

wondering what move would be most effective. I made no sound; of that I was certain. Yet some sixth sense must have warned her of my presence. For without rhyme or reason she suddenly stood erect, and swinging about in her tracks, confronted me.

Her face, which had been a little flushed from stooping, went white. She stared at me without speaking, her eyes wide with terrified wonder. I could see her lips slowly part, as the shock of what she beheld began to relax the jaw muscles along the olive-white cheek.

I stared back at her with a singularly disengaged mind. I felt, in fact, very much at my ease, very much the master of the situation. As an opponent, I could see, she would be more than mysterious. She would, in fact, be extremely interesting.

HER next move, however, threw a new complexion on the situation. For she unexpectedly let her hand dart out to the wall beside her, just behind the safe top. As she did so, I could hear the snap of a switch button; the next moment the lights went out. It left the room in impenetrable darkness.

I stood there, unprepared for any offensive or defensive movement. Yet my enemy, I knew, was not idle. As I stood peering unavailingly through the gloom I could hear the quick thud of the safe door being shut. Then came the distinct sound of a heavy key being thrust and turned in a metal lock—the safe, obviously, was of the old-fashioned key-tumbler make—and then the noise of this key being withdrawn. Then came a click or two of shoe heels, a rustle of clothing, and a moment later the startlingly sharp shattering of a window pane.

The woman had deliberately locked the safe and flung the key through the window! She had stolen a march on me. She had defeated me in the first movement of our encounter. My hesitation had been a mistake, a costly mistake.

"Be so good as to turn on that light!" I commanded.

Not a sound came from the darkness.

"Turn up that light," I cried, "or I'll fire! I'll rake every foot of this room!" And with that I gave a very significant double click to my cigarette-case spring.

The light came on again, as suddenly as it went out. I discreetly pocketed my cigarette case.

The woman was standing beside the safe, as before, studying me with her wide and challenging eyes. But all this time not a word had come from her lips.

"Sit down!" I commanded, as authoritatively and yet as offhandedly as I could. It was then that she spoke for the first time.

"Thank you, I prefer to stand!" was her answer. She spoke calmly and distinctly and almost without accent. Yet I felt the voice was, in some way, a foreign one. Some vague substratum of the exotic in the carefully enunciated tones made me surmise that she was either an Austrian or a Gallicized Hungarian, or if not that, possibly a Polish woman.

"You will be here for some time," I hinted.

"And you?" she asked. I noticed an almost imperceptible shrug of her softly rounded shoulder. Rice powder, I imagined, somewhat increased its general effect of dead-whiteness.

"I'll be here until that safe is opened," was my retort.

"That long?" she mocked.

"That long!" I repeated, exasperated at her slow smile.

"Ah, then I shall sit down," she murmured as she caught up the lace cape and adjusted it about her shoulders. "For, believe me, that will be a very, very long time, monsieur!"

I watched her carefully as she crossed the room and sank into a chair. She drew her cream-coloured train across her knees with frugal and studious deliberateness.

IT suddenly flashed over me, as I watched her, that her ruse might have been a double-barreled one. Obliquity such as hers would have unseen convolutions. It was not the key to the safe she had flung through the window! She would never have been so foolish. It was a trick, a subterfuge. She still had that key somewhere about her.

"And now what must I do?" she asked, as she drew the cloak closer about her shoulders.

"You can hand me over the key to that safe," was my answer.

She could actually afford to laugh a little.

"That is quite impossible!"

"I want that key!" I insisted.

"Pardon, but is this not—dangerous?" she mildly inquired. "Is it not so, to break into houses at midnight, and rob women?"

It was my turn to laugh.

"Not a bit of it," I calmly assured her. "And you can judge if I'm frightened or not. There's something much more dangerous than that!"

She was again studying me with her puzzled and ever-narrowing eyes.

"Which means?" she prompted.

"Well, for example, the theft of governmental naval codes, among other things."

"You are very, very drunk," she retorted, with her quietly scoffing smile. "Or you are insane, quite insane. May I not lock my jewels in my own safe? Ah, I begin to see—this is a trick, that you may steal from me!"

"Then why not send for the police?" I challenged, pointing toward her telephone.

A look of guile crept into her studious eyes.

"You will permit that?" she asked.

"I invite it," was my answer.

"Then I shall call for help."

"Only from the police."

"Yes; I shall call for help," she repeated, crossing to the telephone.

I leaned forward as she stood in front of it. I caught her bare arm in my left hand, just below the elbow. As I drew it backward it brought her body against mine, pinning her other arm down close against my side.

The thing was repugnant to me, but it was necessary. As I pinioned her there, writhing and panting, I deliberately thrust my right hand into the open bosom of her gown. I was dimly conscious of a faint aura of perfume, of a sense of warmth behind the soft and lace-fringed corsage. But it was the key itself that redeemed the assault and brought a gasp of relief to my lips, the huge brass key, as big as an egg beater.

"Lache!" I heard gasped into my ear.

The woman staggered to a chair, white to the lips; and for a moment or two I thought she was going to faint.

"Oh, you dog!" she gasped, as she sat there panting and staring at me with her blazing eyes. "Cochon! Cur!"

But I paid little heed to her, for the wine of victory was already coursing and tingling through all my veins.

"You know you can still call the police," I told her, as I faced the heavy black door of the safe. One turn of the wrist, I knew, would bring me face to face with my prize.

A SUDDEN movement from the woman, as I stooped over the safe door, brought me round in a flash. She was on her feet and halfway across the room before I could intercept her. And I was not any too gentle, I'm afraid, for the excitement of the thing had gone to my head.

That earlier assault at my hands seemed to have intimidated her. I could see actual terror in her eyes as I forced her back against the wall. She must have realized her helplessness. She stared up into my face, bewildered, desperate. There was something alluring and yet disturbing. I could see what an effective weapon that sheer physical beauty of hers might be, once its tigerish menace had been fully sheathed.

"Wait!" she cried, catching at my arm. "If there is anything you want I will give it to you."

"There are several things I want," was my uncompromising answer.

"But why should you want them?" she asked, still clinging to my arm.

"It's my duty to take them," I replied, unconscious of any mendacity. "That's what I'm sent here for! That's why I've watched the man who gave you the packet!"

"What packet?"

"The packet you took in Madison Square an hour ago; the packet you locked in this safe! And if you like I'll tell you just what that packet is!"

"This is some mistake, some very sad mistake," she had the effrontery to declare. Her arm still clung to me. Her face was very close to mine as she went on. "I can explain everything, if you will only give me the time—everything! I can show you where you are wrong, and how you may suffer through a mistake like this!"

"We can talk all that over later," I promptly told her, for I was beginning to suspect that her object now was merely to kill time, to keep me there, in the hope of some chance discovery. I peered about the room, wondering what would be the quickest way out of my dilemma.

"What are you going to do?" she asked, as she watched me shove a chair over against the wall, directly beside the safe.

"I'm going to seat you very comfortably in this very comfortable chair," I informed her, "and in this

equally comfortable corner directly behind the safe door. And at the first trick or sign of trouble, I'm afraid I'm going to make a hole right through one of those nice white shoulders of yours!"

She sat down without being forced into the chair. Her alert and ever-moving eyes blazed luminous from her dead-white face. I knew, as I thrust the huge key in the safe lock and turned it back, that she would have to be watched, and watched every moment of the time.

I had already counted on the safe door, as it swung back, making a barrier across the corner in which she sat. This I found to be the case. I took a second precaution, however, by shoving a tilted chair back firmly in under the edge of the safe lock.

I knew, as I stooped before the open strong box, that she could make no sudden move without my being conscious of it. I also knew that time was precious. So I reached into the depths of the almost empty safe and lifted out a number of papers neatly held together by a rubber band.

These I placed on the safe top. Then I snapped off the band and examined the first document. On the back of it, neatly inscribed in French, was the eminently satisfactory legend: "Plans and Specifications; Four Submarines: Bs. Lake Torpedo Company, Bridgeport." The next packet was a blueprint of war projectiles, and on the back of it was written: "Model Tracings, through Jenner, from the Bliss & Company Works—18—Self-Projectors."

THE third packet carried no inscription. But as I opened it I saw at a glance what it was. I knew in a moment that I held before me the governmental wheel code of wireless signals in active service. It was the code that had been stolen from Lieutenant Palmer. The fourth and last paper, I found, was plainly the dummy which had been taken from the same officer that night in Madison Square. The case was complete. The chase was over and done.

"In the cash drawer, on the right, you will find more," quietly remarked the young woman, watching me from the side of the safe.

"It's locked," I said, as I tugged at the drawer knob. I stood erect at her sudden laugh.

"Why not take everything?" she asked, with her scoffing smile.

And I saw no reason why I shouldn't; though a suspicion crossed my mind that this might be still another ruse to kill time. If such it was, I faced it at once, for I sent my boot heel promptly in against the wooden cash drawer, smashing it at one blow.

She had been mistaken, or had deliberately lied, for the drawer was empty. And I told her so, with considerable heat.

"Ah, we all make mistakes, I think," she murmured, with her enigmatic shrug.

"What I want to know," I said, as I banded the four papers together and thrust them down in my pocket, "is just how you got that first code from my young friend the lieutenant?"

She smiled again, a little wearily, as I swung the safe door shut and locked it. She did not rise from the chair. But as I stood confronting her, something in my attitude, apparently, struck her as distinctly humorous. For she broke into a sudden and deeper ripple of laughter. There was, however, something icy and chilling in it. Her eyes now seemed more veiled. They had lost their earlier look of terror. Her face seemed to have relaxed into softer contours.

"Would you like to know?" she said, lifting her face and looking with that older, half-mocking glance into my own. She was speaking slowly and deliberately, and I could see the slight shrug she gave to one pantherlike shoulder. "Would I be so out of place in a ballroom? Ah, have not more things than hearts been lost when a man dances with a woman?"

"I see—you mean you stole it, at the Plaza?"

"Not at all, monsieur!" she murmured languidly back. Then she drew a deeper breath, and sat more rigid in her straight-back chair.

SOMETHING about her face, at that moment, puzzled me. It seemed to hold some latent note of confidence. The last trace of fear had fled from it. There was something strangely like triumph, muffled triumph, in it.

A fear shot through me, as I stooped peering into her shadowy eyes. It went through my entire body, like an electric shock. It brought me wheeling suddenly about with my back to her and my face to the open room.

Then I understood. I saw through it all, in one tingling second. For there, facing me, stood the figure of a man in navy blue. It was the same figure that I had followed through the square.

But now there was nothing secretive or circuitous

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