

tioned Karl Pffer—at least I 'eard no other name."

"That's right, Mr. Hawkins; I see you are an officer of extraordinary quality."

"Yes, sir. I was trained in Scotland Yard, in the Old Land."

"I THOUGHT as much; that is why I am going to confide in you—it will be necessary, up to a certain point. Karl Pffer was murdered. I will tell you how I know, for we must work together to punish his slayer. The dead man wore a ruby ring, always. It is not on his finger now. He had a curious nervous habit of toying with the ring, but he would not have removed it while in the act of taking his own life. It could not have fallen from his finger, because, as you observe, his hands are drawn together by the agony of that corrosive that was forced down his throat. It was forced down his throat by a man who held the victim's neck in his left arm in a clasp so powerful that Pffer was as helpless as a babe. There is an abrasion on the skin of the neck that is like a diagram to what I state. On the dead man's left hand is a mark of the corrosive that was spilled as Pffer clutched at the hand that held the bottle to his lips; even on the outer edge of the lips there are marks of the fluid. If he had taken it himself he would have thrown his head back and poured it down his throat. It has been somebody that Pffer knew, who either came into the room or was here, perhaps hiding, when he entered—he would have raised an alarm had it been a stranger—and as they discussed some subject of mutual interest that man suddenly seized Pffer, who was almost a physical wreck, and accomplished his vicious purpose. While the murderer waited a few minutes to make sure that his victim was dead, he enclosed the ring in an envelope, but in addressing it the pen caught on the rough surface presented by the enclosure and ruined the envelope. He tore it up and wrote another, I presume. The writing is not Pffer's—I know that."

"But the door was locked on the inside," Hawkins objected; "and the floor clerk, the maids, even the elevator boys, say that no stranger came to this part of the 'ouse during the time this must 'ave 'appened."

"Who occupies the room beyond that?" Colonel Drouski asked, pointing to a door that connected with the next room.

"I'll find out," Hawkins answered, passing to the hall. Presently he returned with the maid, saying, "Mr. Camden 'as that room, sir. 'E didn't do it, anyway; the gentleman 'as lived in the 'ouse for years; I know 'im. Besides, the door between the two rooms is locked."

"Who occupies the one on this side, 1448?" Colonel Drouski asked.

"It's vacant, sir," the maid answered; "the gentleman that occupied it changed to-day to 1445, next to Mr. Camden; he wanted a room with a bath. He's a foreign-lookin' gentleman."

"Thank you," Colonel Drouski said; "but, before you go, at what time was this waste-paper basket emptied to-day?"

"About half-past six, sir—when I did up the room."

WHEN the maid had gone Colonel Drouski paced the floor in a mood of intense thought. Suddenly he turned and examined the window, raising it and thrusting his broad shoulders through the casement. Then he closed it and, turning to Hawkins, said: "I have discovered how the slayer entered this room and also why he vacated the one next and moved further away from his prey. This is the top floor, and just outside of that window runs a sort of trough, or jutting eave, along which a man might make his way from room to room. It would take nerve, but the man who did the foul deed had a cool nerve. On the left of the window is a pillar barring the passage on the eave between this room and the next, 1448. The foreign-looking gentleman, as the maid describes him, changed to 1445 because of that impediment."

"Do you want to examine 1445, sir?" Hawkins asked.

"It would be useless; I have seen that the eave runs right by the window. I wish to have a look at the gentleman himself. What time are the mail boxes below emptied, Officer?" Drouski asked suddenly.

"Every hour. Ten o'clock will be the next collection—it's just past nine now."

"Ah! we're too late, then. We'll at once look for the gentleman of 1445."

Below, in the office, they learned that the occupant of that number was Mr. Salvini Rubitini. Then Colonel Drouski requested the clerk to find that guest's registration in the book. The handwriting was the same as that of the envelope he had already found in the basket.

"I don't know the guest by sight," Hawkins said, "but we'll easily find 'im if 'e's in the 'otel."

He called a page and said: "Page, Mr. Rubitini, boy. 'Urry—find 'im quickly; and when you've found 'im say that 'e's wanted at the telephone booth. You come in with 'im, lad, and when 'e finds 'e's not wanted you can say it was your mistake."

Hawkins added to Colonel Drouski when the boy had gone on his errand: "We can sit 'ere, sir, just behind this corner, and watch the gentleman come to the phone—we'll know 'im by the boy."

The shrill treble of the page went piping through the corridors, "Mr. Rub-i-tini-i?" until it died away. There was a silent wait of five minutes. Suddenly Hawkins touched Colonel Drouski on the arm and whispered: "There they go, sir."

He felt the arm his fingers rested on vibrate like an electric wire; he fancied that he heard a snarling gasp. Looking up, he saw Drouski's face twisted into a mask of malignity; the black eyes glared like the eyes of a bulldog possessed of bloodthirst.

"That's 'im, right enough," Hawkins said. "'E do look like a foreign gentleman."

"Come with me, please," Colonel Drouski answered. Hawkins followed him through the entrance to the sidewalk.

"I shall ask you to keep in touch with Mr. Rubitini," Colonel Drouski said; "I shall be away perhaps for an hour. At what time would a letter collected here at nine o'clock, or possibly at eight, reach another hotel, say within a mile or so?" he asked.

"It would be delivered about ten, I should say—certainly before midnight."

"Very well, Mr. Hawkins. I shall hope to find you here about the office upon my return, and I may say that I shall expect you to accept a substantial acknowledgment of your invaluable services. Please do not lose sight of our man; and do not let any message that may come from him be delivered."

COLONEL DROUSKI called a cab. When they had turned a corner he said: "Drive to the Hotel Del Monte, quickly, please."

In ten minutes he entered the Del Monte, and, stepping into the office, said to the clerk: "I am Colonel Drouski. Countess Boskovitch, who is living here, is a relative of mine. I have written her a letter on some very important matter, but I wish to speak to her personally about that same matter. It was an afterthought. May I trouble you to ask if my letter has arrived within the past hour?"

The clerk shot a quick, searching look at the speaker. The Colonel's aristocratic appearance indicated that he was not an impostor. Then he stepped over to the mail clerk and, returning, said: "There has been nothing for Countess Boskovitch since evening. There should be a mail presently. Shall I send up your card?"

"I will wait until my letter containing some documents arrives; then I should like to visit the Countess," Colonel Drouski answered.

For half an hour he sat waiting the advent of the postman. At the end of that time a man in grey, with a heavily laden leather bag slung from his shoulder, walked quickly up to the office desk, deposited a sheaf of letters and turned away.

Colonel Drouski again addressed the clerk: "Will you kindly see if my letter has arrived—from the Hotel der Grosse it was sent."

"Yes, sir, here it is," the clerk answered as his nimble fingers ran over the mail. "Will you send a card, sir, or—"

"I'm in a hurry—it is late," Colonel Drouski interrupted. "To save time, I should like to accompany the page. The Countess has a drawing-room where we could discuss this matter."

"Page!" the clerk cut short Colonel Drouski's words, and added to the boy: "Take this gentleman up to 327. Take his card in to Countess Boskovitch. Take this letter up!"

As they left the elevator on the third floor Colonel Drouski said to the page: "I will give the letter to the Countess. Please give my card to her maid."

COLONEL DROUSKI could feel the ring within the envelope as he waited for an answer to the page's knock. He mused upon the strange exactness with which all links in the chain of evidence fitted into each other so simply and yet so conclusively. The investigation once started led to a goal so very different from the one the coroner had arrived at, working as he had from a preconceived decision. Drouski's thoughts were interrupted by the opening of the door and the voice of a French maid as she spoke to the page. Drouski stepped quickly to the

door and said: "Kindly tell the Countess that I bring a message from Alexis."

Almost immediately the maid, opening the door again, said: "Entre, Monsieur—Her Ladyship will see you."

Presently there was a rustle of silk skirts, the wafting of a gentle perfume as though roses had been hurled through an open window; a slight figure came forward with a soft, slipping movement. The feet touched the heavy rug with the noiseless reach of a cat.

Colonel Drouski had stood with averted face, seemingly intent on an old engraving that rested against the wall. A gentle voice, soft, cultured, claimed his attention, saying: "Monsieur has a message for me?"

Colonel Drouski turned his somber eyes upon the girl; she uttered a cry—it was a startled gasp, rather; her face paled; her eyes, wide, were fixed upon the dark face of the man and her hands, tightly clenched, were pressed close to her heaving bosom.

"You—you—"

"Yes, it is I, Little Manon; I arrived to-day—too late for all but just to bring you this message from Alexis."

AS Colonel Drouski stepped forward, holding in his hand the letter, the girl cowered away from him, holding her hands before her face as though she would avert a blow. She shrank into a chair that her trembling limbs touched.

"Here is the letter from Alexis, Little Manon," Colonel Drouski repeated.

The girl took the letter with trembling hand, her eyes staring in affright, and her lips, dry-narched, incapable of remonstrance.

"Open it, Little Manon," Colonel Drouski commanded; "give me the ring it contains, and then read aloud. It is long since I had the pleasure of a letter from Alexis; we will enjoy this one together."

The girl obeyed mechanically. She dropped the ring into Colonel Drouski's palm with a gesture as though a serpent had stung her. The red stone caught a glint of light from the chandelier—it was like a drop of blood.

"Now read, please," the Colonel commanded.

She obeyed; her voice sounded dead, far away.

"Heavenly Manon,—Dream-faced Manon:—"

"I send you the pledge that he is dead. You will read to-morrow that he took his own life. And that is true, Manon; it was his own hand that poured the libation down his throat; he quaffed the bitter cup that brings joy to you and to me. I respect your commands not to see you, but I die with the torture of exile. But he is dead. I wait, Dream Angel; smile upon me, for surely I have earned this reward."

"ALEXIS."

"Now write, please," Colonel Drouski commanded when the girl's voice had stilled.

She drew herself wearily to a writing table. Standing at her side, Colonel Drouski dictated:

"Alexis:—"

"I have given the ring to Nicholas, he is here. Your deed has filled me with horror. Nicholas knows everything—I have told him everything. If you ask me why I have sacrificed you I answer that the sacrifice to do otherwise is too great, it is impossible. By your act you have sacrificed yourself—"

The pen dropped from the girl's fingers, her hand covered her eyes as though she would shut out some horrible vision; she moaned, "I can't write that—I can't."

"You must; it is the easier way. Otherwise there will be a trial and Alexis will be hanged like a common murderer. As for you, Little Manon, the other place where we are going will be better than a lifetime here behind prison bars. Write what I dictate."

"Alexis will think that I have wantonly betrayed him—"

"As others have thought before, Little Manon. Still it is better that he thinks thus than choose the gallows; it will be better. There is no other way to save you, Little Manon, and always that was your first thought."

The girl shivered and, taking the pen again, wrote what the cold, passionless voice bade until it was finished with her name.

Then Colonel Drouski said: "You will abide here, Little Manon, until I come to you. Pray do not bring yourself discomfort by trying to go elsewhere, for you will be closely watched. I may say, Manon, that you will not be allowed to send any message. Besides, for your own sake, it is well

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