

The door of the room was ajar and gradually swinging wider in the draught. Very soon it would be wide enough for any passing in the passage outside to spy the slim figure that stood so motionless before the open window. It was almost wide enough now. Surely it was wide enough, for suddenly it ceased to move. The draught continued to eddy round the room, stirring the soft brown hair about the woman's temples, but the door stood still as at the behest of an unseen hand.

For fully half a minute nothing happened; then, as suddenly and silently as a picture flashed from a magic lantern slide, a man's head came into view. A man's eyes, dusky, fierce, with something of a stare in them, looked the motionless figure keenly up and down.

There followed another interval as though the intruder were debating with himself upon some plan of action, then, boldly but quite quietly, he pushed the door back and entered.

He was a slight, trim man, clean-shaven, with high cheek-bones that made a long jaw seem the leaner by contrast. His sleek black hair was parted in the middle above his swarthy face, giving an unmistakably foreign touch to his appearance. His tread was light and wary as a cat's.

His eyes swept the room comprehensively as he advanced, coming back to the woman at the window as though magnetically drawn to her. But she remained quite unaware of him, and he, no whit disconcerted, calmly seated himself at one of the tables behind her and took up a pack of cards.

The dance-music in the room below was uproariously gay. Some of the dancers were singing. Now and then a man's voice bellowed through the clamour like the blare of a bull.

Whenever this happened, the man at the table smiled to himself a faint, thin-lipped smile, and the woman at the window shivered again.

Suddenly, during a lull, he spoke. He was counting out the cards into heaps with lightning rapidity, turning up one here and there, and he did not raise his eyes from his occupation.