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hear everything at once. Send the waiter away—we can look after ourselves. You'll spoil my appetite by keeping me waiting—I've been on pins and needles ever since I got your last telegram."

"I've been on pins and needles since seven o'clock this morning," remarked Scraye, laughing. He strolled over to one of the windows and looked out on the Cathedral Close below. And suddenly he started and drew back. "Packe!" he said. "Come here—come to this corner of the window and look round the blind. Do you see those people coming out of the north porch there—the three people? Look carefully at the younger of the two women."

Packe, obeying these mysterious instructions, edged his nose to the corner of the window curtains and looked out. He saw three persons crossing the Close from the porch of the cathedral—an elderly gentleman of military appearance, a lady who was presumably his wife, and a younger lady of fine figure and handsome face who was talking to her companions with great vivacity.

"Well?" he said. "I see 'em. What of them?"

"Know any of them?" asked Scraye. "None of them," answered Packe. "Who are they?"

"Three of my guests at Scraye. I knew they were coming into Brycheste; that's why I didn't want you to be about. I didn't want the lady in the wonderful hat to see you. She might know you, by sight, anyhow. You don't know her?"

"I don't know any of 'em—never seen 'em before," said Packe.

"The old gentleman is Colonel Durham—the old lady is his wife. And the young—or younger—lady is Mrs. Wythenshawe. Take a good look at her. It's lucky I caught sight of them just now; it'll save me a lot of trouble. I'm a poor hand at description, and I was going to describe her to you. Now you can see her for yourself."

"Undeniably pretty woman," remarked Packe. "Charming! And who is Mrs. Wythenshawe?"

Scraye laughed. The door opened and the head-waiter marshalled in a satellite bearing dishes.

"Get rid of these chaps," whispered Packe as he turned away from the window. "I won't break bread nor touch liquor until I'm on the way to satisfaction."

Scraye waited until the men had left the room.

"Very well," he said. "Here goes, then. You know our state chambers at Scraye?"

"Of course!"

"You remember the Queen's Chamber in particular?"

"Quite well, and that the bed-linen's never been washed since Elizabeth slept in it."

"Do you remember the inset cupboard or cabinet in that room, in which we keep certain heirlooms?"

"I do."

"Do you remember the cross which the Tsar of Russia gave to my grandfather?"

"Yes, of course."

"Very well. The Tsar's Cross has been stolen."

"Stolen?"

"Stolen — abstracted — purloined — annexed — anything you like. It's gone, anyhow. And—under strange circumstances. That's why I sent for you. I thought of you as by an inspiration. I said to myself, 'I'm not going to have the police poking their noses into this affair, and I won't employ private detectives. There is Nicholson Packe who spends part of his time in writing sensational novels—he's always dealing with mysteries and murders and burglaries and that sort of thing on paper; here's a chance for him to have a go at a mystery in real life.' So there you are."

"Awfully good of you!" murmured Packe, a little doubtfully. "Er—what do you want me to do?"

"Hear all about it, first of all," replied Scraye. "I'll put it in the briefest and plainest fashion. You must know that that cupboard or cabinet in which those things are kept has never been locked—my grandfather, who first arranged the various contents, never locked it, and my father didn't,

and of course, I followed their example. All the same, during some fifty or sixty years, nothing's ever been missed. I suppose thousands upon thousands have walked through our State Chambers since we threw them open to inspection, but we've never lost anything. Now we come to this affair. I myself happened to be in the Queen's Chamber yesterday evening, and I saw the Tsar's Cross in its usual place. My house-steward, Viner, who takes a look round every night, saw it also in its place last night at half-past ten o'clock. This morning he came to me at seven o'clock to tell me it was gone. I visited the room with him, saw for myself that it had disappeared, and immediately wired for you. That's all of that part, Packe."

Packe poured out a glass of sherry and sipped it thoughtfully.

"Then, before you go on to the next part, I'll ask two or three questions," he said. "First of all—this hasn't been a burglary?"

"No—no! No burglary. Had it been a burglary, the burglars wouldn't have stopped at merely taking the cross. There are things in that cabinet which are worth much more."

"That brings me to the next question. How much is that cross worth?"

"Oh, I believe, as regards intrinsic worth, some five or six thousand pounds. It is, of course, of solid gold set with diamonds. I never had it valued, but Viner tells me that it was valued in my father's time and that that's about the figure it was then estimated at. But I don't believe it's been stolen for its mere intrinsic value."

"No? For what, then?"

Scraye shook his head.

"I'm not clear on that point—yet," he answered. "I've got a sort of muddled notion—we'll work it out later. That's the principal reason why I want your help. This is no common theft, Packe—it's a decidedly uncommon one."

"I suppose," remarked Packe, "that the Tsar's Cross has some fame which distinguishes it amongst these sort of things? Some of these heirlooms, for instance, are celebrated throughout the world. Is it one of them?"

"It is. It was given, as I think I told you when you were at Scraye, to my great-grandfather by the then Tsar of Russia, at the time the Peace of Tilsit was signed, in 1814. My great-grandfather, you know, was then in the diplomatic service, and rendered some particular help to the Allied Sovereigns. Oh, amongst old English family heirlooms, it is very well known indeed—very famous. Viner tells me that at least one-half of the thousands of visitors who go round the State Chambers every year are well acquainted with its history and always ask to have it pointed out."

"That's something to know," remarked Packe, musingly. "The motive of a theft or a burglary is not always mere robbery. Well—now you've told me all the circumstances relating to your discovery that the cross is missing?"

"All. It's simply—gone."

"Very good," said Packe. "Then I'm going to ask you a plain question. The cross, we conclude, has been stolen. Do you suspect anybody of stealing it?"

Scraye leaned across the table, smiling. He jerked a thumb towards the windows. "Yes!" he answered in a whisper. "I do. I suspect the woman I pointed out to you just now—Mrs. Wythenshawe!"

To be continued.)

Other Intentions.—Recruiting Officer—"And now, my lad, just one more question—are you prepared to die for your country?"

Recruit—"No, I ain't! That ain't wot I'm j'ining for. I want to make a few of them Germans die for theirs!"—Tit-Bits.

Long Known.—"Father," said the minister's son, "my teacher says that 'collect' and 'congregate' mean the same thing. Do they?"

"Perhaps they do, my son," said the venerable clergyman; "but you may tell your teacher that there is a vast difference between a congregation and a collection."—Christian Register.