

the twenty thousand of course)—to cover absolutely everything, you know.”

“Multiply your twenty-five by two, and we’re your men,” said Harry.

“Multiply it by two? Fifty thousand? Oh, nonsense!”

“Twenty out of pocket—thirty profit. I call it very reasonable.”

Major Duplay rose with a decisive air.

“I’m afraid I’m wasting your time,” he said, “and my own too. I must say good-afternoon.”

“Pray, Major Duplay, don’t be so abrupt, sir. We’ve——” It was Sloyd who spoke, with an eager gesture as though he would detain the visitor. Harry turned on him with his ugliest, haughtiest scowl.

“I thought you’d left this to me, Sloyd?” he said.

Sloyd subsided, apologetic, but evidently terrified. Alas, that the grit had been supplied! But for that a triumph must have awaited the Major. Harry turned to Duplay.

“I asked you before if you’d authority to treat. I ask you now if you’ve authority to refuse to treat.”

“I’ve authority to refuse to discuss absurdities.”

“Doubtless. And to settle what are absurdities? Look here. I don’t ask you to accept that proposal without referring to Mr. Iver. I merely say that is the proposal and that we give Mr. Iver three days to consider it. After that our offer is withdrawn.”

Sloyd was biting his nails—aye, those nails that he got trimmed in Regent Street twice a week; critical transactions must bring grist to those skilled in manicure. Duplay glanced from his troubled face to Harry’s solid, composed, even amused mask.

“And you might add,” Harry went on, “that it would be a very good thing if Mr. Iver saw his way to run up and have a talk with me. I think I could make him see the thing from our point of view.” Something seemed to occur to him. “You must tell him that in ordinary circumstances I should