

The husky voice seemed to be hypnotizing Cairn; it was a siren's song, thralling him.

"Because," continued Ferrara evenly, "in common with all humanity, I am compound of man and woman, I can resent the enmity which drives me from shore to shore, but being myself a connoisseur of the red lips and laughing eyes of maidenhood—I am thinking more particularly of Myra—I can forgive you, dear Cairn—"

Then Cairn recovered himself.

"You white-faced cur!" he snarled through clenched teeth; his knuckles whitened as he stepped around the case. "You dare to stand there mocking me!"

Ferrara again placed the case between himself and his enemy.

"Pause, my dear Cairn," he said, without emotion. "What would you do? Be discreet, dear Cairn, reflect that I have only to call an attendant in order to have you pitched, ignominiously, into the street."

"Before God I will throttle the life from you!" said Cairn, in a voice savagely hoarse.

He sprang again towards Ferrara. Again the latter dodged around the case with an agility which defied the heavier man.

"Your temperament is so painfully Celtic, Cairn," he protested mockingly. "I perceive quite clearly that you will not discuss this matter judiciously. Must I then call for the attendant?"

Cairn clenched his fists convulsively. Through all the tumult of his rage the fact had penetrated—that he was helpless. He could not attack Ferrara in that place; he could not detain him against his will. For Ferrara had only to claim official protection to bring about the complete discomfiture of his assailant. Across the case containing the duplicate ring, he glanced at this incarnate fiend, whom the law which he had secretly outraged now served to protect. Ferrara spoke again in his musical voice.

"I regret that you will not be reasonable, Cairn. There is so much that I should like to say to you; there are so many things of interest which I could tell you. Do you know in some respects I am peculiarly gifted, Cairn? At times I can recollect, quite distinctly, particulars of former incarnations. Do you see that priestess lying there, just through the doorway? I can quite distinctly remember having met her when she was a girl; she was beautiful, Cairn. And I can even recall how, one night beside the Nile—but I can see that you are growing impatient! If you will not avail yourself of this opportunity, I must bid you good-day."

He turned and walked towards the door, Cairn leapt after him; but Ferrara, suddenly beginning to run, reached the end of the Egyptian Room and darted out on to the landing before his pursuer had time to realize what he was about.

At the moment that Ferrara turned the corner ahead of him, Cairn saw something drop. Coming to the end of the room, he stooped and picked up this object, which was a plaited silk cord about three feet in length. He did not pause to examine it more closely, but thrust it into his pocket and raced down the steps after the retreating figure of Ferrara. At the foot, a constable held out his arm, detaining him. Cairn stopped in surprise.

"I must ask you for your name and address," said the constable gruffly.

"For Heaven's sake, what for?"

"A gentleman has complained—"

"My good man," exclaimed Cairn, and proffered his card, "it is—it is a practical joke on his part. I know him well!"

The constable looked at the card, and from the card, suspiciously, back to Cairn. Apparently the appearance of the latter reassured him—or he may have formed a better opinion of Cairn from the fact that half-a-crown had quickly changed hands.

"All right, sir," he said, "it is no