

THE SECRET WITNESS

CHAPTER I

JUNE 12, 1914

THE Countess Marishka was fleet of foot. She was straight and slender and she set a pace for Renwick along the tortuous paths in the rose gardens of the Archduke which soon had her pursuer gasping. She ran like a boy, her dark hair falling about her ears, her draperies like Nike's in the wind, her cheeks and eyes glowing, a pretty quarry indeed and well worthy of so arduous a pursuit. For Renwick was not to be denied and as the girl turned into the path which led to the thatched arbor, he saw that she was breathing hard and the half-timorous laugh she threw over her shoulder at him only spurred him on to new endeavor. He reached the hedge as she disappeared, but his instinct was unerring and he leaped through the swaying branches just in time to see the hem of her skirt in the foliage on the other side and plunging through caught her in his arms just as she sank, laughing breathlessly, to the spangled shadows of the turf beyond.

"Marishka," he cried joyously, "did you mean it?"
But she wouldn't reply.