

occupants had left them. Bronsart glanced at the empty seats and smiled. He saw still in each the man who had just quitted it.

He looked down at his hands — delicate, feminine hands with slender fingers, but powerful thumbs. They trembled slightly. He smiled again. This unwonted evidence of weakness amused him — in a way, touched him.

“Ah, but that was a trick worth taking, my boy! You’ve got those cock-sure fellows by the throat, and they don’t even suspect it yet.”

On the desk stood a Canton bowl of red-blooded roses. They were always there — fresh every morning from his conservatory. Nature by the river’s brim had no charm for Bronsart — he liked it glass-housed, exotic, moist with cultivated dew.

He drew the bowl towards him, and rearranged the brilliant mass of bloom with those deft, artistic, woman’s fingers. Every perception was awake, every faculty strained to supremest tension; the moment’s caressing of his long-stemmed favourites soothed him.

He looked critically about the room — at the heavy Oriental rug as baffling and elusive in pattern and colouring as the philosophy of the race to which its weavers belonged — at the long row of windows which gave such broad expansive effect of light — and last, at the fire, around which those human pieces on his individual chess-board had lounged at ease, and smoked his choice cigars.

It was all such a scientifically wrought-out setting — so subtly calculated as to psychologic effect — for