

me of plotting to throw disgrace on Molly. Then he insisted on my coming back with him to Dunkeld, to meet you and to clear Molly's name. I saw immediately that this would not suit my book at all. I had studied time tables to some purpose. If I missed a certain boat, I might not be able to get away to Spain for two or three days, and I was not certain how you would take Hannington's revelations. I knew that I had, strictly speaking, brought myself within reach of the law. I did not want to wait on Scottish soil, and be confronted with the tale of my own misdemeanors—besides running the risk of prosecution for embezzlement if you were in a particularly savage mood. It was absolutely necessary then, for me to get away.

"Hannington was difficult to deal with. He insisted: I refused. He attacked me in his usual brutal way—knocked me down, and tried to extract from me a promise that I would go with him to Dunkeld to meet you. I had a loaded revolver in my pocket. The temptation was too great. I got my hand free, and I fired. I meant to wing him only—but at a short distance one does more harm sometimes with fire-arms than one intends. I can, however, assure you that I meant only to disable, not to kill, him. I ascertained that he was alive before I went on my way, and I knew that he was sure to be found and taken to your house before long. I amused myself with picturing the *ménage* that would be formed at Torresmuir—with Jack Hannington as a reformed character being lectured by Madame. It was quite a shock to me to hear that the poor fellow was dead.

"I have now told you the whole story in outline, and you can fill in the details as you please. I have not succeeded in my main object, but I have not done very badly for myself after all. The only thing that I want now is your assurance that I am safe from prosecution for embezzlement, fraud, robbery, or whatever you like to call it, and that you will not make the contents of this letter public, so as to bring suspicion upon me with regard to Hannington's death. In return for this assurance, which, for Marie's sake, I think that you will give, I will set your mind at rest on a point which once disturbed you more than you would allow—the fate of that stone which went by the name of 'The Luck of the House.'