POOR DOCUMENT

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THE POWERS AND MAXINE

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CHAPTER III.

Lisa Makes Mischief.

When Ivor was safely out of the room, my first thought was to escape from behind the lounge, and get upstairs to my own quarters. But just as I had sat up, very cramped and wretched, with one foot and one arm asleep, Lord Mountstuart came in again, and down I had to duck.

He had brought a friend, who was as mad about old books and first editions, as he; a stuffy, elderly thing, who had never seen Lord Mounstuart's treasures before. As both were perfectly daft on the subject, they must have kept me lying there an hour, while they fussed about from one glass-protected book-case to another, murmuring admiration of Caxtons, or discussing the value of a Mazarin Bible, with their noses in a lot of old volumes which ought to have been eaten up by moths long ago. As for me, I should have been delighted to set fire to the whole lot.

At last Lord Mountstuart (whom I've nicknamed 'Stewey') remembered that there was a ball going on, and that he was the host. So he and the other old duffer pottered away, leaving the coast clear and the door wide open. It was my luck, (which is always bad and always has been) that a pair of flirting idiots, for whom the conservatory, or our "den," or the stairs, wasn't secluded enough, must needs be prying about and spy that open door before I had conquered my cramps and got up from behind the sofa.

The dim light commended itself to their silliness, and after hesitating a minute, the girl—whoever she was—allowed herself to be drawn into a room where she had no business to be. Then, to make bad worse, they selected the lounge to sit upon, and I had to lie closely wedged against the wall, with "pins and needles" pricking all over my cramped body, while some man I didn't know proposed and was accepted by some girl I shall probably never see.

They continued to sit, making a tremendous fuss about each other, until voices were "heard off," as they say in the directions for theatricals, whereupon they sprang up and hurried out like "guilty things upon a fearful summons."

By that time, I was more dead than alive, but I did manage to crawl out of my prison, and creep up to my room by a back stairway which the servants use. But it was very late now, and people were going, even the young ones who love dancing. As soon as I was able, I scuttled out of my ball dress and into a dressing gown. Also I undid my hair, which is my one beauty, and let it hang over my shoulders, streaming down in front on each side, so that nobody would know one shoulder is higher than the other. It wasn't that I was particularly anxious to appear well before Di (though I have enough vanity not to like the contrast between us to seem too great, even when she and I are alone) but because I wanted her to think, when she came to my room, that I'd been there a long time.

I was sure she would come and peep in at the door, to steal away if she found me asleep, or to enquire how I felt if I were awake.

By and bye the handle of the door moved softly, just as I had expected, and seeing a light, Di came in. It was late, and she had danced all night, but instead of looking tired she was radiant. When she spoke, her voice was as gay and happy as Ivor's had been when he first came into Lord Mountstuart's study with the Foreign Secretary.

I said that I was much better, and had had a nice rest; that if I hadn't wanted to hear how everything had gone at the ball, I should have been in bed and asleep long ago.

"Everything went very well," said she. "I think it was a great success."

"Did you dance every dance?" I asked, working up slowly to what I meant to say.

"Except a few that I sat out."

"I can guess who sat them out with you," said I. "Ivor Dundas. And one was number Thirteen, wasn't it?"

"How do you know?"

"He told me he was going to have Thirteen with you. Oh, you needn't try to hide anything from me. He tells most things to his 'Imp.' Was he nice when he proposed?"

"He didn't propose."

"I'll give you the sapphire Lady Mountstuart gave me, if he didn't tell you he loved you, and ask if there'd be a chance for him in case he got Algiers."

"I wouldn't take your bracelet even if—if——. But you're a little witch, Lisa."

"Of course I am!" I exclaimed, smiling, though I had a sickening wrench of the heart. "And I suppose you forgot all his faults and feelings, and said he could have you, Algiers or no Algiers."

"I don't believe he has all those faults and failings you were talking about this evening," said Di, with her cheeks very pink. "He may have flirted a little at one time. Women have spoiled him a lot. But—but he does love me, Lisa."

"And he did love Maxine!" I laughed. "He didn't. He never loved her. I—you see, you put such horrid thoughts into my head that—that I just mentioned her name when he said to-night—oh, when he said the usual things, about never having cared seriously for anyone until he saw me. Only—it seems treacherous to call them 'usual,' because—when you love a man you feel that the things he says can never have been said before, in the same way, by any other man to any other woman."

"Only perhaps by the same man to another woman," I mocked at her, trying to act as if I were teasing in fun.

"Lisa, you can be hateful sometimes!" she cried.

"It's only for your good, if I'm hateful now," I said. "I don't want to have you disappointed, when it's too late. I want you to keep your eyes open, and see exactly where you're going. It's the truest thing ever said that 'love is blind.' You can't deny that you're in love with Ivor Dundas."

"I don't deny it," she answered, with a proud air which would, I suppose, have made Ivor want to kiss her.

"And you didn't deny it to him?"

"No, I didn't. But thanks to you, I put him upon a kind of probation. I wish I hadn't, now. I wish I'd shown that I trusted him entirely. I know he deserves to be trusted; and to-morrow I shall tell him——"

"I don't think I should commit myself any further till day after to-morrow," said I drily. "Indeed, you couldn't if you wanted to, unless you wrote or wired. You won't see him to-morrow."

"Yes, I shall," she contradicted me, opening those big hazel eyes of hers, that looked positively black with excitement. "He's going to the Duchess of Glasgow's bazaar, because I said I should most likely be there: and I will go——"

"But he won't."

"How can you know anything about it?"

"I do know, everything. And I'll tell you what I know, if you'll promise me two things." "What things?"

"That you won't ask me how I found out, and that you'll swear never to give me away to anybody."

"Of course I wouldn't 'give you away,' as you call it. But—I'm not sure I want you to tell me. I have faith in Ivor. I'd rather not hear stories behind his back."

"Oh, very well, then, go to the Duchess's to-morrow," I snapped, "and wear your prettiest frock to please Ivor, when just about that time he'll be arriving in Paris to keep a very particular engagement with Maxine de Renzie."

Di grew suddenly pale, and her eyes looked violent instead of black. "I don't believe he's going to Paris!" she exclaimed.

"I know he's going. And I know he's going especially to see Maxine."

"It can't be. He told me to-night he wouldn't cross the street to see her. I—I made it a condition—that if he found he cared enough for her to want to see her again, he must go, of course: but he must give up all thought of me. If I'm to reign, I must reign alone."

"Well, then, on thinking it over, he probably did find that he wanted to see her."

"No. For he loved me just as much when we parted, only half an hour ago."

"Yet at least two hours ago, he'd arranged a meeting with Maxine for to-morrow afternoon."

"You're dreaming."

"I was never wider awake: or if I'm dreaming, you can dream the same dream if you'll be at Victoria Station to-morrow, or rather this morning, when the boat train goes out at 10 o'clock."

"I will be there!" cried Di, going from red to white. "And you shall be with me, to see that you're wrong. I know you will be wrong."

"That's an engagement," said I. "At 10 o'clock, Victoria Station, just you and I, and nobody else in the house the wiser. If I'm right, and Ivor's there, shall you think it wise to give him up?"

"He might be obliged to go to Paris, suddenly, for some business reason, without meaning to call on Maxine de Renzie—in which case he'd probably write me. But—at the station, I shall ask him straight out—(that is, if he's there, as I'm sure he won't be)—whether he intends to see Mademoiselle de Renzie. If he says no, I'll believe him. If he says yes——"

"You'll tell him all is over between you?"

"He'd know without my telling, after our talk last night."

"And whatever happens, you will say nothing about having heard Maxine's name from me?"

"Nothing," Di answered. And I knew she would keep her word.

CHAPTER IV.

Ivor Travels to Paris.

It is rather a startling sensation for a man to be caught suddenly by the nape of the neck, so to speak, and pitched out of Heaven down to—the other place.

But that was what happened to me when I arrived at Victoria Station, on my way to Paris.

I had taken my ticket and hurried on to the platform without too much time to spare (I'd been warned not to risk observation by being too early) when I came face to face with the girl whom, at any other time, I should have liked best to meet: whom at that particular time I least wished to meet: Diana Forrest.

"The Imp"—Lisa Drummond—was with her: but I saw only Di at first—Di, looking a little pale and harassed, but beautiful as always. Only last night I had told her that Paris had no attractions for me. I had said that I didn't care to see Maxine de Renzie: yet here I was on the way to see, and here was Di discovering me in the act of going to see her.

Of course I could lie; and I suppose some men, even of honour, would think it justifiable as well as wise to lie in such a case, when explanations were forbidden. But I couldn't lie to a girl I loved as I love Diana Forrest. It would have sickened me with life and with myself to do it; and it was with the knowledge in my mind that I could not and would not lie, that I had to greet her with a conventional "Good morning."

"Are you going out of town?" I asked, with my hat off for her and for the Imp, whose strange little weazened face I now saw looking over my tall shoulders. It had never before struck me that the Imp was like a cat; but suddenly the resemblance struck me—something in the poor little creature's expression, it must have been, or in her greenish grey eyes which seemed at that moment to concentrate all the knowledge of old and evil things that has ever come into the world since the days of the early Egyptians—when a cat was worshipped.

"No, I'm not going out of town," Di answered. "I came here to meet you, in case you should be leaving by this train, and I brought Lisa with me."

"Who told you I was leaving?" I asked, hoping for a second or two that the Foreign Secretary had confided to her something of his secret—guessing ours, perhaps, and that my unexpected, unexplicable absence might injure me with her.

"I can't tell you," she answered. "I don't believe you would go; even though I got your letter by the eight o'clock post this morning."

"I'm glad you got that," I said. "I posted it soon after I left you last night."

"Why didn't you tell me when we were bidding each other good-bye, that you wouldn't be able to see me this afternoon, instead of waiting to write?"

"Frankly and honestly," I said, (for I had to say it) "just at the moment, and only for the moment, I forgot about the Duchess of Glasgow's bazaar. That was because, after I decided to drop in at the bazaar, something happened which made it impossible for me to go. In my letter I begged you to let me see you to-morrow instead; and now I begin it again. Do say 'yes.'"

"I'll say yes on one condition—and gladly," she replied, with an odd, pale little smile, "that you tell me where you're going this morning. I know it must seem horrid in me to ask, but—but—oh, Ivor, it isn't horrid if you could understand."

"I'm going to Paris," I answered, beginning to feel as if I had a cold potato where my heart ought to be. "I am obliged to go, on business."

"You didn't say anything about Paris in your letter this morning, when you told me you couldn't come to the Duchess's," said Di, looking like a beautiful, unhappy child, her eyes big and appealing, her mouth proud. "You only mentioned 'an urgent engagement which you'd forgotten.'"

"I thought that would be enough to explain, in a hurry," I told her, lamely.

"So it was—so it would have been," she faltered, "if it hadn't been for—what we said just night about Paris. And then—I can't explain to you, Ivor, any more than it seems you can to me. But I did hear you meant to go there, and—after our talk, I couldn't believe it. I didn't come to the station to find you; I came because I was perfectly sure I wouldn't find you, and wanted to prove that I hadn't found you. Yet—you're here."

"And, though I am here, you will trust me just the same," I said, as firmly as I could.

"Of course. I'll trust you, if——"

"If what?"

"If you'll tell me just one little, tiny thing: that you're not going to see Maxine de Renzie."

"I may see her," I admitted.

"But—but at least, you're not going on purpose?"

This drove me into a corner. Without being disloyal to the Foreign Secretary, I could not deny all personal desire to meet Maxine. Yet to what suspicion was I not laying myself open in confessing that I deliberately intended to see her, having sworn by all things a man does swear by when he wishes to please a girl, that I didn't wish to see Maxine, and would not see Maxine?

"You said you'd trust me, Di," I reminded her. "For heaven's sake don't break that promise."

"But—if you're breaking a promise to me?"

"A promise?"

"Worse, then! Because I didn't ask you to promise. I had too much faith in you for that. I believed you when you said you didn't care for—anyone but me. I've told Lisa. It doesn't matter our speaking like this before her. I asked you to wait for my promise for a little while, until I could be quite sure you didn't think of Miss de Renzie as—some people fancied you did. If you wanted to see her, I said you must go, and laughed at the idea. Yet the very next morning, by the first train, you start."

"Only because I am obliged to," I hazarded in spite of the Foreign Secretary and his precautions. But I was punished for my lack of them by making matters worse instead of better for myself.

"Obliged to!" she echoed. "Then there's something you must settle with her, before you can be—free."

The guard was shutting the carriage doors. In another minute I should lose the train. And I must not lost the train. For her future and mine, as well as Maxine's. I must not.

"Dearest," I said hurriedly. "I am free. There's no question of freedom. Yet I shall have to go. I hold you to your word. Trust me."

"Not if you go to her—this day of all days." The words were wrung from the poor child's lips, I could see, by sheer anguish, and it was like death to me that I should cause her this anguish, instead of soothing it.

"You shall. You must," I commanded, rather than implored. "Good-bye, darling—precious one. I shall think of you every instant, and I shall come back to you to-morrow."

"You needn't. You need never come to me again," she said, white lipped. And the guard whistled, waving his green flag.

"Don't dare to say such a cruel thing—a thing you don't mean!" I cried, catching at the closed door of a first-class compartment. As I did so, a little man inside jumped to the window and shouted, "Reserved! Don't you see it's reserved?" which explained the fact that the door seemed to be fastened.

I stepped back, my eyes falling on the label to which the man pointed, and would have tried the handle of the next carriage, had not women rushed at the door as the train began to move, and dexterously opened it with a railway key. Their throwing themselves thus in my way would have lost me my last chance of catching the moving train, had I not dashed in after them. If I could choose, I would be the last man to obtrude myself where I was not wanted, but there was no time to choose; and I was thankful to get in anywhere, rather than break my word. Besides, my heart was too sore at leaving Diana as I had had to leave her, to care much for anything else. I had just sense enough to fight my way in, though the two men with the key (not the one who had occupied the compartment first) yelled that it was reserved, and would have pushed me out if I hadn't been too strong for them. I had a dim impression that, instead of joining with the newcomers, the first man, who would have kept the place to himself before their entrance, now seemed willing to aid me against the others. They being once foisted upon him, he appeared to wish for my presence too, or else he merely desired to prevent me from being dashed onto the platform and perhaps, killed for he thrust out a hand and tried to pull me in.

At the same time, a guard came along, protesting against the unseemly struggle, and the carriage door was slammed shut upon us all four.

When I got my balance, and was able to look out, the train had gone so far that Diana and Lisa had been swept away from my sight. It was like a bad omen; and the fear was cold upon me that I had lost my love forever.

At that moment, I suffered so atrociously that if it had not been too late, I fear I should have sacrificed Maxine and the Foreign Secretary and even the Entente Cordiale (provided he had not been exaggerating) for Di's sake, and love's sake. But there was no going back now, even if I would. The train was already travelling almost at full speed, and there was nothing to do but resign myself to the inevitable, and hope for the best. Someone, it was clear, had tried to work mischief between Diana and me, and there were only too many chances that he had succeeded. Could be it be Bob West, I asked myself, as I half-dazedly looked for a place to sit down among the litter of small luggage with which the first occupant of the carriage had strewn every seat. Bob was as much in love with Di as a man of his rather unintellectual, unimaginative type could be, and he hadn't shown himself as friendly lately to me as he once had: still, I didn't think he was the sort of fellow to trip up a rival in the race by a trick, even if he could possibly have found out that I was going to Paris this morning.

"Won't you sit here, sir?" a voice broke into my thoughts, and I saw that the little man had cleared a place for me next his own, which was in a corner facing the engine. Thanking him absent-mindedly, I sat down, and began to observe my travelling companions for the first time.

So far, their faces had been mere blurs for me: but now it struck me that all three were rather peculiar; that is, peculiar when seen in a first class carriage.

The man who had reserved the compartment for himself, and who had removed a bundle of golf sticks from the seat to make room for me, did not look like a typical golfer, nor did he appear at all the sort of person who might be expected to reserve a whole compartment for himself. He was small and thin, and weedy, with little blinking, pink-rimmed eyes of the kind which ought to have had white lashes instead of the sparse, jet black ones that rimmed them. His forehead, though narrow, suggested shrewdness, as did the expression of those light coloured eyes of his which were set close to the sharp, slightly up-turned nose. His hair was so black that it made his skin seem singularly pallid, though it was only sallow; and a mean, rabbit mouth worked nervously over two prominent teeth. Though his clothes were good, and new, they had the air of having been bought ready made; and in spite of his would-be "smart" get up, the man (who might have been anywhere between thirty and thirty-eight) looked somewhat like an ex-groom, or bookmaker, masquerading as a "swell."

The two intruders who had violated the sanctity of the reserved compartment by means of their railway key, were both bigger and more manly than he who had a right to it. One was dark and doubtless Jewish, with a heavy beard and mustache, in the midst of which his sensual and cruel mouth pouted disagreeably red. The other was puffy and flushed, with a brick-coloured complexion deeply pitted by small-pox. They also were flashily dressed with "horsey" neckties and conspicuous scarf-pins. As I glanced at the pair, they were talking together in a low voice, with an open newspaper held up between them; but the man who had helped me in against their will sat silent, staring out of the window and uneasily fingering his collar. Not one of the trio was, apparently, paying the slightest attention to me, now that I was seated; nevertheless I thought of the large, long letter-case which I carried in an inner breast pocket of my carefully buttoned coat. I would not attract attention to the contents of that pocket by touching it, to assure myself that it was safe, but I had done so just before meeting Di, and I felt certain that nothing could have happened to it since.

I folded my arms across my chest, glanced up to see where the cord of communication might be found in case of emergency; and then reflected that these men were not likely to be dangerous, since I had followed them into the compartment, not they me. This thought was reassuring, as they were three to one if they combined against me, and the train was, unfortunately not a corridor train. Therefore, having assured myself that I was not among spies bent on having my life or the secret I carried, I forgot about my fellow-travellers, and fell into gloomy speculations as to my chances with Diana Forrest. I had been loving her, thinking of little else but her and my hopes of her, for many months now; but never had I realized what a miserable, empty world it would be for me without her for my own, as I did now, when I had perhaps lost her.

Not that I would allow myself to think that I could not get her back. I would not think it. I would force her to believe in me, to trust me, event to repent her suspicious, though appearances were all against me, and Heaven knew how much or when I might be permitted to explain. I would not be a man if I took her at her word, and let her slip from me, no matter how many times that word were repeated, so I told myself over and over. Yet a voice inside me seemed to say that nothing would be as it had been; that I'd sacrificed my happiness to please a stranger, and to save a woman whom I had never really loved.

Di was so beautiful, so sweet, so used to being admired by men; there were so many who loved her, so many with a thousand times more to offer than I had or would ever have: how could I hope that she would go on caring for me, after what had happened to-day? I wondered. She hadn't said in actual words last night that she would marry me, whereas this morning she had almost said she never would. I should have nobody to blame but myself if I came back to London to-morrow to find her engaged to Lord Robert West—a man who, as his brother has no children, might some day make her a Duchess.

"Sorry to have seemed rude just now, sir," said one of the two railway-key men, suddenly reminding me of his unnecessary existence. "Hardly knew what I was about when I shoved you away from the door. Me and my friend was afraid of missing the train, so we pushed—instinct of self-preservation, I suppose," and he chuckled as if he had got off some witticism. "Anyhow, I apologise. Nothing intentional, 'pon my word."

"Thanks. No apology is necessary," I replied as indifferently as I felt.

"That's all right, then," finished the Jewish-faced man, who had spoken. He turned to his companion, and the two resumed their conversation behind the newspaper: but I now became conscious that they occasionally glanced over the top at their neighbor or at me, as if their whole attention were not taken up with the news of the day.

Any interest they might feel in me, provided it had nothing to do with a certain pocket, they were welcome to: but the little man was apparently not of the same mind concerning himself. His nervously twitching hand on the upholstered seat-arm which separated his place from mine attracted my attention, which was then drawn up to his face. He was so sickly pale, under a kind of yellowish glaze spread over his complexion, that I thought he must be ill, perhaps suffering from train sickness, in anxious anticipation of the horrors which might be in store for him on the boat. Presently he pulled out a red-bordered handkerchief, and unobtrusively wiped his forehead, under his checked travelling cap. When he had done this, I saw that his hair was left streaked with damp; and there was a faint, purplish stain on the handkerchief, observing which with evident dismay he stuffed the big square of coarse cambric hastily into his pocket.

"The little beast must dye his hair," I thought contemptuously. "Perhaps he's an albino, really. His eyes look like it."

With that, he threw a frightened glance at me, which caused me to turn away and spare him the humiliation of knowing that he was observed. But immediately after, he had made an effort to pull himself together, picking up a book he had laid down to wipe his forehead, and holding it so close to his nose that the printed page must have been a mere blur, unless he was very near sighted. Thus he sat for some time; yet I felt that no look thrown by the other two was lost on him. He seemed to know each time one of them peered over the newspaper; and when at last the train slowed down by the Admiralty Pier, all his nervousness returned. His small thin hands, freckled on their backs, hovered over one piece of luggage after another, as if he could not decide how to pile the things together.

Naturally I had not brought my man with me on this errand, therefore I had let my suitcase go into the van, that I might have both hands free, and I had nothing to do when the train stopped but jump out and make for the boat. Nevertheless I lingered, folding up a newspaper, and tearing an article out of a magazine by way of excuse; for it was not my object to be caught in a crowd and hustled, perhaps, by some clever wretches who might be lying in wait for what I had in my pocket. It seemed impossible that anyone could have learned that I was playing messenger between the British Secretary for Foreign Affairs and Maxine de Renzie: still, the danger and difficulty of the apparently simple mission had been so strongly impressed on me that I did not intend to neglect any precaution.

I lingered therefore; and the Jewish-looking man with his heavy-faced friend lingered also, for some reason of their own. They had no luggage, except a very small handbag each, but these they opened at the last minute to stuff in their newspapers, and apparently to review the other contents. Presently, when the first rush for the boat was over, and the porters who had come to the door of our compartment had gone away empty-handed, I would have gone out, had I not caught an imploring glance from the little man who had reserved the carriage. Perhaps I imagined it, but his pink-rimmed eyes seemed to say, "For heaven's sake, don't leave me alone with these others."

"Would you be so very kind, sir," he said to me, "to beckon a porter, as you are near the door? I find after all that I shan't be able to carry everything myself."

I did as he asked; and there was so much confusion in the carriage when the porter came, that in self defence the two friends got out with their bags. I also descended and would have followed in the wake of the crowd, if the little man had not called after me. He had lost his ticket, he said. Would I be so extremely obliging as to throw an eye about the platform to see if it had fallen there?

I did oblige him in this manner, without avail; but by this time he had found the missing treasure in the folds of his travelling rug; and scrambling out of the carriage, attended by the porter I had secured for him, he would have walked by my side towards the boat, had I not dropped behind a few steps, thinking—as always—of the contents of that inner breast pocket.

He and I were now at the tail-end of the procession hastening boatward, or almost at the tail, for there were but four or five other passengers—a family party with a fat nurse and crying baby—behind us. As I approached the gangway, I saw on deck my late travelling companions, the Jewish man and his friend, regarding us with interest. Then, just as I was about to step on board, almost on the little man's heels, there came a cry apparently from someone ahead: "Look out—gangway's falling!"

In an instant all was confusion. The fat nurse behind me screamed, as the nervous fellow in front leaped like a cat, intent on saving himself no matter what happened to anyone else, and flung me against the woman with the baby. Two or three excitable Frenchmen just ahead also attempted to turn, thus almost throwing the little man onto his knees. The large bag which he carried hit me across the shins; in his terror he almost embraced me as he helped himself up; the nurse, as she stumbled, pitched forward onto my shoulder, and if I had not seized the howling baby, it would certainly have fallen under our feet.

My bowler was knocked over my eyes, and though an officer of the boat cried the reassuring intelligence that it was a false alarm—that the gangway was "all right," and never had been anything but all right, I could not readjust my hat nor see what was going on until after the fat nurse had obligingly retrieved her charge, without a word of thanks.

My first thought was for the lettercase in my pocket, for I had a horrible idea that the scare might have been got up for the express purpose of robbing me of it. But I could feel its outline as plainly as ever under my coat, and decided, thankfully, that after all the alarm had had nothing to do with me.

I had wired for a private cabin, thinking it would be well to be out of the way of my fellow-passengers during the crossing: but the weather had been rough for a day or two (it was not yet the middle of April) and everything was already engaged; therefore I walked the deck most of the time, always conscious of the unusual thickness of my breast pocket. The little man paced up and down, too, though his yellow face grew slowly green, and he would have been much better off below, lying on his back. As for the two others, they also remained on deck, talking together as they leaned against the rail; but though I passed them now and again, I noticed that the little man invariably avoided them by turning before he reached their "pitch."

At the Gare du Nord, I regretted that I had not carried my own bag, because if I had it would have been examined on the boat, and all bother would have been over. But rather than run any risks in the crowd thronging the douane, I decided to let the suit-case look after itself, and send down for it with the key from the hotel later. Again the little man was close to my side as I went in search of a cab, for all his things had gone through by the custom house officer in mid channel, so that he too was free to depart without delay. He even seemed to cling to me somewhat wistfully and I half thought he meant to speak but he did not save for a "good evening sir," as I separated myself from him at last. He had stuck rather too close, elbow to elbow; but I had no fear for the letter-case, as he was on the wrong side to play any conjurer's tricks with that. The last I saw of the fellow, he was engaging a cab, and looking uneasily over his shoulder at his two late travelling companions, who were getting into another vehicle near by.

I went straight to the Elysee Palace Hotel, where I had never stopped before—a long drive from the Gare du Nord—and claimed the rooms for which "Mr. George Sandford" had wired from London. The suite engaged was a charming one, and the private salon almost worthy to receive the lovely lady I expected. Nor did she keep me waiting. I had had time only to give instructions about sending a man with a key to the station for my luggage, to say that a lady would call, to reach my rooms, and to draw the curtains over the windows, when a knock came at the salon door. I was in the act of turning on the electric light when this happened, but to my surprise the room remained in darkness—or rather, in a pink dusk lent by the colour of the curtains.

"The lady has arrived, Monsieur," announced the servant. "As Monsieur expected her, she had come up without waiting; but I regret that something has gone wrong with the electricity, all over the hotel. It was but just now discovered, at time for turning on the lights, otherwise lamps and plenty of candles would be provided, though no doubt the light will fonctionne properly in a few minutes. If Monsieur permits, I will instantly bring him a lamp."

"No, thank you," I said hurriedly, for I did not wish to be interrupted in the midst of my important interview with Maxine. "If the light comes on, it will be all right: if not, I will put back the curtains; and it is not yet quite dark. Show the lady in."

Into the pink twilight of the curtained room came Maxine de Renzie, whose tall and noble figure I recognized in its plain, close-fitting black dress, though her wide brimmed hat was draped with a thickly embroidered veil that completely hid her face, while long, graceful lace folds fell over and obscured the bright auburn of her hair.

"One moment," I said. "Let me push the curtains back. The electricity has failed."

"No, no," she answered. "Better leave them as they are. The lights may come on and we be seen from outside. Why——"

as she drew nearer to me, and the servant closed the door, "I thought I recognized that voice! It is Ivor Dundas."

"No other," said I. "Didn't the—weren't you warned who would be the man to come?"

"No," she replied. "Only the assumed name of the messenger and place of meeting were wired. It was safer so, even though the telegram was in a cypher which I trust nobody knows—except myself and one other. But I'm glad—glad it's you. It was clever of—him, to have sent you. No one would dream that—no one would think it strange if they knew (as I hope they wont) that you came to Paris to see me. Oh, the relief that you've got through safely! Nothing has happened? You have—the paper?"

"Nothing has happened, and I have the paper," I reassured her. "No adventures, to speak of, on the way, and no reason to think I've been spotted. Anyway, here I am; and here is something which will put an end to your anxiety." And I tapped the breast of my coat, meaningly.

"Thank God!" breathed Maxine, with a thrilling note in her voice which would have done her great credit on the stage, though I am sure she was never further in her life from the thought of acting. "After all I've suffered, it seems too good to be true. Give it to me, quick, Ivor, and let me go."

"I will," I said. "But you might seem to take just a little more interest in me, even if you don't really feel it, you know. You might just say, 'How have you been for the last twelve months?'"

"Oh, I do take an interest, and I'm grateful to you—I can't tell you how grateful. But I have no time to think either of you or myself now," she said, eagerly. "If you knew everything, you'd understand."

"I know practically nothing," I confessed; "still, I do understand. I was only teasing you. Forgive me. I oughtn't to have done it, even for a minute. Here is the letter-case which the Foreign—which was given to me to bring to you."

"Wait!" she exclaimed, still in the half whisper from which she had never departed. "Wait! It will be better to lock the door." But even as she spoke, there came a knock, loud and insistent. With a spring, she flung herself on me, her hand fumbling for the pocket I had tapped suggestively a moment ago. I let her draw out the long case which I had been guarding—the case I had not touched since leaving London, except to feel anxiously for its outline through my buttoned coat. At least, whatever might be about to happen, she had it in her own hands now.

Neither of us spoke or made a sound during the instant that she clung to me, the faint, well-remembered perfume of her hair, her dress, in my nostrils. But as she stared away, and I knew that she had the letter-case, the knock came again. Then, before I could be sure whether she wished for time to hide, or whether she would have me cry "come in," without seeming to hesitate, the door opened. For a second of two Maxine and I, and a group of figures at the door were mere shadows in the ever deepening pink dusk: but I could scarcely have counted ten before the long expected light sprang up. I had turned it in more than one place: and a sudden, brilliant illumination showed me a tall Commissary of Police, with two little gendarmes looking over his shoulder.

I threw a glance at Maxine, who was still veiled, and was relieved to see that she had found some means of putting the letter-case out of sight. Having ascertained this, I sharply enquired in French what in the devil's name the Commissary of Police meant by walking into an Englishman's rooms without being invited; and not only that, but what under heaven he wanted anyway.

He was far more polite than I was.

"Ten thousand pardons, Monsieur," he apologized. "I knocked twice, but hearing no answer, entered, thinking that perhaps, after all, the salon was unoccupied. Important business must be my excuse. I have to request that Monsieur Dundas will first place in my hands the gift he has brought from London to Mademoiselle de Renzie."

"I have brought no gift for Mademoiselle de Renzie," I prevaricated boldly; but the man's knowledge of my name was ominous. If the Paris police had contrived to learn it already, as well as to find out that I was the bearer of something for Maxine, it looked as if they knew enough to play the game in their own way—whatever that might be.

"Perhaps I should say, the thing which Mademoiselle lent—to a friend in England, and Monsieur has now kindly returned," amended the Commissary of Police as politely, as patiently, as ever.

"Really, I don't know what you are talking about," I said, shrugging my shoulders and looking bewildered—or hoping that I looked bewildered. All the while I was wondering, desperately if this meant ruin for Maxine, or if she would still find some way of saving herself. But all I could do for her at the moment was to keep calm, and tell as many lies as necessary. I hadn't been able to lie to Diana; but I had no compunctions about doing it now, if it were to help Maxine. The worst was, that I was far from sure it would help her.

"I trust, Monsieur, that you do not wish to prevent the French police from doing their duty," said the officer, his tone becoming peremptory for the first time. "Should you attempt it, I should unfortunately be compelled to order that Monsieur be searched."

"You seem to forget that you're dealing with a British subject," said I.

"Who is offending against the laws of a friendly country," he capped my words. "You can complain afterwards, Monsieur. But now——"

"Why don't you empty your pockets, Mr. Dundas," suggested Maxine, lightly, yet contemptuously, "and show them that you've nothing in which the police can have any interest? I suppose the next thing they propose, will be to search me."

"I deeply regret to say that will be the next thing, Mademoiselle, unless satisfaction is given to me," returned the Commissary of Police.

Maxine threw back her thick veil; and if this were the first time these men had ever seen the celebrated actress off the stage, it seemed to me that her beauty must almost have dazzled them, thus suddenly displayed. For Maxine is a gloriously handsome woman, and never had she been most striking, more wonderful, than at that moment, when her dark eyes laughed out of her white face, and her red lips smiled as if neither they, nor the great eyes, had any secret to hide.

"Look at me," she said, throwing back her arms in such a way as to bring forward her slender body, in the tight black sheath of that dress which was of the fashion which, I think, women call "Princess." It fitted her as smoothly as the gloves that covered her arms to the elbows.

"Do you think there is much chance for concealment in this dress?" she asked. "I haven't a pocket, you see. No self-respecting woman could have, in a gown like this. I don't know in the least what sort of "gift" my old friend is supposed to have brought me. Is it large or small? I'll take off my gloves and let you see my rings, if you like, Monsieur le Commisaire, for I've been taught, as a servant of the public, to be civil to my fellow servants, even if they should be unreasonable. No? You don't want to see my rings? Let me oblige you by taking off my hat, then. I might have put the thing—whatever it is—in my hair."

As she spoke, she drew out her hatpins, still laughing in a half scornful, half good-natured way. She was bewitching as she stood smiling, with her black hat and veil in her hand, the ruffled waves of her dark red hair shadowing her forehead.

Meanwhile, fired by her example, I turned out the contents of my pockets: a letter or two; a flat gold cigarette case; a match box; my watch, and a handkerchief: also in an outer pocket of my coat, a small bit of crumpled paper of which I had no recollection: but as one of the gendarmes politely picked it up from the floor, where it had fallen, and handed it to me without examining it, mechanically I slipped it back into the pocket, and thought no more of it at the time. There were too many other things to think of, and I was wondering what on earth Maxine could have done with the letter-case. She had had no more than two seconds in which to dispose of it, hardly enough, it seemed to me, to pass it from one hand to another, yet apparently it was well hidden.

"Now, are you satisfied?" she asked, "Now that we have both shown you we have nothing to conceal; or would you like to take me to the police station, and have some dreadful female search me more thoroughly still? I'll go with you, if you like. I won't even be indiscreet enough to ask questions, since you seem inclined to do what we've no need to do—keep your own secrets. All I stipulate is, that if you wish to take such measures you'll take them at once, for as you may possibly be aware, this is the first night of my new play, and I should be sorry to be late."

The Commissary of Police looked fixedly at Maxine for a moment, as if he would read her soul. "No, Mademoiselle," he said, "I am convinced that neither you nor Monsieur are concealing anything about your persons. I will not trouble you further until we have searched the room."

Maxine could not blanch, for already she was as white as she will be when she lies in her coffin. But though her expression did not change, I saw that the pupils of her eyes dilated. Actress that she is, she could control her muscles; but she could not control the beating of the blood in her brain. I felt that she was conscious of this betrayal, under the gaze of the policeman, and she laughed to distract his attention. My heart ached for her. I thought of a meadow-lark manoeuvering to hide the place where her nest lies. Poor, beautiful Maxine! In spite of her pride, her courage, the veneer of hardness which her experience of the world had given, she was infinitely pathetic in my eyes; and though I had never loved her, though I did love another woman, I would have given my life gladly at this minute if I could have saved her from the catastrophe she dreaded.

(To be continued.)

DUNN'S MILL AT GRAND BAY BURNED

Fire of Unknown Origin Causes Loss Estimated at $25,000.

A fire which resulted in the almost total destruction of Dunn's mill and wharf at Grand Bay occurred Saturday morning. The mill, which was owned by George B. Dunn, of Houlton, had not been running for the past three years. It was built in 1893-4 and was valued at about $25,000. There was $11,000 insurance. The origin of the fire is unknown.

The fire broke out about 11 a. m. It is supposed that it was set in some way as there was nothing in the building to cause a blaze. The wind was blowing off shore at the time and the residences of the neighborhood were consequently in little danger. The tug James Holly, owned by James Holly & Sons, and the Flushing, owned by Glasier & Son, rendered every assistance possible by pumping water on the flames. S. P. Gerow, who was in Grand Bay with his yacht, also did good work endeavoring to stop the course of the fire but it had secured too strong a hold and by 1.30 p. m. not only the buildings but the wharf were enveloped in flames. The saw mill, drying shed, carpenters' shop and carriage shed were completely destroyed. The machinery, it is said, will also be an almost total loss.

The property was insured for $11,000, divided as follows: Commercial Union, $5,000; Norwich Union, $2,000; Royal, $2,000; Richmond & Drummond, $2,000.

The mill was built in 1893-4 and with equipment cost about $25,000. It was operated by Dunn Brothers under J. A. Gregory until 1904 when work was discontinued owing to litigation. About a year ago the property was put up for sale and was bid in by George B. Dunn, of Houlton, for $8,000.

Speaking to a Telegraph reporter Sunday, Mr. Gregory, who is agent for Mr Dunn, said he had wired to the owner at Houlton informing him of the loss but had received no reply and was unable to say what would be done with the property. Mr. Gregory added that he wished to express his thanks to the owners and crews of the tugs James Holly and Flushing for their efforts to put out the fire and to Mr. Gerow who also rendered most able assistance.

A good crop of hay was cut this year on the abandoned trotting track at Rigby park, near Portland. The Old Orchard track, another fast trotting course in Maine, is also a hay field.