seemed to Wells that she searched his face narrowly for a brief instant—then, with an inclination of the hand to both, she was gone. Fritz appeared at the door.

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Outside Minobar Mansions Rivington looked at his watch.

"Twelve twenty-five," he said. "Come along, Dogger, the night's young. We are going to Cumberland Terrace. And if Mr Wisden Willoughby is in his bed, he'll have to get out of it!"

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CHAPTER VI

NEWS

WELLS recognised very clearly that Rivington was in a mood which would brook no denial and no delay, and he followed him into the first hansom that hove in sight without so much as a question or a protest. After all, it was best, he said to himself, to let Rivington have his own way entirely at that juncture. Baulked of it he would fret and fume all night.

"This chap will run us round to Cumberland Terrace in under ten minutes," said Rivington, as the hansom crossed Tottenham Court Road and sped along Howland Street in the direction of Fitzroy Square. "It's only round the corner. I must have some information from old Willoughby and his wife. I thought I should have got at least something to go upon from Madame de Marlé."

"Are you sure you didn't, Daubs!" asked Wells, drawing out a cigar-case and offering it

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to Rivington. "Have a cigar—it'll do you good."

Rivington took a cigar and turned an astonished face upon his friend.

"Am I sure that I didn't, Dogger?" he said. "Why, what did I get out of Madame but positive negations. It was 'No' all along."

"Not so sure of that either," answered Wells. "If you want my honest opinion, I don't trust Madame de Marlé."

Rivington laughed.

"You—don't—trust—Madame de Marlé!" he exclaimed. "Why, what"—

"I wouldn't trust her as far as I could throw her with one hand," answered Wells. "Which is about a foot."

Rivington gasped.

"Dear me, Dogger!" he said. "You surprise me. Now, Madame has always struck me as being one of the most candid, outspoken persons that one could possibly meet. You saw to-night how plainly she answered my questions. I am convinced that had she been able to give me any information concerning Miss de St Evreux she would have done so.

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But, as she implied, it would be preposterous to expect her to know all the private affairs of the people who attend her Sunday receptions. Why do you not trust Madame de Marlé?"

"Because I don't—that's why!" replied Wells. "State of natural antipathy, I suppose. Never mind that. What are you going to do at the old City Johnny's?—more questions?"

"I want to know what they know of Miss de St Evreux," answered Rivington, slowly and thoughtfully. "I want to know where she came from to them—what references she gave—what her habits were. There must be some clue that one can lay hold of. For I shall find her, Dogger, I shall find her!"

"You don't think, old chap, that considering you have no—no right—eh—you know, to—to act on Miss de St Evreux's behalf, that she wouldn't perhaps resent this—eh—interference with her affairs, if she came to know of it?" inquired Wells.

"When a man is as much in love as I am," answered Rivington, "he's not very likely to stick at small things like that. I want to know where she is, and I will know, and if there's

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any explaining to be done, I'll do it later on. How do I know that she isn't in danger? And if a woman's in danger, and the man who loves her knows it, and moves heaven and earth to free her of the danger, do you think she's going to say much about it in the wrong way?"

"I can't gainsay that," answered Wells. "It's a queer business. I wish there was a bit of straight work in it—something you could get your hands up to, you know—no hole-and-corner work. You know, Daubs, you're not a bit the better for going to the lady who fastens herself behind iron bars; it would take a good deal to get anything out of her, even if she did know anything. By the bye, what *does* she want to barricade herself in like that for? And again, why does she employ a man who has obviously gone through his training in the German Army as a footman?"

"Oh, as to the grille and the gate and the garden, mere whim, mere caprice!" said Rivington. "And really, you can't deny that the garden is a beautiful thought made into an equally charming fact. As for Fritz—well,

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there are said to be thirty thousand men, who have gone through their training in the German Army, here in London following various avocations. Fritz is a quiet, peaceful, well-behaved fellow. Why should he not earn his living as Madame's footman? Since she must have one, why not he?"

"I should have thought a boy in buttons or a neat parlour-maid would have done," answered Wells. "But I'll agree with you, Daubs, old chap: Madame is a woman of whim and caprice. I wonder what the secret of that lock is?"

He uttered the last sentence in a very low aside, and Rivington did not catch it. Before he had time to ask Wells what he was talking about the cab turned into Cumberland Terrace from the Outer Circle and stopped in front of Mr Wisden Willoughby's mansion.

Mr Wisden Willoughby had presumably not yet retired to rest. There were lights in his windows upstairs and downstairs, and when a very sleepy-looking young footman opened the door in surprise to Rivington's urgent knock the master of the house himself

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was seen hovering in his rear, habited, it is true, in a much be-flowered dressing-gown, but evidently quite wide awake. At the sound of Rivington's voice he came forward with outstretched hand.

"Come in, my dear sir, come in!" he said in grave, hushed accents. "And you also, my dear young gentleman. To tell you the truth, Mr Rivington, I am not at all surprised to see you. I said to Mrs Wisden Willoughby just now, 'Maria,' I said, 'I shall not be at all surprised if Mr Rivington should call to-night. If he has momentous news, Maria,' I said, 'I am sure that he will not sleep until he has communicated it to us.' This way, this way, gentlemen."

Having requested the sleepy-looking young footman to tell the cabman to wait, Rivington, followed by Wells, trod upon Mr Willoughby's tracks into a heavily-furnished dining-room, from the walls of which several generations of Willoughbys looked down upon solid mahogany, thick carpets, and a massive side-board. At a sign and a word from his master the footman—who had poked his nose into

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the room out of sheer curiosity, something within him strongly insisting that these two young swells were in reality detectives from Scotland Yard—placed a solid-looking spirit-case on the table and flanked it with tumblers and syphons. Mr Willoughby waved a hospitable hand.

"Not a word, my dear sir, not a word until you have partaken of refreshment," he said solemnly. "I am aware, gentlemen, of the terribly harassing nature of these inquiries—I have not been so upset for years as I have to-day—you may go, Bassett—never, indeed, gentlemen, so upset since a certain crisis in the City years ago. But that, of course—help yourselves, help yourselves, gentlemen, I beg."

More to please this worthy gentleman than because they particularly desired it, Rivington and Wells helped themselves to a drink. Mr Willoughby—who, it appeared, had just helped himself at the time of their arrival—looking solemnly on until they had raised their glasses to their lips and set them down again. Then, and not till then, and then with a hushed voice, he asked—

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"And what news have we, sir, of our unfortunate affair? It is, I trust, good—I earnestly trust it is good, Mr Rivington. Feeling as I do that I stand *in loco parentis* to Mamzel de St Evreux"—

"I am sorry to say that I have no news at all, Mr Willoughby," said Rivington, interrupting his host's eloquence. "Madame de Marlé, from whom I have just come, can tell us nothing that we do not know. She only knows Miss de St Evreux as an acquaintance—nothing more. Of her private affairs she is in total ignorance. And so I drove round here to ask you and Mrs Willoughby to give me some further information. You, at any-rate, can tell me when and under what circumstances Miss de St Evreux came to you—with what references—perhaps you may know other things. Tell me, I beg you, what you can!"

Mr Willoughby, who had listened to this with his head on one side and his thumbs twirling one over the other like the sails of windmills, now sat up erect and assumed the air of a righteous man who goes into a

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witness-box well content to speak the truth.

"Sir," he said, "whatever information it is in my power to give I shall not withhold. Sir, I regret that Mrs Wisden Willoughby has now retired to much-needed rest, but I believe that whatever information Mrs Wisden Willoughby could have given you, I can give. Sir, I shall begin from the beginning. I beg you be seated, gentlemen. Sir, it is now some eighteen months ago that my wife and myself, after due consideration of the matter, decided that it was our duty to our progeny, which consists, I may say, of two daughters and one son, aged respectively eleven, nine and seven, to afford them the advantages which must necessarily spring from the care and tuition of a first-class French governess. Following the advice of friends we advertised for such a young lady in the *Morning Post* of London and in the *Tawmps* of Parry. Our advertisement in the *Tawmps* produced various communications. I need only refer to one. It was from Mamzel Yvette de St Evreux. It was accompanied by the very highest testi-

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monials—one from the Reverend Mother of the Convent of Notre Dame at Courbevoie, just outside Paris, where Mamzel had been educated; another from the Dowager Lady Firmdene, whose daughter Mamzel had perfected in the French language during their two years' residence in Paris, where their lady mother has an appartymong in the district of Passy, and one from the Abbé Gournay, a well-known clergyman of that famous city. On the strength of these testimonials we engaged Mamzel de St Evreux—and we have never regretted it."

Rivington, who had made a note of these names and places, breathed a sigh of relief.

"You do not know anything of Miss de St Evreux's friends?" he asked. "Did she ever speak of her relations, her family?"

"Sir," replied Mr Willoughby, "I have always understood, in company with Mrs Wisden Willoughby, that Mamzel de St Evreux was an orphan, and had been brought up at the convent in Beauvais as such. The Reverend Mother Jupuin, sir, at that highly-respectable religious establishment, would no

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doubt be able to afford information on this point."

"I shall see the Reverend Mother to-morrow," said Rivington, quietly. "One more question, Mr Willoughby. We all know that Miss de St Evreux used to spend her Sunday evenings at Madame de Marlé's. Did she go out at any other time—as a regular thing?"

"Sir," replied Mr Willoughby, "every Wednesday evening from four o'clock until eleven, or when she, in her discretion chose to return, was at Mamzel de St Evreux's entire disposal. She usually went out in the evenings at six and returned at ten. She always went forth on foot, but returned in a hansom: I believe she was fond of the play. You will understand, gentlemen, that Mamzel was not short of money. Mamzel's stipend in this house, gentlemen, was one hundred pounds per annum. In addition to which, sir, there were little gifts on such occasions as Christmas, her birthday, and so forth."

"I am sure you have been most good and kind to Miss de St Evreux," said Rivington.

Mr Willoughby inclined his head.

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"Sir," he said, "we had come to look upon Mamzel de St Evreux as one of the Wisden Willoughbys!"

A few minutes later Rivington and Wells left the Cumberland Terrace mansion and drove away.

"Well, we've hit upon something at last!" said Rivington, with a sigh of relief. "I shall go across to Normandy to-morrow, Dogger. I'll begin at the beginning, the sisters at the convent will be able to tell me more, and perhaps I can build up something gradually. Will you come, dear old boy? Normandy will look well just now."

"I'll come, Daubs," answered Wells. "I said I'd see you through."

"Let's get out and walk," said Rivington, as they rattled down Portland Place into Regent Street. "Now that I know something I want to think, and I can't think in a hansom. Tumble out, Dogger, and stretch your legs."

Walking arm-in-arm along the now almost deserted thoroughfare the two friends paced smartly along until they came to the corner of Vigo Street. And there, underneath a lamp-

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post, they almost ran down a little man in a flowing cape and a big sombrero, who started back, looked up, uttered an exclamation, and removed his head-gear with a courtly sweep. Rivington uttered an exclamation too.

"Why, Carlo mio!" he said. "Is it you? I trust you have not been to see me and had the bad luck to find me out."

The artist shook his head and showed a set of beautiful white teeth in the lamplight.

"Ah, no, Signor Rivington!" he said. "No, no, I have just come from a friend. But I shall come to you very soon."

"Do, I want to see you, Marini. You have not been to Madame's lately, either."

"No, no, signor, I have been much engaged. But I shall come to Madame's, too. I wish to meet the Signorina de St Evreux again. Ah, if she would but let me paint her! Do you think she would, Signor Rivington? I did see her to-night, and once I thought, 'Now I will ask her,' and then I thought, 'No, no, she is hurried, bothered, I shall ask her at her leisure, when she returns, not now.' But if she would but sit to me—ah!"

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Wells winced under the grip which Rivington fixed upon his arm. But Rivington's voice was cool enough when he spoke.

"I have no doubt Miss de St Evreux would sit for you, Carlo mio," he said, kindly. "You saw her to-night, you say. Where was that?"

"Oh, at Victoria Station, signor, all bustle and push, and hurry about. Me, I could not explain to a young lady what I did want, eh? Besides she was in a great hurry herself to catch the boat-train for Paris. My friend and I, we were seeing a compatriot off by the same train, the Signorina de St Evreux, she pass us close by. Ah, what grace, what a shape! when she returns I shall crave my humblest, my most persuadingest, that she honour me with but just one, two, three little sittings. I have an idea, grand, magnificent!"

"Well, I've no doubt she will, Carlo amico. But come to see me soon, then we shall talk. Till we meet again, Carlo!"

Once round the corner of Vigo Street Rivington uttered a sharp cry and broke into a run. He dashed along the street, startled

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the astonished porter at the entrance to the Albany, and once through the lodge door, darted madly for his rooms, where he woke Etheredge out of a sweet sleep in his own particular sanctum.

"Quick, Etheredge, quick, there's news, news, news!" he cried. "We leave for Newhaven and Dieppe in the morning at ten. Set to work, get everything in readiness, never mind sleep, we'll sleep to-morrow." Then catching Wells by the hands he almost swung him off his feet as he shouted, "I told you I should find her, Dogger, old chap! I told you I should find her!"

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CHAPTER I

THE TELEGRAM

WHEN the day-service boat ran out of Newhaven next day shortly before noon, Rivington heaved a mighty sigh of satisfaction and relief.

"The sooner the white cliffs drop behind and the grey ones rise in front, the better I shall be pleased!" he said to Wells, with whom he had begun a perambulation of the upper deck. "We're getting nearer with every turn of the screws anyway."

"Ay, but nearer to what?" asked Wells.

Rivington faced round upon his companion with uplifted eyebrows.

"To what?" he exclaimed. "Why, to her, of course, man! What are we going across for?"

Wells, who was smoking a formidable-looking briar pipe, which he had carefully filled immediately upon leaving the train for the boat, remained silent for a few minutes, during

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which his brows were gathered together in what was apparently a severe effort of thought.

"You're quite sure we're not off on a wild-goose chase, Daubs, old chap?" he said at length. "I don't want to throw cold water on the scheme, but you know you're one of those awfully impulsive, go-ahead sort of fellows who are rather inclined—eh?"

"No doubt—no doubt, dear old boy!" said Rivington, laughing. "But I am something of a fatalist and a good deal of a believer in luck, and I feel confident that I shall be successful—something tells me that I shall be successful."

"Very reassuring and comfortable feeling to have," said Wells, "but look here, Daubs, what's your plan of campaign? Here we are bound for Paris simply because that chap Marini tells you that he saw Miss de St Evreux leave Victoria last night on the boat-train by this very route. Well, granted that he did, Paris is a pretty big place, and people who want to lose themselves there needn't have much difficulty in doing it. How do you propose to come across Miss de St Evreux?"

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"My dear Dogger," replied Rivington, "although I am a dreamer and a visionary and a most unpractical person in the eyes of most people, I am in reality one of the most mathematically-minded individuals in the world. I like to go on systems and to arrive at results by logical processes. Now, as we are in possession of certain facts relating to Miss de St Evreux, which show that she was educated at a certain religious establishment in Paris, and that at least two persons of some standing in Paris are acquainted with her, we are in the position of being able to build up from the foundation. We will go first to the authorities of this convent and find out all they can tell us, and I shall be very much surprised indeed if we do not instantly gain some news. For I have invariably noticed, my dear Dogger, that young women who have been bred in convent-schools never lose a chance of visiting their old preceptresses when occasion offers—it is, I think, due as much to a womanly vanity to show off their pretty dresses to the soberly-clad nuns as to affection for the haunts of their younger days, and I am quite sure

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that if Miss de St Evreux has gone to Paris she will sooner or later visit the Convent of Notre Dame."

"And supposing she hasn't gone to Paris?" said Wells.

"That," said Rivington, "seems quite impossible. Of course she has gone to Paris. Where else should she go?"

"I suppose there are places between this and Paris," remarked Wells. "There is Dieppe, for example—only place I can think of just now."

"No," said Rivington, after a moment's thought, "it must be Paris—I have a presentiment that it is Paris."

"Well, and when she is found in Paris—what then?" asked Wells.

"Then I shall ask her to marry me," replied Rivington. "That is obvious. And whether she will or not I shall at anyrate find out why she left England in such a mysterious and sudden fashion."

"I'm not so sure about that," said Wells. "Perhaps you think I'm in a carping mood, Daubs, but I can't help feeling there's more in

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this than you think. I'm a bit muddled by last night. I haven't got over Madame de Marlé and Paradise Court yet."

Rivington laughed.

"Oh, there's nothing mysterious about Madame de Marlé and Paradise Court!" he said. "You don't think surely that Madame has anything to do with the disappearance of Miss de St Evreux?"

"I don't trust Madame," replied Wells, as he knocked the ashes out of his pipe. "However, that's neither here nor there. You want to find Miss de St Evreux, and I'll help you as much as ever I can. Look here, Daubs, let's go down and get some lunch—I'm confoundedly hungry."

There were very few passengers lunching when the two friends got downstairs. There was something more than a fresh breeze that morning, and the minds of the greater number of the people who were crossing seemed to incline rather to the shelter of private cabins and berths than to meat and drink. But at the table next to that whereat Rivington and Wells seated themselves sat a young lady

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upon whom Wells's attention was very quickly fixed—first of all, because she was satisfying a very healthy appetite in generous fashion, and secondly, because something in her air and appearance made a strong, instant appeal to him.

This young lady was of a type which appears to have sprung into existence during the last twenty-five or thirty years. She was the sort of young woman who can ride a horse, drive a long ball at golf, walk twenty miles in wind and rain, dance all night without fatigue, and in all respects and purposes show herself the equal of man so far as endurance and strength are concerned. She was above the medium height, sturdily yet gracefully fashioned, her face was pleasant, cheerful, frank, her eyes were bright, her cheeks rosy with good health and a sound constitution. Her thick brown hair was piled up in a business-like but essentially becoming knot under her smart cloth toque, and she herself was attired, as all young ladies of her type always seem to be, save in the eventide, in a tailor-made coat and skirt which was not a little mannish. When you see such a young woman as this you look

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round instinctively for a boy full of golf clubs, or a hockey stick, or a gun, or at least a tennis bat. This young woman, however, appeared to have none of these things, but she certainly possessed a huge camera, which, with a golf cloak, manufactured out of some rough material of a rather sporting pattern, lay on a chair at her side.

It did Wells good to see this healthy, vigorous-looking young woman eat and drink. She appeared to have as great a partiality for cold roast beef as a Yorkshire farmer has. She twice despatched the steward for more, and it was more than evident that she enjoyed it. Moreover, she demanded whisky-and-soda and drank it with a zest. She, it was plain, was none of your namby-pamby misses who peck at their food and sip, bird-like, at their drink. It seemed to Wells that the fitting climax to this rosy-cheeked young woman's repast would have been a big cigar. He felt sure, at anyrate, that she had a cigarette-case somewhere about her.

"If you will pardon my absence for a little time, dear old boy," said Rivington, bending

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over to Wells with one of his most engaging smiles, when they had finished lunch, "I will go forward and see how Etheredge is. I perceive now that we are getting well out into the Channel, that the boat is beginning to roll somewhat, and poor Etheredge is a very bad sailor. If I go and say a few words to him he will perhaps pull himself together. In the face of domestic difficulties, Etheredge is a lion, but once at sea, even in a Channel crossing, he becomes lamb-like."

"Make him eat some food and give him a good stiff drink," counselled Wells. He remained in his place when Rivington had gone, staring from time to time at the young woman opposite who, having eaten and drunk to her heart's desire, was now performing some mysterious rites with her camera. "Ripping-looking girl!" he said to himself. "I wonder who she is and where she's going?"

It presently appeared that the young lady's immediate intention was to go on deck, but the boat was just then performing various movements and evolutions of a somewhat discomposing nature, and when she rose to her

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feet, clutching her camera under one arm and the large patterned cloak under the other, it was speedily evident that to reach the door of the saloon and the stairway beyond it was a feat that would require more nautical skill than even she was possessed of.

With a grateful appreciation of the blessed fact that there was just then not a single steward in sight, and that the only other man in the saloon was an aged gentleman seated in a far corner and peacefully and laboriously engaged in dipping sticks of dry toast into a bowl of beef-tea, Wells sprang joyfully to seize the desired opportunity.

"If you will let me take your camera and cloak under one arm and give you the other to hold on to," he said, suiting the action to the words, "I'll get you upstairs all right."

The young lady stared. She was at least two inches taller than her would-be knight, and much heavier.

"But—what will you hold on to?" she asked.

"Oh, I'm all right!" answered Wells, possessing himself of the cloak and the camera

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and folding the former dexterously around the latter. "Now if you would get a firm grip on me—don't be afraid."

He steered her safely across the saloon and as far as the foot of the stairway. But there, an extra roll of the boat coming suddenly and the young lady inclining with equal suddenness in the wrong direction, they came hopelessly to grief, and after a vain attempt to save the situation found themselves in a heap on the stairs.

"It was all my fault!" said the young lady, ruefully, as she gathered herself up.

"Yes," said Wells, "you went the wrong way. Never mind, the camera's safe, I kept a hold on it. Let's try again."

This time he piloted her safely on deck, and at her request saw her established in a sheltered nook. And then, as she simply thanked him with a very frank smile and showed no disposition to keep him at her side, he withdrew and went into hiding to rub a bruised elbow. But later on, as he paced up and down with Rivington, he stole covert glances at the young woman of the camera, and once she looked at him and they smiled.

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"And of course she's going somewhere where I'm not going, and we shall never see each other again!" he said to himself. "And she looks just my sort!"

Dieppe at last! Blue-smocked porters, jabbering, gesticulating, elbowing; fiercely-moustached gendarmes, all cloak and sword; douaniers, all talk and chalk; porters eager to carry anything, even a hand-bag, never two whole yards of platform; small boys anxious to sell postcards, and willing to accept English pennies; washing hanging out of the windows of the houses beneath which the train is drawn up; old women in frilled caps; old men in sabots; a dog drawing a milk cart; a great smell of fish; much bustle and confusion and coming and going of men in peaked caps and Napoleon the Third beards—finally screeching and grinding and rattling and rumbling, and Dieppe town and its basins, and its old church and its fortifications, and its suburbs gliding away, and in its stead the slowly-opening valley of the winding Seine and all the glories of pastoral Normandy—the rich meadows richly stocked with cattle; the little towns and villages

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by the river; the stately châteaux high above the uplands; the woods in their gay spring-time gladness, and over everything the smiling sun.

In his corner of a first-class smoking carriage Wells went to sleep. He was nodding at Longueville—at Cleres he was as sound asleep as if he had been in his own bunk. He woke at last, because the train stopped, and looked sleepily out of the window next to him. Rouen! Three hours yet to Paris. He closed his eyes again as the train moved out of the station, and before it had got well into the tunnel was fast asleep once more.

A hand on his shoulder, first gentle, then insistent, brought him to consciousness once more. Etheredge, very pale and agitated, was in the compartment.

"Mr Wells—Mr Wells! Have you seen my master, sir!"

Wells shook the sleep out of his head.

"Seen him? What do you mean, Etheredge? He was there—in that corner—when I went to sleep—that was some time before we passed Rouen."

"My master is not on the train, sir!"

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"Not on the train? Good Heavens!—man—you're dreaming! Not on"—

"This is a corridor train, sir, and I have searched it from end to end, and Mr Rivington is not on it. He must have got off at Rouen."

"Now I come to think of it," said Wells, "he was not in the carriage when I woke up at Rouen. He must have got out at Rouen and missed the train. Here, let me go with you and have a look, Etheredge."

But there was no Rivington to be found. Neither, incidentally, was the girl with the camera.

"We must go on to Paris, Etheredge. There'll be a telegram from Mr Rivington at the Grand."

But no wire was awaiting them at the Grand Hotel, nor did any news of Rivington arrive that night. It was not until noon next day that Wells, who was by that time getting anxious, received this message—sent off from Rouen an hour earlier—

"I have found what I sought. Come back here by the next train, and meet me at Hotel

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D'Angleterre. Come, however, as a perfect stranger to me, and do not speak to, or recognise me in any way until I make first advance. Let Etheredge come in his proper capacity of my servant, but separately from yourself, and arrive at different times. Be extremely careful about all this, and show no surprise at anything you see on arrival."

An hour later Wells and Etheredge, travelling separately, were on their way back to Rouen.

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CHAPTER II

THE WRONG YOUNG WOMAN

On the Quai de la Bourse in Rouen, overlooking the Seine, which here makes yet another of its many twistings and turnings, and is in this sketch at anyrate a river crowded with merchandise, stands the Hotel D'Angleterre, its lower windows hidden from the street by a screen of foliage. Behind this screen are little round tables and chairs whereat you may take your coffee after dinner on pleasant evenings, and at the same time—if you are a stranger to the Old Norman city—interest yourself in watching the various types of life which pass and repass under the plane-trees in front. On spring evenings this is a very pleasant way of spending that hour after dinner in which laziness is the supreme desire and delight of the soul. There are so many things to look at—a brave soldier in his red trousers, his blue-grey coat, his picturesque képi; a woman with a little filler cup, a big

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basket and a huge umbrella; a workman in his blouse and sabots; the blind man, led by his little daughter who peeps through the leafy screen, and making sure that you are one of those English, comes in with her finger in her mouth, her round eyes shyly entreating you to drop at least a sou in her father's tin cup—all these things you will surely see, together with many others, such as officers in their uniforms, a priest or two in cassock and shovel hat, smart young ladies in very high-heeled shoes, schoolboys in their picturesque hooded cloaks, gendarmerie with white gloves and much sword, together with an infinitude of dogs who have either much licence from their owners or exercise the privilege of living ownerless, and accordingly drop in wherever their fancy leads. There is usually a steamer with a black and red funnel loading or unloading just across the quay, and the boots and high-heeled shoes and wooden sabots patter and clatter along the pavement to the rattle of chains and creaking of windlasses. You might be in Hull, or Dublin, or Liverpool if that steamer were all you had to see, but between it and you, hidden

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behind the leafy screen of the Hotel D'Angleterre, there is a stream of life perpetually ebbing and flowing which is French, and—to you—foreign.

Within this screen, stretched out lazily in a basket lounge chair, drawn up by the side of a little table whereon stood a coffee service, a liqueur glass full of some golden-hued liquid and a stand of matches, sat Wells, alone and therefore silent. It was some seven and a half hours since he had received the mysterious message from Rivington, and two and a half since he had arrived at the Hotel d'Angleterre. There seemed to be a good many people in the hotel, English and American tourists many of them, but he had seen nothing of Rivington on his arrival, although after being shown to his room he had looked into the various public apartments and had kept an eye on the vestibule. At half-past six he had dined at the *table d'hôte*. There were some thirty or forty other people in the *salle-à-manger*, and more in the restaurant adjoining it, but Rivington was not amongst them. Twice, wandering about the place, he had

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encountered Etheredge. The valet was as immobile of countenance, as much a perfect stranger as he had been from the time he and Wells parted company at the Grand Hotel in Paris and drove off in separate conveyances to the St Lazare Station. Wells began to think this sort of game mysterious, but a trifle dull. He wondered if Rivington had come to any harm; if he had really met the object of his devotion and his search and had run away with her; if he, Wells, would have to hang about there goodness knows how long, doing nothing, and whether it would be a desertion of what seemed to be his part if he took a turn along the quays and had a look at the out-door cafés. And in the midst of these speculations a *coupé* drew up at the entrance to the hotel, and Rivington, tossing the driver what appeared to be a highly satisfactory remuneration, got out and walked slowly within the leafy screen. His eyes fell at once on Wells and on a vacant seat close by him. Without a sign of recognition he dropped into the seat with the air of a tired man, and glancing round fixed the attention of a waiter who had just brought

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coffee to a party of Americans, and beckoning him to his side ordered cognac and soda.

Wells, utterly indifferent in outward appearance to the newcomer, was keeping an eye on Rivington's game. Rivington produced a cigarette-case, selected a cigarette, and began to feel in his pockets for his match-box. Finding it at last he also found it empty. He looked round him—the match-stand on Wells's table caught his eyes. He bent towards that innocently-unconscious young gentleman.

"May I trouble you for the matches, sir?" he said, in that peculiarly icy tone which Englishmen invariably affect towards everybody whom they recognise as their own countrymen.

Wells seized the match-stand and leaned across the table to hand it to Rivington. As their heads drew nearer together he caught a rapid yet clear whisper, "At the Corneille Statue in half an hour. Be careful." Then Rivington, seizing and striking a match, said in audible tones, icier than ever, "Thank you, sir," and lighting his cigarette sat back in his chair and smoked—an incarnation of reserved

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strangerhood — until his brandy and soda arrived. For some minutes he remained smoking and sipping. At last, without so much as a look at Wells, he rose and lounged into the hotel.

Wells let ten minutes go by, then he, too, rose and went within. He turned into the reading-room, just inside the entrance-hall, and took up a map of Rouen at which he had gazed idly for a few minutes before. The statue of Corneille? Where the dickens was the statue of Corneille? How was he to find a statue of Corneille or anybody else in a strange city? There was a statue of somebody or other just outside the hotel a little way along the quay, under the trees—was that it? No, that was the statue of Bordelieu, and there was a bridge over the Seine named after the same chap, who was no doubt some writing or artistic johnny. Corneille—Corneille? Ah, there was a Pont Corneille, a bridge which seemed to cross an island in the middle of the river. Ah, yes, and there was the appointed rendezvous, the Statue de Corneille, on a span of that same island evidently. Very well, that much was plain. It seemed from the map to

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be close to the hotel; he would make a gradual progress to it. Putting on a cap, lighting a cigar, and furnishing himself with his stoutest stick, Wells presently left the hotel and sauntered away to his left. He passed two or three out-door cafés, where the chairs were already well filled, and people were enjoying the spring twilight. Then he came to the theatre. There were great bills on the doors announcing that M. Mounet-Sully was playing that night, and boys and youths were offering tickets, bought in advance, to passers-by or to late-comers who had not already provided themselves. He sauntered further—along the Quai de Paris, staring at the little shops, at the folk seen through the open doors of brasseries and tobacco dépôts. And at length he came to the north end of what he felt sure was the Pont Corneille and turned across it, looking for the statue.

There it was—in a recess built off the bridge and rising from the island which he had seen marked in the map. It was now quite dusk and he could not see the inscription, but as he stood eyeing the statue he heard a quick step

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behind him, and the next instant Rivington went by with a sharp whisper—

"Follow me across the bridge!"

There were many people coming and going over the Pont Corneille at that moment, but Wells had no difficulty in keeping Rivington's tall figure in sight. Rivington walked slowly, walked as a man walks who goes out to enjoy the cool of the evening. Once or twice he stopped, and leaning over the parapet of the bridge, gazed for a moment or two at the swishing waters of the Seine. When he did this, Wells acted on his own sense of what was best to be done if they, as he fancied, were pursuing a plan of action designed to convince anyone observing them that they were strangers to each other—he passed on, contriving at some little distance to let Rivington re-pass him. But keeping a sharp look-out on the people who came and went, he saw nothing to excite any suspicion that they were either observed or followed.

Rivington turned to the left on crossing the bridge, and traversing the Quai d'Elbœuf, proceeded along the Grand Cours until the road

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gradually left the town. There were now very few people about, a cart or two rattled along the highway towards Sotteville, a train rattled and clanked on the line close by. Out here, now that the dusk had fallen, there was little light. And suddenly Rivington stopped and let Wells come up to him. As they met, he heaved a great sigh of relief.

"There, Dogger!" he said, "I think we shall be safe if we walk a little way along this road—I don't see any signs of our being followed or watched, though goodness knows we may be! However"—

"Look here, Daubs," interrupted Wells, "what's all this mystery about? What's it mean, this dodging and lurking and pretending that we're strangers and all that? I don't half like it? Are you frightened of something or somebody?"

Rivington uttered a sound which was half-sigh, half-groan.

"To tell you the truth, Dogger," he said, "I don't know exactly whether I am frightened or not. Physically, I am not at all frightened, mentally, I suppose I am un-

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easy. The fact is, we are in the middle of a mystery."

"I am, without doubt," replied Wells. "But you—surely you have got some sort of news by this? You said in your wire yesterday, 'I have found what I sought.' Did that mean that you had found Miss de St Evreux?"

"Miss de St Evreux is here!"

"Here—in Rouen?"

"In Rouen. So, also, is that rosy-cheeked young lady of the camera whom we saw on the boat yesterday."

Wells gasped and came to a halt. He had been thinking of the young lady of the camera a good deal.

"What on earth has she got to do with Miss de St Evreux?" he exclaimed, wonderingly. "There's nothing to be astonished at in her being here. She's probably taking photographs of the place, but why mention her in connection with your affair? You don't mean"—

"I mean, my dear Dogger, that she has something to do with it, and what it is I don't know. Whether it is that she is watching me,

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or watching Miss de St Evreux, or both, or neither, or somebody else who has some connection with us, or one of us, I cannot tell, but she is certainly here either because I am here, or Miss de St Evreux is here, or somebody who has something to do with one of us or both of us is here. Ostensibly the young lady is amusing herself with her camera; between ourselves I believe the camera to be a mere blind."

Wells kept silent for a few minutes.

"I'm no hand at mysteries, Daubs," he said at last. "Give me a straight course and I'll have a cut in with anybody, but I'm shot if I can understand anything you're talking about."

"Give me a cigar and I'll tell you everything that has happened from the time I left you yesterday until now," said Rivington. "That of course is exactly what I want to tell you, so that you can set your brain to work on it. There!—now we will walk gently forward; this road, you see, is very quiet."

"Go ahead, then!" said Wells.

Rivington puffed thoughtfully at his cigar. He kept silent for a minute or two.

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"I'll begin at the beginning," he said at length, as they walked slowly on, "and tell you everything as it happened, in order. Then you'll see how things fit in or don't fit in. Some points of the affair, I promise you, are utterly inexplicable to me. Well, here goes. You will remember, Dogger, that on the way from Dieppe to Rouen you went to sleep. You had had very little sleep the previous night, and when you dropped asleep in the train you were soon sleeping soundly—you were, in fact, hard and fast asleep when the train drew up at Rouen—so fast asleep that you did not hear or see me leave the carriage."

"No, I didn't," agreed Wells. "Though I woke up just after—must have done—for I remember seeing the name Rouen on a board."

"Well, I left the carriage and the train at Rouen," continued Rivington, "left them for a good reason—I had seen Miss de St Evreux!"

"Yes?"

"When the train came to a standstill in the station I got up to find Etheredge whom I believed to be about two compartments away

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on the left of my own. I walked down the corridor and could not find him. I came back and went the other way: he was not to be seen in that direction either. I proceeded to walk along the corridor, towards the rear of the train, looking into each carriage. While I was thus engaged I saw the young lady of the camera leave the train—indeed, as there was no porter just at hand, I helped her with her baggage. Then I went on in search of Etheredge. He, however, was not to be found in the rear portion of the train, so I came to the conclusion that he was in the front part. I, however, was now in the last carriage close to the guard's van, and the train was just beginning to move out of the station. Out of sheer idle curiosity I put my head out of the window and took a look round. We were passing the exit—outside it, in the court-yard of the station, I saw, as it were in the flash of an eye, Yvette de St Evreux herself, just stepping into a *coupé*. I bounded to the door of the carriage—on that side it was locked. I leapt to the other—it was open. I got out on to the step—the train was gather-

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ing speed. At the risk of a good rolling in the dust I dropped off and came off unhurt, except for a bruise to my right knee, and was then some sixty yards past the platform. I ran back to be received with exclamations, and gesticulations by sundry officials who had witnessed my foolhardy proceeding. It took me some minutes to calm and reassure them—more minutes to question porters, drivers and loafers outside the station as to where the young lady had gone to who had driven off in a *coupé* a few minutes before. Oh! they remembered her perfectly—*une demoiselle Anglaise*, of a certainty. Where, but to the Hotel de France, Rue des Carmes? I drove like a fury to the Hotel de France—asked for the young English lady who had just arrived—and was shown into the presence of—the rosy-cheeked damsel of the camera!"

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CHAPTER III

THE THREE VEHICLES

"You may imagine, my dear boy," continued Rivington, "the utter amazement with which the damsel of the camera confronted me and the disappointment which I experienced on confronting her. To say that we stood staring at each other for a full minute, probably with wide eyes and open mouths, would, I sincerely believe, be no exaggeration. As to myself I was no very presentable sight. To begin with, I was bare of head and dusty of raiment, for I had left my head-gear in the compartment wherein you were so peacefully slumbering, and in spite of my gymnastic performance in leaping from the train, had rolled at least once over in the dust and cinders of the railway track. Therefore I suppose I looked rather like a madman."

"If I am not mistaken," said Wells, "the camera young woman possesses a strong sense of humour."

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"I entirely agree with you, Dogger," said Rivington, "she does possess a very keen sense of humour. That saved the situation and put us at our ease. Greatly to the admiration of the waiter who had shown me into the *salle - de - lecteur* and had manufactured a reason for lingering there, the lady of the camera broke the silence and the ice with what one might almost call a shriek of laughter, and then said with truly British *sang froid*—

"'What *is* the matter?'

"'The matter, madam,' I replied, 'the matter is that I have made a huge mistake—I have mistaken you for somebody else.'

She glanced at my uncovered and unkempt head, and then at my dusty, begrimed clothes.

"'But you appear,' she said, almost archly, 'you appear to have been in the wars. I hope you have not been fighting?'

"'I will seek refuge in the truth,' I said. 'And the truth is that after assisting you with your baggage just now I went along the train to find my servant whom I did not find, and chancing to look out of the window I saw

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someone on the platform of whom I am in search.'

She interrupted me with a sudden drawing together of her brows and a quick look in her eyes.

"'A young lady?' she said.

"'Why do you think that?' I asked.

"'Because you followed me,' she answered, quickly enough.

"'True,' said I. 'The lady is young. And seeing her on the platform I leapt from the train when it was in motion, rolled in the dust, and ran back to the station. According to the various intelligent functionaries at the station you were the young lady I was in search of, and you had driven to the Hotel de France. Therefore I drove to the Hotel de France—here I am—and I am disappointed—yet there are compensations,' I added, as graciously as an untidy man could."

"Oh, you began making up to her, did you?" inquired Wells.

"Dogger, Dogger, don't use vulgar terms! Of course I spoke nicely to her—was not she a woman?"

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"What did she say to that?" growled Wells.

"To that? Nothing. She is a matter-of-fact young person, the camera damsel, whoever she is. She merely remarked that she was sorry for my disappointment and hoped I should be successful in my search. Then, as by an afterthought, she said, 'I am staying in Rouen for a few days, perhaps, if you describe your lost friend to me I can help you to find her, though as this is not London or Paris you will surely come across her quickly.' I therefore described Yvette to her, made my bow, and left her, she observing that she would be findable any morning somewhere about the town in company with the camera."

"Umph!" said Wells.

"Now you see my predicament," continued Rivington. "There I was friendless and alone in Rouen, certain that I had seen Yvette and equally certain that she had escaped me. However, to know that she was there, in the same city, was a great deal. I made my toilet at the Hotel de France, took a drink, sallied out to the nearest hat shop to buy a hat,

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purchased a rather pretty walking-cane and some gloves, and then went down to my old quarters, the Angleterre, to book rooms and to tell them that my man and luggage would arrive on the morrow. And after that, there still remaining nearly two hours before dinner-time, I went back to the station, hoping that I might find the man into whose *coupê* I had seen Yvette stepping as the train moved past the sortie. That man, however, was not to be found. Some others had a dim notion that two ladies had driven up to the station in a *coupé* about the time of the arrival of the Dieppe-Paris express, but they were as certain that they were not English as they were positive that the young lady I wanted was she of the camera at the Hotel de France. Had not all the young English ladies cheeks of the most red and eyes of the brightest? Then I remembered that Miss de St Evreux is not at all English in appearance and that I ought not to have labelled her English in describing her. It was evident that there was nothing to be done at the station. I met with nothing but obtuseness in every quarter. So I walked

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round the central part of the town for an hour or so, hoping that I might see Yvette. But when I eventually returned to the Hotel D'Angleterre a little after six o'clock, I had seen nothing of her. She might, for ought that I knew, be within a hundred yards of me, but how was I to find her?"

"You were certain, Daubs, that it was Miss de St Evreux of whom you caught that passing glimpse?" asked Wells.

"I never doubted it, dear boy, for a moment," answered Rivington. "It was impossible to doubt it. When you have seen Yvette you will know why. Well, to resume, I dined in the hotel and afterwards sat outside there, wondering what to do next and how to go about things. After a time I strolled along the quay in the eastward direction and came to the theatre and saw that Monsieur Mounet-Sully was playing that evening, and having nothing that I could think of doing, I decided to go to the play. I therefore purchased a seat in a part of the house in which it was not necessary to appear in evening dress, and in due course I took my place. I had not been

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