

"You are indeed! How did you do it?" I muttered.

"So: the bullet stunned me, but when I awoke, I saw everything as plainly as day. I slipped out of the cellar through the pivot door that you know of, and re-entered the palace by a secret way known only to myself, and, of course, went straight to my rooms and armed myself. De Guira's men had gone off with the gold, but I soon found them. He was quietly engaged in setting fire to the palace. I killed him with the butt end of my pistol, and then, wishing for a little amusement, I wrapped myself up in his cloak, made myself up to resemble him, and went to his men—those beauties yonder. Well, I got them to return to the palace and bear him out to the waggon—they thought it was I! Ha! ha! ha! When I met you, I was looking for some police to give them in charge, but when I saw you I altered my plans. I thought to myself: I shall arrest you, and then carry out the whole affair as de Guira had intended—in his place. Then if you proved a fool and persisted in believing me mad, I would kill you. If not, we could have a good laugh at the expense of these silly statues. Oh, Rupert, look at their faces! Ha! ha! ha! Tfu! I have a stitch—I'll die of laughter. Ha! ha! ha!

De Guira's satellites, however, did not furnish me with food for mirth. Already awakening from their astonishment, their expressions were growing wild and desperate, and only my master's pistol shaking in their faces restrained them from springing