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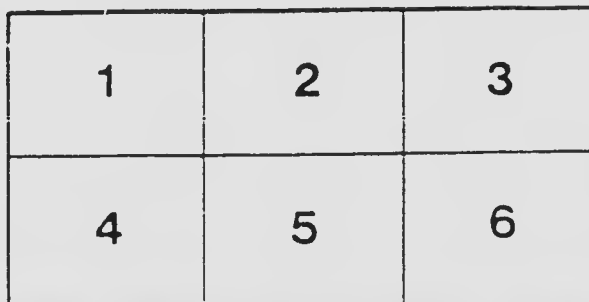
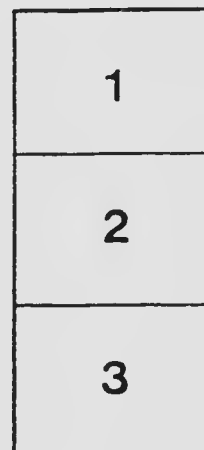
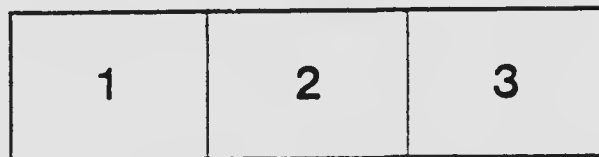
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THE MYSTERY OF THE  
GREEN HEART



**THE MYSTERY OF THE  
GREEN HEART**

BY

**MAX PEMBERTON**

AUTHOR OF "I CROWN THE KING"

**WILLIAM BRIGGS  
TORONTO**

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# THE MYSTERY OF THE GREEN HEART

## CHAPTER I

### THE NEWS IS MADE KNOWN UPON THE FIRST DAY OF JULY

THE story of the Green Heart begins properly at Pangbourne upon the morning of the first day of July in the year 1908. A week had yet to run until the opening of the regatta at Henley; but Pangbourne, nevertheless, reflected aquatic anticipations of lively business and patronage.

Boats were sent down to Henley by the watermen every day. Steam tugs attached themselves to monstrous houseboats and began to tow them toward Reading and Shiplake. The inns were full of people who preferred to stay at some little distance from the regatta course.

To such an inn, the Swan, which lies but little removed from Whitchurch Lock, there came a little after five o'clock upon the morning of the first day of July a young Oxford boatman named Huggins, who beat loudly upon the door and implored the awakened sleepers to come immediately to his assistance.

"There's a boat agen the bank by the weir," said he, speaking as one who was utterly unnerved by what he had seen; "do you come along wi' me, for I'm blest if I know what to make of it."

Now Huggins was answered by an ancient waterman of the name of Jarvis, who slept in one of the attics above the river and



was just about to go down to open the boathouses. Hearing the hullabaloo, he put his head out of the window and espied a strange young man, holding a hand to his heart as though to help his breathing, and so very white and shaken that the importance of his words could no longer be doubted.

"Ay, mate, and who be you?"

"I'm Huggins from Oxford. We're taking the ships down to the races, but were held up last night by way of Streatly. Here was I about to make the lock just now when my mate see the thing. I tell you it's a boat and a lady in it. You'd better come down quick."

The old man muttered something about a boat with a lady in it being no new thing in these parts; but he went down nevertheless, and as he went he awakened his master. The loud knocking had brought other inmates to the windows, and one of these, a young physician from the Addenbrooke Hospital at Cambridge, now put in his word.

"What's up, my man?" he asked.

Huggins repeated his story.

"I see the boat in the long grass. She's dead, or I don't know the likes of it. A fair lady, too, with diamonds on her. That's what sent me here."

"Did you wake the lock-keeper?"

"What's the good of he? I was through the St. John Ambulance class in Oxford and I know it's a doctor we want. If you can tell me——?"

"I am a doctor. Wait a minute and I'll come down. Where do you say the boat is?"

"It's over agen the weir bridge. You'll see it if you step across. I tell you it's given me and my mate a rare fright and no mistake."

The doctor made no reply, but withdrew to dress himself. When he arrived upon the scene there was quite a little group of pale-faced men standing upon the bank hard by the boathouse. Day had broken with a heavy haze, which promised heat later on. The wind whispered in the reeds, and the water lapped coldly in the channels by the sheds.

"Now then," said the doctor, "if we are all ready! Have you got anything in the way of an ambulance here? No? Then bring some oars and ropes. I don't suppose there's much the matter, but we should be ready for anything. You come with me, my man, and show me where it is. And Johnson, get some brandy, if you please."

He addressed himself to one of the servants of the inn, who obeyed him with alacrity. Men love a leader, and this young fellow led by right of knowledge. As the group moved away toward the weir bridge, they heard shouts of laughter from the little room down by the water's edge. The cries came from a company of undergraduates making ready for their morning bathe, in ignorance of the tragedy.

Behind them an early train on the Great Western Railway went by with a roar and a vomit of flame to Didcot and the junction. The steam-tug which was towing Huggins' racing boats to Henley, lay moored by the opposite bank, and steam poured from her valves. This robbed the scene of its silence, for the river had no other craft to show, and the streets of Pangbourne were without any signs of life. Moreover, the church clock struck half-past five as they reached the weir bridge, and this quickened all their steps.

Huggins had said that the boat lay among the reeds, but none espied it until they came to the very place where it had anchored itself, and then three of them saw it together. It was an ordinary skiff, such as is used for pleasure purposes upon the Thames, built of teak and handsomely furnished with blue carpet and cushions. Driven by the stream, it must have narrowly escaped the main current of the weir, but accident or the wind had turned it aside at the last moment, and now it lay against one of the piles with the stern swung round against the bank.

Within the boat lay the body of a woman who might have been any age from twenty-five to thirty. Her hands were clasped together in an attitude which suggested prayer or pain. Her head was bowed so that the jewels upon her neck were visible, but more remarkable than these facts was that of her dress. She

was gowned, in the words of those round about, as though for a ball or a party. And this rich gown of pansy chiffon embroidered in flowers of pink and gold, over a skirt of white silk, spoke of tragedy so surely that even the doctor began to admit its possibilities.

"Bring the boat round," he cried in a stern tone; and then to one of the lads, "Run to the police station, my boy, and send an inspector here. Tell him it is urgent."

The lad was only too willing to escape a scene so grim, and went headlong upon his errand. The boat meanwhile was brought round very gently to the bank and the body lifted to the grass. There they laid it upon the cushions from the skiff while Dr. Travis put his fingers upon the pulseless wrist and then pressed his ear to a heart which would never beat again.

"She is quite dead," he said, rising at length, and then, "Poor lady, there has been foul play here; it is a case for the police."

They heard him with awe. The lock-keeper was now upon the scene, and eager questions were addressed to him. When the inspector from the station at length arrived, he drove the merely curious away, and then talked aside with Dr. Travis.

"I have sent for the ambulance, sir. The surgeon has been telephoned. Do you make anything of it?—do you know the lady?"

"I can tell you nothing," said the doctor. "They awoke me a little after five, and I came at once. She has been dead some hours, though. I leave it to your surgeon to say how many."

"But it is not a natural death."

"I think not, though it might be the heart. She has suffered much—the lower limb were paralysed before she died."

"Poor thing—and a very beautiful woman, sir. You can see she comes of a class." The doctor then listened to the lock-keeper. For the first time some whisper of identity was to be heard, and the mention of a name.

"The boat's from Highlands Castle, sir—the prince's place."

"How do you know that?"

"By the queer burgee; that's a foreigner, sir, and so's the prince, though his horses make us to forget it sometimes."

The doctor listened very seriously.

"You are speaking of a great name—one of the greatest in Europe to-day," he said at length. "This lady would have been a friend of his."

"Ay, to be sure, and, now I think of it, I've seen her more than once in that very boat along with his Highnesses, too, and others as pretty as herself. Why, only yesterday there was a young man asking me—but perhaps I'd better say nothing about that. I'll tell the police."

Dr. Travis said he would be wise to do so. A sergeant of police and two constables had now arrived and made themselves masters of the situation. The crowd, augmented considerably as the village of Pangbourne awoke to the news collected by the Swan Inn and discussed the affair with animation.

But no one yet spoke of murder, though many had a thought of it in their hearts, which they would express loudly enough by-and-by.

This was the state of affairs, the police waiting for the ambulance, the crowd increasing every moment, the day beginning to break with a glorious promise of summer, when a fast motor-car came along the river road from Streatly, and all who knew the locality recognised it as the private carriage of Prince Maurevale of Dara. Immediately now the least intelligent of the onlookers could say that the unknown lady had been staying with the prince's party at Streatly, and that identification must be established without delay. Interest remained at high pitch. The crowd pressed forward, and was with difficulty restrained by the police.

The prince himself was in the car, and was the first to cross the weir bridge toward the island. He was followed by a young lady of eighteen years of age, enveloped from head to foot in a light grey motor-coat, and so agitated that she made the passage of the bridge with difficulty. Together these two advanced toward the body, the prince lifting his hat as he came, the young lady covering her face with her hands.

It was evident that they recognised the unknown at once—the prince with a loud cry, his companion with a flood of tears she could not repress.

Meanwhile the constables drew back as an act of homage both to the dead and the living. Dr. Travis remained alone with the distinguished foreigner that he might relate what he knew of this affair.

“I am privileged to meet you, sir, under most unhappy circumstances,” he said. “There is no doubt, I fear, that this poor lady has been dead for some hours.”

The prince inclined his head, as though grateful for the doctor’s courtesy.

“At what time was this discovery made?” he asked.

The doctor answered that it must have been at five o’clock.

“Are you able to give any explanation of her condition?”

“Impossible until an autopsy has been made. My first opinion pointed to *angina pectoris*.”

“But now——?”

“I think that she may have come to her end by foul means.”

The prince sighed, but did not protest. The doctor, however, stepped forward to assist the young lady, who reeled in a swoon, and would have fallen but for his outstretched arm.

“I fear that the scene has been too much for her. . . . It is natural. Let us take her back to the inn.”

“No,” rejoined the prince firmly; “to my carriage, if you please.”

And then, going up to her, he said: “Stella, Stella”—and at these words the young lady opened her eyes again and permitted him to lead her toward the carriage.

“Let all those who know anything of this come to me at Highlands Castle immediately,” said Prince Maurevale. “I should like to see Inspector Jarrard as soon as possible. He should get help from Reading.”

A sergeant of police replied that the inspector had gone back up to the station to communicate with headquarters, but would go to the castle directly he returned and had put the body on an ambulance. Dr. Travis, however, would remain upon the scene

until the police surgeon arrived—and this being arranged the prince drove off. All thought it remarkable that the name of the lady had not been mentioned, and that the prince had received the story of her death with such brief questioning. None, however, wondered at the conduct of his companion, which was but natural at such a tragic moment of recognition.

By this time a police ambulance had come from Reading, and the body was set upon it and conveyed to Highlands Castle, which stands upon the hills just above Streatly. The boat remained in the custody of the police, and was subjected by them to a close scrutiny. The contents proved to be such as a river skiff should possess; but, in addition to the sculls and the oar-hooks, there was a walking-stick of black ebony with an ivory knob.

Of this the inspector took possession, and, having invited Dr. Travis to accompany him, he set out for the castle. The gates were already surrounded by a concourse of people, come together none knew whence, but attracted as kites by this story of death.

These already spoke of murder . . . and the rumour gained strength as the day wore on.

It was repeated in all the papers next day that beyond a doubt Lady Anna Maclain had died of poison.

## CHAPTER II

### IN WHICH WE LEARN MORE OF PRINCE MAUREVALE

IT was Prince Bismarck who said of the House of Maurevale that its sons would live to write a page in the history of Europe. This was after the signing of the famous Berlin Treaty, in which Russia rewarded her stout allies in Wallachia by robbing them of precious territory.

But thirty-four years passed before Europe heard again, except in a social way, of the sole survivors of that house of genius.

Prince Maurevale was no patriot in the common sense. He had graduated at a German university, but he came to England in his twenty-second year, and there he remained. There was no more popular member of the Marlborough and the Jockey Clubs. His good looks had become a fable. The very cabmen at Newmarket and at Epsom spoke of "Maury's" horses, and were wont to recommend them to all and sundry.

In London this true Bohemian was well known to the people; his little white house in Park Lane had long been an object beloved of 'busmen, and his coach remarked by frequenters of Hyde Park.

He was in his thirty-seventh year at this time; but had never married. Had he done so he would have inflicted a wrong upon the multitude of social gossips, who bandied his name in amorous play between the courts of Alsatia and of Arlington Street, and were never so happy as when finding him a wife.

For all this, his friendships were many, and even his friends could not deny the strange influence he wielded over women. This was rather mental than physical, the fruit of a sage and eloquent intelligence rather than of athletic gifts which could not be denied. As a horseman, a fencer, a shot, and an oarsman, he could hold his own in any company, His daring as a gambler

was admitted, and that is a quality which rarely fails to make an appeal to wemen of his station.

That such a man, the idol of a society which a poet had declared to consist chiefly of the bores and bored, should awake one morning to find himself the best discussed and, in a way, desired of any in Europe is less remarkable when the story of his ancestry is remembered and the promises made for its descendants by so shrewd an observer as the great Prince Bismarck.

To his friends these sudden revelations of notoriety came without surprise. They knew that Maurevale of Dara was by no means the dilettante that rumour had made him out to be. Ambitions of no ordinary kind had governed his acts from his boyhood. For every day spent upon the heath at Newmarket or the moors of Macrihanish there were five days afterwards in the wonderful laboratories and workshops of Highlands Castle, of which the world knew so little. To these, said the intimates, Prince Maurevale gave the best of his life; upon these he spent the most part of a considerable fortune. His work was done neither for appearance nor for reward, but in the name of humanity.

How the truth leaked out it is a little difficult to say, but the world awoke one day to hear that Maurevale of Dara had become in a sense the master of Europe. And this neither by personality nor by fable; but by the possession of a scientific secret and the completion of an invention which might make war henceforth impossible.

He had, said the electrifying rumour, discovered methods of governing a torpedo so wonderful and so uncontestable that their possession in the navy, even the smallest, might make that navy master of the world.

For not only had he thus established a mastery of the most subtle of all forces, but to it had linked a knowledge of high explosives surpassing that of the Germans, and so wonderful and far-reaching that he himself had grown to fear his own secret.

Convinced of the reality of his pretensions—for here rumour gave the most precise particulars of the results accomplished—the diplomatists of Europe asked themselves immediately that momen-



tous question, "Upon whom will this sovereignty be bestowed? Would this dilettante of the booths and bazaars of Vanity Fair throw in his lot finally with the country of his adoption, or might other nations buy the secret at a price?"

A further question, put in the dark corners of the diplomatic palaces, suggested the Secret Service and its possibilities.

Would Prince Maurevale be dethroned by spies, or would he first establish his boast that there should be no more war?

These were vital matters, and interested the whole world.

Admitting the ideal to be a fine one, very naturally the diplomatists of Europe refused to accept it. "Maurevale," said they, "must be bought at any price—or if not bought, then treated as an enemy against whom all weapons may be turned."

They filled his house with spies and dogged his steps at every turn.

The great idea became the vulgar theme of secret service agents—and the most blatant of self-seekers.

These, however, plotted and planned to the prince's amusement. No page of tragedy had been written about this affair until the body of Lady Anna Maclain was carried to Highlands Castle, and society heard with awe the story of her death.

## CHAPTER III

### THE JURY IS PERPLEXED

THE coroner's inquest was held upon the third day after Lady Anna Maclain's death, and the jury assembled in the chaplain's library, which is over against the early English cloister of Highlands Castle, and justly famed for the beauty of its Jacobean panelling.

A jury had been gathered diligently of zealous officers, anxious to please so generous a patron as Prince Maurevale. They were for the most part strangers, but Mr. Bell, a schoolmaster, served at the last moment, and a local preacher, by name Turner, made up the complement.

All approached the castle with bent heads and solemn faces, in token of a grief of which they were unconscious, and as a witness to a sympathy which was but an expectation of reward.

A wet and rainy day found Mr. Child, the butler, over anxious about their boots, and posted at the cloister gates. Highlands Castle stands above the River Thames at Streatly upon a round, green hill. There had been no carriages provided, so hastily was all done—and these good fellows had walked a long way in quest of the two shillings with which the Government rewards them.

Within, the castle was very silent and typical of death.

Footmen moved a-tiptoe, as though they were afraid of their own shadows. Questions were put and answered in hushed whispers. The jury sidled into the great room and responded to Dr. Flack, a deputy-coroner, in timid monosyllables. The chaplain, who was also the rector of a neighbouring church, St. Agatha's, wore his cassock, and the silk of it rustled pleasantly wherever he moved. The body had already been viewed as it

lay in the open coffin before the altar, tapers upon either side of it, and so great a harbourage of flowers round about that the dead woman's face could be seen with difficulty.

Anon the castle party entered, and instantly the jury stood and bowed deferentially. The busy chaplain became even busier, setting the chairs with due regard to the rank of the sitters, and not disdaining the menial task of dusting them.

Maurevale was the first to come in, and he was followed immediately by Lady Constance Heliers, the daughter of the Duke of Alton.

Those who were acquainted with Maurevale could not but remark the gentleness of his demeanour to all about him, and the solemnity his example inspired.

Not a tall man, he could tower by his personality in any assembly. He had a soldier's figure, but the face of a poet—and there were those who had said that he was not unlike the pictures of the great Lord Byron. His dress was that of an English gentleman.

Almost as closely observed as Prince Maurevale was Lady Constance, the Duke of Alton's only daughter.

Scandal had told many a lying tale of this charming if eccentric girl. To-day it would make of her the greatest woman gambler in Europe; to-morrow it would hint that she was about to marry an actor.

The duke's notorious poverty fostered these cruel scandals and wrought a culminating injustice. At the same house there were many who rightly shook their heads when Lady Constance's name was mentioned, and it was recalled that her dead mother had been well known in theatrical circles more than thirty years ago. These said that she would marry Maurevale if she could; and none who knew her doubted the meaning of her friendship for the prince.

It was very natural that such a lady should surrender to the solemnities of such an occasion as this, and make no pretence to other than feminine attributes.

Entering the room upon Maurevale's heels, she glanced quickly at the jury, and then averted her eyes and looked up to

the galleries as though wondering if the books would speak. For the chaplain she had a gracious smile as he bent to offer her a chair. A woman would have said that her dark hair matched her mourning, and that black was her colour. The greengrocer, however, who had a seat in a dark corner beneath the gallery, wondered why she wore so much jewellery.

Immediately attending Lady Constance Heliers came Maurevale's brother, Georges, a fair-faced young man who was then serving in the Roumanian Army, and had come to England for a holiday. His methods were precise and soldierly. He saluted the coroner, bowed to the jury, and then drew back to make way for the Count of Fours, a French gentleman of some fifty years of age, who treated every one with the stately courtesy characteristic of the French aristocracy, and apologised once more for the absence of Madame, whom he declared to be prostrate and quite unable to be present.

The count's manner was not less agitated when he uttered these words than had been Lady Constance Heliers' when she first observed the jury sitting about the table. Both were evidently overwhelmed by the tragedy which had come upon this unhappy house.

Of the others of the castle party, the one most remarked was the youngest daughter of Lord Kerrimore, Stella Insole, whom more than one judge had pronounced to be the most beautiful of the débutantes that year.

She looked a mere child in her delicate gown of black, and instantly made a sure appeal to the hearts of the humble audience. Here was one whom a true sorrow had afflicted. The round blue eyes spoke at once of intellect and of love; the forehead of a clever race. She was girlish in all her movements, and more than one spectator remarked that she seemed obsessed by Maurevale's presence, and hardly lifted her eyes from his face.

This was the young lady who was recognised by Dr. Travis and by Huggins, the boatman, as having been Maurevale's companion upon the fatal morning.

She was followed into the room by three young men who had been taking part in a tennis tournament in the locality. Their

efforts to distract and to console her were alike abortive, and in the end they abandoned them and fell to discussing the company from unobtrusive seats in the shadow of the gallery.

It was now the coroner's turn to make an obsequious speech, flattering the house of Maurevale and regretting the necessity for this inquiry. Quite maladroitly he dwelt upon the poor lady's virtues, and the mystery surrounding her death. "That mystery, gentlemen," he added, "we are now come together to unravel—as far as the evidence permits us to do so. The jury have already seen the body. I will, therefore, call the boatman Huggins without further loss of time."

Huggins, the young boatman who had discovered the skiff by the weir, stepped up to the table and gave his evidence very clearly. He had been attracted by the dangerous situation of the boat, and had crossed the lock to examine it. Then he saw that it was not empty, and that a lady was asleep—as he thought—in the stern of it. When he drew nearer he came to the conclusion that she was dead.

"What made you think so?"

"The way her was a-lying."

"How was that?"

"Upon her side. She looked very pretty."

"Was there anything else extraordinary about her appearance?"

"She was dressed for a party—I thought that uncommon."

"Did you observe that she wore any jewellery?"

"Yes."

"Tell the jury what it was."

"A string of diamonds round her neck, and an armlet with a broken link."

"How a broken link——?"

"One of a chain. Something had been took orf of it."

"You imagine that to have been the case?"

"Well, I don't know for certain."

He paused for an instant as though nettled by the cross-examination, and in the brief interval a voice was heard.

It was that of the Count of Fours.

"The gentleman is quite right," he said quietly; "the ornament that Lady Anna Maclain carried upon her bracelet was a heart of green jade."

He bowed to the coroner and sat again. Meanwhile there was a buzz of talk over in the corner where the servants were sitting, and the voice of a maidservant was heard declaring that monsieur le comte seemed to know everything. She was a Frenchwoman, Berthe, the maid to Lady Anna.

"That is true," she cried in her own tongue; "the heart of green jade is missing, monsieur, but it was there when Madame went out to meet Captain Ferman."

A jurymen asked that the words should be translated, but the coroner silenced him, and declared that the maid would give her evidence presently, and that everything must be taken in its proper sequence. Huggins the boatman could add nothing further to what was already known, and was soon dismissed. Equally laconic was the evidence of the police surgeon, who took refuge behind the Home Office.

"The lady has undoubtedly been poisoned," he said, "but there is no evidence as yet to show the nature of the drug employed."

"You do not think it is antipyrin, or any of the nostrums for headache commonly used by women?"

"I am quite convinced it is not."

"There is no evidence of any violence having been used? This poor lady could not possibly have been the victim of one who attempted to rob her?"

"There is absolutely no justification for such an assumption."

"Do you think that the drug was self-administered?"

"It is impossible to say 'Yes' or 'No' to that. No poison has been found in her rooms."

"And the Home Office will make its report immediately?"

"I am momentarily expecting it."

"Could there be any possible connection between this trinket which is missing and the crime you believe to have been committed?"

The doctor smiled.

"As much as between the wood of that table and the Emperor of China."

The coroner now said that they were to have the privilege of hearing Prince Maurevale, who immediately advanced to the table. A hush fell upon the room, and all listened intently.

"I believe I am correct in saying that you have known the dead lady for some years?" the coroner began. The witness inclined his head.

"She was among the number of your intimate friends?"

"Undoubtedly so—I mourn for her loss as for a sister."

"Had you any reason to believe that she was in trouble?"

Maurevale hesitated.

"She had the troubles of a woman whose birthright is obligation. I do not think we need enter into that?"

"Then you wish us to understand that you know of nothing which might have impelled her to self-destruction?"

"She was the last woman in the world, the very last, about whom such a thought could arise."

"Had she been long at Highlands, sir?"

"She came with us from London—three weeks ago."

"Being then in an ordinary state of health?"

"I have never seen her better. She had great hopes of aiding me in my work—it gave her pleasure to do so."

"She was, I think, the only sister of the present Earl of Farrard, who is in Australia. May I tell the jury that she was much beloved in Society?"

"It would be very proper to do so."

"And that she had many friends?"

"Certainly—her friends were numerous. She was a clever woman, but not too clever to be popular."

"Sympathetic, I may take it?"

"Undoubtedly."

"And without enemies?"

Maurevale shrugged his shoulders. It was obvious that the question was unwelcome.

"The humblest have their enemies," he said. "It is a privi-

lege they share with the greatest. This poor lady has earned the title to that distinction. She was not immune."

"That we understand. She would possess both friends and enemies in the world's common way. But we are here to investigate what we must consider at the moment a very terrible crime. I am compelled to ask you, sir, if you know of any particular circumstance in the life of Lady Anna Maclain which would justify further investigation."

Again Maurevale displayed his displeasure.

"I have no right to speak," he said at last; "it is for the police to do their duty. My generalities will not help you. They may be less than just—they may be criminal."

"By which I take you to mean that you know of nothing which is not in the ordinary circumstance of our daily lives."

"You have put it better than I, sir."

The coroner was highly pleased at the compliment, and signified to the jury that they should thank the prince for his assistance. The next witness called was the local inspector of police, who gave his evidence from a notebook with the sharp clack of discipline and the precision of convinced authority.

"I was called to the river at five-forty by a boy from the Swan Inn. There I found the boat from which they had taken the body of a lady, subsequently identified as Lady Anna Maclain. The doctor who had been the first summoned pronounced her to be dead. He thought it might be heart disease, but was not sure."

"Did you observe any significant fact—anything which might help the jury?"

"Nothing except that the lady's jewellery had not been interfered with, and that a man's walking-stick was in the boat."

This confession, uttered in the hard, metallic voice peculiar to policemen, instantly arrested the attention of every one in the room. Shuffling feet and bent heads denoted the importance of the evidence. The coroner took his pen into his hand again and prepared to write.

"What kind of a stick was it, inspector?"

"It is here, sir—the jury can see it for themselves."



He turned about to speak to a sergeant at the door, and the sergeant to a constable in the passage without. Presently the stick with the ivory knob was passed from hand to hand and laid upon the oak table before the coroner; and this was the moment when the Count of Fours, who had watched the whole proceeding with startled eyes, rose again to his feet and intervened for the second time.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but the stick is mine."

The coroner nodded his head, and said, "Presently, sir," meaning that the count's turn would come. Then he continued to question the inspector.

"The medical evidence in the possession of the police points, I understand, to a very serious crime. Can you help the jury with any further information, inspector?"

"Not at present, sir. The case is in the hands of the authorities at Reading, and I believe that an arrest will be made presently."

"It would not be in the interests of justice to speak of that?"

"Not on this occasion, sir——"

He retired from the box to give place to the Count of Fours. This handsome old gentleman began with an expression of regret and pity which greatly moved all who heard it. He declaimed upon the dead lady's wealth and his admiration for her many virtues. Then he spoke of the circumstance.

"The stick is mine, sir—I have missed it some days. It would now appear that I left it in the boat upon the last occasion of my embarkment. There is no importance to be attached to it. I am glad to be able to say so."

"Otherwise you can tell the jury nothing?"

The count paused and wiped his forehead with a very large handkerchief.

"There is one thing," he said; "a box of green jade has been mentioned. I would wish the jury to know that madame, my wife, gave that to Lady Anna."

"We are much obliged to you for the information, count. Would you be good enough to describe the ornament?"

"Certainly, it was a bon-bon box bought by my wife at Peking. Its value lay in the beauty of the jade—nothing more. The Chinaman who sold it spoke of a superstition. I pay no heed to that."

"Can you remember the nature of the superstition?"

"I fear not—these silly tales do not interest an intellectual man."

"And you attach no importance to its absence?"

"Why should I? The poor lady would have lost it as she stepped into the boat. Nothing could be more natural."

"It seems so. We are very much indebted to you, count. Perhaps upon another occasion, madame la comtesse may tell us something more of this box. Let the maid Berthe now be called."

The count returned to his seat, and the maid Berthe, who had been devoted to the dead woman, was called to the table. Her distress was very real, and overcame her utterly for a little while. When she recovered her self-control a truly Celtic outburst opened her evidence, and she declared hysterically that Captain Ferman should answer for the crime.

There was a general cry of astonishment in the room. Maurevale drew his chair nearer to the table, and, resting his chin upon his hand, watched the girl with an eye which no gesture, not even the lightest, escaped.

The name of Captain Ferman had been blurted out without any reticence, and in a way the coroner pronounced to be improper.

"Come, come, my girl," he cried, remembering that the jury but half understood the jargon of French and English in which the maid spoke, "you must wait until the questions are put to you"; and then to the count he said, "Would you, sir, be so obliging as to tell the jury just what she does say?"

The count agreed, and advanced again to the table. He was obviously very nervous, and his nervousness increased as each answer was received. It might have been thought that he was the friend of the man whose name had been dragged in thus at the last moment, and that he resented the testimony that he must pass on to the jury.

"Now, my girl, please to answer us categorically. You were Lady Anna's maid?"

"Yes, certainly, sir."

"How long had you been in her service?"

"One, two, three years—after she returned from India."

"We have heard nothing of India. It would not be necessary, I suppose, gentlemen" (this to the jury). "She was a good mistress to you?"

"I would have died for her."

"Did she take you into her confidence: tell you about her troubles or anything of that kind?"

"Ah, oui—but always of Captain Ferman. I shall never forget, jamais——"

"Please to calm yourself. You say she spoke of Captain Ferman. Can you tell us anything of it?"

"His Highness know all about it. She cannot abide the captain—she run away from him."

"Come, now, you are talking nonsense. She disliked this gentleman and avoided him. Is that what you wish to tell the jury?"

"Yes, sir; I wish to say so with all my heart."

"Did her ladyship tell you as much?"

"Every day—when the captain wrote."

"Can you remember any particular occasion?"

"This is Saturday—well, she spoke of him on Sunday morning. There was a letter then."

"Was she upset by it?"

"She cried, messieurs, cried a very long time. Then she said she must go to London the next day to see the captain."

"Did she carry out that intention?"

"No, messieurs, there was a telegram."

"Did you read it?—you need not be afraid to tell us."

Berthe blushed until her face was dangerously crimson.

"She left it upon the dressing-table—I must see it."

"And the words of it——"

"It said, 'Tuesday if possible—otherwise Wednesday.'"

"Nothing more?"

"Nothing more, sir."

"Do you know if Lady Anna went to London on either of these days?"

"She went on Tuesday, sir."

"But not on the day of her death?"

"No, sir; the captain came here upon that day."

It is needless to say with what astonishment these significant remarks were received. The coroner wrote down every word that she spoke, and the inspector of police made copious notes.

"You say that Captain Ferman came to this house on Tuesday last? Are you quite sure of that?"

"I do not say that he came to this house. But he was at the house of the boats, and madame met him there."

"How do you come to know that?"

"I am gone to the village to buy some writing-paper. The short way home is by the river gate and the little house where they keep the boats. Then I am much frightened. I hear a voice, and I know it for that of the captain. A lady is with him—it is madame."

It was to be observed that she fell to the French idiom and the present tense as the shame of her confession seized upon her and prompted her to anger. The coroner waited a little while for her to resume, and then continued:

"You are willing to swear that you saw Captain Ferman?"

"I will swear by the crucifix, monsieur."

"Could you tell the jury what time it was?"

"It would have been at ten o'clock, sir."

"Are the village shops open for the sale of note-paper at ten o'clock?"

The girl went crimson.

"No, sir; the shop was shut."

"And you did not buy any note-paper?"

"No, sir; I did not buy the paper."

The jury nodded their heads to each other at this point, and the coroner made one of those gestures aside which might have implied that he disbelieved the witness. At this point, however,

Stella Insole, who had listened to the evidence with an intensity which betrayed the most poignant interest, whispered to one of the young men who stood by her chair, and he in turn whispered to the prince. The latter thanked him with an inclination of the head, and immediately passed on the message to the coroner, who began to question the maid anew.

"What did you do when you had seen the captain?"

"I came away at once, sir."

"You did not watch him?"

"Oh, monsieur!"

"But you can swear that you heard Lady Anna's voice?"

"If I should mistake it, sir!"

"And being convinced that it was she—what then?"

"I returned to the house and to her bedroom. I wish to make sure."

"Did you find the bedroom empty?"

"No, sir."

"It was not empty—who was there, then?"

"Monsieur Blandy, the steward, ne was there."

"Oh, but that was very unusual—what was he doing there?"

"I beg your pardon, gentlemen, but I was a-shutting of a winder."

The interruption came from the far corner of the room, where Mr. Blandy, the steward, watched the proceedings in the company of certain maids and footmen whom it had been deemed wiser to make confidants in this affair.

He was a bald-headed, red-nosed man, who was utterly taken aback by this accusation. Perhaps an observer would have said that the emphasis of his protest was a little unnecessary and possible of misinterpretation; but he continued to address the company round about in muttered phrases of complaint, and did not cease even when he was told to hold his tongue.

"You saw Mr. Blandy in Lady Anna's room. Are you able to say what he was doing there?"

"Yes, sir; he was turning over the papers on the writing-table."

The admission astounded the court. Quick glances were exchanged between the coroner and the jury; the inspector looked closely at the witness and began to bite the end of his pencil. A wasp indeed, this pale-faced, smooth-tongued Frenchwoman, who had worshipped her dead mistress as a divinity.

"Are you quite sure of this, my girl? Will you swear it on your oath?"

"Oh yes, sir; I am quite sure."

"And you repeat that when you entered your mistress's bedroom—but what time was that?"

"I did not look at the time, sir."

"Shall we say it was after ten o'clock?"

"Oh yes, sir, it was after ten o'clock."

"You entered the bedroom, and Mr. Blandy was there?"

"He was, sir."

"Turning over the papers on the writing-table?"

"I will swear it."

"Was the electric light turned on?"

"Over the table, sir."

"And it remained on—this light over the table?"

"No, sir; he put it out when he heard me coming?"

A murmur of surprise greeted this new admission, and did not subside for some moments. Many eyes were watching the unfortunate Blandy, who could control himself no longer, but boldly declared the girl to be a liar. The coroner, however, silenced him by the stern reminder that he would be heard presently, and continued his task.

"What did Mr. Blandy say when you discovered him?"

"He said that the wind was blowing the things about."

"In the room, of course. Did you agree with him?"

"No, sir, there was no wind."

"And you told him so?"

"I told him he had better go quick, or I would let my mistress know."

"And he went at once?"

"At once, sir."

"Without saying any more about the window?"

"He never mentioned it, sir."

"But he spoke about the wind?"

"Oh, I did not listen to that."

It now became clear that the girl had nothing more to tell the jury, and she was permitted to go, having contrived in a few short sentences to incriminate two people and to put the court in some doubts as to her veracity.

Mr. Blandy was the next witness to be called, and he floundered to the table in a great state of heat and excitement. His early statement was severely censured by the coroner, who told him very plainly that he must behave himself.

"This girl is a liar through and through," he began, and then, as though to impress the jury, he added, "a French liar."

"Oh, come sir, that is not the way to give your evidence. Tell the jury what you were doing in Lady Anna's room on the night of Tuesday last."

"I have told the gentleman—I was there to shut a winder."

"What took you upstairs at such a time?"

"A noise of the things blowing about."

"You could hear it from the hall below?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you were in the hall?"

"Well, not exactly in the hall—I was in the corridor."

"Which corridor?"

"The one that leads to the pantry."

The coroner turned to the prince and asked him a question. He looked very serious upon receiving an answer.

"I am told that the corridor you name is on the opposite side of the house. What have you to say to that?"

"Why, the wind was blowing the blinds about there, and so naturally I thought of the bedroom upstairs. Is that to stand against me?"

"No one is suggesting such a thing. We merely want you to tell the truth."

"Well, there it is then. I'm no liar like that girl."

"Did you enter more than one bedroom?"

"Yes, two or three——"

"Whose were they?"

"His Highness's to begin with."

"Is that near to the room occupied by Lady Anna?"

"No, it's in the other wing."

"So you went straight from one to the other—neglecting other rooms?"

"I went to the rooms I thought the most important. Lady Anna was next door to being mistress of this house."

The coroner passed it over.

"She was an important guest?"

"She was Number One from the start."

"And you were most desirous of making her comfortable?"

"I was indeed, sir."

A further question was about to be put—the coroner had it upon his lips in fact—when a telegram was brought in for the inspector of police, and by him passed over the table. When the coroner had read it also he handed it to Maurevale and then to the jury. Its contents, however, were not made public, and presently, somewhat to the surprise of all present, the inquiry was adjourned.

"Until this day week, gentlemen, at the Bull Hotel. You must not let anything that happens elsewhere influence your minds in the meantime. I am asked by his Highness to thank you for your attention. The fees will be paid next time."

The house-party discussed the affair in scattered groups as they crossed the great cloister to the castle precincts. Very voluble and full of his grievance, the old Count of Fours recalled the episode of the sick, and declaimed against the coincidence as he accompanied Lady Constance Heliers to the house. The university boys kept together, and were as awed as young men ever are in the presence of death. The prince walked with Stella Insole, who waited with trembling heart for him to speak.

"Must I not know?" she asked at last. The question had been expected by him from the moment the telegram came, and was not to be avoided.



"Yes," he rejoined reluctantly. "It is as we feared, and Ferman is arrested."

She did not answer him. Her face was colourless, and her heart beating rapidly. Perhaps for the first time the prince realised how much of womanly sweetness and sympathy she added to her beauty. This day revealed so many things.

"Let us go to my room—I have much to do, Stella," he said, "and you must help me now."

## CHAPTER IV

### THE PRINCE AND STELLA INSOLE

PRINCE MAUREVALE'S room at Highlands is in the western wing, over against the great laboratory, which is famous, not only throughout the country, but the world.

It is a very large apartment with a domed ceiling, panelled after the manner of Joseph Vernet. Luxury abounds therein; but a love of ancient art is the predominating note, and there are paintings of the early Italian and Spanish schools which connoisseurs travel far to see.

Perhaps, however, there is no ornament of his sanctum which the prince values so highly as the great glass case which contains the addresses and the gifts which have reached him from the various peace societies of Europe. These have come from many nations, from Berlin and from Paris, from the Czar of Russia and the President at the White House. They all bear witness to a common recognition of a noble aim.

To this room came Maurevale with Stella Insole immediately after the inquest in the chaplain's library. His assistant, that pale-faced youth, Otto Walther, whose devotion was unquestioned, sat at a table in the corner when the pair entered; but at a sign he withdrew, and then the prince turned to Stella and bade her speak.

"You have much to tell me," he said, in a kindly tone. "Is not this our opportunity, Stella?"

She answered him to his surprise, that she could tell him nothing—and emotion mastering her, she repeated this assurance with tears.

The confession was wholly true. The supreme secret would never be his unless his lips forced her own to utter it. The passionate love for him which had tortured her these many

months lay locked in the treasure-house of her heart. And he, Maurevale, who believed that he could read woman as an open book, did but say that she grieved for her dead friend, Anna Maclain, and would not be comforted.

Her father, Lord Kerrimore, was a fine type of the Irish nobleman, who had rendered Maurevale some friendly service in Egypt many years ago. When trouble came in Ireland and the father was beggared, the prince remembered his obligation and fulfilled it. The old baron received an altogether preposterous fee as the master of the Maurevale stable at Newmarket; the only son, Albert, was in a Lancer regiment; the two daughters, Stella and Kitty, became the children of Highlands, and made it their home.

Maurevale liked young society — light and laughter and beauty were essential to his well-being. These qualities he found in Lord Kerrimore's daughters—but Stella, the youngest, had begun to interest him lately by the possession of other gifts. She was a critic of perception above the ordinary. Her talk was often witty and sometimes shrewd. She studied the sciences laboriously, but wept over her own inability to master them. In the end she could confess to herself that she was merely a woman, and that any attempt to win the prince's favour by empiric subterfuge could but end in winning his contempt.

She was foolish, of course, to dream about such a man, and she knew that she was foolish. The succession of distinguished guests at the castle showed her women of many stations and diverse gifts, descendants of great houses, the daughters of millionaires, the noted beauties of society succumbing to Maurevale's dominant personality, and utterly conquered by it. Her life at Highlands permitted her to hear almost daily the ancient story that this was a man who would never know the love of woman. She assented to the proposition, believed it for a while, and then came to doubt it. And her doubt was awakened upon the day Lady Anna told her that her faith was false.

She had believed that the dead woman was to become the prince's wife, and nothing but death had altered her belief.

It is easy to imagine that circumstances such as these forbade

her to reply to Maurevale as he wished or to be other than embarrassed by his interrogation. She could not answer him frankly, and her silence grieved him.

"So," he said, "it would appear that even my friends turn from me?"

She protested against it hotly, watching him with burning eyes as he paced the long room, and wondering where she would find courage. Presently she said:

"Is it not that your friends may fear to speak—do they not trust you absolutely?"

He turned and looked at her.

"In what, Stella?"

"In that you, who have rewarded right, will know how to avenge wrong."

"Do you mean, then, that I shall leave my work to become a policeman?"

He came and laid a hand upon her shoulder.

"Stella, do you believe that Captain Ferman loved Anna Maclain?"

"I do most certainly believe it; but I believe no less that my sister loved him."

"Knowing my opinion of him, and that I had forbidden him this house?"

"Forgive me; a woman's love owes nothing to another's opinion. It is all-sufficient in itself."

"True, true. Too often do we forget how far our hearts lie from what the world would teach us. I forbade Jack Ferman my house. Why? Because his ambition was greater than his friendship. He would have sold me to the English Government. He wished to open these doors and possess himself of my secret. He measured his intellect against mine, and found it to be a child's. And now you tell me that I must save him! I ask you why, child?"

"Because you know that he is innocent."

"I know! Did you hear them at the inquest?"

"Yes, but they were poor people who do not think."

"And their evidence is false?"

"I believe it to be mistaken."

"Ah, but let us consider. It is clear that this lady, who stood as my own sister to me—it is clear that she has been the subject of a foul crime. The last person seen with her is Jack Ferman. He writes to her making secret appointments. I know, for she herself told me, that he has been trying to make her the instrument of his espionage for some months past. She resists him—implores him to abandon his dishonourable task—to leave her. Then she is found dead, poisoned in my house. Am I to suffer that dishonour?"

"You will avenge the crime."

He stood and raised a hand in solemn witness.

"By the help of Heaven, yes, I will avenge her."

He went to the window and looked over the quadrangle.

"Observe," he said, "that is Lady Heliers' carriage. She is the first to go. A woman who has spent her days protesting against the selfishness of modern life is the very first to leave me when I have need of her."

"Is it not well that one who was so bitter an enemy to her we loved should leave us at this time?"

The prince turned his dark eyes upon her.

"Can we be sure either of love or enmity?"

"A woman can."

"Ah, you correct me. I shall accept a woman's judgment. Her flight, you see, is not even dignified. She is leaving a message with the count, I doubt not for me. The count himself paces the quadrangle impatiently because madame, his wife, will not rise and quit my house. He would fly from this vulgar scene of death and escape the searching eyes which are already watching him. The night may permit him to go, and to-morrow we shall know him no more. So much for these sacred friendships. Now let us see what our servants are doing."

Maurevale crossed the room to one of the windows upon the opposite side, and there looked out upon the kitchen court. This was a paved quadrangle which showed him a group of men-servants gathered about the affable, if suspected, Blandy. The steward was gesticulating wildly, and plainly talking in loud tones.

Presently a bell summoned the men, and they went their ways, while Mr. Blandy himself stood a little while in deep thought. Then he also crossed the court with quick steps, and, going toward the stable-yard, was lost to their view.

"Do you see," said Maurevale, with a sigh, "this man was called a faithful servant yesterday. To-day he is preparing to leave my house. He will go by night, and stealthily. Should I not say, Stella, that he is a guilty man?"

"Or one who is very much afraid——"

"I see, and fear shunning the ordeal adds to it a thousandfold. To-morrow Mr. Blandy may be in the custody of the police, and I, in spite of the service he has rendered me, powerless to help him. Is not that a heavy punishment for an indiscretion—is it justice, Stella?"

"I think you will keep Mr. Blandy."

"I——"

"And punish the real author of this crime."

He sighed, and fell once more to pacing the room as a man who protested silently against the rôle he must fulfil.

"Our ambitions tower to the stars, to fall again as birds that are stricken. Then we lie crouching on the earth because it is our destiny. Do you know, Stella, that I was upon the point of attaining my desires, fables that they seem? Do you know that Europe has begun to believe me when I have said there shall be no more war? I was to go to Berlin this week and state the conditions upon which I will entrust my inventions to a chosen nation for the preservation of the peace of the world? Of all the zealots who supported me in this, Anna was the most devoted. Now death strikes her down. The lust of money forces us back upon the primal instincts. Her devotion to me awakens the appetite of the brute. She is the enemy—she must pay the price."

"Do you believe all this of Captain Ferman?"

He paused, and looked at her with searching eyes.

"Why do you ask me that?"

"Because all our hope is in you. Oh, you will save Jack Ferman!"

"If he is innocent I will save him. Tell your sister so. If

he is innocent. Meanwhile, I say that you must be my ally. We must begin our task now, this very moment. All our great schemes must be forgotten until it is accomplished. There must be neither rest nor weariness. It is for her sake, Stella; for the sake of a woman who has loved me."

"Tell me what to do, and you shall have no more devoted servant."

"I believe it—herein fortune is kind to me, for it seems to tell me that what I have lost may be found again. You are a woman, and you have a woman's instincts. Use them for your sister's sake. Her love is not less noble because it is unselfish. I must think well of Ferman because she commands it. Help me to do so, Stella."

"Ah, sir, if I had but the cleverness——"

"You will find it in love, child. We shall be alone in this henceforth. Let us work as though Anna herself were watching and helping us."

He paused once more, listening to a sound of wheels which came up from the courtyard below—and as he did so a smile of contempt crossed his face.

"As I told you, the amiable count has persuaded madame his distressed wife to flee this dangerous country and return to the hospitable and less curious shores of France. He was a man sent by the French Government to beg the secret of my work. I will not say that he returns empty-handed, for madame goes with him. Do you think it odd that his stick was found in the boat, Stella?"

"I thought it odd that he should make so much of it."

"Exactly, but there was something else which was made light of. Did you think of that also?"

She looked up with wondering eyes.

"The heart of green jade——"

"Ah, truly, the heart of green jade, which the doctor told us was of no more account than the table before him."

"Did you believe that?"

He answered her very solemnly.

"So little that when I shall have found the heart of green jade I shall find also the murderer of Anna Maclain."

## CHAPTER V

### THE LAW, BUT NOT NECESSARILY THE MAJESTY THEREOF

SIR MALCOLM MORRISON, the famous chief inspector, is wont to complain, and the complaint is just, that there would be few undetected murderers in England if he were called to the scene at an early hour.

A practice so desirable is frustrated chiefly by the vanity of a local police. These take a case in hand, frequently bungle it, obliterate the vital clues, utter many fine platitudes, and then in despair communicate with Scotland Yard. Sir Malcolm Morrison comes in as a physician at the eleventh hour, when the patient is already *in extremis*, and the man upon the spot has nothing further to do but to pocket the fees his ignorance has earned him. Let it be admitted without preface that such an indictment of bureaucracy could not be made when the search for the murderer of Anna Maclain began.

So swift was the action of Scotland Yard that an almost immediate arrest followed, and London heard with an amazement most profound that one of the most popular young soldiers of the day was in custody.

The handsome, witty, dare-devil Jack Ferman, the woman's favourite, the friend of princes, the notorious rider—he in custody for the murder of a woman he had been known to worship. Little wonder that the social world seemed to stand still, that nothing else was as much as mentioned among those who were in "the movement." Incredible, said society. And disgraceful, added his friends, unless the evidence were overwhelming.

Of this evidence the world learned but little at the police courts. Proof that Ferman had been with the dead woman on



the night of the tragedy was put in, and his own refusal to give any account of that secret meeting. A remand was asked for and granted by a magistrate, who believed that the police knew their business and would never make such a mistake as this. Excitement waxed, and became as a fever among the captain's friends. Lady Anna's would-be avengers were not less numerous.

These were the facts when that distinguished officer of police, Sir Malcolm Morrison, alighted from a brougham at the door of Highlands Castle upon the afternoon following the inquest, and asked for his Highness, Prince Maurevale.

A quiet and dignified personality this, six feet in height, dressed with precise care, wearing gloves of lavender suède, and a silk hat which could brave Bond Street unashamed.

The interview took place not in the great study where the prince had received Stella Insole earlier in the day, but in the small red library to the right of the hall as you enter the castle. Hither a footman, who went warily before so distinguished an officer of police as Sir Malcolm, conducted the visitor, and here the prince met him five minutes later.

"Sir Malcolm Morrison—that is a name I should know well——"

"And I that of Prince Maurevale no less."

And then he said, with a light wave of the hand :

"But I regret the circumstances, sir."

Maurevale replied, still looking at the card in his hand,

"And I no less. You have come here to get my help, of course."

"If you can help me! At present the case seems quite clear. This young madman poisoned her because she would not marry him."

"You believe that, sir——"

"The police believe everything and nothing. It is as far as the evidence leads us."

"But the coroner's jury——"

Sir Malcolm smiled, and brushed it aside, as it were, with a gesture of the hand.

"We must have our farces in England. I have read the evidence. Very amusing and, in its way, instructive."

"And yet it is evidence which led you to arrest Captain Ferman."

Sir Malcolm raised his brows.

"The maid Berthe——?"

"No other."

"I will not debate it. Permit me to ask a question in my turn. How did you come to be at Pangbourne at that hour in the morning?"

"Because my boatman, Willis, is an early riser."

"He missed the boat——?"

"Yes."

"Which he knew to be out on the previous evening?"

"Certainly—he alarmed the house. There is another reason. Miss Insole, my guest, was anxious concerning Lady Anna. She was awake when the alarm came——"

Again Sir Malcolm seemed to listen.

"Why was she anxious?"

"A woman's anxiety. Lady Anna had left the dinner-table pleading headache. It would be natural."

"But uncommon in your circles. Pardon the levity. I will see the room and the boat, if you will permit me."

"Indeed, I will accompany you. The others have already been here."

"Then I shall expect to do little good."

They rose and went upstairs together. The door of the dead woman's room had been sealed by the local police; but Sir Malcolm broke it without ceremony and went in. Everything was just as Lady Anna had left it. A long cupboard was half-full of her gowns and hats from Paris and Vienna. The table was littered with brushes and ornaments, but not with bottles, for these had already been sent to London for analysis. An open book lay upon the bed—the cover of which had been turned down as though for some one who wished to lie there without undressing.

The chief inspector made a swift survey of this room, but it

seemed to afford him but little satisfaction. From time to time he asked a question of Maurevale, but did not appear to pay much attention to the answers.

"They are well off, the Farrards?"

"Pardon me, I know nothing of their income."

"But it would be fair to ask the question now. Are you not the target for every adventurer in Europe?"

"They say so. A man who strives for peace between the nations begins by making many enemies."

"Of course he does. The finer his mind the grosser the minds by which he is surrounded. They come here to steal your inventions. You are aware of it."

Maurevale smiled.

"They afford me much amusement, Sir Malcolm."

"Did the poor lady know anything of them?"

"As much as I did——"

"She would have done. Ferman, I remember, is on the staff."

"You are suggesting——"

"Nothing at all. But if I were on the staff at Whitehall, and I heard that a certain distinguished visitor had invented a high explosive which would make war against the Power possessing it impossible, I think I should want to know what it was."

Maurevale smiled again, but would not take up the issue. Presently Sir Malcolm said:

"By the way, do you ever use coniine here?"

"Why do you ask that?"

"Oh, I'll tell you. A preparation of coniine has been found in Ferman's rooms."

"Indeed, and yet it was not coniine which poisoned this poor lady."

"You say——"

"A mere opinion."

"But I am profoundly interested."

"Then I do not think that she was poisoned by coniine."

"They won't agree with you—and if they don't, Ferman will hang."

"For a crime he did not commit; I think not."

Sir Malcolm drummed with his fingers upon the marble-topped washhand stand.

"You have other ideas, sir?"

"Certainly, but they are no more than ideas."

"You say then——?"

"That this poor lady was poisoned not by conium but by a combination of drugs, of which one was certainly the poisonous rhus."

"Ah, an Indian drug——"

"No, Chinese."

"Then that would seem to say——"

Maurevale shrugged his shoulders.

"That we are as far as Streatly is from Peking from the author of this crime."

It was Sir Malcolm's turn to smile now. These fine theories were altogether too distant for him. He had a plain case for a jury, and would not complicate it. Why should he?

"I fear you will not convince us, sir," he said. "For Porman's sake I wish it were otherwise. The evidence—I beg your pardon, but is that a button lying by the door—a red button?"

He crossed the room, attracted by a bright red object which lay upon the black mat against the door. Evidently his entrance had disturbed the mat and brought this button to light. The inspector scanned it very closely, then passed it to the prince.

"What do you make of that?"

"It is the ordinary button of the Légion d'Honneur."

"How very curious that it should be here. Let us see, among your guests were——"

"It would belong to the Count of Fours."

"Ah, that unfortunate count. His stick—the box—and now the button. Evidently good reputation has quarrelled with him. Well, I will take care of it. There is just one thing more. May I see your steward, Mr. Blandy?"

"Certainly—if he is in the house."

"But you do not imagine——?"

"Oh, so many things happen."

They left the room and returned to the hall. There Maurevale rang the bell and asked the footman to send Mr. Blandy immediately. While they waited, the talk was of common things—of Maurevale's horses about to run at Newmarket, of his patronage of the new Aero Club, of the stupidity of politics and the dangers of the European situation. But no further reference was made to the one subject until the footman returned, and said with some confusion that Mr. Blandy had left the castle and would not return, they thought, until nightfall.

"Ah," said Sir Malcolm, "that is unfortunate."

But he made no further observation whatever and drove off as he had come, a shrewd and wary ally of the law whose majesty he worshipped.

Maurevale, however, went straight to his own room, and as he went his butler Child stopped him in the corridor and told him news.

"I don't know how to tell your Highness—but they've come for Mr. Blandy."

"Ah," said Maurevale, "I was expecting them." And that was all.

## CHAPTER VI

### STELLA BEGINS HER TASK

STELLA INSOLE waited until she heard her sister Kitty breathe quietly, and then, knowing her to be asleep, she crept from the room a-tiptoe, and made to go to her own apartment.

It was nearly twelve o'clock, and Highlands Castle was at rest. True, a bright light shone out from the observatory in the park, but she knew that the prince was not there, for a fast motor-car had carried him from Streatly at ten o'clock that night, and Mr. Child, the butler, said that he might not return for some days.

Her own vigil had been entirely one of sisterly charity. Though younger than Kitty, she had borne the burden of the day, and now at dead of night she knew that sleep would be denied her.

For Kitty her compassion was sincere; and indeed their secrets were not dissimilar. For a long time society had believed that Jack Ferman would marry Kitty Insole. There was no engagement, but it was one of those accepted beliefs which rarely betray the credulous. Then came the story that he was infatuated with Anna Maclain, whom he had known in India, and the world wondered why he did not marry her. Kitty was thought of no longer.

Silence had been the sisters' refuge; but now it was impossible to be silent any longer. Kitty loved a man who stood in the shadow of death, and no shame was too great a price to pay for his safety. Weeping in her sister's arms she confessed that she loved the young man unalterably, and never so much as in this moment of his peril. Fear for him became an appre-

hension passing all bounds. She pictured him in prison, and her very imagination tortured her. In death Lady Anna had become a more formidable enemy than in life. All was lost indeed, and naught but shame remained—to which Stella replied that this might be said when Prince Maurevale had ceased to help them; but that while he was their friend, then indeed might they live to hope that sorrow would pass from their lives as a dream of the unremembered night.

“He is working for you, Kitty: he is working for Jack,” she said. Kitty answered that the hour for it had gone by.

“He will not succeed, Stella. What should a man know of the secret between them? He cannot help us.”

“Why do you say there was a secret, Kitty?”

She could not answer logically.

“Jack loved me until she came from India. After that all was changed. He told me that honour and the Service compelled him to do what he was doing. He said that he and Anna were working for a common object.”

“The prince’s secrets—yes. How many have tried to rob him of them. He works for the peace of the world, and they reward him by filling his houses with spies. Can you believe that of Jack, dear—was he not a soldier?”

“It might even be a soldier’s work, Stella, if the good of his country demanded it——”

“Ah, the good of his country! How if it were the love of Anna—it is more likely, Kitty. Men never gamble so madly as when the stake is a woman’s love. Even the prince was deceived by her.”

“Then how will he save Jack——?”

“I cannot tell you, but I am as sure that he will save him as that the moon is shining upon the park. Will you not believe me, dear? Do I ever tell you what is false?”

Kitty was too worn out to argue any further, and, very tired and wan, she fell asleep at last and left her sister to go to her own room and dream her dreams of succour and of success. The house was quite still by this time, and the clock in the long corridor numbered the seconds almost humanly; mechanical

prophets to speak of moments that never should recur. Through the long windows the moonbeams spread their pools of mellow light, searching out the dark places and giving weird shapes to the armoured images of the alcoves and the bays.

Stella passed down the long corridor of which there had been so much talk at the inquest, and chancing to see the door of Lady Anna's dressing-room wide open, she stood there a little while, recalling visions of the past and wondering why death had come upon this house.

It seemed but a few hours since she had seen a beautiful woman standing radiant before that glass, the glow of lamps upon her fair skin, the shimmer of silk and chiffon about her. To-night the same mirror, trapping a ray of the moonbeams, showed her but a dull and leaden image of her own white face, while the room itself echoed the emptiness which death is the supreme type.

Stella had not meant to enter the room at all; she wondered that she did so; but impulse drove her irresistibly, and she advanced with beating heart, almost deceiving herself for an instant into the belief that she had called the dead woman and had been answered.

The hallucination passed as quickly as it had come, but the spell of it remained to terrify Stella Insole. Then a sudden fear both of the scene and of the unknown caused her to switch on the electric light, and to ask herself what she did there at all.

To be sure, there was little in the place to excite remark. The police had dismissed it summarily enough, and Sir Malcolm never set foot in it, deceived by the fact that a bathroom intervened between it and the larger apartment, and that the local report of the case made no mention of it.

To Stella, none the less, it was a harbourage of abiding memories.

Hence, night after night, had Anna Maclain gone down to her victories in the brilliant rooms below. Here had she used her most subtle arts that she might conquer afterwards. And now she lay dead before the altar of the chapel, and the material things spoke of her life with an irony that moved to tears.



The wonderful gowns, they hung limp and lifeless upon their pegs. Gold had lost its glitter and silver did not shine. A racquet spoke of youth and vitality; a whip of a dead woman's daring horsemanship; an uncut novel of a leisure which wasted few of the hours upon the imagined romance but many upon the actual. Anon and all these things would go out to the lumber markets of the world. Other women of another kingdom would wear the gowns and play the fine lady in them. The racquet would lie and rot, perchance; the whip be guarded as a memento of death by one to whom Anna Maclain had been nothing in life. Such are the penalties which all must pay; such is the fate to which all must bend.

Stella's quick brain thought of all these things as she stood in the silent room, and asked herself what impulse had led her there.

Anna Maclain had been no friend to her. Her own love for Maurevale had seemed so poor a thing pitted against those arts which the world had taught her rival. And now that rival was dead, and she, Stella — but she did not dare to pursue the thought further, and reminded herself that she was there to do Maurevale's work.

Had this room any message for her?

It was but a woman's idea, but it had sent her there for all her argument, and now it drove her to swift and secret acts.

Quickly and dexterously she searched the apartment. Her shrewd judgment reminded her of the treasure-house of a woman's secret. There was no drawer so humble that she did not ravage it, no nook or cranny which escaped her scrutiny. The futility of it all, the fact that others of riper experience had preceded her did not daunt Stella Insole. She believed that the impulse which had sent her there was one of a guidance external to herself and irresistible. She persisted, in spite of mocking emptiness and of indiscretion which might have worked a mischief.

And then, as suddenly, she desisted, and listening with bent ear she could have sworn there was some one in the adjoining room, and that she could number the very footsteps across the parquet of the bathroom.

It was a soft step, strange, and yet definite. For an instant she tried to persuade herself that she had been watched in her turn, and that one of the servants of the house, even it might be a servant of the police, had detected her in her task, but had not been willing to interrupt her. Against this she set the swift logic of her own instincts, and it came upon her with an overwhelming sense of dread and helplessness that she might be listening to the murderer's footstep, and that a cry from her would bring him to the room.

Call upon her courage as she would, Stella could not utter this cry. Her tongue cleaved to the roof of her mouth, her heart beat uncontrollably, her limbs trembled as though an ague had fallen upon her, yet she could not cry out. And upon this fear came the desire to know, a desire which mastered even the momentary paralysis of courage and of idea. She must know who was in that room though death were the penalty.

She tottered forward to the bathroom door and tried to switch on the light. A sound of quick breathing in the darkness beyond warned her that she was within a pace of knowledge, and that the coming of the light must answer the unspoken question whatever the cost of just curiosity. Should she serve the man she loved to such a point as this, or turn and summon the assistance so near at hand? Swaying in the doubt, believing that the outcome was inevitable, she put her hand upon the switch at last and flooded the room with the searching rays.

But the cost of it was too great, and she fell fainting in the act. When she awoke, the kindly Otto Walther, Maurevale's fellow-worker, was at her side, and a little group of the castle servants stood anxiously about her.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE PRINCE AND THE ACCUSED

THE governor of the prison had been advised by the authorities that some courtesy beyond ordinary must be shown to Prince Maurevale of Dara, and that the unusual privilege of a private interview with the prisoner had been accorded to him.

This was nominally in the interests of justice, but more truthfully in those of a common official purpose to stand well with a man whom all Europe was seeking to propitiate.

So it came about that the men met in a private room by the library, and that no warder either watched or listened at a forbidding grating.

It is needless to say with what surprise Jack Ferman heard the name of his visitor, and with what vague suspicions he received it.

In some sense Maurevale of Dara had been the author of all his ills—alienating the affections of the woman he had loved, and creating by his genius those temptations he had been unable to resist. And now this man came to him in prison—upon a mission he could but surmise and resent.

John Philip Ferman, as his name was written correctly, had just attained his thirty-fifth year, was fair and florid in complexion, and possessed of those soldierly manners which women especially find pleasing. His antipathy to Maurevale of Dara had been entirely official until Lady Anna Maclain visited Highlands Castle, when it passed to a bitter jealousy which the fires of a racial prejudice intensified.

The humiliations, nay, the actual dangers, of his present position were acute enough that this new ordeal must be added to them.

And yet he went to the room, hoping he knew not what of the encounter.

The prince, who was dressed in a grey frock suit, and carried a heavy stick with a silver knob, stood to receive the prisoner, and held out his hand to him very willingly.

"Captain Ferman, believe me that I have come here in the hope of serving you——"

"I must believe, prince—but I'm glad you told me."

Maurevale ignored the obvious *gaucherie* of the retort, and pushed a chair forward.

"Shall we sit, Captain Ferman?"

"Then it's to be a long pow-wow."

"As you shall choose to make it. And first will you permit me a certain freedom in recounting an older story?"

"I'll permit you to say anything, you please if you'll tell me why they say I murdered a woman for whom I would have given twenty lives if I'd had 'em."

"We shall come to that by-and-by. To begin, you have been engaged for some months in trying to steal the secrets of my laboratory at Highlands, so far as they concerned your experts at Whitehall."

Jack Ferman leaned back in the plain deal chair, and his face flushed crimson. So matter-of-fact had been the accusation, so devoid of anger or of malice, that he was at a loss to find a word in answer to it. And there he sat, colouring like an overgrown schoolboy, and yet wishful to tell nothing but the truth.

"Well," he stammered at last, "that's so, and I'm not ashamed of it. They're all after 'em—and why shouldn't my country get 'em? We'd have paid you a bigger price than the Germans——"

Maurevale silenced him with a gesture.

"I bore you no ill-will, though I considered it wiser for prudence' sake to deny you my house. Your country has claims upon me, but none which determined me at present to depart from my own intentions where these secrets are concerned. You acted in what you believed to be the national interest, and I held you blameless. Then came your attempts to suborn my friends to your own ends. You tempted Lady Anna Maclain to betray

me, and were rebuffed. Do I speak the truth, Captain Ferman?"

The soldier bent his head: he would not look his adversary in the face.

"It's true—I can't deny it."

"And yet it is a most dishonourable thing to admit."

"It depends upon your point of view—I was doing my duty."

"Come, come, sir; your duty would have been richly rewarded had you succeeded in tempting this unhappy woman."

"I know it, nevertheless——"

"Pray spare me that. Your present situation may be in some part due to the folly of officials, but in a great measure it is the consequence of your own acts. Let us admit as much, and we have made a good beginning."

"Then I won't deny it. I was wrong to tempt Anna; but we both wanted the money, and we wanted it badly."

Maurevalc sighed.

"Had you come to me and said so, I would have spared you many hours of shame. Now they are inevitable—for you and for her. If there is any hope left to me, it is that I may save you from the final consequences of this unsoldierly career to which you have so long devoted yourself. For that I am come here—to be your friend because you were the friend of a woman I revered."

He spoke with a deep emotion which the other could not resist. Jack Ferman had played with the deeper truths of life for many years, but now the play was ended, and he saw himself upon the brink of an unimagined consequence and drew back afraid. He had loved Anna Maclain passionately enough—but to passion cupidity had been allied, and now he must gather the fruits of his desire and make no complaint because they were bitter.

"Oh!" he cried, almost as one in despair, "you don't tell me that any one believes it? Great God! they don't think I killed her?"

"The police are confident of it. They have found the poison

confinement in your rooms. I hear that the correspondence on both sides is compromising beyond hope. You actually threatened her in your letters. You spoke of giving her so many weeks or days in which to answer your so-called ultimatums. Believe me, there is but a plank between you and the scaffold. I doubt even my own power to save you——”

“But—but I say it’s a black lie. I never had any poison that I know of in my life . . . and as for killing her, I’d as soon have killed my own sister. Why don’t you tell them it’s a lie—why don’t my friends speak for me? I loved her madly. Must I be kennelled here like a dog for every coward to point a finger at? I tell you I loved her—I loved her madly—she never could have been anything to me, but I loved her—and now they say I could do this thing. Oh, you can’t believe it; there isn’t an honest man in all London who would suffer them to say it——”

Maurevale endeavoured to calm him, but succeeded with difficulty. Jack Ferman had gone lightly enough into this, the battle of his life, but the stress of it had broken him already, and he, who was the light of the social booths and bazaars a month ago, now cut a pitiful figure enough. In truth both Maurevale and the world which knew him had yet to discover the master key, but while the one had a clue to it already, the other did not so much as imagine that it existed.

“My dear fellow,” said Maurevale, with some kindness, “let me beg of you to reflect rather what you shall say than what may be said by others with whom we have no concern. I am here as your friend, and implore you to help me. The police say you are guilty; I believe you to be innocent——”

“Thank Heaven for that! If you say so, others will follow.”

“You must help me to say so. You must answer my questions.”

“So far as I can answer them.”

“But surely there are no secrets at such an hour as this?”

“I’ll tell you when you come to them.”

Maurevale sighed and watched the face keenly. This new manner did not reassure him; there was even the suspicion of a hangdog look, a something not altogether candid, a sudden lapse

to suspicion, a reticence which did not promise well. But he avoided any remark upon it and continued, suavely :

"Did you know Lady Constance Heliers at all?"

"Oh yes, I knew her."

"Was she ever in India——?"

"Not to my knowledge——"

"And therefore would not have been acquainted with Lady Anna at that time?"

"I never saw her there——"

"Although you were stationed—in the Punjab, I think, for some years——?"

"That's so; why do you ask?"

"I have a purpose—sufficient that you did not know her there. I now come to another point. You were at Strealy on the night of the murder?"

"I'll not deny it."

"Why did you go there?"

"To tell Anna something she very much wanted to know."

"Ah—and you feel indisposed to make me your confidant?"

"I cannot make any man my confidant."

"It is a question of honour as between man and woman, Captain Ferman?"

"It is so."

"Then I shall respect it absolutely; but you will not be surprised if others do not do so."

"I am prepared for that."

"And the consequences——?"

"Oh, I don't know; I daren't say—I won't think about it."

"They will compel you to think about it."

"Then let them. It's all the amends I can make her. Let them do what they like."

Maurevale nodded approvingly.

"You are a brave man, Captain Ferman."

"No, don't call me that. I tell you, I'm a coward—there isn't a bigger coward in all London to-day. Man, I just sit in my cell thinking about it all until the sweat runs down my face. I killed her, I, Jack Ferman—I killed her. And I must stand

before my fellow-men accused of that. I must hear the lawyers arguing it; I must fight for my life before a jury of my fellow-men who know nothing about the truth and never will know anything—when it's all over, I may go to the scaffold for her—go to my God, charged with the death of a woman who never had a truer friend. See, I am telling you my secret thoughts—you, the last man I would have named to hear them in all the country. You know now what I am, and you can pity or despise me as you choose. I tell you, I stand in the shadow of death and I know it; can I say more?"

He rose abruptly, a spasm of agony upon his face and his pupils dilated by the visions of his own creation.

"Afraid—for myself, yes, and for her no less. You know the truth now; you know the whole of it."

"Why do you say that? Am I a wizard?"

"No; but you are a man who is clever enough to believe that I am ready to die for Anna Maclain."

"Shielding the true murderer——"

"Ah, that's the question. Tell me who did it, and I will answer you."

"Then you yourself are in ignorance——"

"As ignorant as you are—if you are ignorant."

"Credit me with no superhuman powers, I beg of you. I am no wiser than the others, but I go to work in a different way. For instance, this heart of green jade——"

Ferman turned about, but his expression was simply curious.

"The trinket she wore on her bracelet! What's that got to do with it?"

"We must ascertain. Do you remember if she wore it upon the night you speak of?"

"I can't remember. But I've seen it, of course. A funny little green heart with some Chinese letters upon it. She used to consider it a sort of charm."

"Is that why she says, 'Pray that the green heart may hide me when the hour comes'? The police make nothing of it—but you will remember it, Captain Ferman."

"I do remember it, but I cannot speak of it."



"I see—this also concerns her honour. Would the same apply to her friend, White Hill——"

"Ah, you know about that——"

"I hear of it from the police."

"Ah, they are a clever lot. Well, White Hill is the name of a diamond mine. All the world knows that——"

"Oh, the world is not so well informed——"

"But I'll swear it—I'll swear it on my——"

"I think not, Captain Ferman, or I sha' begin to lose faith in you— White Hill is the name of a man. Will you tell me more now——"

"Not a word, if it costs me my life."

"White Hill, then, must be protected."

"I cannot tell you. He didn't kill her. He wasn't in England."

"I will believe you. There is nothing else, I think, except to speak of courage."

"Do you say it——"

"I do say it."

"After what has happened between us!"

"I say it in the name of the woman——"

"Oh, you have made a changed man of me; I see that the sun is shining."

"Beware, however, of your divinities, and—remember that I may fail."

"You—you fail——"

"It is possible. I must speak of it."

"I won't believe you. I shall sleep to-night. God! What the nights have been!"

"I can understand that. I must make them otherwise. By the way, you know they have a warrant for Blandy—my steward?"

"A warrant for Blandy—oh, come. A warrant for poor old Blandy—ha, ha, ha! Now that's news."

"Yes, and he has bolted."

Ferman became deadly white in an instant.

"Bolted! Blandy bolted——"

“Yes, I thought you would like to know. Well, I suppose the time is up. Good-bye, Captain Ferman. I don't suppose I shall be able to see you again until the trial. There you will hear of me.”

He held out his hand and the other shook it.

But he uttered no word, and his agitation was evident as Maurevale quitted the room and followed the warder to the great gate of the prison.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE HOUSE OF THE FIVE GREEN SHUTTERS

**M**AUREVALE had said that Mr. Blandy, his steward, had bolted, but this was only a manner of speaking, for it turned out afterwards that the good fellow had left a note for his master promising faithfully to return within the week, and pleading "urgent private affairs" for his absence.

How far he would have been faithful to this promise or what were his true intentions no man might say. He left Streatly upon the day of the inquest, and that night he was in London. There he stopped at a humble hotel in Soho, largely frequented by foreigners, and, having ordered his room and his dinner, sauntered about the streets for a while and then went off in the direction of Pentonville Prison.

The visit, if the testimony of Jabez Fenn, a young detective who followed the faithful Blandy upon his round, is to be believed, appeared to afford the steward but poor satisfaction. He was obviously restless and ill at ease; bought the recurring editions of the evening papers, but did no more than glance at them; haunted the prison as though he had the will to visit but was afraid; and returned finally to the mean hotel and to the by no means humble repast he had commanded there.

His evening—for as such he would have referred to it—was occupied in the lighter amusements. A good bottle of Burgundy, despite the season, put some heart into Mr. Blandy and brought quite unnecessary colour to his cheeks. He puffed at a cigar vulgarly and omnivorously as though to lose none of the smoke for which he had paid. Becoming holder each hour he quitted the hotel at last to visit a music hall, where none laughed louder at Scotch sallies or misunderstood them so thoroughly. Finally,

he returned to Soho at a quarter to twelve o'clock, and, still unconscious that he was watched, he went to his bed to sleep as soundly as the most innocent man in the country.

It was late next day when he descended to breakfast, and London by no means at her best. A fatal blight had settled upon the city and hidden the sun from perspiring humanity in the intolerable streets. Though the month was July the atmosphere should have been that of humid November, and to make matters worse heavy showers of hot rain fell at intervals, but did nothing to clear the air. Upon such a morning Mr. Blandy opened his newspaper to find that the police were after him, and that he was wanted in connection with the murder of Lady Anna Maclain.

He sat at a well-spread breakfast table when he read this intimation, and had self-control enough to keep the sheet before his eyes that none might discover his confusion. If his heart drummed and his breathing was stertorous, none of his neighbours remarked the fact, for they were foreigners to a man, and would have suffered any eccentricity from that unknown species, the Englishman. To them, Blandy, the steward, was simply *bon garçon* fretting for his food. And he, in turn, ignored their presence, for was not he remembering that he had given his name to Alphonse, the proprietor of the house, and that the first fool who asked for it would most certainly get it?

He, Arthur Blandy, wanted for murder! It had come to that, then, after twenty years of honourable service. He, who had been the model for the servants' hall in the past, church-goer, oracle, wise man, he to stand in the dock with felons. And all for the sake of a promise—but he thrust that thought aside, for it was but a new reflection upon his folly.

A wise man, perhaps, would have put on his hat and gone straight over to the nearest police station to give himself up. Arthur Blandy did not dare to do that. A dull perception appeared to tell him that defence might be his undoing. He had gone through the incidents of the crime a hundred times since its discovery, and had arrived invariably at the conclusion, not only that the world might think him guilty, but that a jury

might declare him to be so. And now the moment had come. The police were at his heels: he might feel their hands upon his shoulder before the clock struck again.

He put the paper down and made some pretence to eat his breakfast. A subsequent confession admitted that the room swam before his eyes, and that the people in the street were so many black figures swaying in the mists, but he remained manfully at the table for at least a quarter of an hour. And when he rose he had mastered the more evident agitation from which he suffered, and could ask for his bill in a firm voice.

Clearly now the man's mind was hovering between a choice of two courses, and he could arrive at no settled resolution. Going to the door, he bade the German porter call him a cab, but delayed to get up, and conversed disjointedly and in broken phrases with Monsieur Alphonse, the proprietor. When this mood passed he acted with great energy, hurrying hither and thither, giving his directions in a loud voice and announcing to all who were there to listen that his destination was Euston. Thither the hansom drove him ploddingly, but he did not stop at the terminus, and, giving another direction at the top of the Tottenham Court Road, he was carried to St. Pancras Station, where he took a third-class ticket for Ely, and found a compartment to himself.

The train left London at twenty minutes past twelve, and arrived at the cathedral city at two o'clock. Mr. Blain appears to have been still indefinite in his purpose, for he did not seem to seek out an hotel, and the report says that he remained at three when he sat down to a modest repast in a dining-room. At four o'clock when he climbed into a dog cart he started for an unknown destination. He had, however, previously questioned the groom as to the whereabouts of a certain well-known inn, Miles from Nowhere, and, having ascertained that this was situated upon the marshes of the River Cam, and was supposed to be exactly half-way between Cambridge and Ely, he drove away alone, and did not return to Ely till midnight.

His absence, he it said, would have been the occasion of some excitement at the inn but for a usual circumstance, and one

that set some tongues wagging in the house. This was nothing more than the arrival in Ely, at a quarter to eight that night, of a powerful Mercedes car carrying a single passenger and driven by a Frenchman who had hardly a word of English. When the car stopped the owner, as it seemed, descended, and put a few questions to the landlord in a tone which did not fail to command a respectful answer.

"You have some of my servants lodging here?"

"Well, sir, I don't know about that—but there is a stout gentleman—"

"What is his name—?"

"I can't say, sir. I was over at Mildenhall when he came, but I don't know, and if you wait a while I'll stop and ask him."

The stranger seemed to be as requested, and the landlord returned to the intimacy that the stout gentleman had left behind him, as was supposed, and that the initials on the card were "A.B." Certainly he had hired a dogcart to take him to a part of the world rarely visited by anybody—viz., the inn known as Five Miles from Nowhere. This information was imparted with true rustic bonhomie, and without an afterthought of suspicion—so guilelessly indeed that the stranger's opinion that he himself would pay the bill looked no word less domestic whatsoever.

"Your servant, did you say, sir——?"

"My steward, who is here upon my business. This is my card. And now, if you please, for my servant's valise."

The landlord gaped at the card, read and re-read it; then doffed his hat with celerity and stood bareheaded before his guest.

"Glad to meet you, sir. I've won many a good 'un on your business's horses at Newmarket——"

"And will many another, I hope. Do not trouble about the change—and do not expect my servant to return."

He re-entered the car—a limousine whose many windows stood wide open—and was driven away at a rapid pace in the direction of Cambridge. This was at the hour when Mr. Blandy,

having quitted the safe high-road as he had been directed, arrived at a country whose desolation appalled him, and whose solitudes are without rival even in the marshes. Flat to the point of wonder, its horizon without trees, a brown river flowing sluggishly between high banks of mud—humanity appeared indeed to have fled from it, and even nature to hide beneath her sorriest cloak.

A solitary village stood upon the confines of this dark prairie, but thereafter the traces of habitation were few. Here and there a white farmhouse rose protestingly amid a rampart of dykes—but the grey road was almost without landmarks, and the few labourers who trod it were the guardians of the pasture lands which science has salved from the waters. No whisper of a kindlier land, no voice from the world of men and things came to break the silence of the waste. The sun gave no images to the black pools, nor did the wind stir them to life and beauty. Everywhere a droning harmony of the insect-laden air lulled to drowsiness, but never to activities. For this was the Ultimate Land of which the poets have written.

Mr. Blandy drove out upon this wild marsh just as the church clock in the village struck seven.

He had never visited the place in his life before, and yet some of the landmarks appeared familiar to him. The great square tower of Ely Cathedral, looming in the distance as in mockery of the desolation around him, enchained his eyes and claimed his interest. From time to time he stopped as though to take the bearings of the tower by a little silver compass he carried upon his watch-chain. The few landmarks were diligently observed, the trend of the river and the situation of the farm-houses. Presently he espied a clump of poplars situated, perhaps, the fifth part of a mile from the track, and these interested him greatly. He looked to the right and to the left, watched the road afar to be sure that none moved upon it, then turned the horse toward the grass and drove straight to the thicket.

The road was very rough, little more than a cart's track, and one which did not appear to have been used since the winter. The difficulties, however, did not daunt Mr. Blandy, who held

on grimly to his seat as the cart swung and rolled over the ruts—and considered himself well rewarded when a sudden turn permitted him to see a squat house at the heart of the copse and to count the windows which gave upon the garden. These he perceived were five in number, and diving into his pocket he produced a paper upon which were written the words, "the house of the five green shutters." No longer did he doubt that he had reached his destination, and whipping up the horse and buttoning up his coat, as was his habit, he drove straight on to the garden gate and there called loudly for some one to admit him.

Mr. Blandy has confessed that he waited a considerable time before it dawned upon him that the house was unoccupied.

His loud shouts of "Hi, there—are you all asleep?" obtained no answer whatever. He did not espy any dog or hear the baying of a distant hound. A poor, half-starved cat did, indeed, crawl upon the window-sill of an upper room and mew most dismally, but her appearance said clearly that she had not been fed for some days, and that the omission was due to the simple fact that there was no one about to feed her. This dawned at last even upon the dull intellect of Arthur Blandy, and stepping down from the cart and tethering the horse he advanced up the narrow garden path and beat upon the door.

No one answered his knock. A critical eye cast upon the asters and geraniums of the tangled garden told him that they perished for want of water, and had been some days untended. The shutters of the house were open and the front door unlocked. Mr. Blandy hesitated no longer to do the obvious thing, and opened the door boldly. He entered the hall and looked about him.

There was nothing interesting here, and yet Mr. Blandy appeared much relieved to discover an old hatstand and a plain deal chair beside it. In the well of the stand there stood a common pink parasol, such as women use in a garden, and an old iron rake with a broken handle. The stairs beyond were carpeted, and a scrubby geranium in a dirty pot served for the ornament of the miniature conservatory upon the first floor.



These did not interest Mr. Blandy at all, and opening the door of the right-hand room without further ceremony he peeped round the edge of it as though still afraid there might be somebody in the house.

The alarm was quite unnecessary. None the less the somewhat elegant furniture of this cramped apartment astonished the worthy steward and brought him to a halt. These chairs of a French design—they were never built for such a house as this. The buffet with the great silver cup—it did not speak of a peasant occupation. He stared open-mouthed at the Japanese ornaments of the mantelshelf, at the neat row of leather-bound books and the elegant bureau which contained them. A step further and the portrait of a woman confronted him—and at that Mr. Blandy gaped as he had not done for many a day.

It was a full-length picture, drawn in crayon, but with rare skill. Arthur Blandy knew nothing of nationalities, but his limited education caused him to say that the portrait was that of a Turkish lady, young and beautiful beyond all expression. Such eyes looked out upon the astonished man that he felt quite abashed even when he remembered it was but a picture. The deftly suggested robe of pure white, the veil fallen aside as though by accident; the oddly shaped Eastern hands with the tapering filbert nails, the little feet peeping out from the spotless petticoat were all portrayed so faithfully that Mr. Blandy found himself drawing nearer the picture inch by inch until at last, forgetful of everything—of his situation, his purpose in coming there, and even of his danger, he dashed his hat down violently upon the table and fell to a vulgarity he could not resist.

"What a gal!" said the steward, and then again, "I'm damned if ever I see her like," and with that he thrust his hands deep into his trousers pockets and stared intently at the picture for five full minutes together.

The distant baying of a hound and the sudden failure of the light reminded him where he stood, and brought him to a new recollection of his purpose in visiting that scene of remotest desolation.

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He had been brave enough in the sunshine, but now that the sun had set, a strange fear of the place fell upon him and set him itching to be off.

He had come there upon one of those strange impulses which drive men headlong when crime is the whip, and now that he had come the fatuity of his purpose dawned upon him.

Of what service, either to him or to the man who had employed him, were these witnesses to a prosperity foreign to the marshes? How would they save Captain Ferman from the gallows or help him, Arthur Blandy, to deny that he was accessory? The answer must be, "Not at all." And meanwhile the unknown master of this place might be watching him where he stood—prying upon him even while he pried, resolving even while he stood irresolute. And at this he went hot and cold and made a hasty movement to the door.

"I'll go to London," he said; "I'll see the captain's lawyers."

The resolve was good, but hardly was it made when he heard a step upon the path outside, and standing rigid, he cried, "The police, by God!"

## CHAPTER IX

### FLIGHT

FOR a moment Arthur Blandy listened with ear intent ; then a new expression crossed his face.

"It's the prince, by all that's wonderful," he cried aloud.

He had never been afraid of so kindly a master, and he was not afraid now.

A child finding a father in a moment of the uttermost peril, a prisoner at the bar told that the case against him is false, could have experienced no revulsion of feeling as sure as that which now came upon the astonished steward.

"Your Highness ; thank Heaven for that."

Maurevale wore a long travelling cloak and a motor cap with ear flaps which disguised him effectually. He had left his motor a third of a mile down the road, and had walked to the cottage as surely as though he visited it every day. Entering without any hesitation, he espied the quaking Blandy, and a smile crossed his face as he did so.

"Good evening, Blandy. I don't think you were expecting me."

"Lord, sir, who'd have thought of such a thing ?"

"And yet you leave your wheel-marks very plainly upon the dusty road. A desolate neighbourhood, Blandy, and one with which you are quite unacquainted."

"That's true, sir. I was never here in my life before to-day."

"And you propose to live here in the future ?"

"No, Highness ; God forbid."

"Ah, but we shall talk about it presently. There are other things to be discussed before we do so. To begin with, Blandy,

I have been travelling a good many hours, and am very hungry. Do me the favour to visit the larder of this house and to see if there is anything to eat there."

"The larder, Highness—but I don't know if they've got a larder."

"They will hardly be without so desirable an addition to a furnished villa. Make your investigations and report to me."

The steward was almost too astonished to speak, but he went off nevertheless, and the prince could hear him delving presently amid strange crockery and stumbling against doors with which he was unfamiliar. He himself spent the interlude in a swift survey of the apartment, which culminated finally in the detection of the picture and a prolonged study of it. A pocket glass with a powerful lens helped him to examine this painting very closely, especially the texture of it; and, not content with this, he removed a fragment of the yellow paper and put it away carefully in a little silver box carried in his waistcoat pocket. When this was done Mr. Blandy's step in the passage warned him of espionage, and he sat again in the chair by the window and would seem to have no eyes but for the solitudes of the landscape.

"Well, Blandy, are we to dine comfortably?"

"There's nothing to eat in the place, sir, but a bit of cold rice-pudding and some stale bread. Why, it must be two days' old."

"Let me see it, Blandy—a rice-pudding, did you say?"

"Yes, sir; nothing else whatever, excepting the groceries."

"Ah, we are indeed unfortunate, and the lunch basket in my car quite empty, I think. You yourself dined at Ely, I believe."

"I did so."

"And told every one that you were going to the village inn known as 'Five Miles from Nowhere.'"

"That's so, sir."

"How very foolish, Blandy—and how very kind to your friends the police."

"Oh, master, I'll take my oath before Heaven that I had nothing to do with it."

Maurevale looked at him beneath gathered brows.

"And the man who bought the fidelity which was mine—your employer who bade you spy upon me for money, what of him, Arthur Blandy?"

"I don't know, sir, any more than a child. If you ask me truly, I believe he done it."

"'He did it,' Blandy, if you please—not 'he done it.' Were I of your opinion, be sure I would not jest. But I am here for your sake and for his—because I know humanity, and do not judge it. Now show me your rice-pudding and let me see if I must go fasting. Hurry up man, for time is short. Do you not know that the police are on our track, and that I am at my wits' ends to save you from them? Look alive, then, before it is too late."

He spoke peremptorily, and a chill ran through the steward's veins, as though the hand of Fate had touched him with icy fingers. This wizard knew—but would knowledge bring salvation? Arthur Blandy trembled in every limb as he set the things upon the table and watched his master's keen eye examining them.

"Do you know anything of rice, Blandy?"

"It's twopence a pound, I believe, sir."

"A serviceable reminder. Observe the fine quality of this particular variety. It is such as they eat in China, I think—a growth that is rarely employed in this country."

"Indeed, Highness, I would never have thought of it."

"But you had some other country than England in your mind when you came to this lonely house, Blandy?"

"It wouldn't be true to say that, sir."

"Then why did you come?"

"Highness, I'll keep nothing from you——"

"You would be wise not to do so."

"Captain Ferman told me all about this house three months ago."

"I have imagined as much."

"He was always very anxious about Lady Anna . . . used to ask about her almost every day. 'Blandy,' he says to me, 'if ever you hear of any trouble happening to her and you can't get at me to tell me all about it, you go to Ely as I have directed

you, and give 'em my message. It shall be worth five hundred of the best, I promise you——”

Maurevale listened with strained ear.

“What was the message, Blandy?”

“I don't know its meaning any more than the——”

“Tell me what it was.”

“The word ‘hasib,’ sir—I was to lay particular stress upon the hache.”

“I see, lest it should be misunderstood. Do you know what the word ‘hasib’ means? I think you said that you did not. Well, it means ‘danger,’ Blandy. It is a word used in Arabic very frequently.”

“Indeed, sir, you astonish me.”

“And you were sent here, plainly, to warn some person, who, however, has already received that warning and has fled.”

“It would appear so, sir——”

“In which case we might be clever enough—but let us see, here is a bureau at which a person might write. There are books upon it, and one has lately been used. Yes, it is a common railway guide, and the page is marked at the trains—why at the trains—where do you think, Blandy?”

“I cannot make a guess, sir——”

“Then I'll tell you. The train is from Ely to Harwich, the through express to catch the Continental boat. How interesting, how very interesting—and, upon my word, this is more remarkable still.”

Maurevale's astonishment was quite unfeigned. The page of the Bradshaw had been marked by a telegraph form, and that form, it appeared, had been delivered to a person named Prevost at the Marsh House Farm some days prior to their visit. When the prince passed it to the amazed Blandy, that worthy discovered the identical word he had been commanded to utter.

“Why, it says ‘hasib,’ sir!”

“It does, Blandy——”

“And says it plainly——”

“So plainly that we must destroy it lest the police should discover it.”

"You said, Highness——"

"That the police must not discover it."

"Not the police—but that telegram might save Captain Ferman's life."

"More likely to hang him, my excellent fellow, much more likely——"

"Does your Highness seriously mean this?"

"As seriously as I say to you that the least mischance to-night may cost you your neck. Was it not to save it that I had you watched to-day?"

"You had me watched, sir!"

"Certainly, from the moment you left my house until you set out from Ely. You see, I am lucky; I might have missed you on the road; but I did not, and here we are, and the question is, at what time will the police arrive?"

"You think they will come here then, sir?"

"If you do not prevent them, certainly they will. Crediting them with common intelligence, they should be here before the morning. They may be here sooner. We, however, shall be already on our way. Now go and see if that horse of yours is still there. He troubles me greatly, Blandy; he is much in my mind—go and see that all is well with him."

The steward left the room, hardly knowing whether he stood on his head or his heels; but Maurevale, watching him out, began to search the apartment anew with swift and searching eyes; and when that was done he went upstairs and passed from bedroom to bedroom of the lonely house.

A large apartment overlooking the road interested him much, and he examined its contents minutely, especially the empty bottles on the washhand-stand and the fragments of paper in the drawers of the dressing-table. A smaller room, plainly furnished for a servant, and a nursery which had evidently not been used for a long time, were the objects but of a brief delay; and, when he had searched the kitchens and the sculleries and had returned for a few moments to the sitting-room to open and identify the books on the writing-table, he was ready to set out with Mr. Blandy.

It had fallen full dark by this time, a moonless night with heavy cloud in the west, and a shudder of wind upon the marshes. Lazarre, the French chauffeur, had lighted the acetylene lamps of his car, and they shone as stars across the flat meadows and showed the turbid waters of the dykes at the roadside. Not a human being, however, passed upon that lonely track; no human tread disturbed the solitude of the waste; and when the prince was sure of the fact he bade Blandy get up into the trap and drive on before him.

"Until I shall stop you, Blandy, at some convenient spot; the signal will be three blasts of the horn. Do you understand?"

"I understand, sir——"

"Then drive on as fast as you can. Hush—one moment. Do you hear that, Blandy!"

"It's a hound barking, sir——"

"And it means?"

"It means they are after me, sir."

He said it with chattering teeth, the while his hands trembled, and he fumbled with the reins until he could hardly sort them out.

"I'd better give myself up, sir."

"You will hang if you do, Blandy."

"No child's more innocent than me."

"Then play the man—or must I play it for you? Here, give me the reins. Now, get up beside me—fool, I say, get up. Don't you understand the police are on your heels?"

Mr. Blandy climbed up anyhow, awed by the stern word and afraid to disobey it.

They drove a mile and a half, perhaps, and then espied a farmhouse, one dim light in a bedroom indicating its situation, and a watch-dog barking loudly at their approach. This they passed without hesitation, for it stood at some distance from the road; and when they had passed it, they found the grassy track changed for the semblance of a tolerable highway, running between muddy banks across a vast marsh where innumerable cattle stood asleep and motionless waiting for the dawn. Following this a little way, the prince at length discovered a gate



giving upon a meadow, and halting there he bade the astonished Blandy descend.

"Open the gate," he said in a voice which brooked no argument, and was obeyed without a word.

"Now help me to unharness this obliging horse—do you hear what I say, Blandy——?"

"Oh yes, Highness, but the people at Ely——"

"They will have no cause to regret the circumstance. Come, man, are you losing your wits?"

"I beg your Highness's pardon."

"You are right to do so. The police will admit as much tomorrow. Do you not still hear them, Blandy? Surely you have ears!"

"Oh yes, I can hear that dog quite plain——"

"You do not hear a dog at all—you hear another motor-car. Listen again. That is a Panhard humming across the marsh. You have some three minutes, Blandy, no more. Did not I tell you so?"

"I'm sure I leave it to your Highness. It makes me quite faint to think of it."

Maurevale smiled, but did not answer. He had spoken truly when he said that he heard a motor humming across the marsh, and he realised that there was no need to alarm his wretched servant further by any suggestion of hypothetical danger.

"Get into the car!" he cried suddenly, as he turned the horse upon the marsh and left the derelict cart by the roadside. The steward obeyed him without a word, and then as peremptorily, Maurevale told his driver in French to turn out all the lamps.

"We must pick our way for a mile or two, Lazarre. They will stop here quite a long time, and we can light up after we have passed the next village. Now, go ahead, my boy; I trust to your skill."

Lazarre replied that the banks would make the driving easy; and he started at once, picking his way with rare cleverness and delighting in the test of his ability. They were none too soon, for hardly had they made the first bend of the narrow road when

a glimmer of light above the meadow indicated the approaching car, and they could hear the squeal of the brakes as it was brought to a halt and the men spread abroad to search the fields about. Maurevale had reckoned that the derelict would serve them above any device his ingenuity could suggest. It was an hour before the police left the place at all, and by that time the fugitives were beyond Six Mile Bottom, and well upon their way to a destination where none would follow.

Day had dawned when Arthur Blandy first began to understand that his master had saved him, for the time being, at any rate, and that their journey had carried them to the brink of a wide estuary, beyond which were the fretting waters of the North Sea. He perceived a village upon the far bank, and a few yachts lying at anchor in the fairway. To one of these, a shapely white steamer, from whose copper funnel a haze of smoke was drifting, the prince made a signal directly he came down to the water's edge, and it was answered immediately by the watch on board. A boat put off and came to the mole, and Blandy understood that he was to be the passenger.

"I will send for you," said Maurevale, "directly I have need of you, and it is safe for you to come. My officers have their instructions, and you will obey them implicitly. Meanwhile, I wish you *bon voyage*, and congratulate you upon your good luck. Really, Mr. Blandy, you are a very fortunate man."

The steward was too dumfounded to speak. The swift episodes of this terrible week, the wonders of the long night, the seeming miracle which had carried him to the ship and the sea stilled his tongue and left him witless. He muttered a few awkward words, tried to ask a question and failed as dismally, and then, without any further utterance whatever, stepped into the boat and was rowed away towards the waiting yacht.

Maurevale, however, re-entered his car and bade Lazarre take him back to London.

The hours were precious, and he knew that the dead woman bade him lose none of them.

## CHAPTER X

### AT NEW SCOTLAND YARD AND ELSEWHERE

A SINGLE landaulette set down Maurevale at the doors of New Scotland Yard at a quarter to nine, and he was admitted at once into Sir Malcolm Morrison's private office.

This was just forty-eight hours after his visit to Cambridgeshire, and London still talked of little else but its nine days' wonder.

And this was very natural, for the death of Lady Anna Maclain had postponed the social festivities planned by more than one famous house which suffered by death what it never would have sacrificed to the living woman.

Elsewhere the friendships were busy and staunch. Hundreds who had known Captain Ferman protested against the monstrous criminality of his arrest, while the minority which declared the evidence to be incontestable was hardly able to obtain a hearing.

The disappearance of Arthur Blandy and the discovery of the derelict cart by which he had attempted to escape the police were the last straw.

The common tongue now named Blandy as the real author of the crime, and hinted darkly that the old Count of Fours, who had returned to Paris, knew much that a jury would like to know. Wonder was expressed that the police had made no inquiries in that direction, or if they had made them had failed to profit by them.

In the main astonishment prevailed, and an utter confusion of ideas which took refuge in a general estimate of Ferman's chances and the efforts which his friends were making on his behalf. Some said that all depended upon Sir Malcolm Morrison and his mastery of the evidence; others declared that if Ferman

died, Prince Maurevale would have sent him to the scaffold. But all agreed this must be the most sensational trial the new century had known, and that nothing quite like it was to be read in social story.

At such a moment, and at the height of such a cataclysm of argument and of interest, Maurevale met the great detective for the second time since the day of the crime, and listened with keen interest to the excuse which had summoned him to Scotland Yard.

Never perhaps had there been such a battle of wits in that official sanctum. Seated upon either side of a great oak table, the one man old and white in experience and success, the other buoyantly youthful and animated by the loftiest purpose, the two faced each other as masters of a diplomacy which should give life or death to the subject of it.

Each realised the subtlety of the mind opposed to him. Each knew that a word ill-spoken might prove the master key.

"You sent for me, Sir Malcolm, and I have travelled a hundred miles to see you. It would be about my servant, Blandy, of course."

Sir Malcolm's brows lifted slightly—he had a note of this upon his papers, but about to mention other things.

"We shall come to that, sir," he said, with just a suspicion of impatience, "but not of yourself. Had I wished to discuss the servant, it would not have been here. What I wish to tell you concerns yourself. Is that unexpected?"

"By no means. But it is a subject of which I am very weary."

"And yet apparently none of sustained interest to others. You have in your service a young man named Otto Walther. Do you repose complete confidence in him?"

"The most absolute."

"Then you will be interested to know that at nine o'clock last night he attended a meeting of the Italian Society of so-called patriots at 29A Portland Place. Was that to your knowledge?"

Maurevale was very greatly interested.

"Indeed," he said with raised brows. "So you believe that Otto had turned politician. And Italian! That is quite extraordinary, Sir Malcolm."

"I ventured the opinion that you would think so. Let us see. Here is an account of his movements. He departs from Highlands Castle at half-past eleven o'clock; is in London at 1.11; drives from there to Eton Terrace, and appears to have an interview with a lady who was lately your guest, the Lady Constance Heliers; goes afterwards to some apartments in Welbeck Street, tenanted, we find, by his father, Dr. Frederick Walther; is unable to see that gentleman, and goes thence to the South Kensington Museum, spends a couple of hours there, and dines afterwards at Earl's Court. At nine he is in Portland Place, at the meeting of the Italian Society, where he remains until a quarter-past ten o'clock, when he accompanies his father back to Welbeck Street, and thence goes alone to Paddington. Do you not find that an interesting recital, Highness?"

Maurevale assented with a nod.

"In all particulars but one most interesting and accurate, Sir Malcolm."

"Do you mean to say——?"

"That all this is known to me? Yes; I mean to say so."

"And what is the particular we have overlooked?"

"Unimportant, but human. A lady accompanied our young friend to South Kensington, and dined with him at the exhibition afterwards." Sir Malcolm sighed.

"I had not imagined that you worked so zealously, or would watch those whom you trust."

"Pardon me, I am too old a student of human nature to conduct my experiments at hazard. Those who serve me are first taught to be meticulous, and after that to be elusive. The lad Otto has been watched, not because I fear him, because I fear for him. He visited London to serve me—as you would serve me, Sir Malcolm, by the warning you are about to utter. At the same time I am really very much obliged to you."

"There is no question of obligation, sir. It has been known to us for some months that the agents of at least two Powers

have been instructed to devote their whole attention to your affairs. Now we understand that the time for patience has passed, and that more drastic methods may be followed. Naturally, our first duty is to warn you."

"I affirm my sense of obligation. I can see that you are already disposed to take a wider view where this particular case is concerned. Does it go so far as to suppose Captain Ferman's innocence?"

"By no means. I am inclined to think that it supports an assumption of guilt."

"Indeed?"

"Supposing always that the dead lady was the obstacle to the success of the captain and his friends."

"I see, I see. Certain good people, being determined to steal what they cannot buy, find Lady Anna is in their way. But I remain perplexed."

"It is a delicate matter."

"Go on, go on——"

"They believed you were in love with her."

Maurevale inclined his head.

"That would be the common opinion. I understand it."

"And being in love with her, that you might bestow upon her knowledge which the others could not purchase or steal."

"In short, my dear Sir Malcolm, that I might surrender to her entreaty and come to an immediate understanding with the English Government at her call. I am glad they do her so much justice. At the same time my solicitude for the young man remains. Why should he have killed a woman who, if this account be true, was working for a common object? Surely your hypothesis would not make of him a traitor?"

Sir Malcolm drummed upon the table with his fingers.

"I am afraid it is so, sir."

"Then, permit me to tell you it is an exceedingly foolish hypothesis."

"We shall establish it in court, I fear."

"Upon whose evidence?"

"Upon the evidence of circumstance and probability. The

correspondence makes it plain. She implores him in her letters to abandon his hopes. What hopes? That she would rob you at his bidding. Are there others? Can you say that such a man worked for English employers? I think it is impossible. He was poor, and the Government which tempted him rich. Beware of its agents, sir, for when you become sufficiently dangerous—well, then I will answer for nothing."

"I remain your debtor. Were the information a little more specific it would be more valuable. I mean if there were names——"

"I have mentioned one. Your servant, Otto Walther. His friends will naturally be the objects of your suspicion. I see that your own agents are being employed in this matter. Let me counsel them to begin by watching this young man. Remember, his father was a German suspect five-and-twenty years ago. The skin is cast, but the man remains. So I say, vigilance—and, again, vigilance—and for the third time, vigilance."

"I shall not forget it. Meanwhile you forbid me to carry good news to Captain Ferman's friends?"

"It is impossible. That young man will pay the ultimate penalty as sure as I am sitting in this chair."

"Pardon me, Sir Malcolm, but you are standing."

They laughed together, for the chief's earnestness had carried him to his feet, and he stood when he spoke of "vigilance." The jest passed, however, in an instant, and the two separated upon the more serious notes of menace and of warning, the one having learned much, the other little from the interview. Whatever had been Maurevale's attitude as an auditor, he was deeply impressed by the earnestness of Sir Malcolm's words, and he left the building in a new mood of that despair with which a deeper study of the tragedy did not fail to afflict him.

He worked to establish peace among the nations, and this was his reward; that he must defend his honour and his life against the nations' emissaries. Even here, in this land of liberty, in London, the heart of the world, men conspired that they might debase his hopes and make of him a discredited dreamer, who

must pay the uttermost farthing for his faith in humanity and its destiny. The preacher of the noblest creed that man can recite, the creed of Peace, these schemers would buy his silence at a price, or, failing to buy it, resort to measures more desperate than purchase. This he had always known; but to-night the truth of it shone clear in the darkness of the labyrinth. He must protect himself against them that the innocent should not suffer by his ambitions. All his intellect, his wealth, his influence, must be brought to bear upon one object: the truth and its publication to the world.

The carriage had taken him from Scotland Yard to Park Lane, and he awoke from his reverie to find himself approaching the "little white house," known to every omnibus driver as "Maurie's," and very familiar to the many distinguished foreigners who visit London during the spring and summer months.

It was then a quarter to ten o'clock, and the social ferment of the night at its zenith.

He recognised many acquaintances; women enshrouded in satin and ermine who were rocked in the cradle of a luxurious equipage as they passed from stage to stage upon the exacting pilgrimage; men who hurried by in hansoms or taxi-cabs, familiar figures haunting the steps of clubs. Open windows, the visions of white figures and of stooping backs, the froth of music, the aureole of lamps spoke of ambitious hospitalities and of a response no more real. He espied the beggars lurking in the shadow of the park railings, and would ask himself again what is the true meaning of this play we call life, and whither must the truth or the justice of it be sought? When he answered that sympathy is the key, and by sympathy alone shall the riddle be read, he thought, he knew not why, of Stella Insole.

He had known thousands of women in his adventurous life, but never yet one who thus could compel remembrance, or remind him that the hours were so many since last he had seen her; and he began to be impatient because the traffic delayed him and the mass of carriages forbade him to press on quickly. When at last he entered the hall of his own house, he asked



immediately if the young ladies had arrived from Streatly, and was answered by his butler that they were then upstairs, having delayed to dine until nine o'clock.

"Which is to say that they did not think you would return to-night, Highness," the man added, fearing with true menial apprehension that he might have to serve the repast anew. But Maurevale immediately undeceived him.

"I am going to the duke's reception in half-an-hour. Let them prepare me a bath. I will see Miss Stella in my study immediately . . . and afterwards if Paul is here——"

"He returned twenty minutes ago, Highness."

"Then let him come when I ring."

He passed on up the stairs and entered his study, a long, narrow room at the back of the house, lighted by lamps cunningly placed in the frieze, and harbouring books which the rarest taste had furnished. Here a moment later came Stella Insole, dressed in a gown of black lace and wearing an ornament of diamonds about her neck—and as she stood in the glow of the light, her eyes bright with expectancy and her hair aflame with threads of gold, he understood that she also had been counting the hours, and that impatience was not his alone.

"You sent for me, Prince——"

"Indeed, yes, Stella—to hear you reproach me that it was not sooner. Let us see, it is four days since I have seen you—four days. Have you remembered that?"

"Oh yes—but I understood that it must be so."

"And that I must go away again immediately?"

She shook her head. Her quick breathing showed an agitation she could not hide.

"Will that be for long? I hope not."

"I hope so, too. When next I see you it will be at Lausanne for the Conference."

Her eyes were wide open now.

"Do you wish me to go to Lausanne, then?"

He began to pace the room as though thinking deeply.

"We must have change. It is the master-key of life. I go to Switzerland for the Peace Congress, and afterwards to the

East. You will naturally wish to visit your friends, and since London has so little to offer us, perhaps you would like to take your sister to France."

He paused and looked at her, and then, as though a look reproached him and he was ashamed of the subterfuge, he said:

"Stella, I wish you to accept the invitation of our old friend the Count of Fours, and to take your sister to the château at Aizy-la-Belle."

He knew that she would be astonished, but he was equally sure of her assent. Stella, indeed, was not thinking of herself at all, but of her sister Kitty, and of what absence must mean to her at such an hour. So much Maurevale understood without words, and taking her hand he said:

"It is wiser for both of you. These are dangerous hours, and the less Kitty knows of them the better. You will go to the count's house to help me, Stella—and to help your sister. He is a very pleasant gentleman, and his good wife has no faults but those proper to her sex. Let us help them if we can, to a better understanding of each other. Above all things, let us try to clear her good name from the paltry suspicions which cluster about it. Will you not go to Aizy-la-Belle for that?"

"Indeed, I will do so gladly."

"Then you shall start to-morrow morning. Meanwhile I am all curiosity to hear what has happened at Highlands in my absence. You have much to tell me, I am sure, Stella."

"So much that I hardly know how to tell you at all."

"Then do not think of me in the matter. I shall be a stranger to whom you are telling everything from the beginning. It is important that you should do so, Stella. Our friend's life depends upon our candour. We must hide nothing from ourselves, not even our thoughts. Now sit there and tell me. I shall not interrupt you."

Very quietly and methodically she began to recite the events of the strange night, confessed her impulse to visit Lady Anna's dressing-room and to search it anew lest anything had been overlooked. When she spoke of her belief that she heard steps,

and of her conviction that some one watched her while she worked, the prince listened with grave face and ear intent. But a stranger confession was to come. This very morning, as she was leaving Paddington Station, the same idea had recurred to her. For an instant she heard behind her on the platform the same pattering of feet which had so alarmed her at Streatly. Now as then her attempt at discovery had been vain. There had been no one near her to excite suspicion. A holiday crowd surged upon the platform, but was not remarkable. She did not believe that she had been followed.

"None the less," said Maurevale, "you were convinced of the steps?"

"I am sure of it—I could not be mistaken."

"A quick step?"

"A shuffling step, as though some one walked in slippers."

"Did you look round quickly?"

"At once."

"And remarked no one near you?"

"Except a porter and a woman of the working classes."

"So that it might have been a hallucination?"

"I do not think it was."

"But it might have been. And upon this occasion our young friend Otto Walther was not there to help you?"

"Oh yes; he came up with us from Streatly."

"He accompanied you—let me see, did Otto question you after you had visited the dressing-room?"

"Yes, several times. I thought him very anxious."

"To know of your discoveries—which is odd, since you made none?"

"None of importance."

"You would not have done. There was nothing whatever in that room, I remember, but a glove in the right-hand drawer of the dressing-table?"

"And in the glove——"

He turned in his chair and looked her straight in the face.

"There was something in the glove, child?"

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She coloured with a girl's pride that she should have been able to answer him, and fumbling an instant with a locket attached to her bracelet she took therefrom a white tablet and laid it on the table before him.

"That was in the glove," she said.

## CHAPTER XI

### PAUL THE RUSSIAN

**M**AUREVALE laid the tablet upon a sheet of crimson blotting-paper, and, taking a magnifying-glass from the drawer upon the right-hand side of the table, he studied the little white object with the profoundest care. Evidently he was both surprised and perplexed, and his mind worked visibly upon certain perceptions which had come to him.

Stella, upon her part, watched him with a child's desire for approval. Would he say that she had done well? Would he ask her in all earnestness for that help of her comradeship which, hitherto, had been but the subject of his flattery? If she might but win his whole confidence, the confidence of a man who was known to distrust women and to despise their intellect! This was in her thoughts as she watched and waited for him to speak.

"Let me see," he said at last, "you found this in Lady Anna's glove——?"

"Yes."

"It was turned half inside out, I remember, and was such a glove as women use when they are travelling."

"Or driving in the country."

"A kid glove, and new. She might have worn it on the afternoon of her death."

"I think it very possible."

"And evidently she carried the tablet in it because she had been suffering very much from headache. That would be quite natural. You, however, brought it to me in the locket upon your bracelet, and that sets me thinking. Did Lady Anna, I wonder, ever carry her tablets in a locket?"

"I asked the maid Berthe that——"

"You did! Capital! And she said——"

"That sometimes her mistress carried them in the heart of green jade, which is missing."

"My dear child, this is a most excellent service. Jack Ferman may yet live to thank you for it. I hope so—but I will not deceive you by any false hopes. We are but upon the threshold of our task. A hundred difficulties confront us, any one of which may be fatal. Let us resolve to meet them together, Stella, resolutely and with courage. You will go to France to-morrow, but I have little hope of your work there. What is wanted is the inspiration of an instant which shall reveal a dead woman's secret, and show us why we have not guessed it. That may yet come—to one of us, Stella. Should it be you, lose not an hour in finding me wheresoever I am. And remember, I have chosen you of many to be my helper in this."

"I could never forget it. At Lausanne I will tell you what I have done."

He sighed deeply. This Lausanne, with what hopes of an inspired ambition had he not contemplated his visit thither a month ago. And now he must think rather of an altar of pride upon which a woman who had loved him lay already dead; an altar whose fires were those not of good will toward men but of vengeance.

Stella Insole understood this quite well, and as he rose to bid her farewell she spoke of it.

"I had hoped so much of Lausanne."

"Yes, my child. Is it anything to you that I dream dreams?"

"The world would not call them dreams if it knew the truth."

"But, being ignorant, sends the servants of its disbelief to silence or to kill me. Such is humanity's faith in humanity. Such will ever be the rewards of him who says, 'There shall be no more war.' But I am grown a philosopher, and I go where philosophy must serve me. Is it not eleven o'clock? Lady Constance will be losing patience, and that would be a tragedy. Good-night, Stella; let us keep a little faith in humanity even yet."

He held out his hand and caught her own for a moment in his. She was very pale, and her heart beat strangely.

"I wish you were not going to see Lady Constance," she said.

He asked her why.

"Because I'm afraid of her."

"A woman's just estimate. I fear her also, and for that reason I am going to see her. Rest assured, little friend, my enemies are known to me, and while they are known I am content. It is ignorance which is perilous, and against that we are powerless."

He spoke with some emotion, and it was not hidden from her that he was sensible of the perils now surrounding his path and of the mysteries growing more profound every hour and baffling him by their changing perplexities. But this ebb of courage passed instantly, and, bidding her write to him every day, and promising that he himself would not forget how precious the news might be to her, he left her to return to her sister with what message her affection might dictate.

It was growing very late, as he had said, and his movements henceforth were impatient. When a man stepped forward from the shadows of the hall and expressed a desire to speak with him he turned half about with a gesture of despair, but discovering him to be no other than his foreign secretary, Paul, displeasure gave place to gratification, and he bade the young Russian—for such was the secretary's nationality—step into his brougham with him and tell him the news as they went. This the young fellow did very willingly, and they had no sooner entered the carriage than he began to speak freely of the work he had done during the recent days.

"Your Highness has received the report concerning Herr Otto Walther?"

"I have studied it very closely, Paul."

"There is nothing to add to it."

"But you will see that his father, the worthy Dr. Frederick, is kept under close observation."

"It shall be done by a picked man, Highness. I think the Frenchman, Clouson, is the best for the task. M. Lépine,

the Paris Prefect, recommended him highly to us, you will remember."

"I remember perfectly. Let him be chosen. He will watch the doctor night and day—and his friends. The German correspondence particularly should be useful. He will need brains if he is to make anything of it. Have you had any news of the maid Berthe, the young lady who is so very anxious to hang this unfortunate young fellow who is charged with the crime? I had hope there."

"I fear we shall disappoint your Highness. She has not yet left the castle, and has been seen by nobody. But she has received a telegram."

"Ah! then her friends are not idle. Did you obtain a copy of it?"

"Certainly, but your Highness could not read it by this light. It is strange, however, and worthy of notice—in French, and a proverb. 'Le cœur ne veut douloir ce que l'œil ne peut voir.'"

"Meaning that what the eye sees not, of that the heart will not complain. I find it strange, as you say. When was it received?"

"Yesterday at half-past six o'clock."

"From London?"

"From Vigo Street, Highness."

The prince was very much interested. Some minutes passed and found him quite silent, but presently he asked:

"Has she been away from Highlands at all?"

"Twice upon the river, Highness."

"A curious employment for a woman who has just lost a mistress to whom she was devoted. Which way did she go?"

"To Pangbourne——"

"Ah! to the scene of our unhappy discovery. And then?"

"She waited there as though expecting some one. But none appeared, and she returned with apparent reluctance to the castle. I may say at once that the telegram was not answered."

The prince assented with a nod. They had come by this time to the top of Piccadilly, and were just turning eastward towards the Duke of Asherton's house. Indicating that his



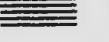
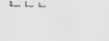
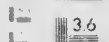


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driver should proceed very slowly, the prince passed to other topics as though this were already dismissed.

"The woman must be kept under close observation. Your own tasks, Paul, have a wider field. I fear I must send you to the East."

"To the East, Highness?"

"Yes, I want you to search the history of the young Earl of Farrard, and to discover for me the names of all the places which he and his sister visited between the years 1900 and 1905. If necessary, you must follow in his steps. But I may think it wiser to go myself. That will be as your story decides. You will lose no time, Paul."

"Not an hour, Highness."

"Then let me hear immediately what progress you are making. This is the duke's, I think. Well, I may hear much or little to-night—but I am beginning to doubt if England, or, indeed, Europe, can tell me the whole. I am much in the hands of my friends, Paul . . . very much."

"They are the hands of those who would give their lives for your Highness."

"I believe it, and am grateful to them. Do you return to Highlands to-night?"

"If possible, sir."

"Then tell my servant Otto that we are going to show his old enemies the Admiralty what our brains can do, at Shoebury-ness in a few days' time. Let him be prepared."

"I will not forget, Highness."

The carriage turned into the well-known courtyard of the duke's house at the words, and the prince descended without any further remark. He was very late, and the majority of the guests had already arrived, but one carriage followed him to the door, and he was by no means displeased to see that its occupants were no other than Lady Constance Heliers and that notoriously rich and amiable youth, Rupert Wally, the Australian sportsman. These shook hands with him very cordially, and passed before him to the orgy upon the staircase.

Maurevale, however, stood a moment in deep thought.

"She has taken to love-making, then," he said to himself, and added, "with an honest man, I perceive. Well, that is not what I had wished . . . and I do not think I shall find the heart of green jade in this house."

He shrugged his shoulders, and went on up the stairs.

And as he went a bishop linked arms with him, and began to speak of the dead woman in tones at once of curiosity and of awe.

## CHAPTER XII

### A NEW NAME IS HEARD

THE Duchess of Asherton's receptions were in a way political, which, as a wit remarked, was as good as to say that they were politically in the way.

The dear old duke was notorious for his amours and his political indiscretions, and had more than once threatened to destroy his party by a troublesome gift for the truth, exceedingly embarrassing both to politicians and to women. The duchess, on the other hand, smiled sweetly upon all the derelicts from Westminster, and having promised them baronetcies in a whisper, sent them back to their pens the most loyal and devoted followers of a Prime Minister who was not even at the pains to remember their names.

Maurevale had often been pressed by the duchess to be present upon these occasions, and not infrequently chided for his absence. She welcomed him this night with a fervour that was not all a sham; and regardless of the bishop, who had just begun to speak of the possibilities of Ferman's guilt, she bade them make way for his Highness, and carried him at once to the centre of the scene, where stood Herr Krussman, the famous German diplomatist, and the Grand Duke Ferdinand, about to attend the Peace Congress in the name of the Czar. These received Maurevale with a cordiality which nothing but self-interest could excuse. He was the one man in London they were most desirous to see.

"Herr Krussman, do you know the prince? And you, duke—of course, you know each other. Now where is Bertie—we really must find Bertie, or he will never forgive me. Why, there he is—I thought he would not be far away."

Thus the duchess, as she introduced the cosmopolitans to each other. The young man Bertie, otherwise Mr. Herbert Alltalk, now pushed his way through the press, and having wiped the perspiration from his steaming forehead, he greeted the prince with lofty cordiality.

"Good of you to come under the circumstances. Every one is wondering if you are going to Lausanne. I'm sure Herr Krussman wants to know that. Don't you, Excellency?"

Herr Krussman bowed.

"We could not fail to be interested in anything Prince Maurevale does."

"I take it as a great compliment," said Maurevale quietly; from which moment he turned to speak to the foreigners, quite ignoring the young man.

"Have you been long in England, Excellency?"

"Five days—I am fortunate in the sixth. They told me I would not see you to-night. The surprise is the more welcome."

"And the expression no less. You were doubtful about my going to Lausanne, then?"

"Frankly, we doubted it—unless you had come to a decision."

"To offer my work to the nations."

"Or to one nation," intervened Herr Krussman.

The prince shrugged his shoulders.

"I wish to be quite frank with you, gentlemen. My work henceforth is solely in the interests of the peace of Europe."

"For which his Majesty works unceasingly," said the Grand Duke.

"And earns the homage of all thinking men thereby," said the prince.

"But the suspicions of the diplomatists and the sneers of those who preach peace in the newspapers—" rejoined the German. Maurevale ignored this.

"I have long believed," he said, "that science and not diplomacy will make an end of war. The silent gun, the high explosive which shall not be local in its action, the torpedo against which your nets are unavailing—these are great mediators. My

years have been given to the study . . . if I think it completed, well, I am the optimist and none is compelled to believe. But incredulity is a matter of indifference to me. Rather, gentlemen, I seek honesty."

They smiled together—the Grand Duke kindly, the German with the air of a man who was listening to a fairy tale.

"An *ipse dixit* is of little value in the councils of Europe to-day," he said. "Your gospel stands or falls not by peace but by war, prince. How are you going to convince us at Lausanne? How shall we convince our Governments in turn that your claims—pardon me—are not open to the suspicion of an exaggeration which would be fatal to them?"

"That," retorted the prince, "I shall leave to the delegates."

"Then you will attend the council?"

"It is my earnest hope."

Herr Krussman watched him closely.

"Ah," he said, "then I perceive you are aware of what will be said if you do not come."

"Perfectly aware; they will say I am an impostor, and cease to consider me further."

"It might be their misfortune, prince."

"It certainly would be so——"

The Grand Duke was about to reply to him when the young man, Herbert Alltalk, having demolished a Cabinet Minister with a fury of eloquence which put the music to shame, turned again to join in the talk; but at that moment Lady Constance touched Maurevale upon the shoulder, and reproached him for neglect.

"My dear man, are you really so dreadfully annoyed with me?"

"Why should I be annoyed?"

"I have a thousand things to say to you, and you will hear none of them. Let us go where the world no longer turns upon its own axis—or somebody else's. There is news."

She said no more, and Maurevale followed her quietly to a corner of the balcony overlooking Piccadilly. The press was lighter here, and the curtain shielded them a little from the

turmoil of sound and the elbows of the schemers. At the same time they could see all that went on in the room had they the mind to do so.

Lady Constance was dressed in a satin gown of a deep red shade. Her ornaments were diamonds, of which she wore a magnificent tiara and a pendant, whose real stones had long been the security for some of her many gambling debts. There was no wilder bridge player in London, and none with whom the shady gamester played more willingly. She owned horses whose performances were, in sporting parlance, as black as her eyes. But of her wit and shrewdness there was, unfortunately, as little doubt as of her social insolvency—a fact with which Maurevale was very well acquainted.

"Well," he said, "and what is the news I am to hear?"

"That your man Blandy has been seen in Calais."

"Indeed, then I wonder that those who saw him did not communicate with the police."

"Oh, but they are friends of yours. Do you remember Archie Kerrington, Lord Sapiston's son? He has just come over, and he is quite positive that he saw Mr. Blandy on the platform at Calais."

"Did he tell you so himself?"

"I haven't seen him yet—but Mr. Wally tells me that he was in the club this afternoon telling everybody."

"Ah, but I do not remember that I have had the pleasure of receiving Mr. Kerrington at my house."

"He says that he knows Mr. Blandy quite well—he used to see him at Newmarket. I think we ought to do something for poor Jack Ferman's sake. Now, really, don't you believe him to be quite innocent?"

"It is difficult to answer you. Innocent is an abstract term."

"But you must have definite opinions. A man always has."

"Especially when he is ignorant. I am naturally deeply interested—and my interest brings me here to-night."

"That is why I came—I have been trying to see you for some days. Do you know what people are saying——?"



"I have been too busy to ask."

"They are saying that you ought not to go to Lausanne until Jack has been cleared."

"And do you agree with them?"

"Oh, absolutely. I think it should be a point of honour. The poor woman was your guest. Do you not owe it to her to remain here?"

"I have never thought of it in that light. Perhaps there is some exaggeration. The evidence against your friend may not be what you believe."

"There is no doubt of it at all. Sir Malcolm has told my father that nothing can save him. Oh, my dear man, the letters. Why, every one knew that the pair of them were working for the Admiralty. Apparently you were the last to become aware of it."

"If I was unaware of it!"

"Then you knew?"

"Let us say that I understand women."

"A miracle! And that antediluvian sentiment common to schoolgirls saved her at the eleventh hour! Really, if it were not so very dreadful it would be exciting. She quarrels with her too progressive friend, and he, they say, kills her. You really have some responsibility in the matter."

"I am unaware of it, and so I am here."

"And we must keep you—set snares if necessary. I am thinking of one at Goodwood. Why not come down to the duke's box for the week?"

"Would that help Captain Ferman?"

"I think it might. We would try to get Sir Malcolm down, if only for the night. And I would ask other friends of Jack's—we could have a council of war."

"But that is the date I should set out for Lausanne—by the way, there is your friend, Dr. Frederick Walther. He appears to be looking for you."

"For me—how absurd! I hardly know him. Is he not the father of your tame youth with the big eyes? I thought you said so."

"It is true—but I thought that you knew him well."

"Quite a hopeless mistake. Let us talk of something more pleasant. Now, won't you come to Goodwood if I ask you——"

"The invitation would be quite irresistible if it were not for Lausanne."

"My father says that if you knew what he knows you would not go to Lausanne at all."

"A wise man, undoubtedly. Is he good enough to add reasons?"

"He thinks you have too many friends in England, too many interests here; besides, the Kaiser means to wreck the Conference. You should go to Berlin first . . . the other thing is make-believe."

"I will remember it. Meanwhile I am convinced that Dr. Frederick is looking for you. Why, here he is."

It was quite true. The doctor, altogether a typically benevolent old gentleman with a white beard and the face of a prophet in the pictures, having wandered about the great saloon aimlessly, now sauntered out on the balcony, and seeing Maurevale, greeted him with cordiality. The glance which he exchanged with the Lady Constance as he did so was instantaneous and full of meaning to one who had eyes to read it. Maurevale, however, seemed quite unconscious of it.

"My dear doctor, what a pleasant surprise!"

"I am delighted to meet you, sir—of whom my dear son never ceases to speak with affection."

"Ah, but Otto is a very good boy. Have you seen him lately?"

"It is many weeks . . . but I am intruding. Is not this a lady whom I had the pleasure of meeting once at your house? I thought so—but I have such a poor memory for names. Pray forgive me, madam."

"My dear doctor, I was once your patient, and you saved my life. No physician should forget such a miracle as that. But perhaps you only remember the dead."

"It would depend upon their sex," said the old man sagely, at which they all laughed and returned together to the saloon. Just as they entered a voluble German attaché went up to

the doctor and greeted him in his own tongue. The remark appeared to concern Egypt and a certain Tahir Pasha, concerning whom the doctor had been inquiring.

"Well," said the prince to Lady Constance, as he was about to bid her good-night, "I will remember your invitation to Goodwood."

"That would be splendid of you. If you are tired of London before then, do not forget the 'box.'"

"Your cottage at Wargrave?"

"Yes, I am there every week-end—sometimes almost alone. There would always be room for Prince Maurevale."

"That is an invitation I must underline. If I thought that I might meet Archie Kerrington there, and hear the news of my man Blandy!"

"Oh," she cried, her black eyes flashing with excitement, "I will ask him if you promise to come."

"Then I will promise—for, let us see, shall we say Saturday week?"

"It would be perfectly delightful of you."

They parted upon it, she going off on the arm of Rupert Wally, he making for the door as though to leave the house. Half-way down the great staircase, however, Maurevale espied the bishop, who loved to talk of the dead; and, making the coming trial of Captain Ferman an excuse, he led the ecclesiastical worthy into an alcove of the conservatory, and there detained him for ten minutes with all the gossip, pertinent or otherwise, he could command. Then, as though uncertain of his purpose, he returned to the door of the big room and watched the throng until he had detected the white-headed doctor and Lady Constance.

They were together engaged in ardent conversation, and almost regardless of others about them. Apparently the meek and philanthropic physician was much agitated, and reproached his partner for something she had or had not done—and so far was the dispute carried that the pair went out to the balcony to resume it. Maurevale in his turn, directly he had made sure of this, descended to the hall, and sent his footman for his car.

His work at the duke's was done, but he understood that elsewhere it was but beginning.

The night had fallen very hot with the intolerable heat of summer, as London knows it all too rarely. Though it was after one o'clock, few houses in Park Lane were shut, and the long line of carriages and of cars with their sleepy coachmen and cigarette-smoking chauffeurs stood for a black contrast to the shimmer of light in which the social play proceeded. For a little while, perchance, Maurevale fell to a philosopher's mood, speculating upon the havoc of the years. Let so much as a decade pass, he could say, and many of those houses would open their doors to other mistresses, many of these revellers be old men and women complaining of life and its monotony. From which it was natural to pass to a vivid memory of Lady Anna, to dwell upon her qualities of sympathy and her profound mental gifts, and to recall that hour so recent when there had been no more welcome figure in Vanity Fair.

He was beginning to believe by this time that fidelity to his own cause had cost Anna Maclain her life. Out of the tangled skein a few clear threads had been drawn, and he husbanded them as precious. She had died because he, Maurevale, had reached the true woman's heart and prevailed above the evil counsellors who would have made her their tool. But beyond that all was darkness—and it were already as though the dead reproached him for what he had not done, and Anna herself was at his side to demand an account of his stewardship.

He had sworn to avenge her, and his oath carried him to this impasse, that he must defend himself against those who had been her enemies. If there were any silver lining to the cloud, it was the sure knowledge of a young girl's friendship for the dead woman and her abiding love. And this, above all, was in his mind as he stepped from his landaulette at the door of his own house, and told his men that he had no further need of them. The world that opened out before him had Stella Insole at its heart. It was odd that he had yet to discover a deeper truth, and one for which he must pay a bitter price.

But he was quite ignorant of this—and as though to mock

the kindly thought which this name never failed to inspire, a sudden sound of a footstep upon the pavement attracted his keen ear and waked him to vigilance.

It was an odd sound and unmistakable, a shuffling as of slippers in the shadows, a cunning, unfamiliar step upon a London pavement, and one which recalled in an instant the episode at Highlands and at Paddington.

Alive to its meaning, Maurevale strode forward and peered about him, though vainly. None but a policeman was to be discovered in the vicinity; and his own men, when questioned, answered that they had seen nobody.

He entered the house and shut the door slowly. From the door of his study a figure advanced towards him, and he recognised his secretary, Paul, the Russian. Such a man would not have come at such an hour unless the errand had been urgent, and, sparing words, the prince invited him to enter the room.

"Well, Paul?"

"It is to ask you a question, sir."

"I am listening."

"Do you know, have you ever heard the name Tahir Pasha?"

Maurevale smiled. None the less there was the light of a new interest in his dark eyes, and for an instant his lips quivered as he spoke.

"Yes," he said. "I have heard the name once—from the lips of Dr. Frederick Walther this night."

The Russian nodded his head.

"You would have done so," he said quietly, "for the news comes from his son."

"Indeed—he is in London?"

"He is on his way to Shoeburyness, Highness."

"Ah!" said Maurevale, "I will see him there. Have you anything more to say, Paul?"

"Yes, Highness, to express a hope."

"It is——?"

"That you will not find Otto Walther a traitor."

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE DESTROYER

MAUREVALE had informed the British Admiralty that he would give a demonstration of the powers of his new torpedo upon a certain date to be named by him, and this trial took place three days after the reception at the Duke of Asherton's house.

The most stringent precautions were necessary to this experiment, and the greatest secrecy was observed. Accompanied only by his assistant, Otto Walther, Maurevale motored from London at the dead of night and was in the sleeping town of Southend before the sun had risen. There he went on board a low grey destroyer waiting for him off the pier-head, and, taking Otto to his cabin, he began to question him about his readiness for the trial, but more particularly about other matters which had first place in his mind.

"You have no fear of what is to take place to-day, Otto. You are quite ready?"

"We are always ready, Highness."

"I wish to show my English friends that rumour for once is a truer guide than incredulity. A mistake would be fatal—not to us, but to them. Are you quite sure that we shall make no mistake, Otto?"

"I am so certain, Highness, that I consent to lose your favour if we do so."

"That you will not do while you deserve it. Let me see; it is now eight years since I found you at Zurich, and you were named as the most promising of all their students. Is it not so?"

"It will be eight years in August, Highness."

"During which time we have worked together secretly that we might serve not ourselves but mankind."

"I have only done my duty, Highness."

"But it has been nobly done in spite of those who would have turned you from it."

"I do not understand you, sir——"

"Come, come, Otto, we are losing a little of our frankness, and that will never do. There are secret things in all lives which none may question. I have respected your difficulties, but you must reward me by candour. You are in some trouble, Otto."

The young man hung his head. Maurevale continued:

"And your trouble is not upon your own account, but upon mine. We shall mention no names, but there are those who tempt you to betray me. Beware of them, Otto."

"Indeed, Highness, I know what I have to do."

"And will come to me if the burdens are heavier than you can bear. How long has this been going on, Otto?"

"For a long time, Highness; for as long as we have known Lady Anna."

"Indeed! Then it began at the time of our first acquaintance with her?"

"Yes, sir; I should say so."

The prince reflected upon it a little while. Then he said:

"You have had something to say to me for some days, Otto. I know that you are seeking an opportunity to speak with me. Is not this a good occasion?"

"If you please, Highness."

"Does it concern our work?"

"No, sir; it concerns Miss Insole."

"Miss Insole—Miss Stella?"

"Yes, sir——"

"And what of her?"

"I love her, Highness."

There was not a shadow of fear in the clear blue eyes now, and they looked Maurevale frankly in the face. His own astonish-

ment was considerable. He wondered that the intimation moved him so much.

"Have you spoken to Miss Insole?"

"No, sir; I should not do so without your permission."

"That is very well said. She is in France at present. I will permit you to speak to her upon her return, when I am able to tell her that your fidelity has proved itself against many temptations. Now go and rest. We have a long day, and, remember, there must be no such thing as failure."

Otto had expected a very different answer from this, and his heart beat wildly and his cheeks were aflame as he left the cabin and went to do the prince's bidding. Maurevale, however, discovered that he could not sleep, and, mounting the companion, he paced the deserted deck and watched the sun rising gloriously above the estuary. It was just four o'clock of the morning, and the Admiralty officials were to come on board at six.

How odd that a youth's confession should affect him so strangely! Eight years ago he had discovered this clever young electrician in the laboratory at Zurich. The officials said that the boy was a genius and must have a future. Inquiry discovered the facts that he was the son of a German father, Frederick Walther, and of an English mother, Catherine, the daughter of a Sussex parson. Both his parents had, however, long been resident in London, where Dr. Walther, having naturalised himself, had been a specialist in Welbeck Street. Maurevale took the lad into his service, and did not regret the step. There never was a more brilliant fellow, and he worked with a zeal which rivalled his master's.

And now he had given overt evidence of the common human trend, and had declared a passion for which every excuse must be offered. Nothing more natural than his love for Stella Insole could be imagined. Had they not been at Highlands Castle for months together? And were they not both of an age when the love dream becomes the supreme reality of life? Maurevale admitted it as he paced the lonely deck. He could not blame the lad; the scales had fallen suddenly from his eyes and shown him whither the road of youth must lead. Thither he might not hope



to follow, and he remembered, with a sudden tremor he could not control, that the flower of his own youth had withered, but had fallen upon no woman's heart.

The appearance of the crew, his own chosen men, interrupted his reverie and brought him to the plain truths of the day. An hour for which he had long waited was approaching, and the issues were momentous. He had given fifteen years of his life to a scientific study of naval warfare, and believed that he held in his hands a secret so wonderful that its possession by any one nation must mean the dominion of the world. For the fame attendant on the authority he personally might wield he cared not at all. As a lad he had witnessed feuds among the people of South-Eastern Europe, the massacres of women and children, the villages of tears. Later life sent him through the Russian war; he had served in America and been in the trenches before Port Arthur. And all the time he had heard the cry of the children, and had said: "I will save the people. I will give peace to the land."

He had striven ceaselessly to this end; he whom society looked upon but as one of its prettiest butterflies; he, Maurevale of Dara, whose horses and whose yachts were the envy of men; whose favour was desired by so many women. And now one of the glorious hours was at hand—he felt sure of it, and remembered a little bitterly that all his wit might not prevail against the secret enemies who would rob him of its fruits.

A launch from Sheerness carried the Admiralty officials to Southend punctually at six o'clock. The First Lord wore his usual bluff and hearty manner, and began to interest himself in the destroyer from the moment he came aboard. With him was Admiral Sir Henry Hay, from the flagship, Mr. Janson, the constructor of torpedoes, and Mr. James Black, then in charge of the wireless telegraphy department—and no sooner had they embarked than the destroyer headed for the open sea and the deserted reaches of the Maplins. Then breakfast was served in the very ordinary saloon, and when this was done they found the ship at anchor and ready for such tests as the officials might impose.

"Your hull was built by Thornycroft's, I think," said the First Lord as he mounted the companion. Maurevale answered that it was so.

"She is quite ordinary," he rejoined, "merely the platform for my experiments. What I have to show you, gentlemen, must be seen upon the water. This is my conning tower. You will not wonder that there are but two keys to it in the world and that I hold them both."

Sir Henry Hay said that it would be wonderful if a third key did not find its way to Berlin very shortly—but the remark passed off with a laugh as Maurevale opened the iron gate of the conning tower and bade Otto, his assistant, enter. Then he closed the door and said that he was entirely at his guests' commands.

"I have promised to show you a torpedo which will answer to my commands as though it had human ears to receive them," he continued, "that claim I now hope to make good. Yonder, gentlemen, is a target of armoured steel defended by nets and standing for the hull of one of your greatest warships. I shall destroy that, and then show you that the charge which destroyed it is one-fiftieth of that which you employ in your torpedoes. Moreover, I hope to convince you that the driving force of this invention is so considerably superior to anything now known to your Navy that if the nets were booms of solid steel they would not save your ships. That is my claim. You shall be the judges of its modesty."

He had led them to the bows as he talked, and they looked out over a sheen of rippling water beyond which were the low cliffs and the hills of Essex. Behind them stood Sheppey; further eastward the low outline of Herne Bay; and in the far distance the Foreland. Great steamers went to and fro by the Nore; the distant horizon showed them the sails of fishing boats shining almost blood red in the powerful sunlight. Here and there a roving barge might have seemed to be within the danger zone, but a signal from the destroyer sent it sagging seaward and left the waste unbroken, save by the low black target moored last night for this demonstration, and now rocking upon the swell until the moment of destruction should come.

"Now," said Maurevale, "we will, with your pleasure, gentlemen, launch our torpedo."

He made a signal to his men, and a sound as of hissing and rushing water turned every eye towards the sea, upon which almost immediately the grey shape of the smallest of torpedoes was seen threading the waves as some monster fish which delighted in the sunshine. No visible agency controlled this, and yet it was obviously under the most perfect control. Turning in graceful curves, now speeding to a rush the eye could hardly follow, anon riding as a bird which rests upon a wave, it was difficult to believe that the shape was untenanted by a human mind or had no secret link with the master of the ship. None the less the truth of it was incontestable. A man spoke, and the lifeless metal obeyed. Even the Sea Lords stood amazed.

"You are working upon Marconi's system, of course," said Mr. Janson, whose interest was profound. "I had heard as much in London, but I was not prepared for what I have seen."

"Clever beyond all doubt," added Sir Henry laconically. "You'll make her talk next."

"In a tone that some people will not consider musical," retorted Maurevale with a smile—and then he said, "I will now bring the enemy within a foot of this ship, Sir Henry. If a mistake were made, not a man of you would live to reproach me. But we shall take care—and by your pleasure——"

He looked from one to the other and smiled again at a hesitation natural and by no means inexplicable. These distinguished officers were in no mind to be hurled headlong into the next world to make an inventor's holiday, and possibly they would have said so had not the word already been spoken and the torpedo headed for the destroyer at a speed which left them enthralled and spellbound. Even Maurevale watched it approach with beating heart. What a test to impose! What a gamble in human life! And if he failed. . . .

He stood motionless by the taffrail, and the others crowded about him, their nerves at a tension, their faces drawn and eloquent of doubt. How this cursed machine, whose explosives could have destroyed a town, how she raced at them, cleaving the

water as a monster chasing prey, hurling a blinding cloud of the spindrift for her banner infernal, inevitable. And who shall wonder that men cried out involuntarily as she drew near the destroyer and destruction and death shone amid the foam at their feet. No power on earth, it seemed, could save them. They listened for the crash, imagined already the thunderous sounds of explosion, the rushing air, the instant death—and then were agape and wondering while the torpedo lay like a cradle upon the water, and even the ticking of its engines was audible.

"Gentlemen," asked Maurevale, turning to them with a smiling face, "have I kept my word?"

The First Lord admitted it readily.

"I would not have missed it for a thousand pounds," said he.

The others were not less enthusiastic, but it remained for Sir Henry to express his astonishment that the Secret Service had failed to make this magic known.

"You must be very clever to keep it from them, prince," he said. Maurevale doubted if he had been so.

"I am vigilant, Sir Henry—and my servants are faithful."

"They need to be—and you, well, I do not envy you when Kiel is sure of it."

"Oh, perhaps I shall survive their curiosity. Now, if you please, for the target. And first, gentlemen, to show you the measure of the charge which my torpedo carries."

A delay followed, in which some highly technical experiments were conducted. These were superintended by Mr. Jansen, of torpedo fame, and the constructor, Mr. Black, and when they were concluded and the experts satisfied, a second torpedo was launched at the target, while Maurevale stood by the little conning tower and directed his assistant how to act.

"Let Sir Henry command," he said, with a gesture which insinuated he did not mind how it was; "he shall direct us what we are to do and we will do it to the best of our ability. Now, sir, will you please give us our orders."

Sir Henry reflected an instant.

"I direct the attack amidships," he said bluntly.

The word was given, the torpedo raced forward toward the very heart of the rolling target. An instant later came a loud cry, "Easy!" and the silver tube stopped in the fairway of the seas as though an anchor had been cast by an unseen hand.

"The attack is detected," said Sir Henry; "let the torpedo be returned."

Maurevale dropped his hand and the shell began to move, slowly at first as it turned about upon a short axis toward the ship it had left; then with gathering speed, as its fellow had done, until it also lay still and motionless in the shadow of the gangway.

"Now," said the admiral, "we shall attack upon the port quarter and discharge. Full speed ahead, if you please."

Again the signal was given and the race renewed. This time, however, there was no deviation from an appointed course. The torpedo headed for a spell toward the north-east, then swung round as though her helm were put hard down and held straight as an arrow for the anchored target. A moment later the destroyer herself shook from stem to stern with the vibration of an explosion which spread across the sea with the devastating force of unmeasured winds. The group by the conning tower reeled back before it; the ship heeled and wallowed in the surge; the heavens echoed a thunder of sounds which were as cannon in the ears.

But the target had disappeared from view, and the sea which harboured it was now but a waste of curdling foam which continued to wash about the destroyer as the forces of a tide which surged up from the very bowels of the deep.

"Gentlemen," said Maurevale, "that is what I have to show you."

No one answered him for a little while.

Perhaps they understood already that they were in the presence of a genius most profound, and that here was a man who, as he said, held the destinies of the nations in the hollow of his hand. But this was not the stage upon which to admit as much even should enthusiasm be guilty of an indiscretion. So the four contented themselves with those general expressions which are of the non-committal order, and permitted no others to escape them

until the Admiralty launch was boarded off Sheerness and they bade the prince farewell.

"Of course, you have astonished us," said the First Lord at the head of the gangway ladder. "I might even follow you so far as to say that on the day you bring these things to Whitehall we can say with you that there will be no more war."

"By which you mean," said Maurevale suavely, "that the British Government is not unprepared to deal with me."

"It is ready to-day," said the First Lord.

The prince bowed and shook hands with him.

"I think I must keep my secrets a little while," said he.

"For the people at Kiel to steal them! Believe me, there is no secrecy possible to-day. If we had worked in a cloud this morning, the evening papers would have it to-night. I don't envy you your vigil if you are going to lie on this river many days. But I suppose you are not?"

"Indeed," said Maurevale, "my moorings for the present are off Canvey Island."

"A dangerous place," rejoined Sir Henry. "Beware of visitors."

"Thank you, but I shall be very glad to see them. Good-bye, gentlemen, and believe me I am much obliged to you."

He waved his hand to them, and the destroyer moved slowly down the river. It was twelve o'clock then and the tide at the first of the ebb. Prince Maurevale knew that this had been a splendid hour for him; but he had ceased to think of it.

"I shall have visitors at Canvey Island," he said to himself, "and it is not impossible that among them will be the man I would give half my fortune to discover and punish."

He went to his cabin for luncheon, and after that he slept for three hours. When he awoke the evening papers were already telling of some wonderful experiments with a new torpedo at Shoeburyness, and giving the names of those who had witnessed them. But to Maurevale the more ominous thing was that they spoke also of Captain Ferman's committal upon the full charge of murder, and named the October Assizes for his trial.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE VIGIL

THEY had moored the destroyer off the bleak and unspeakable Canvey Island, and here Maurevale, having given shore leave to his crew, kept vigil for fifty hours.

He had sent Otto Walther back to Highlands Castle upon the morning of the first day, and his companions were two of his own body servants, who spoke not a word of English, but whose fidelity was beyond all question. These had followed him from Dara to the splendid exile of the western countries—and would have followed him to the world's end as uncomplainingly.

There was another friend, and one who cared neither for the secrets of peace nor war—his great boarhound Charles, who lay at his cabin door while he slept and was rarely far from his heels when he awoke.

These two were the real guardians of the ship, and upon them lay the burdens of the secrets. Harboured in that black and forbidding hull was the work of twenty years, the fruit of a genius which the world must yet discover. And guarding it stood the man who had paid already a bitter price for his achievement—the price of a woman's life, and of one who had loved him.

Maurevale thought much of this as he paced the lonely deck at sunset and watched the busy river scene, the great ships going out to the ends of the earth, the incoming steamers, to whose passengers the coastwise lights of England were the beacons of homeland.

How far apart his life lay from emotions such as these! His own country had almost ceased to remember him. He had but one relative living, his brother Georges; while as for love of

woman—but at that he thought of Stella Insole, and fell to wondering if she knew that Otto Walther loved her.

There had been but one visitor to the destroyer during that tedious day, and he the Russian, Paul. His news had interested Maurevale greatly, though he did not let his secretary perceive as much. When the good fellow warned him of the danger attending continued residence in the ship the prince admitted the prudence of the warning, but would not be deterred.

"They have struck at my friend," he said quietly, "and will not hesitate to strike at me. The hand which killed Lady Anna because she would not seil my secrets, which she did not possess, will endeavour to kill me eventually. What better opportunity for such a man than this lonely place and this ship, whose possession would enrich him beyond all knowledge? Let us say no more about it. Sooner or later he will come here, and I shall know him. You, meanwhile, will be continuing your work ashore. We are to save Captain Ferman from his folly, and we have not an hour to lose."

Paul admitted it.

"Highness," he said, "I have hardly slept since you sent for me. There are agents of ours at work in every country of Europe—even in Egypt."

Maurevale turned his head.

"In Egypt——?"

"Yes, sir, since we find that Lady Anna was five months there with her brother, the earl, before she went to India."

"Most interesting, Paul, and a fact which had escaped me. I am obliged to you. Pursue your inquiries in that direction, but do not forget our friend the doctor. Have you the names of his associates—I think you promised them for to-day?"

"They are here, Highness."

Maurevale ran his eye over the list with the quick glance of one who has a profound memory for details.

"Chiefly riff-raff from Kiel and Berlin, I perceive, and one man who is notoriously working for the Austrian Government. There is a new name, however. I do not remember to have heard of Ludwig Monheim previously——"



"A most dangerous person, Highness. He is one of the syndicate at Antwerp which lives upon the theft of official documents and sells them to the Governments. I hardly venture to tell you—but it is said that the name stands for a woman."

"Evidently a person we should know. And the friend of Dr. Walther, you said."

"They returned to Welbeck Street together—from the Italian Society when the son, Otto, was present."

"Ah! I see that you still doubt that young man."

"Can I help it, Highness, when I have every reason to believe that his father is in the pay of the Agency at Kiel?"

"A false premiss. May not the son be proof against their machinations?"

"It would be difficult when a father is the tempter."

"We shall remember it, Paul. Who knows, one of these very people may come here to-night."

"I am indeed concerned that your Highness should run such grave risks."

"Say, rather, that your concern is for an innocent man who stands in the shadow of death. Did you visit Captain Ferman's lawyers?"

"I was there this morning."

"And they said——"

"That nothing but a miracle could save him."

"But you told them to retain the greatest counsel of the day. You said that I wished and would be responsible?"

"Indeed, Highness, I gave them the most precise instructions. Sir Horace Rupert is already briefed, and will have Mr. Weid with him. They say that the letters are the damning evidence. There are wild threats and others more definite. And we must not forget that the captain was the last person who saw her alive."

"It is possible. But I am not sure of it, Paul!"

"Not sure of it, Highness!"

"Very far from sure of it."

"You wish me to tell them——"

"That I will see Sir Horace as soon as it would be useful to

do so. If I do not see him by the day of the trial, he will know that I cannot help his client."

"Heaven forbid that it should be so, Highness."

Maurevale made no response, and after talk more commonplace the Russian left the ship. Then dinner was served in the little saloon, and when this was done and the servants had taken their own supper and gone to bed, the prince went up to the decks and began a searching examination of the ship which must have occupied him for a full hour.

Carrying an electric lantern, he entered the conning tower and inspected every key and wire of the intricate apparatus erected there. A solid steel door opening in the floor showed him the more profound secrets of his genius and convinced him that they had not been tampered with. He looked to batteries, dynamos, the books of the records, the wonderful instruments, and found them as they had been at the hour of the demonstration before the Admiralty. In the end he convinced himself that whoever were the unknown spies of whom the Russian had spoken, this ship knew nothing of them. And so he returned to the upper deck and prepared for the vigil of the night.

But one light shone above the destroyer now, and that was the anchor light which warned ships of her moorings. In a sense the lantern was supererogatory, for the grey boat lay quite close to the flat and muddy banks of Canvey Island and was out of the course even of the barges. But Maurevale desired that her position should be indicated and his men obeyed him. For the rest his preparations were very simple. He went to his cabin and switched on its lights so that, if any watched him, the spy might say, this man goes to bed. Then he turned out the lamps one by one—and slipping into his clothes again he crawled to the deck and lay flat in the shadow of the taffrail.

He had a pillow for his head and a rug to keep off the mist. By his side lay the hound nosing a warm hand and intermittently suspicious. From the estuary there came the booming of sirens—and he could hear the thud of the steamers' propellers as they felt their way in from the Nore. Round about the destroyer, however, all was silence, and the water lapped

rhythmically with a great sound of contrast. Such a lullaby did this dreamy reiteration prove that Maurevale was almost asleep when the hound beside him started up with pointing ears and uttered a menace unmistakable. It needed more than a word to silence him, and when silenced he would not sleep again but lay with poised head and ears which waited a warning.

Maurevale had not heard the sound which waked the dog, and fell to wondering what it might be. Raising his head very cautiously he surveyed the hither water and searched it for any sign of an approaching boat, but could discern none.

The darkness of the night, the fog below and the cloud above, conspired to befriend any who had designs upon the ship, and it became apparent that an unknown might approach from the river or the shore with impunity. Of such an attempt there was at present no evidence whatever, nor was the silence again broken for a full hour or more. The twinkling lights upon the Essex hills spoke of the railway rather than the farmhouse; and, anon, when a locomotive left a trail of fire to mount above the low banks of mist, it seemed as though the earth itself were at war with the night and vomited flame in defiance.

A bell upon the mainland struck one and a chime upon the far side of the river responded musically. Maurevale, who had settled himself to sleep again by this time, became aware of a curious fact and one of which the hound was quick to take notice. This was nothing more or less than a movement of the aft hawser about the capstan which held it, a strange tremor upon the rope and a distinct jar of the iron in its socket. Twice repeated, the thing could have been understood by any one—a man was upon the hawser and employed it to climb from the shore to the deck of the destroyer. Nothing could be more certain, and had there been any doubt the hound's restlessness, his rebellion against restraint, and low growling told the tale too clearly.

Convinced that at last his vigil would reward him, Maurevale bestowed a single glance upon the motor launch, moored by his orders against the gangway ladder, and then drew the hound almost into his arms and so compelled him to be still. It was

fascinating to watch the tell-tale of the rope, the movements, clever and cunning, of the unknown spy; now a bold advance which set the hawser a-quiver as a bow that is bent; then a halt for breath or because prudence got the better of daring—but always eloquent of plan and plot and the act of a man aware but not afraid of his danger.

Maurevale had taken up a position quite close to the taffrail at a point where the aft hawser ran diagonally towards the shore. His only visible weapon was a heavy stick with a round, black knob, and this was slung from his wrist by a plain leather strap. The watch, comfortably asleep by the fo'castle, knew nothing of what was going on and gave no sign. The well-trained hound appeared to perceive the truth of the situation and to consent to it. Crouched by his master's side, his ears did not relax their vigilance nor his eyes their watchfulness. He would have sprung at the taffrail upon the shadow of a signal, and he seemed to know that the signal would be given presently.

Meanwhile, there was a tedious interval of waiting. The rope quivered with a daring movement, and then, as suddenly, it ceased to move at all. Save for an occasional tremor and the sharpened angle of its trend, you might have said that the unknown had let go of it and sought another agency. Nor was this in any way difficult to understand, for a tugboat hauling barges to Leigh had come in quite close to the island at the moment, and the wave of the backwash surged about the destroyer, while the boom of the siren burst out of the mists with affrighting suddenness. Quite a long time passed before the last of the barges had gone by, and even when silence fell again and the tide droned placidly once more about the ship, there was no movement whatever upon the index of the rope.

So this intruder had lost his courage at a siren's boom, and for the time being debated the wisdom of his enterprise.

The conclusion was inevitable if unwelcome to Maurevale. Do what he would, his daring might achieve nothing at such a stage; if, indeed, daring would not rob him of the last hope of discovery. As he had come, in the mists, so might the spy go upon such a night. And if he went, the fruits of that long vigil

would be lost finally, and beyond hope of other opportunity. Such was Maurevale's argument at a moment when the adventure took a turn altogether unexpected, and waked him in an instant from despair of his adventure to the liveliest hope. The rope began to sway again, not subtly with the motions of a man afraid, but boldly, with the aggressive act of one who cared no longer for discovery.

One great movement it gave, rattling the capstan and vibrating as under a heavy shock. Then, and as unexpectedly, a shrill cry was uttered, and in that instant a boat's gunwale struck the ship's side violently.

"By all that's wonderful," cried Maurevale, "a woman's voice!"

He stood up, fearing discovery no longer. The hound bayed furiously, and leaped about the deck in maddened impotence—the watch came stumbling along to ask who went?

"To the launch," said Maurevale—and then—

"Make a signal to the police—first—we shall have need of them."

## CHAPTER XV

### THE WHERRY IS FOUND

A ROCKET cut the fog and fell still flaming into the swirling ebb.

Out in the open river the mists still drifted in heavy banks which opened here and there to show the distant lights of the Kentish shore and the steamers whose sirens continued to boom their warnings. Through such a gateway of the fog Maurevale perceived the outline of a common wherry and understood that, of those who would have come aboard the ship, one now made for safety upon the far side, while the other, if alive, must be sought for on the open lands of Canvey Island.

It was a perplexing situation, unlooked for and wholly difficult. The searchlight with which the destroyer was provided could do no more than shed a golden aureole upon the rampart of the fog; while as for the lantern which the watchman carried, its feeble rays but accentuated the blackness of the swift waters which eddied about the rudder of the ship. Here was no evidence at all of the scene which had been enacted. Whoever had played a second part in that affair had fled to the mainland—or lay dead beneath the shadow of the poop.

A police launch came at length out of the shadows and its captain hailed the ship. To him Maurevale told the story in the briefest sentences.

“There is a man either in the water here or on the island. I charge him if you arrest him. Another has crossed the river. Let one of your men come with me in my launch. I am faster than you—and, captain, place a guard here until my return.”

He descended the ladder as he spoke and stepped upon his own launch, of which the engine was already running. Of the

eight men aboard the police boat, two mounted to the decks of the destroyer, while a third followed the prince and took the tiller at his direction. Then they headed almost straight across the river for the Blythe Sound and Egypt Bay by St. Mary's Marshes.

This was an odd chase and momentous; nor could Maurevale rid himself of the idea that success or failure in it carried great issues.

Out of the unknown voices had spoken to him for the first time. He had been hitherto as a man groping amid the mysteries of an imagined scene, but one which his mind could not yet people. And yonder, rowing a boat through the mists which swept the river, was one who might unlock the door of perplexity and permit the light to shine. All, indeed, might depend upon this night—even the life of the man whom public opinion declared guilty before a jury had spoken.

To the police officer this distinguished foreigner's fury of impatience was a thing incomprehensible. Well he knew the name of Prince Maurevale, and had been quite aware of the demonstrations at Shoeburyness; but that so much importance should be attached to a mere attempt to go on board the destroyer was beyond all experience remarkable. Nevertheless, the magic of it eventually infected him also; and he found himself catching at any shadow in the fog and crying a multitude of warnings which were of no value whatsoever.

"Did you see him clearly, sir?"

"I saw a man and a boat. They were fifty yards from the ship."

"He wouldn't be one of the down-river thieves—they rarely get this far. Do you say there were two of them, sir?"

"I am sure of it—and one has just gone into that drift to starboard. Come round a point—yes, that will do. We shall take him yet if the fog gives."

"It won't do that until after sunrise, sir. But I do think I see a wherry—yes, there to starboard, and one man rowing. Now, sir, we'll take him surely."

He brought the launch round, and, bending forward, peered

into the chill bank of mist toward which they were being carried. Here they were almost at the heart of the river, and had lost the lights both upon the Essex and the Kentish shores. Moreover, it was a dangerous place, and a great ship looming up suddenly as a vast headland upon a foggy shore warned them of the peril they ran. Maurevale, however, kept the launch running at full speed—and when, without warning, he stopped the engine, it was not fear of the shipping but of the fugitive's escape which prompted him.

"Listen!" he cried; "can you hear a sound of oars?"

The officer leaned over the gunwale until his ear was almost upon the water.

"Yes, sir," he said, "I hear it plainly—but there's a steamer coming now."

"Is it going down river——"

"Ah, that I cannot tell you, sir. If you had a siren on board——"

"Oh, we have that—what do you suggest?"

"Three blasts short and then one long—I'm thinking of my mates."

"Will they be in the reach?"

"They're never far off, sir."

"Then we will signal them."

He put his foot upon a pedal as he spoke, and a very musical siren, wined by the motor's exhaust, sent harmonious echoes through the fog, to be answered by a renewed booming from the steamer, and anon by the shrill whistle of a launch.

"That's the police boat, sir."

"Can you send them a message?"

"They'll understand the Morse code, prince."

"Then we'll send them down river while we run across. Please to port a little—yes, that will do; and now straight ahead."

He sounded a message, clear and distinct, and it was answered by the launch. They were racing fast through the mists now, and emerged presently in a clear patch where a barge lay at anchor and a sailing vessel with four masts was being towed to



Gravesend. A hail to the look-out upon the tug failed to obtain a hearing, nor could the master of the barge give them any news of the fugitive. He had seen no wherry, and "wasn't looking for none," he added a little sourly—an answer which brought them to an abrupt halt and seemed to say that they had been outwitted after all.

"The man's holding down wind, sir," said the officer. "I do believe I can hear him still."

"Be sure you do not hear the tug."

"The tug is going easy—she's in the bank again. Now you listen for yourself, sir."

Maurevale obeyed him—though reluctantly. But for the woeful mischance of the fog he believed that the clue to a supreme mystery would already have been in his hands. And here he must lie impotently, the mists shutting out his hopes and the black water deriding him. Never had he seemed so near to success as when a voice spoke to him from the darkness about his ship. The very futility of the sequel mocked him beyond endurance.

"I hear nothing," he said, when a moment had passed; "if there is an echo of oars, it would be from your own boat. Besides, the tug is moving again."

"Yes, sir, but I am sure of what I saw. The wherry's over yonder in that black well. She couldn't well have run ashore and us know nothing of it. You came across like a railway train, sir—I'm sure these motors have got the devil inside of 'em."

Maurevale smiled.

"At present," he said, "the particular devil I want appears to be somewhere between the Blythe Buoy and London Bridge. Well, we should not lose him—and, by Heaven, there he is."

A man accustomed to safeguard his emotions, one who rarely expressed himself with enthusiasm, this admission of an unnatural excitement meant much that was not confessed by the prince and carried imitation even to the dull official intellect. As for his companion, who had been content during the easy to believe that the night's work was done and a pleasant return to quarters

imminent, he was now all eyes and ears, appealing to strange gods and full of certainties. He had discerned the shape of the wherry in the drift of the mist. It lay yonder, not a hundred yards from the spot. Oh, they could not miss it.

"Why, however, did we come to run by him? And my mates, too! Well, that's a rum go. But he's as good as trapped now, sir. Do you think he'll show fight?"

"Most probably—are you armed?"

"Yes, sir, I have my revolver."

"Then kindly remember I ain't your victim. We are going astern now and you may port a point and hold the course. When I say 'easy' we shall be alongside, and you must help me. Do you hear anything, by the way?"

"There's a steamer on the starboard quarter, sir."

"That's unfortunate. I had not thought of that."

"I fear we must go steady, prince."

"And permit our friend to drift—unlucky indeed."

"He won't go far, not in this fog, sir—there's the steamer sure enough. My hearing's wonderful for an old 'un—that it be."

Maurevale said nothing, but his chagrin was evident. A tramp steamer had emerged from the fog and now stood directly between the pinnacle and the fugitive. Beating a laborious course to the docks, the tramp sounded an incessant blast which echoed across the waste and awakened a quick response alike from the upper reach and the lower. When it had passed, there was no longer any sign of the wherry, nor did the ear detect the dip of hastening oars.

"Well, that beats me," said the officer. "I do believe it's magic, sir. Him going and coming like a peep-show—though, to be sure, I ain't no believer in spirits myself."

"I expect to convert you when we return to the ship. Now, if you please, we are going to drift a little while ourselves and to hold our tongues while we do so. Could you be quite silent for five minutes, do you think?"

"Silence is our duty, sir. What I aint s say——"

"Come, come, I wish you to say nothing. Just wait until I speak to you."

"Certainly, sir, if you wish it. But it's my opinion——"

A stern gesture silenced the irresponsible tongue at last, and Maurevale, having again stopped the engine of the launch, went forward and lay there, peering intently into the drift. He could hear the sirens of the ships no longer, nor was the veil of the fog lifted upon any quarter. Indeed, the utter stillness of it all had become weird beyond experience and suggested an unknown world of the waters over which the launch drifted impotently to some phantom port which would deride them. Meanwhile of the wherry there was no evidence whatever. The unknown had vanished as completely as though the heavens had caught him up or the tide overwhelmed him.

It was a black mystery, but Maurevale refused to despair of it; he still believed the master key was hidden by the drift of the fog, and that any accident of light or the wind might reveal it. In some sense this dripping curtain of the mists expressed the image of his own uncertainties, and stood for their achievement. A great city of man's hope lay beyond the veiled secrets of his own life, and any trick of fortune might disclose it to his eyes. For the moment he must stand alone, as he had stood so many years—a dreamer of dreams and the lord of the lonely places.

He warred against unknown and unscrupulous enemies, and one such lay hid by the fog, within fifty yards of the Kentish shore. Let this man make his escape good, and the work must begin again, he knew not upon what sea or whither. But let him be taken, and it might be that the mystery would vanish as these very phantoms of the fog by which it was cloaked.

To the officer of police the moments were almost unendurable. He depicted supper and a warm bed, and fretted that a crazy foreigner should keep him from them by his whims. Artfully and unobserved, he so played with the tiller and the tide that the pinnacle drifted from the banks to the hither shore, where he hoped to find his fellows and to be relieved. It was this movement that brought discovery at last. A loud cry from the prince, a light thud as they struck some object drifting in the fairway, and the truth was out.

They had found the wherry—and it was empty.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE CRIMSON TARBOOSH

THE prince drew the boat in to the pinnace, and caught at the painter to secure it. He could see but little in the gloom of that place, and had to satisfy himself that the object of his search was missing and the fruit of his night's work lost. When this was done and not before he listened to the exclamations of amazement which fell from his companion and deigned to answer them.

"Empty, sir—then where in the name of all that's wonderful has the man got to?"

"A question I would be glad to answer. Obviously he is either ashore or in the river. You do not suggest—?"

"Me, sir? I suggest nothing. If you'd hit me, I couldn't be more surprised. He must have swum ashore while we was talking about him."

"That is possible, but not likely. We shall warn your chief and leave him to hunt the marshes. But I do not think the man is there."

"Then he must have been caught up like the gentleman what the Bible tells of, sir. That is if he ain't drowned——"

"I would pay a thousand pounds to hear that he is not. Now, help me to make my ship again. I am going to give your chief his instructions."

The man was too dumbfounded to do more than gape at an empty wherry which they now towed across the river; and he obeyed the command with alacrity. The fog had lifted somewhat upon the Essex shore, and they made the destroyer without difficulty, discovering that the police boat had already returned and that the chief was on board. When he heard their story

his opinion was emphatic—that the unknown man had swum to Egypt Bay and thence made his way across the marshes to Chatham or Sheerness.

“What else could he have done, Highness? It he'd upset her, you wouldn't have found the wherry as she was. Believe me, he tricked you in the fog and made his way a fore while you were following an empty boat. But we'll take him yet with any luck, and if we take him, you shall be the first to hear of it.”

And then he asked :

“Am I to keep a guard aboard here?”

“It is quite unnecessary,” said Maurevale, “you will do me a greater service by telegraphing to your men at Gravesend and the docks. Let them look out for a foreigner, perhaps an Indian, who has gone down river either upon a tug or in the chains of a sailing ship she was towing.”

The chief stared in wonder.

“Then you think it was that way, Highness?”

“I have little doubt of it. The man leaped from the wherry as the sailing ship passed him, and either went to the bottom of the Thames or is snug in her chains. Your men can help me very much now. Do not let me detain you—but there is just one question I must put. Have you found the body of the other?”

“Not yet, sir, but the drags are out.”

“Let me know directly you have news; and now, please go, for I have much to do and my own servants will be here directly.”

He dismissed him with a wave of the hand, and returned to the poop to see that he left the ship without delay. When he was gone and the haze of morning had enveloped his launch, Maurevale bade his own fellow go ashore and command the return of the destroyer's crew without delay; and being now absolutely alone, he waited for sunrise with an impatience quite foreign to him. This intolerable night of expectancy and disappointment, how would it end? And the day, what would it bring?

He did not dare to sleep, and maintained his watchfulness as though danger still hovered at the ship and must be met. When at last the sun rose and the Essex shore shaped as some panorama of a welcome stage, he descended the gangway ladder and began to examine the captured wherry from end to end. And here fortune played no tricks with him, for hardly had the sun made search possible when he discovered a crimson tarboosh trampled by a heavy foot at the wherry's bows, and lying where any eye might have espied it.

A crimson tarboosh. How odd that it should be that!

But a few days ago he stood in a drawing-room in Piccadilly and heard a benevolent old gentleman utter an Egyptian name. "Tahir Pasha," he had said, and hesitated to say it at all. And now this derelict of a boat, drifting in the mists by Canvey Island, had given up its token, this trampled tarboosh, which said that Eastern hands had grasped the oars and an Eastern foot had trodden those very boards upon which the trophy lay.

Maurevale was the last man in the world to underrate the value of this discovery. That there was no other relic in the boat, not so much as would have pencilled a single word in his strange story, did not disappoint him. He hid the tarboosh as though it were bejewelled and matchless, fingered the texture of it, and took the most elaborate measurements. Not until he had locked it away in the safe of his own cabin and heard the voices of his crew coming aboard did he appear at his ease or cease to occupy himself with this fascinating jetson.

It was a Saturday morning, and he remembered that he had promised to be with Lady Constance at her cottage by Wargrave, upon this very day. The keen excitements of the recent hours had put the affair out of his recollection. He remembered it now, however, with a new expectancy, and directly he had given his captain instructions for the harbouring of the destroyer in an anchorage known but to master and servant, he left in the pinnace and caught the early express to London. Two hours later he was in Park Lane, and Paul, the Russian, had heard the news.

"A tarboosh, Highness ; that is very wonderful."

"Nothing is wonderful because it is unexpected. We are working in a strange house and must not complain if all the rooms are not familiar to us. Did you not tell me, by the way, that Lady Anna was some months in Egypt upon her way to India?"

"It is true, Highness ; but it appears to lead nowhere. She went much into society, but was very young at that time and conspicuous for little but an ingenue's flirtations. If we are to consider Egypt, there is a more interesting phase——"

"You are thinking of Captain Ferman?"

"Your knowledge astonishes me, sir."

"But it is common knowledge. He had an Egyptian servant—yes ; I have been reminding myself of that since I discovered the tarboosh. We must find that fellow, Paul ; he may be useful to us."

"I hope so, Highness ; but I understand that he returned to Cairo just a year ago."

"Then send a special agent in my name. Let money be spent free ; you understand ? I am determined to stand at nothing in this matter. Have you made arrangements, by the way, for me to see Captain Ferman again?"

"Yes, sir, the solicitors are not unwilling to help us. They will take you to the prison at any time—but I cannot conceal it from your Highness that your friendship for this young man is being misunderstood."

"In what way, Paul?"

"They do not understand, Highness, that you can forgive so quickly."

"Tell them who say so that if I had been an Englishman I would not have hesitated to act as Captain Ferman. Consider, he asks a woman to beg my secrets from me—for what? That he may put them at the service of his country. I discover no other object. The world says 'money' ; but that is the first and the last cry of mediocrity. I do not believe that money was the motive."

"There would appear to be no doubt of his passionate jealousy, sir."

"And upon that account you would hang him! Come, Paul, would you decimate the country?"

"Indeed, Highness, I am very much perplexed—the tarboosh adds to my doubts."

"And leads you anew to the conviction that the captain is guilty. I see that the burdens are to fall entirely upon my shoulders—but at least I count upon your fidelity."

"Your Highness is assured of it."

"Then let us get to work, for the day must be a busy one. And first of the letters—Have you anything from Miss Stella yet?"

"A letter came last night. I judged that it could not be urgent—a telegram has just come. It is from Lady Constance, desiring you to postpone your visit."

"Ah, that is quite unlooked for. Of course, you have not answered it?"

"Indeed no, for I imagined perhaps——"

"That I should still determine to go. Excellent, Paul, the telegram must reach me, let me see—to-night at Wargrave."

He smiled at the thought and turned to answer the telephone, the bell of which had begun to ring while he spoke. When he had finished with the instrument, the secretary observed that his face was unusually pale, and that he was thinking with unwonted intensity.

"Do you know who spoke then, Paul?"

"I cannot imagine, Highness."

"Sir Malcolm himself. They have discovered a body in the river near Canvey Island."

"Indeed, sir——"

"The body of a German, who has letters in his possession addressed to Ludwig Monheim. Does that surprise you?"

"Not at all, sir. But it brings an idea much nearer to me."

"And what is that?"

"That if this murder was not committed by Captain Ferman, then your assistant, Otto, and his father the doctor should be first suspected."



"I will remember it, Paul—now let my car be brought round. If you want me in the course of the next few days, I shall either be at Wargrave—or at Ely."

"At Ely, Highness?"

"Yes, an interesting cathedral city, Paul, which you must know."

He dismissed him upon it, and taking the letter from Stella in his hand he left the house to visit the amiable Lady Constance, who had desired so earnestly to put him off.

## CHAPTER XVII

### STELLA WRITES FROM BLOIS

THE car was a Mercédès limousine, employed despite the warmth of the July day, and the direction the driver received was to go to Henley Bridge first, and then as he should be ordered.

Maurevale could hope for little news from Stella Insole, who had been but a few hours in France. He admired the fidelity which dictated her letter, however, and was glad that she had remembered his wishes.

The note itself spoke both of haste and of travel, being written upon the paper of an hotel at Blois and obviously in an interval of waiting.

To Maurevale it came as a message from the heart of a comrade, and he wondered at his satisfaction. Many women had written to him during his eventful life, but he could recall no letter which moved him to a similar emotion or had been received with such pleasure.

And what images it conjured up—of his own splendid home at Highlands Castle, of the spreading lawns and the fabled yews and the secret places of the gardens wherein she had walked.

All the beauty of the house was associated with her now that she was absent, and no scene could be imagined which she did not dominate. As a child she had come to the castle, and as a child he tried to believe that she had gone forth. It was hard to admit that love already could fold its wings about her, and a man utter the common platitudes with Stella Insole for their object.

Here was the shadow upon the page and one that fell darkly before Maurevale's eyes.

What right had he to keep the secret from her? By what false logic had he supposed her immune from the destiny and the passions of her sex? He could not answer these questions and tried to avoid them. She was very young, and perchance the truth was as he wished it to be.

But he reflected, none the less, upon the folly which had thrown her back upon the company of Otto Walther, and had neglected to remember that the day of her womanhood was at hand.

Otto Walther, to whose genius he owed so much! Otto Walther, the dark-eyed dreamer whose name might be remembered when his own was forgotten! Had he not just heard strange things concerning this very youth, and did he dare to say that they were fabrications?

In that house of mystery there were many rooms. Whither should he seek the key which would unlock the golden door?

He tore the envelope of Stella's letter and found it less brief than he had expected. She spoke of the journey gratefully, and of her sister Kitty's well-being. The count had met them in Paris and taken them thence in his son's motor to Blois, whence the château lay at a distance of twenty kilometres.

"I cannot remember, dear prince," she went on, "if you are well acquainted with this country of which one hears so very much in these motoring days. Surely the realities of its beauty must survive the onslaughts of popularity and leave it unspoiled. To-day we have driven many miles upon the banks of that fair river, the Loire, by which lies France's Arcadia. Not a boat anywhere upon its wide waters, nothing to be seen but sandbanks and deep pools which speak of dead years. The roads themselves go straight as an arrow toward an horizon of limpid blue. There are countless miles of acacias, which must make this a fair garden in the Spring-time—but the boundless fields are eloquent of the earth to which the peasants bend as though the call of a final destiny compelled them.

"I would have had Kitty see something of Paris, if by seeing it I might teach her to forget. What a rare mystery is a young girl's love, dear prince, and how many are its humiliations. Had it

been she herself who suffered, her friends would have known nothing of it; but because it is the man who loved and slighted her she is not afraid to kneel to us that we may save him. What her own life henceforth must be I do not dare to think; but will it not be reward enough if we can give her but a few years of that happiness her courage has deserved?

"For my part, I speak to her ever of hope, and of that hope which lies in the shadow of her beloved name. While your friendship remains it is forbidden to despair. Far away here in this beautiful land the reality of all we have left is more cruel as it is more distant. We think of you, sir, and reproach follows that selfishness which permits us to think of ourselves. And yet, God knows, I grieve for Kitty, for she is heartbroken.

"You asked me, prince, to speak very frankly of all I see at Aizy-la-Belle, and that I shall not hesitate to do. The dear old Count of Fours was much agitated when he met us in Paris, and went in perpetual fear that some unpleasant person would discover and annoy him. He asked me more than once if you had ever been in Egypt or knew that the Lady Anna had been there. Much of what he said I did not understand at all, especially his references to a certain Tahir Pasha, whom he seems to have known many years ago. The way he bundled us out of the place was quite troublesome, and when a little Egyptian boy found his way to the door of the car and tried to speak to him he became almost apoplectic. He is very much changed since the happy days at Highlands—rolls the perpetual cigarette quite carelessly and uses naughty words when the detestable little dog, Cæsar, comes to him to be nursed. Do not you remember that at Highlands the wretched little beast was hardly ever off his knees—thus are the idols downcast.

"I have no news of madame yet. This, I fear, is not a house of amities to which we are going, and yet I am sure the dear old count is very glad to have us, despite his evident fear of his good lady. His anxiety to hear all the news concerning Jack Ferman is painful, and it is ridiculous to remember that vulgar rumour has connected him with the crime because his stick was found in the boat.

"He begs you write to him yourself and assure him that all is going as your friends could wish. Alas, I cannot believe that it is so, for I am so foolish as to think that were it the truth I, before others, would have heard the good tidings.

"I have written much of Kitty in this letter, and so, dear prince, let my conclusions be of her.

"She dreamed a dream of Jack last night, and it has greatly affected her.

"She thought he came to her across the sea to tell her that he was condemned, and to say that he was not unprepared to die. Her faith in him is quite noble, and I would be the last to treat it lightly. Why he ever left her for Anna I do not know, for his letters to Kitty were always frank and if he had ceased to love her, I am sure he would have had the honesty to say so.

"Is not this one more of the many mysteries I pray God we shall unravel?"

Maurevale folded the letter carefully and put it into his pocket.

Many perplexities now joined to the pleasure which its perusal had given him, and some of them were profound.

Thrice in a few days had he heard this name, Tahir Pasha—and from places so widely separated.

His own agents, searching already for this Tahir Pasha in many countries, could but promise diligence and utter vain hopes. He, Maurevale, had the crimson tarboosh meanwhile to speak of Egypt very forcibly, and to bid him in the desperate hour quit England without delay and learn what Cairo could tell him.

Already it began to appear that Fermán's safety lay in no subtle defence based on the facts of the case, but upon the discovery of this mysterious actor, Tahir Pasha, and of his story. And if that were so, time had become of the essence of success—and this must be a race of the wits against time, with an innocent man's life for the stake.

On the other hand—and here was a thought which shook the house of conjecture to its foundations—Ferman himself might dread the discovery of Tahir Pasha, as he would dread it if he

were guilty and had taken an Eastern accomplice in his crime. The motive became of supreme importance, and was difficult to estimate. Had it been a sudden and not inexplicable passion for a woman who did not love him, then motive surely was all sufficient. But Jack Ferman had been very much in love with little Kitty Insole for a season, and he had known Lady Anna during that time. How came he then thus to be the victim of a volte-face which threw him back upon a mad desire to possess this beautiful woman and to kill her because she denied him?

Well might reason stand baffled before the very clues she had discovered. Well might he, Maurevale, continue to say that nothing but a miracle could snatch Ferman from the gallows.

The car had carried him to Henley by this time, and he lunched at the club and sat afterwards to smoke a cigar upon the terrace overlooking the river.

The afternoon had turned dull and cheerless, and few boats were abroad. From time to time heavy clouds gathered above the hills by Hambledon and threatened rain to scare the pleasure-seeker—a circumstance which caused the prince some satisfaction and seemed to cap his plans.

To the few launches or rowing-boats which went up or down the river to the Temple or the Marsh Lock he paid but scant attention. His object was to present himself at Lady Constance's cottage at such an hour as would justify him staying the night even if he must put up at an inn. Fortune, however, had something better in store for him, and when he discovered it, a suggestion rather of the inevitable than of coincidence attended it.

This was a little after three o'clock.

He had finished his cigar and contemplated sending for his car that he might make a detour upon the road to Oxford, when an electric launch came down from Marsh Lock, and who should be sitting in its bows but that benevolent old gentlemen, Dr. Frederick Walther.

None knew this old hypocrite better than the prince, but the surprise of the encounter was so great that for a moment he quite failed to recognise him. When surprise passed, he

remembered the cottage and the telegram which spoke of her ladyship's indisposition. Surely the old doctor was returning from a visit to Wargrave!

Maurevale had no doubt upon the latter point. Constance had told him of its virtues often—and, indeed, since the old duke had lost nine-tenths of his money in a brewery, a speculation which left him a poor but honest teetotaller—the cottage at Wargrave and its modest display constituted the main part of her luxuries.

As for the doctor, his appearance was not so benign as usual, and even a passer-by might have noticed the abstraction of his manner; while a vulgar youth would have described him as looking for sixpence between the floor boards.

Wearing a frock-coat and a crushed straw hat, he had the air of a professional man who had snatched an hour from study or consulting-room, but hastened back to it with a problem which compelled him to expedition.

This also was fortunate for the prince, who otherwise would hardly have escaped detection, at what cost to his plans he might not say.

As it was, he did not move from his seat but just watched the doctor until the launch had gone as far as Temple Island; then, acting with decision, he re-entered his car and drove as fast as he dare to Marlow Station on the Great Western Railway.

"This old gentleman," he argued, "has been to see dear Constance at Wargrave, and is returning to London from Marlow to avoid any possibility of being recognised at the local station. Some urgent news sent him there, and most probably was the same news which caused her ladyship to decline to see me. Well, I must discover the nature of it at her own house—but first to be sure of my supposition."

This was no difficult matter, for he had ordered his driver to wait by Marlow Bridge, and anon the launch appeared and set the doctor down at the landing-stage. Still preoccupied, but apparently fearing detection no longer, the old gentleman directed a firm step toward the railway station, and so was lost to view. Immediately afterwards, Maurevale set out for Wargrave and arrived at the Lady Constance's cottage exactly at seven o'clock.

It was a gay little building, bungalow-fashioned, and built just where the river sweeps to Shiplake and the islands. A kindlier evening, with a flood of warm sunlight, showed the white walls and green jalousies to perfection; while all the air was redolent of the sweet perfume of mignonette, which disputed with the roses and the crimson ramblers for possession of the garden.

Such an hour suggested the lightest side of life—love and laughter and music of the night; but it was hardly typical of that very magnificent person, Lady Constance, or the atmosphere of gaudy shams in which she moved. Maurevale smiled quietly as he crossed the long conservatory which guarded its inner door and rang boldly at the big brass bell. He would look to find Phyllis here—not my Lady of Belgravia.

A sour-looking manservant opened the door and said bluntly, "Her ladyship is not at home." When, however, he had taken a second look at his visitor and had heard his quiet response, his attitude became very different, and he appeared not unwilling to qualify his negative.

"I beg your Highness's pardon—but perhaps you did not receive her ladyship's telegram?"

"A telegram," said the prince, boldly entering the hall, "then her ladyship is ill——"

"Not ill, your Highness, but unable to see anybody to-night."

"Ah," said the prince quietly; "then I will beg her to do me the favour—but here she is, my good fellow, and will speak for herself."

This was very true. Lady Constance herself, hearing voices, had permitted her curiosity to get the better of her prudence, and appeared without warning at the head of the little flight of stairs leading to her boudoir. A clever actress in an ordinary way, this situation was too much for her, and every look, every attitude, spoke of chagrin.

"But, prince," she stammered as she came down, "I sent you a telegram."

He affected to treat it quite lightly.

"My lucky star shines," he rejoined; "a telegram speaks of



anxieties. How many things I should have imagined if that telegram had deceived me. As it is, I know the worst—the village inn and a bed upon which it is impossible to sleep.”

“Then Herbert has told you that I must go to town?”

She looked at her manservant, who had received no instructions to tell this particular lie, and he cast modest eyes upon the parquet. Maurevale found the situation quite delightful.

“Herbert forgot to mention it, but I could imagine no other justification for your malady. You are going to town, my dear lady, to see a specialist—and this, oddly enough, is the last night of the opera. Well, well, the inn, I hear, is passable, and I am really too weary to motor back to-night. Shall I drive you to the station, by the way, before my man stables the car? Your train, of course, is the 8.24, as I see you are dining. There is plenty of time, therefore, and if you decide to honour me by an invitation——”

He laughed and indicated the open door of the dining-room, where a maid was busy about a flower-laden table. Plainly, whatever were her ladyship's engagements, she meant to dine before fulfilling them, and, so intending, her last excuse for sending this most unwelcome visitor to an inn had vanished. Evidently she was at her wits' ends, and no art could conceal the fact.

“My dear Maurevale,” she said, falling naturally to the familiar manner, “you know perfectly well there is not a man in England I would sooner see in this house. Something troublesome has happened—that is all. Let us have dinner at once, and then decide what we will do. I put you off with the greatest reluctance, and you know it. Do not make matters worse by being cynical.”

“Cynical, my dear lady! I was never more serious—or more hungry in my life. As you are in such a hurry, and I see they are about to serve dinner, shall it be *costume de voyage*, and will you forgive me——?”

“Yes, yes,” she cried, “let us dine as we are, by all means, and you can tell me all the news before I go.”

They sat to table presently, and an excellent little dinner was

served. Maurevale found this so well chosen that he was compelled to believe that it had been specially prepared in view of his visit. In that case, Lady Constance had received her ill news by the first post that day, and had telegraphed to Frederick Walther either to confirm or to discuss it. Why, then, did she propose to go to London? Or was her proposal mere bluff, the tale that came first to her lips, and one suggested by Maurevale himself? He thought it must be so—her chagrin could be set down but to one cause.

She expected a visitor at the cottage, and would see him privately. Maurevale was quite sure of this, and the conviction gave him much satisfaction. He, also, would venture to discover the identity of the unknown person who could provoke such a flutter in this dainty dovecot.

With this eventful object in view, he kept his eyes wide open, and did his best to amuse.

That the assignation was in any way connected with her ladyship's partialities for flirtations of mild and other varieties seemed against the probabilities. The suggestion flattered neither his vanity nor his common sense. He knew that she had been scheming for months to get him to her cottage, and did not believe that she would have sacrificed such a diplomatic opportunity had not the motive been altogether of a singular nature.

So he talked to her in his lightest mood, and studied her manner as he did so. Certainly she was a beautiful woman, and it was a thousand pities that the foolish old duke had fooled away the fortunes of his house. Had it been otherwise, his daughter would not have been reduced to these questionable friendships, or thrust back upon the society of knaves. Poverty is a hard taskmaster, and chooses the task.

Maurevale remembered this while he entertained her, and pity rather than contempt lay at the back of his thoughts. He never warred against women, and would not war against this woman. When he spoke of himself, his object was not to learn her opinion, but that of her friends, known and unknown.

“You have read of our little entertainment at Sheerness?”

he asked, when dessert had been served; "but do you read the papers, by the way?"

"At intervals—it is always pleasant to know that dreadful things did not happen yesterday."

"And so you read the news of the day before—a capital plan."

"But I knew you were brilliant," she said; and then archly, "You could not fail to be."

He pretended to take it seriously.

"I have done enough to bring half the rogues of Europe upon my tracks. Perhaps I have also done something for our friend, Jack Ferman."

"Really—that would be good to hear. They say there is no hope for him. Is it so?"

"Ah, if I could tell you. There are possibilities—but no certainties—at least I should not have said so forty-eight hours ago."

She opened her eyes.

"And now?"

"Oh, now—well, now I know something."

He watched her as he uttered the words, and observed that her whole will was bent upon the suppression of an apprehension which threatened to betray her. Her interest in Jack Ferman he had always believed to be both curious and sentimental, but he would not accuse her of inhumanity.

"You know something," she exclaimed at length; and then, with the effusiveness of a born social actress, she said: "Oh, my dear man, you are not going to tell me that Captain Jack is safe?"

"I would give much to be able to say it. Do not forget that I have received him as my guest, and that this charge has come from my house."

"How could I forget it? Impossible. I am not a victim of nerves, and I don't believe in ghosts the least bit in the world—but I will tell you that hardly a night has passed and I have not dreamed of Lady Anna. Why, I can see her now as she came down to dinner on that awful night; I can hear her

laughter, and remember that I thought that tears were not far off. Forget! I am not likely to forget that!"

"Your womanly instincts would forbid. It is impossible that any one who knew her should either forget or forgive. For my part, I will hunt this assassin down to the very grave; I have sworn it, and I will keep my word."

"Then Heaven help the guilty person, my dear Maurevale—if you find him."

"I shall certainly find him. Whether it will be in time to save Ferman's life I cannot tell you. But that he will be found I am as certain as that these are excellent peaches."

"I am glad that you like them. And it is always good to hear a man who is not afraid of his own convictions. Can you tell me anything of this elusive monster, I wonder, or is that a question which should not be asked?"

"By no means. It is a fair question. In the first place, I would have you know that one of his friends is a German."

"A German!"

"Yes, a German and a woman—though generally believed to be a man."

She laughed, and by her laughter betrayed her sense of relief.

"That is a story of a hundred years ago, is it not?"

"Not at all; it is a story of to-day."

"And the name of this interesting person——?"

"Oh, her name is Ludwig Monheim—but, pardon me, you appear to be ill! The room is too hot, I fear."

"I am very stupid, prince. Don't notice me—these July nights are intolerable."

"Then let us go outside—or, if you prefer it, I will open the other window. That is better, is it not? And now, what was I saying? Why, of course, that this German woman being dead——"

"Dead! you did not say that she was dead."

"Such are the facts. She was drowned as she attempted to board my boat off Canvey Island."

"How very dramatic! And, of course, her secrets are buried with her?"

"Far from it—they are already in the possession of the police. We have now to trace her accomplices—and, will you believe me, our quest carries us first to the West End of London."

"To the West End of London—really, it is overpoweringly hot here——"

"Agreed—your courage is greater than your strength. Let me give you a little brandy—you will be the better for it. Ah! I see that the decanter is here."

She was deadly pale, and fanned herself incessantly. A keen observer might have noticed that Maurevale acted with unusual rapidity, but with less than his usual adroitness. He fumbled with the stopper of the decanter, and the glass rang musically as he poured a little brandy into it.

"Drink this," he said, "and then we will go outside."

She obeyed him with unusual docility, and when she had drunk the brandy, she tried to rise, but immediately sank back into her chair and pressed her hands to her forehead.

"", she cried, "I feel just as though I were drugged."

"What a silly idea. Rest a little while on the verandah. I will see that no one disturbs you. Let me give you my arm. Come, it will pass at once in the fresh air."

He almost lifted her to the verandah, which ran the whole length of the room, and then, having arranged the cushions of a low lounge chair, he returned to the dining-room and rang the bell. When the servant appeared, his instructions were mandatory, and such as would command obedience.

"Her ladyship is not very well and is resting. See that she is not disturbed, please. And tell my man that I am returning to London to-night."

The man promised obedience and withdrew. Directly he had gone, the prince went a-tip-toe to the verandah, then returned with silent foot and extinguished the candles one by one. When this was done he crept into the shadows by my lady's chair and waited—he knew not for what.

She had fallen into a stupor, and lay as one heavy in sleep. It was just getting dark upon the river, and the passing boats had

an air of unreality, as though they were ghost ships upon phantom waters. From time to time a murmur of laughter and song would be heard, the tinkling chords of the mandoline or the more ancient and less popular banjo. The neighbouring gardens, however, were deserted, and when it became fully dark, and distant house-boats hung out their lanterns, and lights shone from pretty windows, Maurevale might have imagined himself to be the sentinel of a world apart, the keeper of a house of silence upon the borders of a dream land. But this delusion of sentiment was momentary. He knew, for a truth, that the issues were beyond all words vital to the man whose life he would have saved for Kitty Insole's sake.

A quarter of an hour passed and the situation remained unchanged. It is true that a very ordinary kind of boat was eased for a little while before the cottage, and that, having gone on, it returned presently and again took up a similar station; but no attempt was made by its occupant to come ashore, nor did the darkness permit him or her to be seen. In the end, the skiff joined the others going up to Shiplake or down to Henley, and for fully ten minutes the river showed no human being nor any glimmer of light upon which the vestige of an hypothesis might have been built.

To say that Maurevale was disappointed is to express but ill the vexation which attended this rebuff. He knew that the sleeping woman might recover consciousness at any moment; and having recovered it, would destroy in an instant the gauzy fabric of his schemes. Watching her intently, not a little afraid of the consequences of his venture, he perceived that she lay as one in a heavy stupor—and stupor was all that he had wished to contrive. From this she might awake at any moment, and if she awoke, that was the end of this night's work.

He rose from his seat impatiently, and stepping over the balustrade of the verandah, where the bushes blackened the shadows, he crept a little way down the deserted garden and peered out upon the still river as though incredulous of its silence. A sweet sound of singing arrested his attention pleasantly, but not with any holding interest; and when he had

seen that the stranger was a girl, and that a man paddled the punt which carried her toward Marsh Lock, he turned about and would have returned to the house. Then, as abruptly, he halted and listened with ears which were awake to the lightest sounds.

There was a footstep upon the grass, familiar and unmistakable!

Once before had he listened to that shuffling gait and wondered at the mystery of it—and now he heard it plainly here at Wargrave, and could say that whoever came stood within twenty feet of the shadows which harboured him.

A halting, treacherous step, as though a man crossed the grass in slippers, and stood, almost at every turn, in the winding path to be sure he was not observed—such it was, and as such, it recalled to Maurevale the night of his return to Park Lane and the mystery which had baffled him.

And this also had been the mystery of Highlands Castle, and Stella herself and Otto Walther had played their part in it. The recollection fired him to an interest keen beyond any he had known since the beginning of it. Here and now he would learn why this woman had hesitated to receive him, and why Frederick Walther had come to Wargrave that afternoon. But vastly more important than all, he would discover the identity of the unknown intruder who had entered Highlands Castle within a few days of the murder, and had left it unidentified despite those who guarded it.

He did not move, hardly dared to breathe; but listened entranced to that confession of the steps. And first he could say that the unknown approached covertly and with no great courage at his back. Sometimes the fellow would take three or four steps quite boldly; then stood motionless for long minutes together. This hesitation convinced Maurevale of two things. He judged that the interview with Lady Constance savoured of the clandestine, and again, that some signal or other was missing, and for want of it the man went warily. This conviction became sure when a rustling of leaves upon the right-hand side of the path declared that the intruder had entered the little summer-house and had pushed the honeysuckle aside to do so. In some sense now he was trapped, and the advantage with his adver-

sary. But this might not be a real advantage, for Maurevale could not imagine him to go unarmed, and a fracas would be disastrous. So he hesitated an instant, still reticent to declare himself.

How might he see the man's face and yet go undiscovered? The problem perplexed him, and found him without idea while a full minute passed. Then, as suddenly coming to a resolution, he crept along the grassy border and discovered that he might approach the summer-house from the back. Advancing as deftly as any Indian, he made the place and began to examine it closely. As he had hoped, there were little glass windows upon either side of the door. These would serve his purpose. He took a match from his pocket and struck it—and keeping himself in the shadow he held it before the window. In the same instant a face looked out almost full in his own—and he dropped the burning match and stepped so far back among the bushes that they hid him like a cloak.

It was no shuffling step now that the prince heard upon the grass, but one of a man who fled from discovery and had conceived the possibilities of flight from the beginning. Almost leaping to the boat which awaited him at the steps, the unknown drove his skiff across the river with clumsy strokes and was lost almost instantly to view. The prince, however, returned at once to the verandah, and lighting a candle he held it close to the sleeping lady's face, and was fully content when she opened her eyes and stared up at him.

"Well," he exclaimed in the most natural voice possible, "and are you better, my dear lady?"

She made a great effort to sit up, and shielded her eyes with a trembling hand as she did so.

"Oh," she cried, "my head is whirling"—and then, "why did you let me sleep?"

"It was much the best thing to do. But I fear you won't be able to travel to London to-night."

"I must—I must go. What time is it, prince?"

He took out his watch and held up the candle to see the hands of it.



"It is nearly half-past ten, I think."

She uttered a loud cry, upon which many interpretations might have been put, and struggled to her feet.

"Ten o'clock . . . it cannot be ten o'clock."

"I assure you that it is."

"Then I must go at once."

"It is quite impossible. Let me send for your servants and make up your mind to the inevitable. You really are not fit to do anything to-night."

"Oh, I have promised and I cannot disappoint. Did not I tell you——?"

"Certainly, but all these things are of so little account when health is in the case. For myself, I must return to town, and if you really can trust your servants to do the nursing——?"

He waited, and watched a great sense of relief pass into her eyes. His presence had been the obstacle, and now he was about to remove it. She spoke no more thereafter of a journey to London, but only of his departure.

"It seems so ridiculous that you should go—but what can I do? My head is just whirling—and, oh, it is all so silly, but I seem to be half blind."

"You will be perfectly well after a night's rest. I think you would be wiser not to get up to-morrow, and to see your doctor if your head should trouble you. But I don't think it will—indeed, I should be very much surprised if it did."

She looked at him searchingly, a little recovered from her dizziness, and her suspicions awakened. Something had happened this night of which she knew nothing, and dread fell upon her lest it should have been the thing she imagined.

"Tell me," she exclaimed suddenly, "who came here to-night?"

"Here? I am quite unaware that you had visitors."

Her suspicions were not allayed.

"I dreamed as I slept that a strange man stood by my side—I thought I heard you talking to him."

"Quite a conventional hallucination—you will not expect me to tell you that it was absurd."

"Then no one has been——?"

"I have been aware of nothing more remarkable than the tripper who gazes enraptured from the hired skiff—he could not be called interesting, and so I did not invite him in."

She was altogether deceived by his manner, and greatly relieved. Presently she said—

"I shall really take your advice and go to bed. Will you ever forgive me for this fiasco?"

"You are absolved absolutely — with my blessing. The dinner was excellent."

He held out his hand, and at the same moment the surly manservant opened the door and showed the flaming headlights of the car. Maurevale's last impressions of the house were such as set it in a pentagon of lighted windows with a little door wide open and a vista of a cosy staircase and a beautiful woman, prettily gowned, waiting impatiently for his departure. He waved a last good-night and gave the word to go; but a quarter of a mile from her house he stopped his driver abruptly and bade him return to the inn.

There a boat was quickly found, and pulling a little way up the stream the prince arrived at the house he had just left and perceived in a moment that my lady had not taken his advice at all, but that she had returned to the verandah, and stood there with such a bright lamp by her side that no passer-by could have failed to recognise her.

"So," he said to himself, "she is an optimist, and still waits for her friend. Well, I do not think he will return to-night at any rate."

And then he said—

"An Italian or a Spaniard—obviously a go-between! And I am looking for an Egyptian who wore a crimson tarboosh. Indeed, this is a very great mystery, and who shall say that the truth of it will ever be made known?"

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE MARSHES ARE REVISITED

WEEKS of heavy thunderstorms and of a close and enervating atmosphere had given place to a glorious hour of summer at her prime when Maurevale revisited the cathedral city of Ely and called there upon the old-established firm of Harrison and Trigg.

This was at nine o'clock of the morning, and a little early even for the business folk in that far from busy community. Quite a young clerk appeared at the door of Harrison and Trigg's office in answer to a groom's message, and he was by no means willing to be too free with the stranger.

"The partners, sir, will be here at ten o'clock, neither sooner nor later. Our hours are ten to six, and long enough, too, this summer weather."

"Ah," said Maurevale, "I see you will serve me as well as your principals. It is about that queer old place they call the Marsh House Farm. Will you spare me a few moments of your valuable time?"

The youth looked at the smart buggy and the fine trotting horse in the shafts, and came to the conclusion that a little condescension might be desirable.

"Oh," said he, "with pleasure—but you won't mind telling me your name?"

"Certainly. I am Prince Maurevale, and next time you go racing at Newmarket you will see my horses. But perhaps you were there yesterday?"

The youth shook his head: he was very proud.

"It's not in our family, your Royal Highness, though I don't say I wouldn't put a bit on one of yours if you had told me.

Please come into the private office. I'm sure Mr. Harrison will be very disappointed——"

"And Mr. Trigg likewise?" said Maurevale with a smile, as he followed the youth into a mouldy sanctum which spoke rather of a past prestige than of a present prosperity. Here a chair was dusted and set by a leather-covered table, which offered a sparse variety of books, from the splendid intricacies of "Bradshaw" to the entertaining romances of the *House Agents' Journal*. The youth himself took a quill pen in his hand and sat back at his ease in the writing chair. Maurevale set a spotless white hat upon a convenient newspaper, and at once began his interrogations.

"I have written to your firm concerning the Marsh House Farm, and they have promised to communicate with the last tenant. Can you tell me if any progress has been made?"

"Certainly, I can, sir. The last tenant unfortunately is in chokey, and so there has been this delay. Has your Royal Highness ever heard of Captain Ferman? But of course you have, and what am I thinking about? Why, you're a friend of his."

He blushed to the roots of his well-oiled hair and laughed nervously, as one who has made a *faux pas*. Maurevale, however, immediately put him at his ease.

"As you say, a friend—and, naturally, desiring to help Captain Ferman, I shall be glad to take this old place off his hands. Does it not occur to you that it might be of great use to a lover of horses? Well, then, I hope we shall be able to settle this affair without difficulty."

"But, sir, I understand that the captain will not let the place on any terms whatsoever, and, while he pays the rent, we cannot interfere with him."

Maurevale drummed with his fingers upon the dusty table.

"I had not expected it," he said. "Of course, I see your difficulty. And yet it is odd, for I seem to remember that Captain Ferman himself rarely visited this part of the country."

"Ah, I don't know about that. The rent came round like a baker's cart, and that was all we cared about."

"You never visited the place yourself?"

"Never, except once, when I took the captain's instructions for paint and papering. Mightily particular he was, too; especially about the sanitation—as all you London gentlemen are. Here in Ely we are not so nice, and we look pretty well upon it."

"Absolute pictures of health. It is evident that I must see Captain Ferman and deal with him. Meanwhile I suppose there could be no objection upon your part to my visiting the cottage?"

"I am sure that my superiors will be very willing to be obliging, sir."

"Then tell them I will see Captain Ferman in London; and, remember, that if it ever should be in your family my servants will be delighted to show you my horses at Newmarket."

"Oh, your Royal Highness, I'll bike over some day if it will please you."

The prince stared agape at this odd young man (who would boast to his last hour of his friendship with "Maury, the Roumanian"), and returned to his buggy. The bells of the old cathedral were tolling for morning service then, and Ely was as much alive as it would be in the course of an unexciting day, as like to yesterday and to-morrow as one drop of water to another. But it had no interest for Maurevale, and, letting the impatient "trotter" go as he would, he made straight for the House of the Five Green Shutters, and was at its lonely gate before the sun had touched the zenith.

He had last visited this house upon the day of Arthur Blandy's flight from Highlands, and then he had come covertly and by night. Now he drove openly upon the bare dyke road, and gave a "good-day" to the homely farmers and buxom wenches who lifted curious heads as he passed them at their work. The house itself seemed unchanged since last he set foot in it. The garden, to be sure, was a little wilder, and the weeds had flourished in the tenant's absence; but, otherwise, it was as he had left it upon that night of sharp excitements; and the sun even made of it a pleasant dwelling-house, set picturesquely upon the fen, and by no means undesirable.

Maurevale bade the groom drive on to a neighbouring farm

and there bait and stable his horse. He was not displeased to observe that his visit had attracted a group of curious young people from the fields; and that one of these was a pretty girl of some eighteen years of age, who regarded him a little wistfully and needed but little encouragement to talk. Waiting until the groom was out of hearing, he turned to the girl and began to question her—and she responded with a rustic love of gossip inborn and invaluable.

“Well, my dear, do we not know each other?”

“Oh, no, sir, I’ve never seen you before.”

“But you live in these parts?”

“My feyther’s Mr. Blaker—we live at the smithy down by the fen bridge.”

“Then you remember the lady who used to be at this house?”

“That I do—she was a sawny, she was.”

“Sawny—now what do you mean by that?”

“A silly-ninny—narboddy could understand what her said.”

“Perhaps she wasn’t an Englishwoman—she may have come from some other country.”

“That’s what feyther said—her warn’t up to much good, he thought.”

“Did he say that? Well, now, what did you think yourself?”

“Oh, I never minded her, though the young man, he frightened me awful the first time I saw him.”

“Was there a young man? I never heard of him.”

“Didn’t you—well, he used to ride a bicycle almost every day. I saw him more than once, and he made a face at me.”

“Was he a sawny, too?”

“Feyther says he was one of they Turks teacher speaks about. He used to wear a red thing with a tassel to it—oh, he did look that queer, I couldn’t help laughing.”

“Were they the only two in the house?”

“That’s what narboddy niver knew. You couldn’t go near the house for the dogs they kept.”

“What kind of dogs were those?”

“Two great yellow things—one killed feyther’s old sheep dog, and that was worth a lot of money. My mother says they could

have been up to no good to keep such things about the place."

"Your mother is very right. Have you seen anybody else there since they left?"

"Well, I haven't, but I'm most at home now, for the childers are away from school, and I must mind them."

"You are a large family, eh?"

"Feyther's had seventeen children, and brought 'em up on a pound a week. He says he don't know why anybody wants more."

"Your father's a philosopher, my dear. Here's something to help you to amuse the children. Come and talk to me next time I come here. Perhaps I shall live in that house myself."

She looked at the golden coin, and could not suppress her natural delight

"Why, you've given me a golden one, sir."

"I meant to, my dear."

She cried the news to the others, and then, wolfishly, the primitive instincts prevailing, she closed her fist upon the money and ran wildly down the road toward her home. Maurevale watched her out of sight and then went up to the door of the house and knocked upon it. He was answered immediately by no other than his steward, Arthur Blandy.

But how changed was this Hector!

No longer chubby of cheek and sleek of limb, but an emaciated image of the Arthur Blandy who was; a haunted, timorous relic of a man, starting at his own shadow and trembling at every sound. The prince's knock fell as a blow upon his heart. He could hardly speak when the pleasant voice greeted him.

"Ah, Blandy, so you have arrived?"

"At ten o'clock last night, Highness—an awful journey."

"The yacht set you ashore at Harwich and you came by the boat train to Ely—I hope you were discreet, Blandy?"

"My own father would have passed me in the street, Highness. Such a mock of a man I was."

"Quite right—quite right. I am glad to see you are growing wiser."

"It's been a dreadful time, sir. Fancy me starting up like a frightened hare every time I see a policeman."

Maurevale laughed.

"That was quite unnecessary, Blandy."

"Unnecessary, Highness!"

"As I say, unnecessary. The police have your story from the first line to the last. I myself have written it down for them—and moreover I have promised that you shall be present at the trial."

"You don't say so, Highness!"

"Indeed I do. So henceforth you will think entirely of your work for me."

Great beads of perspiration fell from the man's brow, and he wiped them away with a monstrous silk handkerchief. What hours of agony he had suffered—and that awful night of darkness and haunting sounds through which he had awaited his master's coming. Were these unnecessary? He could have kissed the hand which carried the tidings.

"I am sure I am very much obliged to your Highness; you've made a new man of me."

"Very well, then; let us go to business. Has any one been here since you came?"

"Not a living soul, sir—not since I came."

"Ah, then, you have reason to believe——"

"That some one has visited the house before me? Yes, Highness, I believe that. The picture has gone."

"The picture——?"

"Of the queer-looking lady in the Indian dress."

"You don't say so, Blandy? Well, I must see that for myself."

He entered the sitting-room immediately and discovered the truth of it. The portrait of the Turkish lady no longer hung upon the walls—but the statement that it had gone was premature. Stepping to the buffet above which it had been suspended, the prince perceived the picture wedged between



the furniture and the wall, and with a little help he quickly recovered it.

But in what a state! A man might have said that it had been slashed by a knife or a sword—so cut and torn it was. And the frame half broken to pieces as though by the same savage assault.

Maurevale set the relics of the picture against the wall, but made no immediate remark upon them. Had he told Arthur Blandy the truth, he would have said that this portrait carried him in thought, not to Turkey, but to Egypt, and that the face was the replica of many he had seen in Cairo. But he confessed nothing of this; and when he did speak it was to bid the steward guard the relic carefully.

"I am renting this place, Blandy, and I propose to buy the furniture. Directly you hear from me, send this picture to Park Lane. If the agents come here meanwhile, pretend that you have just arrived and are looking round in my name."

"Would you wish me to stay here all the time, Highness?"

Maurevale turned upon him peremptorily.

"Until the murderer of Lady Anna is discovered you will not stir a step, Mr. Blandy."

Blandy sighed, but had not the courage to protest. He had got himself into a rare mess truly, by his trafficking in dishonourable secrets, and here he was to pay the price of it. No crusted port in this mean house; no soothing cigars o' nights in a pleasant room, with the vista of river and park to make looking out of the windows a delight. Nothing of that kind—here he must lie next door to starvation and still speak of the police. For a fat man thinks first of his food—a thin man of himself.

"I'll do my duty willing, sir, if you'll make it clear what that duty is," he said at length. Maurevale hesitated to respond to that.

"You will report any circumstance to me immediately, however trifling it may seem. Directly the affair is arranged with Captain Ferman, I will see that you have some one in the house with you and a trap. Meanwhile we shall take charge of the

commissariat. Watch night and day, Blandy, and let me know who comes. Some one, you see, has been here already. Now I would pay a hundred pounds if you could tell me who that person was."

"I'd be glad to earn it, Highness. He seems to have been a-rooting everywhere, even in the garden. There's the marks of his fingers all over the place."

"Indeed! but that is very interesting, Blandy. You are becoming quite a detective. Let me see these wonderful marks you speak of."

"They're in the kitchen mostly, sir. His footsteps are also in the garden; I'll show your Highness."

He led the way to the kitchen, and showed exactly what he meant. Some one had been busy in this place, had even lighted a fire, and left a fine imprint of his fingers upon the spotless white dresser and the cupboard beside it. And as though this were not enough, he had stepped out of the kitchen window, across a tangled flower-bed, and so made his way to the very bottom of the garden, by which the dyke ran. Maurevale wondered that he had neglected it at his first visit, for now, when he approached the dyke, he perceived that some one had built a wigwam of reeds at the water's edge, and had lined it within as children line a nest they make in a hayfield.

"Oh," he cried, "but this is very interesting, Blandy; we seem to have come upon a playground, do we not?"

"I rayther think the young lady has been a-using of it, Highness."

"And what makes you think that, Blandy?"

"Why, Highness, I had a mind to peep inside of it this morning, and what do you think I found? Why, these here bits of gold chain, I did."

He handed the prince three tiny golden links, with a broken split-ring at the end of them, and watched his master's face curiously as he did so. Maurevale, indeed, made no attempt to conceal his astonishment.

"You found these links! Now where did you find them, Blandy?"

"I found them among the hay at the bottom of that shanty, Highness."

"Were you looking for anything?"

"Well, I just rooted about; I don't know why it was—a sort of feeling, Highness, that luck might be in my way. And there they were—shining bright as anything in the sunlight."

"I commend your diligence; I am very pleased with you, Blandy. Can you imagine what purpose these links served?"

"They've come off a lady's bracelet. I'm ready to swear it, Highness."

"Undoubtedly they did; your powers of perception are excellent, I see. Continue to employ them in my service, and I can even forget that you contemplated robbing me."

"Highness, I ought to be whipped for that. I can't think what I was doing of."

"Nor why you visited Lady Anna's bedroom upon the night of her death—shall I tell you why, Arthur Blandy?"

"I was a very foolish man."

"An exceedingly foolish man—who went to her room to read the names of the horses I wrote on her menu at dinner-time. Was it not that, Blandy?"

"It were, Highness—and God forgive me, every one of em' lost."

Maurevale smiled.

"I meant them to, Blandy. I wrote them down for that poor lady because she asked me not for winners, but for losers. Your informant, Child, should deal more fairly by you. He is a bad listener, Blandy, remember it."

The jester came lightly enough, and testified, perhaps, to the emotions which the discovery of these few links of gold had awakened. In truth, they filled the mean house with visions, and served instantly to build a bridge between its poor rooms and the wide terraces of Highlands Castle, upon which Lady Anna had walked so proudly. He had no doubt whatever that this chain had linked the Heart of Jade to her white wrist, and that she herself had stood in this very garden many a day and had not complained of its loneliness. Sentiment of another kind

reminded him of her prayer that the Heart might hide her when "the day should come," and he fell to wondering if death after all had not been very kind to her. This thought, however, was quickly replaced by a remembrance of his oath and the duties it put upon him. He would avenge her though he gave all that life held dear to the task.

And this was in his mind when he climbed into the buggy and quitted the House of the Five Green Shutters. Not in England might the truth be found—perhaps not in Europe. But he, Maurevale of Dara, would find it whatever the penalty.

## CHAPTER XIX

### SIR HORACE RUPERT ASKS SOME QUESTIONS

SIR HORACE RUPERT, who had saved enough himself from the court one's maw to make a little row upon Temple Bar, sat in the library of the little house at Park Lane waiting for Prince Maurice's return from Ely, and by no means discontented either with himself or the world.

A dainty cup of tea stood at his elbow; he smoked a cigarette of fine fragrance, and looked through the open window upon that vision of fair women which Hyde Park can disclose even when the society journalist has told us that Goodwood sounds the knell of the departing season.

Sir Horace could indeed afford to look upon society with a benign interest: he carried so many of his secrets in his far from capacious bosom that hardly a man or a woman did not regard him in some way as a species of family confessor who saved aristocratic heads from indiscretions and the necks of the vulgar from the rope.

He was entirely unconventional as an advocate, slim and Eastern in countenance; possessing a wonderful mastery of the intricacies of figures and a mastery of facts no less than his Juries, as one scribe declared, were shaken to their foundations by his eloquence. He had the ears of judges and the confidence of lawyers; knew all the pretty women in London and the love most of them; could tell you exactly what the Duke of Dundee owed to Moss, the money-lender, and why Lord Lansdown married Bella Bolton, the actress. He was a very great counsel, and the hero of more famous cases than any advocate of his time.

Such was the man who waited for Prince Maurice in the little library in Park Lane, and stood there with expectancy and

pleasure when he heard the well-known step on the stair. He had taken quite an unusual course, and was not indisposed to admit as much. This case of cases, the meteoric crime which had astounded all London and put that very social hero Jack Ferman on the carpet, might it not also be the final rung in that ladder of vice which Sir Horace Rupert, would scale the loftiest pinnacle?

He believed that it might be so, and yet there were ugly depths below him. So far his keen eye discovered no light. He had come to the conclusion that nothing short of a miracle would sweep Ferman from the scene, and in miracles he had no faith. So here was a case which was a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles—very big game, but one in whose acuteness he had the highest confidence.

"Sir Rupert, I am glad to hear of your success."

"I shall be glad to hear of your success, and to me."

"I am glad to hear of your success, and to me."

"I am glad to hear of your success, and to me."

"I am glad to hear of your success, and to me."

"I am glad to hear of your success, and to me."

"I am glad to hear of your success, and to me."

"I am glad to hear of your success, and to me."

"I am glad to hear of your success, and to me."

"I am glad to hear of your success, and to me."

"I am glad to hear of your success, and to me."

"To the last line."

"And you think——"

"That he's an innocent man. His manner tells me that. I have seen too many murderers to be mistaken. Anna Maclain was never killed by Jack Ferman, believe me."

"I do believe you—and then?"

"Ah, and then. Well, of course, there's another man or woman in it somewhere."

"Does Ferman himself tell you nothing?"

"On the contrary, he appears to tell me everything that is vital. I can't persuade him that it wasn't suicide."

"Oh, he is of that opinion, then—since when?"

"All the time, I should say. He admits she had some trouble of her own. It came out by accident, and I held him to it."

"Would he not indicate the nature of it?"

"Not a word—most of the time he spends praising your generosity; that's touched him deeply."

"Why should he call it generosity? He was an English soldier, and they have given him Secret Service work to do. He knows that I could help his country greatly—and Secret Service people are taught first to help themselves. I despise the profession he follows, but do not judge him."

"That's fairly put. Do you think the maid Berthe had any grudge against him?"

"Ah, there you ask me a wise question. It was almost the first I asked when the story came out. We are confronted by the immediate difficulty, however, that there is absolutely no evidence at all to connect her with it—at least the police say so."

A curious smile accompanied the assertion, and was not lost upon Sir Horace.

"You don't agree with them, Maurevale?"

"I? Oh, I agree with everybody—but I really know nothing about the woman."

"And attach no importance to her evidence?"

"Absolutely none whatever."

Sir Horace sipped his tea and reflected a little while. Presently he said—

“Ferman thinks the old Frenchman is in it.”

“He does!—I am surprised at that.”

“You know that the count is supposed to be working diplomatically for the French Government?”

“Yes, I understood as much.”

“Well, I don’t suppose he’d be more scrupulous than the rest. That button of the Legion of Honour may serve my client well. No jury will convict if it is put properly to them.”

“And you will put it very well. By the way, does Ferman treat you better than he treats me? Does he tell you anything of Lady Maclain’s story?”

“I didn’t know she had a story; but, of course, all women have. Well, he said nothing about it?”

“And yet I assure you that if you had mentioned a certain name to him, an Egyptian name, you would have made him very angry.”

“That’s very interesting—may I hear the name?”

“Certainly; it is the name of one who was *persona grata* to Kitchener before the Young Egyptians got hold of him and bought him body and soul—they call him Tahir Pasha.”

“And where is this pretty traitor now?”

“Tell me and I will win your case for you. The last I heard of him was in an opium den in Paris. My men were too late by an hour. But they are still hunting.”

“We must find that man, Maurevale; Ferman will hang if we do not.”

“He may hang if we do—I don’t know—it’s a great question to me whether we should find him or no.”

“It is! Then you think—ah, I see, there is an old quarrel—but this is very interesting; and Tahir in Paris. Since how long, I wonder?”

“We know that. He came to Paris from Corfu three days before the affair. He was at the Châtelet upon the night Anna was murdered.”

“Has he friends in England?”



"I am not sure of it. I think there may be one—if there is, I have seen him."

"Seen him—where?"

"In a summer-house at Wargrave rented by my friend Lady Constance Heliers."

Sir Horace did not speak for some minutes. It was plainly to be seen that the mysteries of this most mysterious affair baffled him utterly.

"Well," he exclaimed at last, "I am very much in your hands, prince."

"Ah, but you make my task very difficult. What right has this young man to turn to me?"

"None whatever. That's why you are working for him."

Maurevale shrugged his shoulders.

"You are quite wrong," he said; "I am working because my vanity bids me."

"But in any case you are working, and that's a great deal. God knows what the brief will be like unless you write it."

"You compliment me prematurely. I may write what none can read."

"And if you do Jack Ferman will hang. The greatest case of our time, prince, the very greatest."

"And the greatest advocate," said Prince Maurevale.

Sir Horace was not averse from flattery, and for a little while he smoked a cigarette with some satisfaction. It was quite true that neither he nor his solicitors knew anything whatever about the case, and that if he lost it the affair might work him an irreparable mischief; but his confidence in the prince remained supreme, and he staked all upon it. This man would save Jack Ferman for Anna Maclain's sake. The conviction had been with him from the first, and this interview confirmed it. His own part would be to receive the popular applause which would attend a verdict of "Not guilty."

"Well," he said as he rose to go, "we will all do our best. Did you tell me you were going to Paris?"

"Yes, upon my way to Lausanne to the Congress."

"Ah, the Germans are hoping to keep you out of that. Do you understand their object?"

"Perfectly; they fear that I shall stand for an agreement between the Powers. If they keep me away from Lausanne, the Governments will say, 'This man has nothing to teach us—he is an impostor and afraid to show himself.' Then Germany will make me offers."

"Which you will not accept. But I have no right to say that. You may not love this country as much as we flatter ourselves that you do."

"Say rather that I love no country more than the common humanity I would serve. Is it not the greatest wonder of this twentieth century, my dear Sir Horace, that men still murder each other at the bidding of other men they call politicians, and pay for bringing devastation upon their homes? You, for instance, would murder me under certain circumstances and consider yourself a patriot for doing so. I can see you with a rifle in your hand."

"I would much prefer a brief, Maurevale."

"And you have one. The greatest, I think, of our time."

"Undoubtedly the most perplexing—and that reminds me. Is the Earl of Farrard expected home immediately?"

"I wish we knew. He was on his yacht when last he wrote to Anna. We have sent him all the cables possible telling him of his sister's death. I should not be at all surprised to hear that he is still on the high seas, somewhere between New Zealand and Valparaiso—but, wherever he may be, we can do no more."

"Do you think he would help us?"

"Ah, that is what I should very much like to know."

"But we can get his evidence if we think it necessary—we can get an adjournment."

"My dear Sir Horace, I will answer 'Yes' or 'No' to that when I have found Tahir Pasha."

The great advocate smiled.

"You will have to take to opium, prince," said he.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE SEARCH IS BEGUN

**M**AUREVALE left for Paris upon the following morning, being followed to Victoria Station by his secretary, Paul.

This was the beginning of the holiday season with its attendant discomforts.

Families which would have been much happier in England struggled with adversity and a desire to be in France. Children clung together, obsessed by the fear that they had been forgotten and would be left behind. The guards ran to and fro incessantly, dropping exclamations as princes drop their favours. Those who could, by any chance, take a seat in the wrong train did so immediately, and sat there in banal content. The experienced traveller wondered, on the other hand, why experience sent him across the Channel at such a moment, when there were fifty-one other weeks of the year during which he could have travelled.

Maurevale had reserved a carriage in the Paris express, and here, at some five minutes to eleven o'clock, Paul handed him his letters and received his instructions.

The Russian was very much in earnest, and excited beyond his wont. An admission that he had reached the station with difficulty caused Maurevale some surprise, but was quickly explained.

"A very extraordinary thing has happened, Highness," he began; "had it occurred ten minutes later I would have been compelled to follow you to Paris."

"Well, Paul?"

"It concerns the maid Berthe, Highness."

"Ah, I have been expecting something of this sort. She is in London, is she not?"

"She came just three days ago."

"And her occupation?"

"Apparently the discovery of the person for whom she waited at Pangbourne."

"You interest me very much, Paul—go on."

"As you know, sir, she has been under close observation since the beginning. Yesterday—to be precise, last night at nine o'clock—she met a man near the Criterion grillroom and walked some distance with him in the direction of Piccadilly. They appeared to be quarrelling, and separated at Down Street. This morning she met the man again, at twenty minutes past ten, near her lodging, which is in Ayr Street. The pair entered a cab and drove to St. Pancras Station, where they have been followed by the cleverest of all my assistants, who will make his report to me to-night."

"Have you any description of the man meanwhile?"

"He is five foot ten or so in height, wears a dark serge suit, and is apparently a Spaniard or an Italian. We find that he is at a hotel in Leicester Square—but that he has been in England since the first week in June. His name in the books is Jules Farmot—but I imagine it to be assumed, and that is the opinion of the hotel people."

"Has he been with them from the beginning?"

"No, Highness, for three days only; but they gather from his conversation that he came here from Paris on the day I have named. This morning my colleague was clever enough to snap a picture of him—I have the film with me here, but it is undeveloped. Should your Highness wish——"

"Certainly, I will take it with me, Paul. Let your colleague hear that I commend his diligence. It might be worth while to let Sir Malcolm know of this—but not until I have debated it. You will find me at the Ritz Hotel for three days. After that I am at Lausanne."

Paul looked a little anxious.

"This visit is very daring, Highness."

"I am aware of it, Paul—but do you not say that Gustave Faber is an excellent man, and that he is to take care of me?"

"Ah, sir, but I am jealous. Nevertheless, I trust Faber."

"And feel confident that he will discover for me this very mysterious Egyptian Pasha, upon whose existence an honest man's fate may depend?"

"I believe that he will do so, Highness, though I am unable to agree with your conclusions."

"Your own view being, Paul——?"

"That this is a mystery which no man will ever solve, Highness."

Maurevale sighed, but did not contradict him. Perhaps he was coming to that opinion himself, but his indomitable will refused to hear any such story, and the last words he spoke to his servant were the command that every post must bring an account of his achievements and his failures. Then he took his letters and wondered why he had omitted to notice that the first of them was in Stella Insole's well-known handwriting, and that it had arrived in London by the morning mail.

For a little while this note remained unopened, while Maurevale recalled a picture of the old French château of Aizyla-Belle, and of its gardens. He doubted not that the Count and Countess of Fours would have many guests, and he could conjure up an *al-fresco* scene with the English sisters for its chief ornament. Stella's girlish beauty would win many admirers in that artificial atmosphere of "Paris à la campagne," and could not fail to provoke some jealousies. He was not unwilling that it should be so—for he remembered that the boy, Otto Walther, had already declared his love for her, and that she must know many lovers before the true story of her life could be written.

She wrote freely—an intimate confession of her hopes and her doubts. So newly arrived at the château on the Loire, she spoke of its splendours, ancient and modern, of its great rooms, wherein the kings and queens of France had moved, and of its gardens, wherein already you might espy the monoplane of Monsieur Henri, the count's second son.

"The house is superb," went her words, "a gabled building

of stone, with a façade made familiar to me by twenty writers. One wing of it is carried right across the river upon Norman arches, above which is the ballroom, with the very sedilia upon which the mad Louis played with his images and Charles heard the rhapsodies of the Maid who saved him. Now we set the gramophone upon this ancient bench, while Monsieur Henri tells me that he would fly with me to the world's end, and the machine would carry the spirit—of which I am delighted, but there seems no possibility whatever.

“The other guests are chiefly relatives: the Chevalier Maurice, who makes love after dinner to the count's niece, Olive, but becomes a philosopher of a depressing school in the early morning hours; Monsieur Gaspard, madame's brother, who still believes that France is waiting for a king; and the Bishop of Loches, who is a dear old gentleman with one foot already in Paradise and the other in a poultice. I fear the gout afflicts him sorely—but what is nearer to his heart is the trouble which hovers about this house, and his own difficulty in understanding it.

“You asked me, prince, to visit the château and to give you my impression of its people. You told me that this was a duty I owed to Lady Anna and to my sister. Believing as you do that this visit is a true service to the dear old count, and must make eventually for his happiness, you establish me at once in a position of responsibility and of charity to which I must bring all the devotion I can command.

“Let me, then, speak very frankly to you of my difficulties. When I set out from England I believed with you that nothing but a series of coincidences had connected the honoured name of the Count of Fours with this terrible crime. If I believe it no longer, if I am alarmed and dismayed, let circumstance, not judgment, speak for me.

“The count went to your house frankly and openly to negotiate with you, as you have told me, on behalf of the French Government. His friendship for dear Anna quickly became notorious—provoking the jealousy of Madame, his wife, and perhaps not unjustly. When the dreadful day came, his stick was

found in the boat and a button of his order in the very dressing room. He gives us an open answer to these unhappy witnesses, and we, perforce, are content with them. We assume that he will return to France, and forget the misfortunes to which he was subject in England. But is that the case: do I find evidences of it here in his daily life at Aizy-la-Belle? I am compelled to answer 'None.' I am driven to tell you that every day adds its burden to my doubts.

"Do you remember, sir, that when I was travelling from Paris here I made mention of the fact that the count stood in evident apprehension of meeting some person, and that particularly the approach of a little Egyptian boy troubled him beyond all reason?

"Then at Aizy-la-Belle this curious and quite unlooked-for impression is deepened every hour. The count never leaves his wife's side when he can find an excuse for remaining with her. Madame, upon the other hand, treats him with a disdain which is cruel, and delights, it would seem, in provoking the maddest suspicions.

"To me this drama of espionage and of its resentment is pitiable in its pettiness. I see a courtly old gentleman bending beneath a burden which he has no courage to bear: I am in daily contact with a hard and worldly woman, who uses her husband's gentleness as a whip and scourges him with the very solicitude she despises. Possibly the others of the house are sensible of the play, but to them it has no meaning beyond the quite conventional interpretation the world puts upon the domestic comedies. Madame delights in being gracious to all but her husband—and with him her whims are incessant, and the latest of them confines her rigorously to her own apartments, wherein she plays 'Bridgè' with the bishop and the niece, but is the petulant invalid to Monsieur le Comte.

"Such is the scene, dear prince, to which I am called and upon which my work must be done. I have written this general account of it that you may judge how far I have been influenced by an atmosphere of suspicion, and how far by the realities in the story that is to come.

"For there is a story, and it, I believe, is as strange a story as even you have heard in all the dark hours of this terrible affair.

"Yesterday Monsieur Henri took a party of us to the old palace of Chinon, which, as you will know, is the most splendid ruin in all this châteaux land. More correctly, perhaps, it should be said, that we made a little tour, searching out Amboise and Chevarney and fixing upon Chinon for our *déjeuner*. I am so much in love already with this fascinating country, its exquisite forests, and echoes of five hundred years ago, that I would refuse none who offered to show me more of it; and I felt quite grateful to Monsieur Henri for taking me away from Madame and her petulant ways, and the 'dear old bishop,' who is for ever complaining of the gout.

"Our party was a merry one. The Chevalier Maurice rode at the back with Kitty and Olive, to whom, upon this occasion only, he consented to make love before lunch. I went in front with Monsieur Henri, and listened to his absurd stories of what the world would be like when every one rode in aeroplanes, and even love in a forest would be by no means pastoral. Our journey carried us for a while by the banks of the Loire, that dreamy river from which all life seems to have fled; that wide lake of idle waters, lapping the sandbanks and telling them stories of the mediæval age. Thence we turned to the forests, and were soon amid those woodland scenes which are more beautiful, surely, in France than in any country of the world.

"How good it would be, sir, to live in such a land as this; and may one not be permitted to reflect upon the chances of life which give to some these days of the sweet forest life and the sunshine, while they imprison in the gloom of cities others who have deserved a better fortune? Perchance, as you tell me, the sum total of human happiness is the same for poor and rich, for those who live in palaces and those who live in slums; but is it not hard to believe that one who dreams through life upon the banks of this sunny river is not a happier mortal, and has not lived a truer life, than the most



praiseworthy denizen of Poplar, who has done his duty in that state of life to which it pleased God to call him? These thoughts come to me often when I am in a beautiful country, but never so welcomely as in that dear France you have taught me to love.

"Yesterday they gave me the courage to listen to the absurdities talked by Monsieur Henri, and to bear with them. His promise to fly with me to Olympian heights lost some of its heroism when joined to the qualification that he feared we should get the poorest of food at Chinon, a tragedy which did not happen, for the lunch at the inn there proved quite excellent; and afterwards we went up to the castle to see the identical door against which the French King cracked his crown, and the very spot where the Maid waited for him to return. So far, be it admitted, the venture had nothing out of the charming commonplace which makes a day in châteauxland. You shall soon hear how the aspect of it was to change. We rambled about the château, and then returned, one by one, down the steep road towards the town. Kitty had been with me at the start, but I stopped from time to time to gather the roses from the crumbling wall, and was quite alone when I descended the narrow stone steps and entered the street of ancient houses which lie immediately beneath the citadel. Here the strange thing happened. Thinking nothing of the matter, and forgetting for the hour all that had sent me to this wonderland, I came face to face with the little Egyptian boy who had so frightened Monsieur le Comte upon our journey from Paris, and who recognised me immediately. Indeed, he spoke to me in quite passable French; asked me very cheekily how the angry old gentleman, whom he called 'my father,' was doing.

"You may be sure, sir, that this encounter both surprised and interested me beyond my power to tell. The lad sat astride of a low wall, running round the garden of a grey stone house, such as might have been occupied by any artisan or petty clerk of Chinon.

"His attitude was neither one of concern nor even of curiosity, and I perceived that he addressed me without any

other object than that of reminding me that we had met before. When I answered him in the same spirit, and asked him how long he had been living at Chinon, he replied, with just as much self-assurance, that he had been living there just three days; so that it was evident he had come with us, step by step, from Blois, and that his family had installed themselves in this humble dwelling at the very moment the Count of Fours returned to his home at Aizy-la-Belle.

"I have said that I was alone during this conversation, and very fortunately I remained so. An inquiry as to whether the boy had long left Egypt obtained the response that he had been five years away from his own country; but while I was asking whether he wished to return, a woman came suddenly to the door and demanded to know who I was and what I wanted. To her I responded immediately that I was the friend of Monsieur le Comte de Fours, whereupon she immediately invited me to enter the house, and sent the Egyptian boy upstairs upon an errand of whose nature I remained in ignorance.

"Admit, dear prince, that this invitation was exceedingly fortunate. Had I remained at the gate another five minutes, Monsieur Henri and the Chevalier Maurice—whose charming occupation had been that of twining red roses into Olive's black hair—would have overtaken me, and the whole episode ended in that *frivolité de voyage* of which the Frenchmen have such a ready command. As it was, I entered the cottage just as they passed, and thinking that they must wait for me, and would not resent the delay while coffee and cigarettes were to be had at the inn, I gave no thought to myself but only to the woman before me.

"Let me describe this remarkable person for you with what skill I can command. She is, perhaps, fifty years of age: her skin so browned by the sun that she might be an Eastern woman wearing our dress and habits with difficulty. Her eyes are unforgettable, very large and of a bluish grey, and seeming to reflect an unstable mind and one dominated by fear. In her hands there is some character; they are round and puffy, and the nails very white. She is of middle height, but a little lame; her hair

is so wonderfully white that it is quite impossible to imagine her as a girl or even as a woman in the middle life. Beyond this, I can tell you only that her voice is very soft and pleasing when she is not agitated—but the slightest word of opposition provokes her to a shrill outburst which a true virago could not surpass.

“This person I followed into the parlour upon the right-hand side of the narrow hall. It was very sparsely furnished, and without evidence of daily occupation. A Madonna upon the mantelshelf stood in odd contrast to a model of the Sphinx standing upon a little oak table in the window. There were two or three English books upon the ledge by the fireplace—and more remarkable still, a large framed photograph of Farrard Court above them. So astonished was I to discover this that my amazement was evident to the woman, and she began at once to speak of it.

“‘Mademoiselle knows that house. It is of the English Earl of Farrard—a great nobleman, mademoiselle, where my sister was maid. Mademoiselle is English, and will like to see the English pictures here in our country—is it not so, mademoiselle?’

“I replied as graciously as I could that nothing gave me greater pleasure, but a further reference to Farrard Court would have been indiscreet in the face of her evident desire to avoid it.

“‘My sister has been dead many years,’ she said evasively, ‘and I, mademoiselle, I have come back to my dear France to die. Here at Chinon I was born, and here will I end my days. There is only one country for each of us, and we are faithless children if we forget. Your own land is very beautiful—but, mademoiselle, it is so lonely—the solitudes, the wide, wide marshes, the dykes anywhere. And the people so strange, so sullen. Oh, I do not like your England, and I am glad that I have left it.’

“I concealed the interest I felt, and feigned indifference with what composure I could command.

“‘You must have been in our fen country,’ I said at hazard. ‘England is not all like that, and you were not fortunate, madame.’

“She waved it aside with a gesture; but I thought her grey

eyes were alert none the less, and watching me as shrewdly as I watched her.

“‘Ah, mademoiselle,’ she exclaimed, ‘we poor people cannot pick our comings and goings as you others. I have been in many countries, but there is only one country for me, and I pray God I may never leave it more. Here in France one knows how to live—it is so difficult among strangers.’

“‘And you have travelled far,’ I said, ‘for the little boy who spoke to me is an Egyptian, I think?’

“She made no attempt to deny it. I was surprised that she answered me so readily.

“‘Yes, yes, an Egyptian, a little orphan, mademoiselle, to whom I have been very kind. He tells me that he has seen you before—was it not at Blois?’

“‘Certainly, with Monsieur le Comte de Fours—upon my journey from England.’

“‘Ah, Monsieur le Comte! How many years since I—but you know him well; he is an old friend of yours, mademoiselle?’

“‘He was a great friend of a dear friend of mine—the sister of the English nobleman who owns that house. Your sister would have known the Lady Anna Maclain, I am sure. She must have seen her often at Harvard Court.’

“I confess, prince, that I remained in some alarm at the effect these simple words produced upon this kindly old Frenchwoman. Had I come to rob her house she could not have regarded me with more concern or with an apprehension less concealed. Changing colour at the rapid beating of her heart, the white cheeks flushing in spots of crimson and then assuming pallor quite unnatural in its hue, she pressed her trembling hands to her breast and for quite a long while did not answer me a word.

“‘Ah,’ she exclaimed at last—and I could see with what difficulty she spoke at all—‘then you knew that unhappy lady?’

“‘So well,’ said I, ‘that her death was the greatest sorrow my life has given me.’

“She lifted her eyes, and they glistened with warm tears. It was plain that she suffered much.

“‘Ah, mademoiselle, what a story—and what a crime! The dearest lady that ever lived. And the assassin undiscovered! Oh, it is terrible, terrible, and it makes my heart bleed.’

“‘You speak,’ said I, ‘of a dear friend, and it is evident you knew her very well.’

“She hesitated at this, and the look of reserve and of question, which I had already remarked, passed again into her eyes. Evidently she regretted the weakness of her confession, though the truth of her emotion could not be questioned.

“‘My sister knew her very well, and I, mademoiselle, I have seen her—it is long years ago since we first met, and she—ah, dear God, she is dead.’

“And then she said—

“‘How strange that you should have come to my house—by accident, mademoiselle.’

“‘Indeed,’ said I, ‘it could hardly be called accident at all, for I saw your Egyptian lad at the gate and remembered him immediately as one who attempted to speak to Monsieur le Comte upon our journey from Paris.’

“This, prince, I said with some deliberation, meaning it for the challenge I would now throw down. Its effect upon the dame was altogether curious. She did not turn upon me passionately, as I feared would be the case. There was no meaningless denial or even an explanation—but she simply sat rocking to and fro as one who debated a matter very seriously and could come to no resolution. When this silence had lasted perhaps a full minute she appeared to make up her mind suddenly, and at once began to speak to me confidentially.

“‘Mademoiselle,’ she said, ‘are you the true friend of Monsieur le Comte?’

“I said that I was.

“‘Then you shall tell him from me that he must come to my house without delay.’

“‘To your house, madame? Why so?’

“‘That he may save himself and others from the tongues which speak against him.’

“I looked at her in wonder.

“‘Are you thinking of the death of the Lady Anna Maclain, madame?’

“She rose at once from her chair, and her manner became almost angry.

“‘I say nothing more, mademoiselle. Give the count my message if you are his friend. Let him come to this house without delay—that is all.’

“And then almost solemnly she added—

“‘He will be very wise to come, mademoiselle. Please to insist upon it, for I perceive that he will listen to you.’

“I knew not what to say, prince. It was impossible to argue upon such an invitation, and even had I the desire to do so the good woman’s manner would have forbidden it.

“But there was something even more engrossing than this enigmatical conversation, and of that I shall tell you in a word.

“As the old lady rose to bid me farewell she disturbed a paper almanac hung upon a leaf of the picture frame by the chimney, and when the paper swung aside I saw, as clearly as ever I saw anything in my life, the Heart of Green Jade which the Lady Anna used to wear.

“You will imagine, prince, in what mood I found myself for the homeward journey, and how much my confusion added to the gaiety of my friends who had waited for me at the inn. The few wild roses I carried were but a poor excuse for so long a delay, and my assurance that an old Frenchwoman had detained me by her gossip proved as unkindly an ailly as the truth is apt to do. We made the journey to a salvo of droll innuendo quite ridiculous in its childishness, and immediately upon our return we found the grounds of Aizy-la-Belle prepared for one of those garden fêtes which are such a solace to Madame the Countess.

“For these, as I have already hinted, she leaves her ‘sick bed’ and condescends to come among us. If no impartial observer could by any chance mistake her for an invalid that is her misfortune, which should or should not invite our pity. Certainly no country girl at a fair dances with more zest or is more solicitous of the favours of flattery. Last night she

surpassed herself—and in common charity it should be said that her fête was magnificent. Not until this moment, perhaps, had I understood how admirably are these old châteaux adapted for the *al-fresco* life, or what wonders can be worked in their grounds if money and lights be not spared.

“It was, sir, a veritable scene from the fables of the ancients. We moved in a forest of silver lamps, the most delicious music bewitching us, and countless sprites raising their mocking laughter beneath the stately trees. The river itself had become a stream of magic fire, blue and golden and deeply violet; boats shaped as monstrous birds moved upon it, and the masqueraders were winged things who flitted over the sheen of the waters as giant fireflies from a world of spirits. Such a pageant, lavish in its execution and without restraint in its idea, is after Madame’s own heart, and reconciles her to the solitudes of Aizy-la-Belle. From Paris, from Tours, and even from our own London, our guests have come. And you shall imagine what an opportunity I found therein for the delivery of the old dame’s message to the count, or even for any private speech with him whatsoever.

“He, sir, I confess, is the enigma in this doubtful hour. It seemed to me, I know not why, that the ‘English sisters’ and this dear old gentleman stood apart from all the gaiety round about and were the sadder because of it. At one moment, indeed, I came upon him in a grove of the woods by which the band of the African Chasseurs was playing, and discovered him to be weeping. He took my arm when we met thus and begged me to accompany him to the house—but immediately we were joined by the old Bishop of Loches, and any confidential talk was denied to me. Had it been otherwise I doubt if I could have spoken to him—my heart was heavy and the shadow of death stood about me. But I shall take an early opportunity of speaking to him—and meanwhile, prince, the unforgettable thing remains. The Heart of Green Jade is there in that lonely house, hung as though by a child’s fingers where all the world can see it.”

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE DEN IN THE RUE MONTSERRE

THERE were many birds of passage at the Ritz Hotel, despite the season, and Maurevale was hailed by more than one acquaintance as he crossed the corridor and went up to his private apartments upon the first floor. In a way this vivacious cosmopolitanism of Paris never failed to stimulate his faculties, or to remind him that he was a child of the sun, who had inherited that love of the garish cities to which the monotonies of England were so inimical.

The East called him often back to its spacious heaven and glory of the day. He knew hours when the black eyes beckoned him, and the bizarre drumming of tom-toms buzzed in his ears, and visions of the glittering pagodas shone bright against the sombre backgrounds of the West. These he did not repel, nay, invited them, that he might name a day when the bonds should be broken and the cities of his boyhood be refound. Latterly there had been a more intimate picture in his mind, and he had contemplated a journey which should not be made alone but in the company of one who had taught him anew the meaning of womanhood. This vision, however, was dispelled when a mirror showed him the thinker's face, and the years mocked him from his own image.

How inevitable it all was, this flight of time, this passing of a youth which never might be recalled! Never more would the fires of boyhood burn in his veins; never again would he stand upon the height and cry, "The world is mine and the dawn has come." Nay, rather, life had shrouded him about with a purpose, and he who would save men, must walk amid them as an enemy, drawing his cloak about him and fearing alike their lips and their hands.



Much of this was in his mind as he stood at the foot of the staircase in the Ritz and waited for the lift. A splendid mirror showed him the clever face with the eyes which were unforgettable, the abundant curly hair, and the fine figure which a soldier's life had stiffened in the hard school of the East. But by the side of this the phantom of the years watched and waited, and in his ears a voice was crying, "You shall win no woman's love—the day for that is dead."

Paris had brought this mood upon him, and she should wake him from it. Hardly had he entered his sitting-room when a valet brought him a card upon which were the words "Gustave Faber, Agent de la Police Secrète," and recalling in an instant all the doubt and hope which had carried him from London, he commanded that M. Faber should be admitted, both then and at any hour when he might chance to present himself.

Gustave Faber proved to be a sedate-looking Frenchman of some fifty years of age. His appearance was quite without distinction: a fact, perhaps, to which he owed success in his profession. Of the middle height, his hair was already sown with grey, but a suggestion of youth remained in his clean-shaven face. An observer might have said that he was a retired soldier, had been a *sous officier* or a servant of a Government Department—but few would have named him for a policeman. When he entered the room he bowed formally to the prince and introduced himself in the briefest words.

"Gustave Faber, Highness—by the instruction of your secretary, Paul Gregoriev."

The prince nodded and bade him seat himself.

"I had expected you," he said, "but not so soon. My secretary speaks highly of you, M. Faber, and I see that I must confirm his opinion."

"Your Highness is very good. I fear this is an intrusion at such a time, but naturally I was anxious, especially under the circumstances."

"Which are, M. Faber?"

"That the man, Tahir Pasha, is still in Paris, though I cannot say how many days he will remain here."

"Then you have traced him, after all?"

"Yes, Highness. He has lived for some time in the Rue Dauphine. At the same time it is not always possible to say that he is alive."

"Ah, I have heard of that. He is a victim to drugs?"

"To opium, Highness; a habit he acquired in the East."

"Then he should serve our purpose the better for it. Do you say he is in Paris at this moment?"

"He is living in the Rue Dauphine—at a house which I have reason to believe is rented by the Young Egyptian Party—a dangerous house, Highness, and one which we may not hope to visit."

"Possibly not; I will consider it. You will remember, however, that I am come to Paris to see this man."

"I am perfectly aware of it—if your Highness so pleases, you may see him this night. But the circumstances would be remarkable—and not altogether pleasant."

"You mean that he is in an opium den, I suppose."

"Yes, Highness, in the Rue Montserre, No. 29. There are many scoundrels of all nations—I hesitate to advise your Highness."

"Nevertheless, I will be with you—does our dress matter?"

"It is a matter of indifference, Highness, since these people's customers are drawn from many ranks, and you will find members of the Chamber of Deputies lying side by side with the assassins from the Halles. I should prefer, however, that you should go armed."

"As you please, Monsieur Faber. Let us see, it is now half-past seven. I will be ready for you precisely at nine o'clock."

Gustave Faber withdrew, and Maurevale went down to dinner in the restaurant. Here he met many acquaintances—women who had made love to him during decades; bright-eyed girls not unwilling to make love to him at this immediate moment; a dean who had forgotten the Fathers that he might conduct the daughters to Switzerland; an aeronaut whose machine had been smashed at Issy that morning, but who had already planned a new one; an actor from London who had come to buy French

plays and had found none—a heterogeneous throng dining famously, and asking nothing else of destiny but that to-morrow should be as yesterday.

To Prince Maurevale such puppets as these were amusing enough in the common way, but to-night he could play no part with them. His own destiny appeared to be forcing him along a path so obscure and unwelcome that he wondered sometimes if he did right to follow it at all.

He had served great ambitions, and whither had they led him? To a woman's grave; and thence?—but beyond the grave he had no vision save that which recalled Stella Insole and the gardens of Highlands Castle in which she had walked.

And this vision the glass had mocked and the years cried out upon.

"Youth is dead," the voices cried—and then as ironically, "youth is eternal."

He shut his ears to the voices, and declining invitations alike to the table of the actor and the dean, he dined alone, and was ready for Gustave Faber punctually at nine o'clock.

A long Newmarket overcoat covered him to the heels; he wore an opera hat and carried a heavy stick in his hand. A believer in wit rather than in force, the detective's alarms appeared to him to be somewhat unworthy, and the evil reputation of the house in the Rue Montserre did not deter him in any way.

So much he admitted at the start, but hardly had he entered the house when he would have retracted the words and granted something to Gustave Faber's prudence.

Such a den of iniquity as the Café Vert, in the Rue Montserre—for thus was the place called—hardly exists, perhaps, in any other city in the world, unless it be in Cairo or Port Said.

There is a common café upon the ground floor, the chief room of which is shut off from the pavement by a partition of wood and glass. Here sufficient business is done to satisfy the police; but those who descend a single flight of stairs which lead down, not from the Rue Montserre but from the Rue St. Dominique behind it, are admitted to as strange and gaudy a cellar as the mind of man has yet conceived.

Here are a series of circular and oblong rooms built beneath the house above, and even beneath the street. Domed ceilings show faded, if fantastic, allegories of the grossest debaucheries to which the drug-drinker is prone. There are cabalistic signs in mildewed gold; odd figures of Chinese gods and the fables of the Ming dynasty; strange lamps, which exhale strange odours, and little flames of fire whose breath is the dreamer's paradise and the dreamer's death.

Orientalists in robes of far from spotless white attend the unhappy victims of this foul den, and help them to that insensibility which is their heart's desire.

Men of all nationalities lie upon the narrow benches and cry a satire upon their gift of life.

Here are Christians and Jews, Europeans and Chinese, men from the Indies, East and West, adventurers from many climes; even women prostrate before the great God of Dreams they have chosen to worship.

Prince Maurevale entered this den by the narrow stairway from the Rue St. Dominique. A fat Turk, who wore a fez, answered to Gustave Faber's knock, and bowed deferentially, as the East bows to the West when the West carries a truncheon. An inner door admitted the visitors to a mosque-like apartment, in which were those victims to hashish, mad-eyed creatures, who would have sprung at any human throat for a nod, and sat, meanwhile, straight-backed and stiff against the frowsy red cushions which nursed them. Beyond, in a larger chamber, were varieties of the order of insensibles—creatures who laughed and sang and danced, and from that would turn at any moment upon their neighbours and crush the lives out of them but for the iron hands of the Nubians who kept order here, and knew no argument but that of the monstrous fingers which could hold a neck as in a vice.

The general apartment for those who smoked opium lay beyond this, and was oblong in shape and of some size. The many bunks in it were ranged about the marble walls in two tiers, and each was curtained from observation. Beyond it, and shut from it by heavy draperies, stood a smaller room, quite circular and

having a ceiling richly gilded and coloured. This appeared altogether a different stamp of apartment from the others which they had passed, and the boy attendants who carried the little pipes of opium and lighted them, were dressed in long white robes to which the term spotless might have been fitly applied.

It was in this room, before a low bed of red velvet, that Gustave Faber stopped at last, and indicated that the object of their quest had been found.

"Highness," he said, "that is Tahir Pasha."

The man lay quite insensible and dreaming. His age appeared to be about thirty-five years, and even in such a light the remarkable beauty of his countenance could not have escaped the most unobservant of visitors. Very dark, with black hair which was bunched about his ears and temples after the fashion of the older Egyptians, his countenance had Grecian rather than Oriental characteristics, the forehead being open and pleasing, the nose such as one may see in the statues of the early Greek masters, and the mouth delicate and rosy as that of a woman. In contrast to this was the truly manly figure, square and browned, the arms almost of a mahogany tint, and the chest that of a soldier. More interesting, however, than the purely physical attitude was the mental—for the man dreamed as he slept—and it was as though every line of his thoughts was written upon his face that all who passed might read.

Love and hate and hope and fear, how readily are these emotions expressed. In whatever land of phantoms or reality Tahir Pasha moved, the primal passions were the gift of sleep. Lying very still upon the narrow, coffin-like bed, a very ecstasy seemed to possess him for a moment, to give place as quickly to a frenzy of despair and hate. Through this the lips murmured impotently, the hands were clenched, sweat glistened upon the dark forehead of the sleeper. It was as though he suffered that he might woo the spirit of unknown joys once more, catch at the demons who tortured him, and compel them to hear. When he failed to do so a woman's grief harassed the drawn face and was to be read in every gesture. The lips shaped words of woe, but

did not utter them; the hands, which would have struck the phantoms down, lay impotent, gathering up the coverlet which did not exist.

There were but two occupants of this particular den, and the other was a very old man, apparently a true Chinaman, who slept at the drug's bidding, with the face of a child who is tired.

He, happily, might be ignored, and when the prince had ascertained that none watched him in the room, he bade Faber bring chairs and placed them at the head of the bunk which Tahir occupied. Here there was a curtained recess, disclosing a door which had been locked; but as the curtain hid it completely, Maurevale merely remarked the circumstance and fell to watching the sleeper closely, even to touching his hand and letting his fingers rest upon it a little while.

He was a student of telepathy, and a convinced believer in the power of one brain to influence or dominate another and a weaker brain. No better opportunity for an experiment could possibly be found than in this den of iniquity, where the silence reigned supreme and the sleepers sought but dreams. Sitting by Tahir's side, the prince began to speak in a low voice, as though he questioned an intelligent auditor, and waited for a natural answer.

"You are the Bimbashi Tahir, and you left Egypt five years ago?"

The prone figure stirred slightly, but the face remained without interest, and the question was repeated.

"You are the Bimbashi Tahir, and you left Egypt five years ago?"

The head was turned now and the eyes were staring wildly. Fear had become the dominating impulse, and one might have said that the figure was about to rise.

"You left because of certain charges made against you by the authorities at Assouan, where your regiment was stationed? You were expelled from the army and you fled the country?"

The question received no response. A stolid look of indifference passed across the sleeper's face and was not to be moved.

The prince, however, was not to be discouraged, and he shifted his ground immediately.

"When did you first hear the news of the Lady Anna Maclain?"

The prone figure stirred and shuddered. For a little while afterwards it remained quite still, then was turned about as though to hear the words anew. Before, however, the prince could speak one of the little lads arrived at the bed with a pipe of opium, but, seeing there was no call for it, went out immediately through the curtained recess. This was the moment for Gustave Faber to intervene.

"Sir," he whispered, as the lad went out, "there is a woman behind that door."

Maurevale nodded his head. He had been putting his questions to the sleeper in a low tone; but now he ceased to put them at all, and contented himself instead with a touch of a finger upon the hand which fell limply from the bed. When a few moments had passed, Tahir Pasha stirred and opened his eyes—and immediately those who watched him drew back.

If the Egyptian had seemed to be a fine man when asleep, assuredly waking did not destroy the impression. Of tall stature and immense physical strength, the face appeared to lose its feminine characteristics when the eyes were open, and courage and resignation to take the place of fear and submission. The loose dressing-gown he wore showed the developed muscles of the neck and chest, and when he lifted a hand even the languor of the gesture was forgotten in the admiration of the tremendous forearm which the falling sleeve disclosed.

A boy now advanced to offer the awakened sleeper a new pipe of opium; but he waved him off with an angry gesture, and turned about as though aware that some one stood at his bedside and that he was watched. Perceiving Maurevale, he rested his hand upon his shoulder and surveyed him with the profound gaze of one who makes an appeal to memory but cannot command it. In his turn, the prince apologised with charming

frankness for his intrusion, and begged the Egyptian not to disturb himself.

"I think we have met before, sir," he said, "though I cannot recall the circumstances."

"We have never met," was the response, blunt and without qualification.

"And yet," continued the prince, very quietly, "I seem to remember that you are the Egyptian officer named Tahir Pasha, who was very well known to one of my dearest friends."

He waited for an answer, watching the set face closely. Tahir upon his part deliberately lay back upon the cushion as one who had no interest in the question. Nevertheless, he admitted something utterly unlooked for even by so shrewd a thinker as Maurevale.

"You are Maurevale of Dara," he exclaimed—and then, "I know perfectly well why you come to me. But I cannot help you. Seek others and beware of them."

"Ah," said the prince, "I feared as much. But you would not be unprepared to help me if you could, sir?"

"If I could do so safely, sir—but I cannot. It is not wise for you to come to me. It is most imprudent."

"Why should it be imprudent, sir? Do I not come in the name of one with whom you were very well acquainted?"

"It is possible—I do not wish to be reminded of it."

"Then I am wrong in assuming that you had some friendship for my friend—the Lady Anna Maclain."

The Egyptian started up. His attitude had been entirely passive until this moment—an attitude which the drug might have influenced. Now, however, he began to show some signs of impatience, and he turned upon his interrogator sharply.

"Who is it that has sent you, sir—is it your friend Captain Ferman, the assassin?"

"If it should be, you will desire, I am sure, to serve an innocent man."

"An innocent man! I do not believe it, sir."





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"You do not believe it?"

"Certainly not, since there is every reason to say that he killed the lady you have named."

"But, sir, this cannot be said lightly."

The man's eyes blazed.

"Lightly—am I of a race that speaks lightly? Hear me now—if your law spares this criminal I myself will kill him whenever I shall find him."

"Then you hold him to be guilty?"

There was no answer. The Egyptian had become as one possessed. Rocking to and fro upon his haunches, his eyes blazed fire, and froth came to his lips. Presently he raised his arms high above his head and uttered a shrill cry in a tongue that neither understood—then he fell back heavily upon the cushions and lay insensible.

"Ah," cried Maurevale to his companion as he stooped over the prone figure and lifted one of the sleeves of the Eastern robe, "he wears an amulet, I perceive. Do you know what this is, Monsieur Faber?"

But Gustave Faber made no reply. A movement quick as light had carried him to the curtained door, where he tore the drapery aside and caught at the figure of a woman ambushed there. She, however, flung herself from him, and the knife she carried fell with a clang upon the marble pavement. In the same instant the door was forced back and locked from the far side.

"A she-cat truly," remarked the detective as he picked up the dagger and examined it. "In another moment, Highness, you would have felt the temper of this."

"For the sake of an Egyptian who wears a Heart of Green Jade," rejoined the prince quietly.

He looked again at Tahir Pasha and at the very curious ornament to which he had referred. Convinced that he had made no mistake, and that it was indeed a heart cut from a solid block of that beautiful jade the Chinese work so finely, he covered the sleeper's arm again and bade Gustave Faber follow him.

"We shall learn nothing more here," he said. "Let us go now to the Rue Dauphine."

"To the House of the Green Lamp—ah, Highness, that will be a dangerous journey."

Maurevale made no reply. He had long ceased to consider danger where it stood between him and the mystery it was now the purpose of his life to reveal.

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE GREEN LANTERN IN THE RUE DAUPHINE

THEY took a cab at the end of the street, and crossing the river they came to the Pont Neuf, beyond which lies the old Rue Dauphine.

This is an ancient street running from the quay to the Boulevard St. Germain—a monument to the social history of Paris, which time and fashion have defaced beyond all knowledge.

Formerly the home of princes, it is now peopled by thriving tradesmen and worthy merchants. Students from the Quartier Latin hire apartments in its once glorious houses, and priests from the colleges enjoy the splendours of its faded rooms.

Maurevale knew Paris well, but he did not know this gloomy thoroughfare, nor did he remember to have entered it before. Gustave Faber, on the other hand, was very well acquainted with it, and could have told him grim stories of its once splendid mansions.

To-night he forbore to be anecdotal. Perhaps the mystery attending Maurevale's appearance in Paris had engrossed him also, despite official immunity. He imagined rightly that some matter of deep import was responsible for this curiosity concerning the Egyptian and his life, and he did not disguise in any way the danger of the quest upon which they were embarked.

The latter consideration held him silent as they crossed the Pont Neuf and looked down upon the dark waters of the swift river. The great bell in the Palais de Justice had struck eleven o'clock, the hour at which "life" begins to be worth living on the south side of the Seine. Even the Rue Dauphine could show them a café, brightly lighted and teeming with long-haired students from the colleges. These listened to the strains of "Hungarian" musicians, born somewhere in the neighbourhood

of the "Midi." But none the less the music was bright and catchy, and many feet beat time to it.

Next door to the café were two or three shops, one a bookshop kept by a white-haired old man who must have been an optimist, for his shutters were still down, while he smoked a cigar at his door as though some laggard, intoxicated not by good wine but by learning, might yet buy a volume of him before he went to bed.

Maurevale, who had eyes for everything in the street, stopped the cab directly he espied the old bookseller, and immediately entered into conversation with him. He proved to be a vain and affable man, who spoke freely of his neighbours and seemed pleased at the unexpected opportunity of discussing them. When, however, the prince pointed out the green lantern above the door of an ancient mansion some fifty yards down the street, the old fellow became a little suspicious, and showed some disposition to retire into his cell.

"The House of the Green Lantern—ah, monsieur, none of us know much about that. But I will tell you one thing—the lantern is sometimes of another colour—and that is curious, as you will admit."

"Or merely a question of taste," said Maurevale; "we change the colour of our doorposts, why not of our lanterns? No doubt the house has a history with which you would be familiar; is it not so, monsieur?"

An appeal to his learning flattered the old bookseller and loosed his tongue.

"It was formerly the house of the Marquis of Servaux," he said immediately; "the ceilings are by Horace Vernet—though that is a fact that will not concern the riff-raff who now occupy it. If you are interested in this quarter of our city, I would recommend to you the volumes of Saint-Beuve, of which I have an excellent example in my possession at this moment."

The prince asked to see the books, and they were brought out at once. An offer to purchase them delighted the old man and gained upon his confidence.

"The history of the Servaux family has been treated also by

Lamartine," he went on. "Unfortunately, I have sold the book to the Egyptian lady who came to see me yesterday. But I do not doubt that I could quickly procure another copy if your Excellency desires it?"

Maurevale desired him to do so—then he said:

"Do young Egyptian ladies take an interest in the story of French houses? Surely that is something new."

"As your Excellency says, both new and remarkable. I make nothing of it. Why should I? It is my business to sell books. But I have eyes like my neighbours, and when I see a dead man carried into a coach at midnight, and then a red lantern where a green lantern had stood, why then, as your Excellency will imagine, I am not less curious than others would be."

"It would certainly be very wonderful if you were not—especially if the young lady were sufficiently pretty. I am assuming that she was so, monsieur, or you would not have spoken of her in such flattering terms."

The old man responded to him a little tartly.

"My personal opinions are of no importance to any one, monsieur. Moreover, this is a case for the police, or will be, before we are many days older."

Maurevale now perceived that he had gone a little too far, and that the bookseller was alarmed and would say no more. Laying a hundred-franc note upon the counter, he declared that he would call for the book in a few days' time, and so made as though to leave the shop. Just, however, as he was crossing the threshold a carriage drew up before the House of the Green Lantern, and a young Egyptian woman stepped to the pavement.

"There she is, Excellency," the old bookseller cried, "that is Mlle. Zaida. Is she not beautiful?"

As it was quite impossible to see the young lady's face, Maurevale might have hesitated to reply to the question; but, wishing to draw the old man out, he answered that her beauty was amazing. And then he said:

"She is quite alone, I perceive."

"Always alone, monsieur, except when the brother comes home. But that is not a lucky day for her."

"Is she not fortunate, then, in her brother?"

The bookseller shook his head.

"I do not know what it is. There are some who say absinthe; others who tell a different story. But he is very rich, this Tahir Pasha, and what does it matter what we do while we are rich? The world likes our vices all the better; for then people have something to talk about. Does your Excellency now perceive how very beautiful the young lady is?"

He had laid a hand upon the prince's arm as though to call attention to the opportunity. Standing for a moment to say a word to the coachman, the Egyptian woman permitted the light from the lantern of the carriage to fall full upon her face, and now for the first time Maurevale saw it clearly—and with an astonishment he could hardly conceal.

Immediately he recognised it for the face of the picture in the House of the Five Green Shutters near Ely. There was no possible doubt. Nor could he forget that some unknown miscreant had entered that house and slashed the picture with a sword. Verily were the mysteries shaping anew.

"As beautiful as she appears to be fascinating," he said to the bookseller. "Does she speak French, by the way?"

"With an accent, monsieur, which is pardonable to such a lady. I believe also that she speaks English very well—for I have heard her in conversation with no other than the Count of Fours in this very shop."

"The Count of Fours—but this is very interesting. Is he also a client of yours?"

"For many years I have sent books to Aizy-la-Belle. Certainly I have a great respect for the count, and he, I think, for me."

Maurevale was about to make some answer when Gustave Faber, who had been walking up and down the street, returned to the shop and made a sign that he had something to report. Wishing the bookseller good-night, and promising to return upon an early day, Maurevale linked his arm in that of the detective and went off with him. The Egyptian girl had re-entered the house by this time, and the carriage was driven away. There



were but two lights visible above the lantern, and one of these shone dimly from the cupola of the hall.

"Well," exclaimed Maurevale, "I really think we have done a very good night's work, M. Faber."

"If your Excellency thinks so!"

"But I do think it. Trust a bookseller if you would have the news of the street. Did you not tell me, by the way, that this house was supposed to be owned by the Young Egyptian Party in Paris?"

"The police believe—and mark it dangerous."

"And yet it appears to be quite unworthy of such a description. Why, my dear M. Faber, the good folks are already going to bed."

"Ah, sir, but not all of them, for here is another carriage."

It was quite true, for a second carriage drawn by a fine pair of black horses, now appeared in the street and drew up by the green lantern. Of its three occupants two were men, Eastern certainly, and possibly Egyptian. The third was the woman whom Gustave Faber had discovered in the opium den of the Rue Montserre—a fact which he hastened to point out as he drew Maurevale back into the shadows and lowered his voice to a whisper.

"Do you see—the lady concealed by the curtain, monsieur?"

"Another object for the admiration of our friend the bookseller. She is perhaps a little forbidding, but then booksellers should be catholic in their tastes. Is anything else apparent to you, Faber?"

"The men have been quarrelling, Excellency."

"And one of them is not permitted to enter the house. For a truth we are fortunate—and there is a man who must sup with us."

"Excellency—that is risking too much."

"Which I am here to risk. Now please to follow me."

He crossed the street and followed the young Egyptian who had been dismissed a little summarily at the gate. Jostling him as though by accident when they were almost at the Boulevard

St. Germain, Maurevale apologised with his accustomed courtesy—and then, feigning astonishment, he exclaimed :

“But, monsieur, we have met before.”

“Indeed,” exclaimed the young man, in very passable French, “I am not aware of the circumstance, monsieur.”

“But it is so, for I never forget a face. I am Maurevale of Dara—perhaps my name is known to you?”

“It could not be unknown to any one in Paris. Still, I do not remember how we met.”

“But you will do so presently. And as we both appear to be without a destination, what do you say, monsieur, to a little supper at the Café Heinrich?”

The young man twirled a fierce moustache and seemed to hesitate. Possibly he would have declined even yet but for a word at hazard—thrown down by the prince as a gambler throws his last card.

“Where, sir, we could speak perhaps of Mlle. Zaida.”

The Egyptian started, and looked the speaker full in the face.

“Oh, yes,” he said quickly, “I will come with you, prince, in that case.”

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE YOUNG MAN SPEAKS

THEY had turned into the Boulevard St. Germain by this time, and there Maurevale called a cab and bade the young Egyptian enter. Gustave Faber meanwhile continued his journey on foot, for he had other work to do. A few whispered words confirmed an early appointment with the prince for the morrow, and so the two parted and Maurevale entered the cab. Precisely ten minutes later he had ordered a well-chosen supper at the Café Heinrich, and was there conducted to a private room invariably reserved for him while he was in Paris.

He found the young Egyptian both an agreeable companion and a willing one. An early exchange of confidences established the fact that the young man had served in the Egyptian army, and that his name was Allulah. Very frankly and without passion he declared his sympathies with the National Party, but deplored the methods they had begun to adopt. Maurevale, upon his side, encouraged him to talk, serving him meanwhile to rare dishes and filling his glass with the choicest wine of the Bordeaux country.

"You have been some time in Paris, sir; I gather as much from your conversation," said Maurevale, when the waiters had left the room. Allulah replied that he had been there just six months.

"More than sufficient to pass for a Parisian if you have the disposition," said Maurevale. "I would make a true Parisian of some men in three days. But I should not take them to the south side of the river."

Allulah looked up, shrewdly perceiving the meaning of the question. He had known very well from the beginning that such

a man as Maurevale of Dara would not invite him to supper upon the mere score of conviviality, and was not surprised that the conversation should take such a trend.

"Unless," he said, "there were reasons for your choice. I can well imagine, sir, that the south side of the river is more agreeable to some of us than the other."

"Or more convenient," said Maurevale, with a laugh, "in relation to the Embassies."

The young man did not make an immediate reply; but, when he had drunk another glass of champagne, he asked:

"Does your Excellency refer to any particular Embassy?"

"Most certainly, I am thinking of our good friends in London."

"Would you expect to find them my good friends also?"

"That would depend upon your wisdom. If the Rue Dauphine holds them of small account, it does not follow that the Rue Dauphine is an oracle. You, I am sure, do not think of it as such."

"What leads your Excellency to such an opinion?"

"The fact that you accompany me to supper to-night. Had it been otherwise you would have entered the house with the others—whereas I plainly perceived that you were not welcome."

Allulah sighed and ceased to eat. His thoughts had been carried in a moment to the image of the woman he worshipped, and, if he had confessed the truth aloud, it could not have been more unmistakable. Maurevale, however, who had been convinced of the fact from the beginning, now hastened to push his advantage home.

"You are not welcome except to one. Forgive my frankness, for possibly I can help you. And permit me to congratulate you upon so charming a friend as Mlle. Zaida."

"Then you are acquainted with her, prince?"

"Indeed, no—but I hope to be shortly. Her picture, however, is well known to me, and I have been privileged to see her to-night for the first time."

"You agree with me that she is a beautiful woman?"

"It would be impossible to differ."

"And one worthy of sacrifice?"

"Such a sacrifice, shall we say, as would lead a man to resign a king's commission and to number himself among the rebels. I am speaking in parables, and you shall correct me. Is it not so, sir—and do you find fault with me?"

"Impossible to do so. I have heard you named for a wizard, and I begin to believe rumour. Tell me, for charity's sake, how you came to know of my affairs?"

"With every pleasure. There are certain elemental facts of life which no country changes. I desire to be of service to Mlle. Zaida, and I argue that I may help by the instrumentality of the man who loves her. Fortune or opportunity sends you in my way at the very moment I am determined to find you. So our interests, being common, can be safely discussed."

Alulah nodded his head.

"I should have every confidence in your judgment," he said. Maurevale knew too much of men to doubt the candour of it.

"You are wise to accept my advances," he continued, "for they may mean much to you. In the first place, I may save you from the English Government, should you desire to return to Egypt."

"Then you accuse me of a desire to return?"

"I must do so. The man who does not desire to return to his native land is either a coward or a villain. You are neither, and the day will soon come when you would give ten years of your life for a safe-conduct to the barracks at Cairo. If you went there to-day you would be arrested—it might be you would be shot. But you will desire to take Mlle. Zaida to Egypt ultimately, for she would not be happy in any other country. And so I say that you are wise to confide in me and to speak of your difficulties. Who knows that I may not be the very friend for whom you have been waiting?"

A light of pleasure entered the young man's eyes at these words, and he regarded Maurevale wistfully, as though he were listening to a fairy tale in whose promises he did not dare to believe. Presently he said:

"But why should you help me? What is your obligation that you wish to be my friend?"

"Absolutely none. I am here for the most selfish of interests—to save the life of an Englishman who is in danger. And so I come to you——"

"To me, prince?"

"Yes, to you and to your friend Tahir Pasha."

The Egyptian paled at the words. He was obviously much agitated and not a little alarmed.

"How can Tahir help you? Is he not himself in danger?"

"Of what?"

"Of his friends."

"Because of his English sympathies—is that is in danger?"

It was a word at random, but the shot went home.

"I do not say so."

"But you wish me to infer as much. Very well, we will begin with that. Tahir must be saved for his sister's sake. You must be saved—from yourself, my friend—because you are the lover of Mlle. Zaida, whose sympathies are English also, I imagine."

"I will not try to deceive you, since you know so much. Both Zaida and I regret much that is done in the Rue Dauphine. But we are helpless, and Tahir is worse than helpless."

"I can well imagine it. A man who finds inspiration in an opium den is not likely to be a lusty soldier of any cause. Well, then, must we not rely upon ourselves to give this excellent soldier his liberty?"

Allulah shook his head.

"I wish you success," he said quietly, "but you will be lucky to save his life."

The prince looked up.

"From his friends of the Green Lantern. I see, I see—our arrival upon the scene is at a late hour. But we must do our best—and quickly. Are you aware, by the way, to what your friend Tahir owes his English sympathies? Do you know much of his story?"

"Very little—except that he was dismissed from the Egyptian army for so-called treachery some five years ago. After that he

went first to Tunis and then to Athens. He has been but a few months in Paris."

"And you know nothing of his private affairs—of his wife or children?"

"Of his wife, certainly—she is Mme. Sabine, Ghika's sister. But he has no children?"

"How long has he been married to this lady?"

"I would say for some years; but I have not known them very long—not personally, that is. We were not in the same regiment, Tahir and I."

"And yet I understand that he was a man about whom Cairo gossiped some years ago?"

"Oh, that is true. The women ran after him very much—even the French women as well as the Egyptians. I have heard it said that the wife of the Count of Fours was very much in love with him."

"To the great entertainment of the city, no doubt. I have heard the same thing from the Nile boatmen. The English women fall in love with them and write them letters they cannot read. Did the old count approve of the adventure?"

Allulah smiled archly.

"There was some talk of a duel; but the city laughed so much we heard no more of it. I think also that Mlle. Zaida interfered, for she knew the family very well. It is said that she corresponds with the count still—but I do not know the truth of that."

"Perhaps she would tell it to me if I visited her at the Rue Dauphine?"

A startled look passed into the Egyptian's eyes.

"They would kill you if they knew why you went," he said.

Maurevale lighted a cigar; he seemed quite indifferent to the information.

"I shall not tell them," he remarked smilingly; "besides, I am not the kind of man that such people as these are wise to kill."

"Your intention of going, however, is not quite serious."

"It is perfectly serious. I am going to Mlle. Zaid. —first

that I may save her brother, and after that, to marry her to one of my guests."

The youth coloured deeply.

"I may not stop you," he said, "and yet I think such a journey to be madness."

"But you will help me to make it none the less. At what time should I be likely to find mademoiselle alone?"

"Between four and five in the afternoon, if you must really go."

"I will call there between four and five o'clock to-morrow. May I use your name in this matter?"

"You have my cordial permission; but once more, I beg you to reflect."

"My dear sir," said Maurevale quietly, "I spend most of my life reflecting. It is the only amusement for a man of sense."

It was now very late, and most of the people had left the café. With a promise to Allulah to meet him again at the same place on the following evening, and disregarding his renewed warnings concerning a visit to the house in the Rue Dauphine, Maurevale returned to the Ritz Hotel and to his bed. The day's work had been profitable beyond all hope, and yet, when he came to sum the total of its achievements, even he might have despaired.

For what had he learned, and what did the knowledge contribute to the solution of the supreme mystery?

He had come to Paris believing that the city might add some pages to the story of Lady Anna's death, might throw some new light upon those amazing perplexities to which the crime at Pangbourne had given birth, and help him to send a message of hope to Jack Ferman and his friends. So far these objects were utterly defeated. He found himself in the heart of a new intrigue which might ultimately disclose an amazing story, but not one, he feared, which would help him to redeem his promise to Kitty Insole.

Vaguely he began to think that the old Count of Fours might yet be called upon to answer in a way which would surprise



the world. The one idea, the inspiration he had desired so ardently, refused obstinately to come to him. He was still as a child groping in the dark, though the objects about him were becoming more familiar.

It was late when he awoke next morning, and Gustave Faber already waited for him. The detective had much that was interesting to tell, and one piece of news that was unexpected. Tahir Pasha had spent the night at the house in the Rue Montserre, and had not yet left that den of iniquity. He had been visited there, however, by two men, apparently Egyptians, and these had been followed to the Rue Dauphine, whence one of them had gone on to a little hotel in the Rue St. Honoré. Here he had found no other than the Englishwoman, the Lady Constance Heliers, who had arrived in Paris the previous day, accompanied by Dr. Frederick Walther and Mr. Archie Kerrington, which story M. Faber recited stolidly, as is the habit of the professional policeman.

The prince heard him without remark. That the fascinating Constance Heliers should have come to Paris at such a moment surprised him very much, though, when he came to reflect upon it, he did not know why he should be surprised. Walther's presence was another matter, and must be read as an intimation that the conspiracy had now come to a head, and that the last cards were to be played. Herein amusement rather than danger was to be detected, and, when he had put a few questions to Gustave Faber, the prince began to speak of other matters.

"You say that Tahir Pasha is still in the Rue Montserre. I am glad to hear it, M. Faber, for I wish you to carry a letter to him."

Gustave Faber's eyebrows went up.

"A letter, Excellency? I doubt if he is in a fit state to read a letter."

"Then you will wait until he is so. Meanwhile, do you know of any house in Paris where this man would be safe from his friends?"

"There are many such houses if he would consent to go."

"I think he will consent when he has read my letter. Should

he do so, please to see that he is watched night and day—and in case of necessity do not hesitate to communicate with the Prefect. I myself am going this afternoon to the Rue Dauphine. I shall know more when I have been there, and can then make my plans. You meanwhile will not lose sight of Tahir. I consider this most important."

Faber promised not to do so. At the same time the intimation concerning the house in the Rue Dauphine alarmed him very much, and he did not hesitate to say so.

"Your Excellency is running a grave risk. I really think it would be well to reconsider your determination. These are not Frenchmen, and the Prefect has little authority. If any harm happened to you in the house, they would disappear immediately, and we should never trace them. Besides, it is very difficult to watch the place."

"I can quite imagine that. But do not give yourself any concern in the matter. Nothing will happen to me in the Rue Dauphine. I travel under a lucky star, M. Faber—you may be quite at your ease."

Faber said no more, and Maurevale went down to breakfast. When he had attended to his correspondence and written a letter to the young man Allulah, which he sent by a special messenger from the hotel, he left cards upon the amiable Constance Heliers and then drove for an hour in the Bois. It was four o'clock precisely when his car set him down at the door of the house in the Rue Dauphine, and he told the man to wait for him.

This had been spoken of by the young Egyptian as the favourable hour. Maurevale wondered if it were so. The green lantern was still lighted despite the time of day. He reflected that Gustave Faber was a man of wisdom, and that he had spoken of danger.

But he rang at the bell nevertheless, and had never been more at his ease than when he waited for an answer.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE GARDEN GATE

A FRENCH servant answered the ring and received the visitor with the common formalities. In answer to Maurevale's inquiry whether Mlle. Zaida was at home, he said that he would see, and begged the prince meanwhile to wait in an anteroom of the hall. This was quite a simple apartment, furnished with a few stately chairs of a very ancient epoch, and a large oil painting by Horace Vernet in that painter's usual florid manner.

The great hall, one of the finest in Paris, was entirely unoccupied as Maurevale crossed it. Two splendid staircases led up to a domed landing; the walls were in mosaic; the ceiling magnificently painted in the Italian manner. But of evidence of human occupation there was none whatever. The stillness of the whole place affected the prince in an odd manner, accustomed as he was to the power of silence and to its suggestiveness. He knew the house as a very nest of all the conspiracies against British rule in Egypt. But for what the house told he might have been a caller in the dog days, when the old Marquis of Servaux had gone to the Pyrenees and the *concierge* had fallen into a nap.

Hardly a mumble of the busy life without penetrated these heavy walls. The clocks droned and wailed in the stillness; the movement of a window was a great sound.

Maurevale was a man of iron courage, and a sense of danger seldom failed to animate it. Perhaps he rejoiced in the very peril which surrounded him. By wit alone would he win the supreme secret, and, if wit were lacking, then were it lost for ever.

Some minutes passed before the servant returned. The prince perceived that his manner was no less correct than before, and that the appearance of a stranger in no way embarrassed him. Very civilly he said that Mlle. Zaida was not at home—"but," he added, "Mme. Sabine will see your Highness if you so desire."

This was a disappointment, though Maurevale had hardly hoped to see Mlle. Zaida when he went to the house. The young man, Allulah, was a very simple fellow and had made light of the difficulties; but the prince knew very well that such people as these would not be caught napping; and he replied immediately that he would be glad to see madame. Then the Frenchman bade him follow, and they went up the great staircase together.

It really was wonderful that so large a house should harbour so many people and yet conceal all traces of them. As in the hall below, so here beneath the cupola, not a sound might be heard, not a human voice nor a human footstep. They passed down a long corridor, glowing with treasures of painting and sculpture, and the same impression remained. The dead ages had their grip upon this splendid habitation, and the green lantern burned but in mockery.

Maurevale remembered the lantern, he knew not why, as the servant opened a door at the far end of the corridor and informed him that madame would be down immediately. The room into which they had shown him was quite Eastern in its tapestries and ornaments, if not in its paintings. Brightly coloured stuffs decorated the walls; there were low ottomans and cushions of the Turkish fashion; the windows gave upon the roof of the ballroom below, of which a miniature winter garden had been made. Moreover, there were lamps of an Eastern fashion, and one of them in the corner burned before a Christian ikon.

This was a little surprising and added to the prince's perplexity. But as though it was to be a day of perplexities, he had waited but a little while when a man entered the room quite unexpectedly and appeared to be astonished that a stranger

should occupy it. He was a very old man, with a white beard of prodigious length, and a robe to match it falling to his slippered feet. Bowing gravely, he saluted the prince, and for an instant fixed curious eyes upon him. Then he withdrew as silently, and no echo of his footsteps could be heard from the corridor.

The intrusion was unlooked for, but a second of the kind capped it more dramatically. This was nothing else than the opening of a door in the wall, so deftly concealed that Maurevale had been ignorant of its existence until the tapestry fell back. Then he perceived that the hidden door gave upon a smaller apartment, which was occupied by some half-a-dozen men in Eastern attire—but chiefly by Turks and Egyptians, who wore their native dress and were armed to boot. The men appeared to be engaged in earnest argument; but it was a woman who had opened the door, and she now shut it as softly and bowed coldly to Maurevale. He, however, remained too astonished to return her salute—for he recognised her instantly as the woman who had tried to stab him the previous night in the opium den in the Rue Montserre.

“If you please, monsieur——”

She spoke execrable French, as Easterns are wont to do, but Maurevale detected her nationality instantly, and knew that she was no Egyptian. A tall woman, of savage mien, some would have called her handsome, others merely masculine. Her dress was French and costly; she had a number of bracelets upon an unshapely brown arm, and her raven black hair was caught up by an ornament of diamonds. At hazard, some five feet ten in height; the contour of the face interested the prince greatly and forbade him to divert his eyes. Where had he seen such a face before?

“A thousand pardons, madame,” he exclaimed at last, “but I do not think you are the lady I have called to see.”

“My cousin Zaida is out,” she rejoined, and then, “but as I have no reason to think that you are acquainted with her, I shall take the liberty of asking you your business.”

Maurevale bowed and began to feel more at his ease. A contest of the wits invariably stimulated him, and he understood that this must be such a contest, whatever its dangers. Besides, he stood already at an advantage.

"My excuse might well be that I am a fellow-countryman," he said; "did not the name of Sabine speak to me of Sistova: then, assuredly, the ornament you wear so well, madame, would do so. They have other arts in the West, but the art of the gold workers of our native land——"

He indicated with a gesture the heavy bangles she wore, and pursued the deduction in the same spirit of raillery which had so often served him well.

"A common bond of the exile we suffer so bravely. Here am I ten years out of Dara and yet able to support existence. You, madame, I do not doubt, are in the same happy position. You hymn your native land in the suns of Egypt, and when Egypt wearies, you continue the chant in the Bois de Boulogne. That is both philosophic and patriotic, for how can one remember one's country so kindly as when one is banished from it?"

The woman smiled, but did not make an immediate reply. She still held Maurevale's card in her hand, and it was plain to be seen that she would weigh her words as a miser his gold. Had the prince desired an image he would have thought of her as some magnificent animal trapped and at bay, but hesitating at the moment of attack. In the end she appeared to think that civility would serve her best, and she bade her guest be seated.

"You have not come to the Rue Dauphine to speak to me of patriotism. What then, sir?" she asked. Maurevale, without any hesitation whatsoever:

"To speak of an affair in which I believe that your cousin, Mademoiselle Zaida, would be greatly interested."

"Am I not to share this interest?"

"Possibly. You alone can tell me. It concerns a dear friend of mine, the Count of Fours."

The woman nodded her head. She had been waiting for another story.

"I am not acquainted with him," she rejoined abruptly.

"No, but your cousin is, and so I came to her. You see a most ridiculous thing has happened. There has been a crime committed near my house in England, and those foolish people, the police, insist that the count had some knowledge of it; while I know that he is altogether innocent."

"You know it, prince?"

"Absolutely. And that permits me to ask you if, during your residence in Cairo, you were acquainted with an English-woman, the Lady Anna Maclain."

"I have never heard such a name. Why do you ask me?"

"Because, my dear madame, it would have been a fortunate thing for your husband had you done so."

He uttered the words lightly, but they were unmistakably a threat, and the woman understood them to be so. Trembling with anger she looked Maurevale full in the face with the eyes of one who challenged and was not afraid.

"In what way is my husband concerned?"

"Ah, there I cannot help you. But I may tell you this, that there are persons of influence in London who believe that your husband could tell the whole story of this crime, and who will stand at no risks to procure his evidence. For your own sake, then, you should be warned."

She laughed derisively. "Am I to suppose that they will take him to London by force?"

"It is not impossible. They may even arrest him in Paris."

"In the name of a woman he has never seen."

"Madame, you know that it is not true."

She began to breathe quickly; her hands played nervously with the card she held. Here was a man who flung the gauntlet into her very face.

"Had you not better tell me at once that my husband murdered this lady?"

"It would be utterly false to say so. But I think that he knows the name of the assassin. Or if he does not, he could help us to discover it. That would serve him well. It might also be the means of permitting him the continued use of this

house. I have some influence with the authorities here, and would not oppose a bargain. Let your husband tell me all that he knows of the Lady Anna, and I will see that he is not molested in Paris."

"You will see—what affair is it then of yours?"

"So much my affair that I am resolved to consider no other until my purpose is accomplished."

"A noble ambition. It justifies you, it would seem, in coming to this house to affront its mistress."

"My dear madame, nothing is further from my thoughts. I come to you frankly as to a friend. Surely I must not suppose that this act of justice, this testimony which might save the life of an innocent man, is regarded by you as an affront?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I know nothing of it—and I have said that I cannot help you. Is it not time that this interview should terminate?"

She stood up and put her hand upon the silken cord of a bell-rope, but she did not pull it. Resting thus an instant, she exclaimed:

"I think you had better see my friends—this is no subject for a woman to discuss. If my husband were here——"

"Ah," said Maurevale quietly, "but that would be a long delay."

She let the bell-rope go and advanced toward him.

"What do you say, monsieur?"

"I say it is most unlikely that your husband will return to this house at all. Indeed, I should not be surprised to hear that he had left Paris."

She uttered a low cry and stood swaying in a tempest of anger she could not control. Maurevale understood that he had committed a grave imprudence, but he wished to force her to a confession, and believed that the threat alone could do so. Now he saw his mistake. She was about to summon her friends from the adjoining room, and he had no doubt what their argument would be.

"Where is Tahir?" she asked, recovering herself with an effort. "What have you done with him?"



"My dear madame, are you really supposing that this is an affair of mine? I come to help you, and you shut the door in my face. Really, it is not I who am to blame."

"I believe that you are lying to me," she cried; and with that she turned about and took the bell-pull again in her hand. The critical instant had arrived. Maurevale waited for the men and wondered how he would meet them.

Madame, however, did not pull the cord. It was as though an unseen hand held her back, and she stood swaying by the chimney as though to rid herself of a spell. When some seconds had passed thus, the cord dropped from her hand and the door opened. Maurevale turned about to see the old man upon the threshold and to understand why madame had not summoned her friends. Here was the "influence"; there could be no doubt of it.

Entering very silently and with stealth, the priest crossed the floor and spoke softly to the woman. Her protests, her vain efforts to rise and cry out, were a strange tribute to his power. Apparently he argued with her, but to argument he added a hypnotic suggestion which was unmistakable. Then he turned to Maurevale and spoke in broken English.

"Go," he said; "you have no time to lose. Go, friend, in the name of God."

Maurevale looked at the woman, but did not hesitate. She had fallen almost into a state of coma, and rocked and swayed in the chair by the chimney. The old Egyptian stood by her side still speaking softly in an unknown tongue and chafing her hands. And this was the last the prince saw of them as he left the room and found himself again in the corridor. Here, to his surprise, a young woman waited for him. He recognised her in an instant for Mademoiselle Zaida, whom he had come there to see.

She did not speak, and her slippered feet fell so lightly upon the carpet of the corridor that not a sound could be heard. Plainly she expected Maurevale to follow her, and he was but too ready to do so. A winding iron staircase carried them down towards the back of the house and the garden, but they had hardly begun to descend it when the shouts of angry men were

to be heard and the rush of their footsteps as they burst out upon the corridor above. Mademoiselle meanwhile began to tremble, and when she turned at the foot of the staircase to see if the prince were following her, her white face spoke eloquently of the house and of its people.

"By the garden gate, sir," she cried, thrusting a little key into the prince's hands. He took it readily and pressed her fingers in thanks.

"And you, mademoiselle?"

"Mahomet will protect me."

"But I shall send for you, and this key will open the door. May I tell Allulah that all is well with you?"

She flushed crimson.

"He must not come here——"

"We will come together," Maurevale said, "at ten o'clock to-night, mademoiselle, in the garden you speak of."

She tried to protest, uttered vague words of alarm or doubt, and then changed them swiftly for words of warning. A heavy foot clanged upon the iron staircase above them and warned them of their peril. It was but a step to the garden, and across this, when he had seen mademoiselle return to the house by a basement door, the prince hurried, while the cries behind him gained in intensity and even the woman's voice was heard imploring aid. Maurevale held upon his way undaunted, and, having crossed a patch of scrubby grass, he gained the wall, which bounds the Rue de Névers, and the wicket gate of which the girl had spoken. At the same moment a revolver shot rang out and a bullet chipped the mortar not a foot from the place where he stood.

He had no greater liking for revolver bullets than his fellow-men, and the hand which held the key fumbled at the sharp report, while the head was turned instinctively. Evidently Madame Sabine had recovered her health, he thought, and her compliments were conveyed in a rude shape. He knew now that he had been more than foolish to come to the house at all, and a second bullet striking the very gate as he closed it behind him reminded him of Faber's warning and of its earnestness.

Verily had good luck gone with him to the place and his habitual fortune in the matter of strange friendships.

He slammed the gate, and, walking down to the river quay, he found a cab and ordered the fellow to drive him to the Hôtel Ritz. Vague impressions of his visit and its achievements gave place to the particular impression that he had seen Madame Sabine before, though where and under what circumstances he could not remember. When he did recall them his astonishment surpassed any he had known that day.

"Why," he said to himself at last, "it was at the bungalow at Wargrave. The face in the arbour. Of course, how could I have forgotten it."

And then he said :

"But madame is very much a woman, and the face that I saw in dear Constance's garden was undoubtedly that of a man. What, then, is the meaning of it, and who is the other?"

He could not answer the question. The mystery had carried him to a labyrinth whose gate might never be found.

And if it were not found, Jack Ferman would die ; while as for little Kitty Insole—— !

But he put such thoughts from him and chose rather to remember that he had promised to marry a charming little Egyptian girl at ten o'clock that night to a young man whom he had seen for the first time the previous day.

## CHAPTER XXV

### AN ACCUSATION IS MADE

THE corridor of the Ritz was crowded by "five o'clocks" when Maurevale reached the hotel, and he stood a moment to wonder at the adaptability of the French, who have taken to the tea habit as ducks to water. Here in the crimson corridor a bevy of smartly dressed folk sipped the delectable beverage which they hardly ever saw ten years ago, and the dresses were wonderful enough to arrest even the attention of man.

Many people were there whom he knew: many recognised him. He had expected to find Lady Constance at such a time; but while the porter informed him that she had paid a brief visit to the hotel, she appeared to have taken her departure without letter or message. And for this Maurevale was grateful because he knew that her hour was not yet.

He had despatched a message for Gustave Faber directly he returned, and this ready personage made his appearance some quarter of an hour later. Excited beyond his wont, he declared immediately that he had news and that it was urgent.

"I was just coming along to your Excellency—naturally I should come after your threat to visit the house in the Rue Dauphine. Of course, you did not carry that out?"

Maurevale bade him be seated, and offered him a cigar.

"I am just returned from the very place," he said, with pretence, and then he asked, "Did you really believe that my intention would not be carried out?"

Faber did not know what to say.

"I can only consider your Excellency's return as a miracle," he stammered.

"Come, come, my friend, why should it be that? Crimes

are of two kinds—those which imply brains of a kind and are premeditated, and those which temper provokes and are merely passionate. I did not fear the first, for no one in the Rue Dauphine knew that I was about to visit the house. Against the second I felt able to protect myself. Professedly, it was somewhat a presumptuous expectation, and I might have been mistaken."

Faber said that he could not understand it. "Something happened in the house, I can see," he said at last.

The prince admitted it. "Indeed, and it did. We had some revolver practice, but, fortunately, the man who held the pistol was merciful, and I am here. Let it suffice. My present interest is in the news which you describe as urgent. It concerns Tahir Pasha, of course."

"It does concern him. This morning at twelve o'clock I visited the Rue Montserre with my assistant Dolgery. We found the Egyptian in an exhausted condition, and by no means unwilling to listen to us. He quite understands that the affairs which have kept him in Paris are dangerous, and may be attended by grave consequences. I told him of your interest and of your advice that he should not return immediately to the Rue Dauphine. That advice, I am glad to say, he has now taken. Your Excellency will find him quartered at the Hôtel Beau Seigneur, in the Avenue de l'Opéra. We could go there at once if you are disposed."

"I am certainly disposed—and this is very well done, Faber. Indeed, it makes an end of my difficulty. You will laugh, however, when you hear that my immediate purpose is to marry the young lady of the Rue Dauphine to the youth who supped with me last night."

"To marry the lady—your Excellency is not in earnest!"

"You shall see how earnest I am when you have heard my instructions. I shall require some help, Faber, that of at least half-a-dozen men. Can you assure me as much?"

"If your Excellency really means—but I must assume that you are serious."

"As serious, Faber, as the passion of a man for a woman will

ever permit a third party to be. Now, please, take down my instructions, and then act upon them immediately. I must see Tahir without delay. He is the keystone of our arch. We shall find ourselves among the bricks and mortar if it falls."

"Your Excellency's buildings do not fall, I understand."

"Because, my friend," said the prince slowly, "they are built upon reason."

He said no more upon the matter, but began at once to dictate his commands as he had promised. Faber wondered both at the clearness of his mind and at his instant perception of favourable and unfavourable ideas. Here was a general who thought first of defeat, and when he had considered defeat, then would admit the possibility of victory. And all this he did upon an impulse, as it were, and not upon a considered plan. Ten minutes ago he had been without an idea how he would redeem his promise to Mlle. Zaida, or by what means he would re-enter the house in the Rue Dauphine. Now the whole plot had come to him, and he was swift to act upon it.

Maurevale was still engaged in this exciting task when a servant of the hotel entered the room and handed him a telegram. Tearing the envelope while he was still dictating to Gustave Faber, his voice did not betray in any way the grave tidings which he had just perused.

"You are to be outside the garden gate of the Rue de Névers precisely at ten o'clock—but at half-past nine o'clock you will send three men to the door of the house in the Rue Dauphine, and they will watch it in such a way that any one within the house will be aware of their presence. Do you understand that, Faber?"

"Certainly, Excellency."

"Then ascertain for me, I beg of you, when the evening train from Blois reaches the Quai d'Orsay?"

Faber ceased to write. The digression appeared to him to be extraordinary.

"It arrives at eleven o'clock; but, Excellency, is the Quai d'Orsay in the matter, then?"

"So much in the matter, Faber, that I would give a thousand

louis to know why a young friend of mine will be there this night."

He crushed the telegram in his hand as though he regretted the expression of impatience, and then fell to pacing the room again as one plunged suddenly into an abyss of his thoughts and totally without enlightenment. This mood endured for some minutes, and when it passed Faber perceived that the difficulty had vanished also and that nothing but an intense purpose remained.

"Have you any agent in Chinon?" he asked presently. This was a question which surprised the detective very much.

"In Chinon, sir?"

"I said so; but it appears that you have not. We must have one, however, and the best you can engage. Let him go to a house I will describe and ascertain if it has been visited within the last forty-eight hours by a young Englishwoman, whose portrait I will give you. In any case let him spare neither expense nor trouble to trace this young lady, who, until to-day, was the guest of the Count of Fours at Aizy-la-Belle. You understand, Faber—the lady is missing, and it is feared that she has been decoyed from the count's house."

"That is very serious, prince."

"As serious as it was inevitable. And yet I had not thought of it. Even the best of us is an optimist sometimes, Faber. We think that our brains are infallible and wake up to discover that a fool has outwitted us. So it has always been. I am no different from the others."

"Do you believe, then, that the story of an abduction is true?"

"I believe nothing until it is proved. You will tell me whether this be true or false. Lose no time, I beg of you—for the lady's safety is more precious to me than my own life."

He terminated the interview with the words, and immediately left the Ritz in his own car to visit Tahir Pasha at the Hôtel Beau Seigneur. Never, perhaps, from the beginning of this stupendous task had the meaning of it or the nature of the stake he played for been so well understood. That the truth

might be in the end a story of shame and humiliation ; that his pursuit of it might bring ruin to some and social ostracism to others, he had not doubted—but that little Stella should suffer, that harm might come to her, had never been in his thoughts.

And now the blow had fallen, and Kitty Insole had telegraphed from Blois the momentous announcement that Stella was missing from the château, and that she herself was coming straight to Paris. Such a turn had not been imagined by the prince in the most profound of his many anticipations.

Oh, it was all plain enough, and for that matter a clever move. Maurevale never doubted that Frederick Walther and Constance Heliers were at the back of it, and that they had contrived it to keep him from the Peace Conference at Lausanne. Very probably old Walther had been offered a substantial sum by a Continental Power if he succeeded in silencing the most feared advocate of peace and the one to whom the other Powers would most readily listen. And he had struck, not at the man, but at the woman—a clever trick and one which earned his adversary's admiration.

That actual harm would happen to Stella, Maurevale could not believe. None the less, it was possible that evil might come to her, and if it did he must set it down to his own overweening confidence and to his imprudence. Bitterly now he blamed himself that he had permitted her to go to the count's house at all. Had he not known it for a nest of intriguers, and was it not possible that, after all, this smooth-tongued Frenchman had killed Anna? He had come to think that it might be so, but he reflected that this idea was subsequent to Stella's departure from England. He would not have let her go had it been otherwise.

It was astonishing how all he had planned now seemed impotent and vain in the light of this unlooked-for intelligence. What mattered the truth if Stella Insole were not the first to hear it? He thought of her as he had seen her at Pangbourne during the summer—the simple, shy, little girl, whose wit and cleverness few would have guessed. Truly would he have given half his fortune to have known that all was well with her this night.



These reflections had carried him to the Avenue de l'Opéra, and his car now drew up before a quiet little hotel which almost faced the great opera-house, and was next door to a café largely frequented by Germans. An inquiry of the concierge whether Bimbashi Tahir was in the house resulted in an affirmative answer, and to Maurevale's surprise the Egyptian consented immediately to receive him. Following a page upstairs to a private room on the second floor, he found Tahir sitting at a little writing-table, though it was not apparent that he had been writing; and when he rose Maurevale perceived how marked were the ravages of last night's debauch, and how truly Faber had spoken of his weakness.

The Egyptian was dressed in a black frock-coat with dark trousers, and wore the button of his order. An amazingly handsome man, his carriage was dignified and his air that of an aristocrat. With a gracious wave of his hand he indicated an armchair by the table, and bade the prince take it. Then he called for the eternal coffee and cigarettes.

"Your Excellency has been good enough to take an interest in my affairs," he began. "Since I may not doubt the friendly nature of your intervention, I beg to thank you. Be sure that anything you may say to me will have a careful hearing."

"I was sure of it," said Maurevale as he lighted a cigar, "otherwise the letter would not have been written. And as we have no time to lose I will come to the point without delay. In a word, it concerns the house in the Rue Dauphine."

Tahir turned in his chair that he might listen more carefully.

"Yes," he said slowly, "it would be about that; though what your Excellency knows of such a house I am quite at a loss to say." He waited for an answer, as though unwilling to commit himself until the whole position were declared. Maurevale, however, was frankness itself.

"You shall have the whole story," he said, with an assumption of candour he could at all times command. "The French Government knows of this house, and in the present state of international politics will not permit it to exist. The rest is in

the hands of the police, who, I am given to understand, will visit the Rue Dauphine at ten o'clock to-night."

Tahir nodded his head. A man of phlegmatic temperament, he betrayed no sign of emotion whatsoever. And it may be that he and his friends had been expecting some such tidings.

"What affair is it of the French Government," he asked presently—and then, with just a suspicion of irony, "and of yours, prince? I am curious, and do not hesitate to say so. You warn me—very well. But you know nothing of me, and so you come with some other purpose. Should I not hear that to begin with?"

"Certainly; I will tell it you at once. I want to know something of an English lady whom you knew very well in Cairo five or six years ago—the Lady Anna Maclain."

A curious look came upon Tahir's face. It was as though some one had uttered a word of warning and bidden him beware.

"The Lady Anna Maclain—but she is dead. I have read it in the papers." And then, with a sudden blaze of passion, as though memory returned swiftly, he cried: "Why do you ask me this—you, in whose house she died? Yes, I remember it now—one of your English friends killed her; and you ask me what I knew of her—my God, the one woman for whom I would have given my life—you ask me that?"

Maurevale did not reply immediately. The depth of this man's passion, his obvious sincerity, forbade any mere commonplace expression. And Tahir was obviously sincere. There could be no doubt of the truth of his story. The mere recital of it brought him to his feet as one driven to action by a tempest of anger.

"You shall speak!" he cried, choler almost choking him; "you shall tell me the object of this visit. It is my right to know it. Why do you come to my house with this story—why do you affront me? And not for the first time. I remember that now. We have met before, and I have warned you. Is it not so, prince? Do you deny it?"

He swayed slightly and passed a hand across his forehead as though trying to remember where and under what circumstances

the interview had taken place; but the drug defied him, and, reasserting itself, left him once more impotent and listless. Sinking into a chair he made a sign that he did not wish the interview to continue.

"I have said what should be said," he repeated. "I loved this lady whom your English friend has murdered. Do not come to me, for I cannot help you."

"But you can help justice," rejoined Maurevale quietly. "You can help to punish this man if what you say is true."

"Do you doubt it, then?"

"Why should I believe it?"

Tahir made a movement of contempt.

"Go to Cairo and ask them there," he said; "ask her brother, the English lord, how many times this man threatened his sister, and why she was afraid of him. Then speak to me of doubt. It is as plain as the sun in the east. He murdered her because he was jealous of her friends. I said that he would do so five years ago."

And then he asked—

"If not he, who else? Had she enemies in her own country? I do not believe it. When she went to India did not this man follow her? You must know that it is so. What testimony can I give that is not better given by others? If there is any justice among the English, Captain Ferman will die. If there is not, I will kill him, for I have sworn it."

The threat reanimated, and his words had all the virility and emphasis which sincerity prompted. Maurevale no longer doubted that he believed Ferman to be the author of the crime, and that he not so much as suspected another; but it was evident at the same time that much which could have been told was being kept back, and that a subtle Oriental mind was more keenly alive to the danger of admissions than an unsuspecting listener would have imagined. For all that, the outburst remained startling enough, and the threat highly dangerous to the man whom the prince desired to serve.

"Your feelings do you honour," said Maurevale, when the heat of argument had cooled somewhat. "I am bound to tell

you, however, that the evidence so far entirely fails to support your suspicions. In England we do not believe Captain Ferman to be guilty, nor is it the opinion of his friends that he would have committed such a dastardly crime. Moreover, this poor lady died by poison. . . ."

"It would be the weapon for such a man," interposed Tahir quickly; "has not his brother, the doctor, written a book upon the poisons of the East when he was with his regiment in India? Your friendship is honourable to you—it will not serve him. I say that he murdered her because of his jealousy. He is rightly accused, and your courts will do justice when they sentence him. I have said it, and I will not retract. He was this poor lady's enemy, and all in Cairo knew him to be so. Let that be the story you carry back to England, for I have no other to tell."

The prince expressed his obligation, and perceiving that further pursuit of the subject would be useless, he prepared to take his leave. Before he went, however, he had again to speak of the house in the Rue Dauphine, and with discretion.

"At least you will permit me to be your ambassador with the English Government according to our compact," he said. "If any one can obtain an amnesty for Bimbashi Tahir, I should be the man. I am sure you will wish it for your sister's sake—which is to say that I had the pleasure of making Mlle. Zaida's acquaintance this afternoon."

Tahir had risen to bid his visitor farewell; but at these words he sat down again immediately and regarded him with wondering eyes.

"You have been to the Rue Dauphine?"

"As I say, this afternoon."

"And you have seen my sister?"

"I had the great pleasure."

Tahir shrugged his shoulders.

"What was your purpose in going there?"

"To tell you what I have just told you."

"I must believe it. Whom did you see there?"

"Mlle. Zaida and another, whom I took for the mistress of the house."

"You mean Mme. Ghika—did you tell her why you came?"

"Oh, I never discuss politics with women."

"Who are often the only people with whom they should be discussed. Well, then, what did madame say?"

"She seemed concerned for your safe ."

"Naturally—and my sister?"

"The same answer serves."

Tahir sighed.

"My poor sister," he said, and for some moments he paced the room slowly in the profoundest reverie.

Maurevale watched him with half-shut eyes.

"Be pleased to tell me," exclaimed Tahir, waking from the reverie at last, "is your influence with the English Government such that you will guarantee the safety of me and of my friends in the event of the house in the Rue Dauphine being abandoned?"

"I may safely say that it is; but the abandonment of the house would imply also the abandonment of the propaganda it has been opened to encourage."

Tahir thought upon it.

"I wish to return to Cairo," he said. "I would go there openly. Will you promise me a safe-conduct?"

"My influence shall be used to that end. You could not ask me to say more."

"I understand—yet it is all idle talk. There is a barrier between the English nation and myself which death alone may break down. It can never be. I thank you, prince."

And then, pacing to and fro once more, he repeated the words, "My poor sister," with a sadness he did not attempt to disguise.

Maurevale did not intrude with his sympathy, for he understood that the offer of it at such a time would have been an impertinence. He did, however, suggest that it would be well if Mlle. Zaida were prepared to leave the house in the Rue Dauphine at an early moment—and this, to his surprise, was a suggestion which provoked Tahir to a response even more enigmatical than the other.

"The house is her salvation," he said quietly. "I cannot

save her if she comes. She stands the hostage of my liberty. If you are my friend, remember that."

"I could not forget it," said the prince, offering him his hand.

Plainly, it would have been madness now to confess that he was going to the Rue Dauphine that night for no other purpose than to marry Zaida to her lover.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### THE ALARM

THE young man Allulah waited for the prince at the Café Heinrich, and when they had taken dinner at their leisure they went on to the house in the Rue Dauphine.

This was at ten o'clock, as the prince had agreed with Gustave Faber, and hardly had the car set them down in the street when the detective made his appearance and reported what he had done.

"Your Excellency's instructions have been faithfully carried out," he said, "but I fear we have received them too late. The house is shut up—madame left it early this afternoon, and as to the others, it is very evident that they have already taken alarm. No one has gone in or out since we came—there are no lights burning, and even the servants' quarters would appear to be deserted. I am sorry, but if your Excellency had told me——"

Maurevale intimated briefly that he was not dissatisfied, and thus quieted the qualms of the disappointed officer. In one particular alone did Monsieur Faber appear to have erred, and that was in his assertion that no lights were burning at Tahir's house. This was inaccurate, for the lantern above the porch still showed a bright light—though to-night it was crimson and not green as heretofore. Plainly a danger-signal to any who might approach in ignorance of what had taken place.

The young man Allulah had accompanied the prince to the Rue Dauphine in a great state of inquietude and uncertainty. A lover's natural anxiety suggested divers perils which might overtake so heroic a plot; and he persisted in his assertions that what they were doing could only be done at the hazard of Mademoiselle Zaida's life. Now when he heard the detective he

fell to a mood of such deep despair that the prince no longer doubted the wisdom of his own determination. This young fellow would make a worthy husband—he did not doubt it.

“Come, come,” he said, “that is a poor undertaking which discovers no barriers. I promised you that I would do certain things to-night, and you may blame me when the right time comes. But it is not yet, and we have now much to do which these people have made easier for us. Take courage, my dear boy, and tell yourself that what is done is for mademoiselle’s sake. To begin with, let us be quite sure that she is not in the house—for upon that point I am far from satisfied.”

With this he commanded Faber to leave certain of his men in the Rue Dauphine and to come with the others to the Rue de Névers, which lies at the back of the house and gives access to the garden gate.

It was now a little after ten o’clock, and this quarter of the city silent and deserted. Much of the glamour of Paris was to be found upon the far bank of the river where the lights glowed and the sky was aflame with a golden iridescence. The Rue de Névers, however, might have been a street at the heart of a country town, and when they came up to the garden gate of Tahir’s house there was not even a sergent de ville to interfere with them.

The wall here is very high and the house itself quite hidden from the observation of those who pass by. Maurevale, with a word to his companions to be prepared for an ambushade, opened the gate with the key mademoiselle had given him, and immediately entered the garden. Then he stood to listen, and became aware almost at once that he was not alone.

There are some fine old trees in this quarter of Paris, and the gardens of the Rue Dauphine possess not a few of them. One gigantic chestnut in particular arrested the prince’s attention, and he stood by its trunk to listen for the sounds which had alarmed him. Here the young man Allulah and Gustave Faber joined him, and the three distinctly heard that almost human and plaintive cry which heralded their intrusion.

“What, in Heaven’s name, is it?” the detective asked.



Happily the pallor of his face was hidden by the darkness, which also permitted him to pose afterward as one who "had known it from the beginning." But he was plainly alarmed, and when Allulah laughed softly his alarm turned to anger.

"Then you do not hear it, monsieur?" he cried, appealing to the Egyptian. Allulah replied that he heard it distinctly.

"It is only old Barbasheesh," he said, and then in explanation, "but you are lucky that I am here, for he would have torn you to pieces." And then he called softly in a strange tongue, and a great baboon came swinging down from the branches above and cowered and chattered at the young man's feet.

"Here is one of my friend Tahir's little pleasantries," Allulah said as he commanded the huge brute to be still; "if madame has left the house without him, it means that others are still here. Let us go up at once, for I am sure that something has happened."

He led the way, crossing the garden and climbing the iron stairs to the balcony on the first floor. Here they found the door of the inner hall wide open, and had hardly set foot in it when one of the men stumbled heavily and cried that a man lay on the carpet. When a light was brought all perceived the body of a young fellow who wore Egyptian dress and lay stark dead by the stove.

Some one now discovered the switches for the electric light, and this was turned on fully while Maurevale and Faber examined the body of the youth. It was shockingly mutilated, and plainly by the beast whose gibberings had alarmed them in the garden. Even Faber's men, accustomed to the grimmer tragedies of Paris, suggested that it was work for M. Lépine, and that it would be folly to go on until the police were called in. The prince, however, while telling them to act as they thought fit in the matter, summoned Allulah to his side and suggested that they should search the house together.

"Are you still of opinion that we were wise to come?" he asked. Allulah, grown very pale and trembling as he climbed the first flight of stairs, declared his opinion to be unchanged.

"But we shall not find Zaida alive," he exclaimed in a tone

that was eloquent of despair; "I have known it from the beginning. We are too late, prince, and were foolish to believe that it would be otherwise."

Maurevale did not reply. In truth, he had begun to think that the youth was right, and that even the circumstances did not justify the hazard he had invited. At the same time, he doubted whether madame would have taken such an extreme step—and one which must drive her from Paris—if it did not lead to the exposure of the whole affair at the Palais de Justice. This he would learn almost immediately, for they now stood at the stairs' head and could look down upon the little group of agitated men in the hall below. How silent it all was—how suggestive of the crime that might have been committed.

Allulah was well acquainted with this house of mystery, and now put himself at the head of the party. Swiftly he passed from room to room upon the second story, switching on the lights as he went and declaring his displeasure aloud as disappointment awaited him at every turn. Everywhere they discovered traces of a hurried flight—drawers open and ransacked, floors littered by torn papers; even the remains of a meal taken hurriedly in a boudoir and of a letter unfinished upon a desk. Allulah hardly glanced at this, but the prince put it into his pocket and then followed the youth to the floor above. Here a new surprise awaited them. They stood in a long corridor and heard distinctly the monotone of a man who wailed incessantly in the Eastern fashion. And this voice proceeded from a room upon the right-hand side, whose unlatched door permitted a single ray of light to shine upon the wall of the corridor.

"It is old Mahomet," cried Allulah, his face betraying the pleasure he felt; "I might have expected this. Yes, yes, they would be afraid of Mahomet. And he will tell us the truth. There is nothing to fear now, prince. I should have remembered Mahomet before."

He went on with brisk steps and entered the room boldly, Maurevale upon his heels. The spectacle he discovered, however, unnerved him utterly, and with a loud cry of "Zaida" he ran to the bed and flung himself upon it. Perceiving that a

tragedy had happened, the prince hastened to follow him, and so discovered the almost inanimate figure of Tahir's sister—the young Egyptian girl he had come there to serve. Surely she was dead, he said to himself. And this was the end of the hazard—this the truth they were to discover!

Mahomet, the priest, stood as they entered the room and made way for them willingly. To their earnest questions he could but reply that mademoiselle had been taken ill suddenly, and that his own skill as a physician had achieved little on her account. When they asked him why he had not sent for help, he replied at once that it would have been imprudent to leave her—and that he did not dare to make the truth known to the police for Tahir's sake.

Maurevale listened to these protests calmly, but paid little attention to them. He was convinced that mademoiselle had been poisoned and that none but a clever physician could save her life. Indifferent to the consequences, and believing that Faber would do wisely to pass the affair on to the regular police, he commanded him to send to the prefecture while another messenger went pell-mell for a physician whom he named. The latter came almost immediately, and at once admitted the justice of their suspicions.

“She has been poisoned, sir——”

Maurevale said that he agreed.

“And, I think, by some preparation of henbane. Do you know anything of her story?”

“Very little—though I imagine that the story of her friends may interest the police. Do you think that you can save her life?”

“I will make use of all the known antidotes, but she will be very ill for some weeks even if she recover.”

“That is inevitable. But I am particularly concerned for this young lady, and if you can save her I will ask you to honour me by naming a fee of 25,000 francs. Go to work now, I beg of you, and let me have the news to the Ritz Hotel as early as may be. This young man Allulah has a right here. Please show him every consideration.”

The doctor promised to do so, and at once re-entered the bedroom. Maurevale, however, returned to the first floor of the house and began to search diligently in the deserted rooms as though they might contain some secret vital to his scheme. In this occupation he was interrupted a quarter of an hour later by the advent of M. Jarnac, the sub-prefect of the quarter, and of his assistants, and to these he told his story as quickly as possible.

M. Jarnac, a very little man with a pair of very small eyes covered by very large glasses, listened stolidly, but would admit nothing of significance in reply. The house had been under observation, he said, and some queer stories had been told of it. As for its political significance, that concerned M. Clemenceau and his Foreign Minister, and would be a Government affair. All that the police could take cognisance of immediately were the crimes which had been committed. And this was as much as to say that they would now take possession of the house and make the affair their own, which was exactly what the prince desired them to do.

It was now approaching eleven o'clock, and he remembered that he had to meet Kitty Insole at the Quai d'Orsay, and hear from her lips the true account of Stella's disappearance. He had hoped to go there after an amusing adventure in the Rue Dauphine, ending in a comedy of marriage as pretty as could be played—but instead he must set off from a house of silence and perhaps of death. If satisfaction remained, it was in the tremendous revelations which this tragedy seemed to imply—though he had hardly congratulated himself upon those when Allulah, who followed him down the stairs, shattered them all in an instant.

"I have been speaking to Hassan," the young man said, "and it would seem that Mme. Sabine left early this afternoon. It was just half-an-hour afterwards that Zaida met the Count of Fours."

"The Count of Fours—but that is surprising news. Where did she meet him?"

"At the shop of the old bookseller. She was taken ill

immediately upon returning here. Is it not very significant?"

Maurevale looked very grave.

"It is the most astonishing thing I have heard for many days," he said—and then he asked, "Does the old man know whether the count remained in Paris?"

"He knows very little. Madame appears to have understood that you would communicate with the police, and she made her arrangements for leaving upon your departure yesterday. Zaida was to remain and take charge of the house until Tahir returned. There would seem to be something more than we know concerning these people. You, sir, will be well advised to beware of them."

"Oh," said Maurevale lightly, "do not think of me, but of yourself. I must cut a sorry figure in your eyes—and yet I am not sure that we shall not come to speak of it as a night of fortune. Had mademoiselle gone away with the others—well, that would have been very dangerous. As it is, I pray God she will recover, and from this moment I commend her to your charge. You will both reside in this house, which I shall rent from the Marquis of Servaux. Consider yourselves as under my protection, and do not fail to give me immediate information of mademoiselle's recovery."

Allulah promised to do so, and the prince left him upon the understanding. It was ironical to see the red lamp still burning above the doorway when he drove away, and significant that the house he had found in darkness should now blaze with lights from attic to conciergerie. At the corner of the street, moreover, he met the Prefect himself hastening to the place in a powerful motor-car and accompanied by three of the most able police in Paris. This seemed to say that the highest authorities knew very well the dangerous nature of the organisation in the Rue Dauphine, and were glad to have an opportunity of investigating it.

Maurevale had taken Gustave Faber with him from the house, for it was obvious that a private agent had no *locus standi* now that the police were called in. Besides, he had much to

tell Faber, and was not unwilling to have that shrewd official's help. Particularly did the detective hear with amazement the story that mademoiselle had met the Count of Fours at the bookshop during the course of the afternoon and had been taken ill almost immediately upon her return. This was a fact of which neither could make much—unless it was to be supposed that the count was worthy of all the suspicion which had fallen upon him from the beginning. Evidently Gustave Faber was willing to go as far.

"You are aware that the count spent some years in Egypt?" he remarked presently. The prince said that he was.

"Where, it is to be supposed, he might incline to the National Party. That would make him the friend of these people."

"As you say—and the enemy of Mlle. Zaida. But I cannot understand why such a man takes an interest in Egyptian politics and what it can matter to him whether the English or the Nationalists are masters in Cairo. That's what perplexes me, Faber—that's where I am all at sea."

"Your Excellency may very well say so. Do you not think that Mlle. Zaida herself may enlighten us?"

"Identically the hope which brought me into this affair at all. I determined to make her my friend, believing that she could speak. And now you see what happens. If she lives, she will be very ill for many days—possibly for many weeks. Meanwhile my friend in England will be tried—perhaps condemned for a crime I do not believe he committed. Is not fortune dealing hardly with me?"

"But your Excellency does not permit that fact to shake your confidence, I perceive. You are convinced that you will yet discover the assassin."

"As convinced, Faber, that I know his name as that I am acquainted with your own. Unfortunately conjecture which is not supported by evidence may work a greater mischief in a law court than a lie which is vouched for. So here I am, you see, groping blindly for a new light and quite unable to find my way. Nevertheless, my goal is sure, and I shall get there sooner or

later. Whether it will be in time to save my friend's life—Heaven only knows. That depends a good deal upon my friends——”

“Who are devoted to your Excellency's service. No doubt you will have commands for me to-night.”

“The reason I ask you to accompany me to the station. In the first place we must discover the whereabouts of Mme. Sabine. That woman is very necessary to us. Spare no effort to trace her and to bring me the news as soon as may be. Tahir is no less important to us than to her. She will endeavour to return to him for reasons I am not able to explain to you. He, on the other hand, would give much to return to Cairo under a safe-conduct. If I can procure as much from the English Government, and I have some little influence, we should stand very well with Tahir Pasha. We must not lose sight of him, for that would be adding very much to our difficulties. I count upon you in the matter, Faber.”

“Not without reason, prince. And since this is the Quai d'Orsay, I would express the hope that you will hear good news from the friend you are expecting.”

Maurevale said that he hoped so, and at once entered the station. The express from Blois arrived almost immediately, and one of the first persons who stepped out of the dining-car was little Kitty Insole—alone, and in such a state of distress that it was evident she carried news of the gravest importance. Indeed, but for the prince's word of caution, she would have blurted it out there and then upon the platform where they stood.

“Well,” he exclaimed directly they were seated in the car—for he had already dismissed Faber—“well, Kitty, and so you have come to Paris to tell me that Stella has gone away?”

“Indeed, it is so,” she cried, the stress and strain of it all bringing tears to her eyes; “she went away three days ago, and we have heard nothing of her since.”

“And our friend the count—what does he say?”

“He has gone to Dieppe in search of her.”

“To Dieppe—why to Dieppe?”

"Oh, sir, I must tell you everything. Stella received a letter from Dieppe, and it troubled her very much. She would not tell me why, but I could not be mistaken. So I told the count of it—and when she did not return he went there at once."

"And madame, his wife?"

Kitty shook her head.

"I cannot speak of her—I do not wish to. She seems quite indifferent. I do not believe that she has a heart."

"But she knows of Stella's absence?"

"Oh yes, the whole house knows. Madame alone showed no feeling. With your permission, sir, I will never go to Aizy-la-Belle again."

"That is given willingly. Perhaps madame is not quite so wicked as you think her—I shall know when I hear from Stella."

Kitty opened her eyes very wide.

"Then you expect to hear from her?"

"Unless I am very much mistaken there will be a telegram for us at the hotel. And it will contain good news."

Kitty sighed and turned away her head.

"I do not believe that I shall ever hear good news again," she said.



## CHAPTER XXVII

### THE THIRD SHADOW

ROOMS had been prepared for Kitty Insole at the Ritz, and the prince conducted her to them immediately upon their arrival.

His prophecy, that he would receive a message from Stella, had been made in no boastful spirit, but was a tribute to his unchanged confidence in the wit and the resource of an unusually alert intelligence. He did not think that Stella would fall readily into any trap that knaves might set for her, while he had no doubt that every artifice would be employed. Herein he proved once more how great was his reliance upon the human factor rather than upon the theorems which superficial facts might seem to warrant.

If Stella were worthy of the confidence he had placed in her, she would be a free woman this night, and if she were a free woman, she would write to him. By which process of reasoning he had promised her sister Kitty that there would be news, and by which also he maintained a serenity which the circumstance did not appear to justify.

The letter was there sure enough, upon the table of his own sitting-room, just where he had expected to find it. A glance at the envelope showed that it had come, not from Dieppe, but from Strasburg, and that it had been posted early in the day. Nor had he read many lines of it before it was clear that the writer was in the best of health and spirits and hoped much from the journey she had made so unexpectedly.

"You see," said the prince to Kitty, "it is just as we expected. Stella appears to prefer the German atmosphere to that of Aizy-la-Belle—despite Monsieur Henry's skill as a motorist.

My only disappointment is that she puts me to shame with a letter. Did not I promise you a telegram?"

"Oh, sir, but what does that matter? If Stella is well——"

And then she said, with just a suspicion of chagrin:

"At least she does not think me worthy of her confidence."

"My dear child, she thinks you worthy of everything her love can bestow. But she is wise to be reticent when confidence cannot speak of these things you would wish to hear. Are we not working for your happiness, Kitty?"

She protested against it hotly—the blood coming to her cheeks.

"What is it to me, sir, what can it be—now?" she asked. Maurevale laid a gentle hand upon her shoulder when he answered:

"It may be a gift of mercy to a man who is ready to lay down his life for a woman's honour."

She did not understand him, and could but wonder with those grey eyes of hers wherein Jack Ferman used to read the secrets. Maurevale believed that Ferman had been as a man caught up suddenly by a tempest of passion, and that Kitty Insole might yet have a message for him when the house of the secrets was opened. Of this he would not speak to-night. Indeed, Kitty's presence embarrassed him, for how could he tell her that the day might never be, and that the house might fall before the truth was known?

It remained to comfort her anew with such promises as were justified, and then to send her to bed. He himself, however, could not yet think of rest. A heavy roll of correspondence from his secretary Paul demanded instant attention—and was there not Stella's letter with all its amazing revelations? This he had but scanned when he told Kitty that all was well with her sister, but now he sat down to read it, drawing the lamp to the table and welcoming the silence of the sleeping hotel.

She wrote from Strasburg, that old city of the siege, and prefaced her news with the acceptable assurance that she was quite a free agent in what she had done, and had the greatest hopes of her journey.

"You will be more than astonished," she wrote, "to hear that madame the countess was the direct inspiration of this adventure. She sent me to Strasburg when the count feared that I was going to Dieppe. It is from her that I have obtained the address of Madame Prevost, and by her aid that I have not lost sight of that extraordinary woman whose house at Chinon showed me once more the heart of Green Jade which poor Lady Anna used to wear.

"But this, prince, is to tell you the end of my story, when I should remember that you know nothing of the beginning.

"My last letter spoke of the visit to Chinon, of my discovery of the woman, and of the little Egyptian boy—and of Madame Prevost's request that I would send the count to her without delay.

"You will remember that Madame de Fours gave an alfresco fête upon the evening of my return to Chinon, and that all my efforts to speak to the count apart were unavailing. Next morning I was more fortunate. Many of our guests then left for Paris, and madame, being quite overcome by the ardour of her hospitalities, retired once more from the scene. So I had but Monsieur Henry to reckon with, and here fortune helped me. His long-talked-of aeroplane is now finished and ready for him at Issy—and even the prospect of assuring me that life would not be worth living if I did not accompany him to the forest failed to keep him to terra firma. He left us immediately after the festivities, and we have not seen him since.

"I found the count in the Italian garden, and I think he was not unprepared for the interview. He is a singularly enigmatical personage, and always difficult to understand. For my part, I went straight to the point, telling him all about the woman and not forgetting to remind him that we had seen the little Egyptian lad at Blois. When I had finished he did not make any comment whatever until he had walked twice round the garden. Then he turned to me and said in the most natural way possible:

"'This is very serious, Mademoiselle Stella—this is altogether astonishing.'

"I said that it was so, and waited for him to continue. His

efforts to appear unembarrassed became less successful with every word he spoke, and it would have been apparent to any one that, whatever he might say, his agitation was profound.

“‘Have you any idea, can you form any opinion as to why this woman wishes to see me?’ he asked me.

“‘I told him I was quite unable to do so.

“‘But one thing is clear,’ I said, ‘we should tell the prince without loss of time and let him know that the Green Heart is discovered.’

“‘He nodded his head and seemed to agree. I am sure, however, that the suggestion frightened him very much.

“‘Let us consider,’ he went on, as a man thinking out a problem, ‘the heart of green jade is a common ornament in China. This lady may possess such a trinket and desire to explain her possession of it. The French papers have made much of Lady Anna’s death, and my name has been mentioned. It is possible that she is afraid of what her neighbours would say and desires to be forewarned. We must try and look at the matter from her point of view, and not disturb ourselves with unreasonable hopes. Our nation is given to hysteria, as you, my dear young lady, who know madame the countess, will not be unprepared to admit. I shall go to Chinon and hear the old lady for myself—that will be the best way out of the difficulty, though, frankly, I have no expectations of my journey—none whatever, as you may suppose.’

“‘To this I answered that I thought his decision wise, and that I hoped he would find the matter no more serious than he was disposed to consider it. Nor could I offer any valid objection to his proposal that I should not communicate either with you or any one else until he had himself ascertained the truth of the affair—‘for,’ said he, with one of those gestures so characteristic of his race, ‘we should only be laughed at if it is as I suppose.’ When I agreed, though not believing a word of it, his pleasure was extreme, and he could not make enough of me afterwards.

“‘I shall not try to tell you, prince, how greatly the count’s manner perplexed me, and how little I made of this interview.

"Consider the circumstances. The woman evidently knows the story of dear Anna's death as well as we know it—she has the family history at her fingers' ends: the heart of green jade we have sought for everywhere is to be found in her house: she begs the count to go to her without delay—and his answer is that she is possibly a victim of hysteria, and that while it might be well enough to visit her house, he fears that he will laugh at himself afterwards for his pains. Oh, could any one believe such a story!

"It is not necessary, I hope, for me to say that I did not believe it for a moment. The count fears this woman, and I know that he visited her that very afternoon, going about four o'clock in the big car. His subsequent assurances to me, that he had been to Tours and that Madame Prevost must wait upon his leisure, were but a new justification for my suspicions. I was convinced even then that he did not speak the truth—and now I hear the whole story from Madame Prevost's lips.

"Here I am sure that I shall surprise you, but I am confident none the less of your approval. A sudden resolution inspired by madame the countess, and helped by certain ideas of my own, have taken me from Aizy-la-Belle and installed me in the Grand Hotel at Strasburg. Let me tell you as briefly as may be how this journey came to pass.

"To begin with, a confession.

"You remember, I am sure, the stage fright I suffered at Highlands when I thought that I heard steps in Anna's room. Will you laugh at me, prince, if I tell you that I heard them again, here in this château of Aizy-la-Belle? If you do, I must brave even your ridicule, and tell you that as I was crossing the great ballroom, which is built over the river, about half-an-hour after dinner upon the Wednesday of last week, I distinctly heard the same shuffling footstep almost by my very side.

"The room is, as you will recollect, itself a bridge over the river. It is built upon arches, and we use it for a short cut from the inner hall to the Italian garden. Our dinner party had been a small one—and, after dinner, the Chevalier Maurice went out to make love to the dark-eyed Olive, as is his wont when the

moon shines. The countess herself was in bed and the count had gone to the library to consider, I suppose, what further untruths he might tell me about Madame Prevost. I, unfortunate one, had been left to the tender mercies of the old Bishop of Locues, who promised to talk art to me in the orangery, and I was crossing the dark ballroom to go to him when I heard the steps and could not help crying out—just like a frightened child who fears the dark.

“What shall I say in excuse?”

“The moon shone on the river and a haze of the silvery light hovered in the empty spaces of the ballroom. I peered into the shadows, conscious of a presence, but unable to define it. Driven by the certainty that some one stood near me, I put out my arms as though to defend myself. Then I verily believe that I cried out, asking, ‘Who is it?’ as a maid might have done. All this, sir, in the accepted manner of silly people who are frightened by bogies—even if they be not of their own creation. But I do assure you that my alarm was very real, and not since the night of terror at Highlands have I felt so overwhelmed by a sense of unnameable dread.

“What should I do? Scream for help, and show a crimson face when those buffoons, the footmen, came to my assistance? Or search the room myself and be sure that it was empty? Perhaps fortunately I took a middle course. But oh! with what trembling steps, with what prayers that the darkness would keep its ghosts and the shadows their secrets. Step by step, with arms outstretched, I made my way to the double door which gives upon the bridge. The moments which found me fumbling with the lock were ages of apprehension, æons of waiting for an unseen hand to touch my shoulder, for a voice to whisper words of doom into my listening ears. When I reached the garden at last I had begun to laugh hysterically, so great was the strain. The good bishop found me, and had reason anew to believe that the English nation consists of those who are mad and those who are sane, but that it is impossible to distinguish between them.

“I told him a vain tale—a hundred years ago it would have been of vapours—and tried to compose myself as well as could

be. It was penance enough to be compelled to hear his learned talk of art and religion, and to offer my warm sympathies to a true son of the Church whom the wicked French Government had just turned out of his palace *sans cérémonie*. The gardens themselves were delightfully cool and still, and the moon shone gloriously, throwing demon shadows upon the paths, and creating a lord bishop of such prodigious size that even a French Minister might have worshipped at his feet. These shadows I remarked more than once, as we walked to and fro, speaking of the burning of the Botticellis and other acts of sacrilege committed by the pious folk of old. I cannot tell you why it was, but I fancied that, where there should have been but two images three appeared unmistakably from time to time; and so much did this impression influence me that I called the bishop's attention to it at last, and asked him if I saw aright.

"Observe, sir, how quickly a nervous temperament can influence others. Here was this good old man, as far from alarms as a cactus from the Alpine snows, and a word of mine changes him in a twinkling. He begins to speak of burglaries in the neighbourhood; recollects the 'horrors' perpetrated by bands of roving thieves upon innocent men and women, whose houses they have rifled; suggests an instant alarm and a messenger to the police at Blois. This I could not forbid; at least, so far as it concerned the servants; and so I helped the good man to turn out the domestic guard, and for an hour or more pandemonium reigned in the woods about Aizy. Needless to say, nothing was discovered. The shadows proved phantoms in very truth. Our vain attempts to describe an individual whom we had seen in monstrous silhouette were as vain as they were mirthful. I could but speak of an Alpine hat as large as a sugar-loaf, and of a figure like the trunk of a poplar tree. The good bishop, for his part, could speak of nothing but the third shadow, and of his firm belief that some one had walked behind us in the garden. And with that we returned to the salon to pursue the story with a hundred suggestions, and to declare, each and all, that bed must be a terror.

"Here let me remark that the count himself had taken some

part in this feverish quest, though without earnestness, as it seemed to me. As for madame, his wife, I thought that she seemed very much amused when she appeared among us in a wonderful tea-gown, and with her hair upon her shoulders, as though she had been a school-girl waked from sleep. Her questions to me were not unkindly, and I detected a serious purpose in them, whatever the others may have thought. Nor did she fail to observe the count's absent manner and the perturbation which afflicted him as, indeed, no one could have done, so evident were they.

"I shall not detain you, prince, with an account of our conversation, and of all the silly stories about the bogies with which the company entertained us. It was two o'clock in the morning when we went to bed, and ten when I awoke, after a night of strange dreams, which, contrary to my expectation, had nothing to do with the third 'shadow,' but took me back to Highlands and to the dread hour following Anna's death. With these still compelling me to sad thoughts, I awoke to hear the maid's voice at my bedside, and to see a telegram awaiting me upon her salver. Naturally, I supposed that it had come from you, and was very much astonished when I read it to discover how far from the truth my guess had been. Let me tell you, in a word, that it was from Anna's maid, Berthe, and that she had despatched it from Dieppe.

"Now, what was I to think of this?"

"A telegram from Dieppe, inviting me to go there upon business of urgent importance. And put in words which I could not mistake.

"Please to see me, mademoiselle, at the Hôtel de France. So urgent, that you come to-day. Can tell you alone what I know. Do not fail me, for Captain Ferman's sake.—BERTHE MOREAU."

"How that telegram worried me—but you may well imagine it. For more than an hour I paced up and down my bedroom, asking myself what I should do and if the message were honest or a make-believe. We have so large an account against this girl, she has shown herself so vindictive where Jack Ferman is concerned, that it was natural to suspect all that she might have



done or proposed to do. Once I thought that she might have telegraphed to me in a contrite mood, and that if I went to Dieppe I should hear more of the truth than she had been willing to tell us. This impression, however, I put aside quickly—for why should she choose me for her confidante when it was equally possible for her to communicate with you? And what forbade her to speak openly if she meant to speak at all? So evident was this conclusion that I came early to the determination to send no answer whatever to the message—and in this resolution I was, to my great surprise, supported by no other than madame the countess herself.

“‘But what had madame to do with it?’ I hear you asking, and shall now hasten to tell you.

“The telegram had been in my hands an hour, perhaps; I was still in the throes of perplexity, when a man entered my bedroom and said that madame would like to see me in her boudoir, which lies immediately beneath the apartments I occupy at Aizy-la-Belle.

“Astonished at the invitation, I put on a tea-gown and went down at once. This clever, domineering lady has always been very gracious to me, and I have often admired her wit and shrewdness. Sometimes I have thought that she regarded me a little wistfully, as though anxious to speak intimately but afraid to do so. Now I found her in another mood, amused and annoyingly enigmatical. Moreover, she posed as a kindly magician, speaking of my own perplexities and railing me upon them.

“‘Weil, my dear, and so you do not know how to answer the telegram you have just received.’

“I looked at her, wondering.

“‘But, my dear Madame de Fours, how do you know this?’

“She poured me out a cup of tea—we have taught her in England to drink it in the morning—and then said with a laugh:

“‘They brought it to me by mistake—I saw it was for you and sent it up. Then I hear you walking to and fro. That little lamp above my writing-table trembles every time you pass—I say

to myself, "She is distressed and cannot answer her telegram." Is it not quite natural?"

"I admitted it to be so, and sat at her bidding. For a little while she sat back looking at me with amused and half-shut eyes. Then she said:

"'And where is our friend Maurevale all this time?'"

"I told her you were in Paris; I believed at the Ritz Hotel. She did not seem to hear me."

"'I like Maurevale,' she said; 'he is a man who has but to hold up his finger and all the world listens.'"

"And then she asked me, quite inapropos, and with a sudden turn of her handsome head:

"'Why does he not set your friend Captain Ferman free—why does he keep him in prison?'"

"I told her how willingly you would do so if it lay in your power. She did not appear to understand me, and—so like a Frenchwoman—began to deplore poor Anna's death.

"'Ah, what a life, what a tragedy! How well I remember her in Cairo. She was a beautiful creature, my dear—it was lucky she went away or there would have been a scandal, surely. Do you know her brother, the earl? There's a foolish man for you. I wonder sometimes if there is a more foolish in the world—unless it is my husband. And he is in Australia, they tell me—or somewhere in his yacht. Well, perhaps it is as well for all of us that he should not come home. Tell the prince when you write to him, madame says the earl may do more mischief at home than abroad. You will not forget?'"

"I promised that I would not, unexpected as the admission was. To my question whether she had known Lady Anna well in Egypt, the countess replied with one of those evasive answers so characteristic of her and so hopeless to those who receive them.

"'We were never good friends, my dear, she and I. It was all about the great white diamond—but what should a child like you know of that? Then she went to India, and Cairo forgot her. Perhaps the other woman was glad she had gone. I will not say "Yes" or "No" to that. Your captain, Jack Ferman,

went after her, and that was all we cared to know. Ah, *mon enfant*, is it not incredible that such a man should have killed her—he who was the best friend she had in the years I speak of! Why are people foolish enough to believe it? Why do they not set him free?’

“I could not reply to this, and contented myself by saying how gladly I would hear that our friend had been proved innocent. To my direct question whether she had any suspicion as to the real name of the murderer, she responded with a frightened look that it was a matter for the police, and could be of no concern to any one else.

“‘But I will tell you one thing,’ she said with unwonted emphasis, ‘that Madame Heliers knows more than most of us, and if your friend the prince were clever, he would have discovered it for himself. What a woman—what cunning, what deceit! Ah, my dear, there are some very foolish and some very wicked people in the world, and that Lady Constance is both foolish and wicked. I know what I am talking about, and that’s my answer when you speak to me of suspicion. Ask her why your friend died, and see that she answers you.’

“She was very earnest in this, and, indeed, I heard her with some distress. Reflection, however, convinced me that she was driven by jealousy to speak in this way, and that there could be nothing in her innuendo. When she had calmed down somewhat, she recollected the telegram which had led up to the conversation, and asked me bluntly who had sent it. To my own astonishment, but not to hers, I told her immediately. She is one of those persons who are able to compel confidence and seldom abuse them.

“‘Lady Anna’s maid?’ she exclaimed, a frown appearing upon her handsome face; ‘but what has she to do with it?’

“I said that I could not imagine, and was no less perplexed than she. Then I added:

“‘But it was the maid who declared first of all that Captain Ferman must be guilty.’

“‘So the count told me. And the woman was impertinent enough—but there, I should be grown accustomed to it. Be

sure of one thing, my child—no servant sent that telegram you received.'

"'I thought so too, madame.'

"'Then you are not going to Dieppe?'

"'Certainly not—but I wish that some people could believe me to be there.'

"She regarded me with wonder.

"'You are telling me—oh, but it is a clever little head—clever, clever. They set a trap for you, you—oh, *mon enfant*, but I shall come to love you very much, and so you may tell the prince. Certainly, you shall trick them—I will help you. Why did you not come to me before—after you had seen Madame Prevost, for instance?'

"It was my turn to express surprise. I had not, you may be sure, any notion that she knew of my adventure at Chinon, and her words quite took my breath away. When I had a little recovered, I told her quite frankly how much she astonished me, and how little I thought she knew of the affair. This pleased her, as the vanity of knowledge ever does.

"'I am curious to hear about Prevost,' she said; 'she used to be my servant in Cairo.'

"'Your servant, madame?'

"'I say it. It would be six years and more. A clever woman, that—and a secret one. My husband had been to Chinon to see her—though he little thinks that I am aware of the fact. He is as ignorant as you were, mademoiselle, and that is to say much.'

"'And would be just as curious, perhaps, to know how the information came to you,' said I, a little ruffled. This amused her; for quite a long time she chuckled to herself in a mood which flattered her but little.

"'Women of my age know everything,' she said presently, 'especially when the children tell them. Did you not take Olive to Chinon? Ah, my dear, there is nothing so simple as life when you begin to understand it.'

"'So Olive told you of my adventure. The minx.'

“Be glad that she is, for now I can help you. Are you aware that this Madame Prevost has left Chinon?”

“I am quite unaware of it.”

“But it is true. I have myself inquired, and I find that she has gone to Strasburg to her brother in the Wilhelmstrasse—No. 90. Moreover, she has taken the Egyptian boy with her. Is that not strange, and she did not go to Chinon to end her days, as she told her neighbours? Well, my dear, I am very curious about madame, and you shall go to Strasburg and tell me all about her. Write to the prince, and say what you are doing. The maid Marie shall accompany you, and you shall have one of the men as a courier. Then we will let the others think you are on your way to Dieppe. Oh, oh, that will be a fine answer to them—that will be a pretty turn. And your friend Heliers—but she will never forgive us, *mon enfant*, never—”

“I did not see what Lady Constance had to do with it, and I told her so. She is insistent, however, whenever that name is mentioned, and she turned upon me almost angrily for my interruption.

“What had she to do with it? Why she sent the telegram, of course, that your friend Maurevale might go to Dieppe instead of Lausanne. The German would pay her and her friends pretty well for that, be sure. But she is not clever, my child, not clever enough for such an old hand as this, and so I will show her. Now go and command your maid to pack your things. I will order the barouche, and take good care that we enter it when the count is out of the way. You shall be in Strasburg and not a soul the wiser. Go away at once and do as I tell you—oh, it is a fine trick, a fine trick, and clever the head that thought of it.”

“I left her, vastly pleased with herself—for she had now taken the whole credit of the proposal—and going to my room I did as she bade me. The suddenness of her proposal—its accordance with my own hopes and desires, found me acquiescent, if excited as I have not been since I left England. No harm, I thought, could come to me in Strasburg, and it might

just be possible that I should hear from Madame Prevost's lips that story of the green heart which she had refused so obstinately to tell me at Chinon. A great hope, a firm belief in the wisdom of my determination, buoyed me up and compelled me to second madame's plans with all the art I could command. Obedient to her instructions, I entered the barouche at the garden gate of the château and said good-bye to none.

"We reached Blois early in the afternoon, and caught the express to Orleans. There I changed, and, going across to Chalons-sur-Marne, caught the express to Strasburg, and had the doubtful advantage of arriving in that city in the middle of the night. Madame de Fours, however, had telegraphed to the Grand Hotel, and as hers is still a great name in France, I was treated quite as a regal personage. Going at once to bed, I tried to forget my lonely situation and the demands it would make upon my courage. A memory of Kitty and of my duty to you and to her supported me then, as it has supported me from the beginning. I slept at last, believing and praying that the day would help me.

"It was quite a summer's morning when I awoke, and even this grey old fortress city invited me to cheerfulness. I took a hasty breakfast, and, accompanied by the maid Felise, set off for the Wilhelmstrasse. This proved to be a narrow street at the back of the cathedral, and was chiefly given over to serious-looking shops upon which the sun can shine but seldom because of the great height of the houses. If I were asked to compare it with any street of a foreign city that is well known to me, I would name the Faubourg St. Honoré in Paris, but this is altogether a German street which must come as a surprise to 'stay-at-homes,' who think of Strasburg as it was in the great war, and remember only the heroic defence which the French made of their homes. Be that as it may, it was in the Wilhelmstrasse that Madame de Fours had advised me to pursue the object of my visit, and here at No. 90 I discover the shop of a dealer in curios, with the name Prevost above its window, and at once entered to ask for the woman I had travelled so far to see.

"It was a handsome establishment, full of beautiful objects I could have covered under other circumstances. A little Frenchman with a pointed beard and a Jewish type of face met me with those compliments which seem inseparable from the sale of *objets d'art*; but no sooner had I asked for Madame Prevost than his whole manner changed, and became, if not insolent, at the best far from servile.

"'How,' said he, 'my sister is but just arrived from France, and you are the second this morning who would see her privately. Cannot you state your business, mademoiselle?'

"I said that I could not, protesting that I was sure Madame Prevost would grant me an interview if she knew that I came from Aizy-la-Belle, and begging him to at least mention my name to her. This he did after some demur, and when I had waited in the shop, perhaps a quarter of an hour, he returned to tell me that I must go up by the private staircase to a room upon the first floor, but that Felise, the maid, must stay where she was.

"I went at once, more desirous than I can tell, to meet the white-haired old lady again. When I found her it was in a spacious room looking over the street, a dark and sombre apartment giving upon another at the rear, and furnished with the elegance her brother's calling would demand. Unchanged in many respects, I thought her manner more furtive and suspicious than it had been at Chinon, and she received me with some asperity, as though rebuking my temerity in calling upon her.

"'Why have you come so far to see an old woman like me, mademoiselle?'

"'Because,' said I at once, 'you are the very person who can help me, madame.'

"She heard me patiently, the grey eyes searching my face, and the fat hands tapping the arms of the low chair in which she sat. Presently she said in a low voice:

"'How can I help you, mademoiselle—why do you think so?'

"'Because you were the friend of my friend, the Lady Anna Maclain.'

"She shook her head at this, neither denying nor affirming the accusation. I thought her shrewd at the first interview, and now she proved herself to be so.

"So madame the countess sent you to spy upon me? Ah, that is like the old days, mademoiselle. She would do that, without doubt. Does she believe that I can help you—she who knows very well how that lady died?"

"I could not conceal my astonishment.

"You say that Madame de Fours knows how my friend died, but it is inconceivable, madame."

"Possibly so, mademoiselle, but true nevertheless. When a woman, a Frenchwoman, is jealous, she neither forgets nor forgives. Madame de Fours had the best reasons for wishing your friend out of the way. That is what I have told her husband the count."

"Then you saw him after all, madame?"

"She was surprised that I could ask such a question.

"Did you not send him to my house, then?" she asked.

"I told her at once that I had endeavoured to do so, but that the count had neglected to tell me of his visit. To which she replied:

"Ah, but he would not wish to speak of it. He is a wise man, monsieur le comte, and he knows how to hold his tongue. You may tell madame so when you return to her. If you take my advice, mademoiselle, that will be to-day. What business can you have to keep you in Strasburg? It was madness to come, madness! Go back at once and forget this affair—for the truth will never be told. I say it, and I know."

"I pretended to agree with her, protesting anew my interest and affecting gratitude for her kind advice. Happily, we have a shrewd idea in this world of the opinion in which others hold us, and I had been quite convinced from the beginning that this old lady liked me, or she would not have tolerated my presence in the house. This belief led me to decide upon quite an unusually bold course, and seeming to pay heed to her scruples and to promise her that I would make an early return to England, I ventured to mention your name and to speak also



of your friendship for Anna. The result passed my best expectations. Her interest was captured immediately, and she begged me to sit again.

“‘Ah,’ she said, ‘but your Prince Maurevale is a very great man, my child. If I could speak to him, it would be another matter.’

“‘Oh,’ said I, ‘but he would come to you willingly if you wished it, madame.’

“‘Do you think so—would he have the patience to visit an old woman.’

“‘I am sure that he would—shall I send a telegram to invite him here?’

“She seemed to think upon this. Presently she asked :

“‘Was it not the prince who sent you to Aizy-la-Belle?’

“I said that it was. She seemed pleased at her guess.

“‘Of course he did—to watch madame the countess and to discover what she knew of Lady Anna.’

“‘Yes,’ said I, as though carelessly, ‘and to find out the secret of the heart of green jade.’

“I waited for her to speak, regarding this as the boldest challenge as yet thrown down—but to my very great surprise, the words were without effect. An onlooker might have thought that she did not hear them, so unmistakable was her indifference. Indeed, she would have gone on to speak of the promised visit of my friend Prince Maurevale but for my intervention and persistency.

“‘Yes,’ said I, ‘the prince convinced that the ornament of which I spoke is the key to the mystery. Do you agree with him, madame?’

“‘Agree in what,’ she asked with asperity; ‘of what do you speak, mademoiselle?’

“‘Of a little heart of green jade, a Chinese ornament worn by Lady Anna. Did you not know of it?’

“She shrugged her shoulders as one would shrug them out of pity for an imbecile.

“‘The little green box—in the name of humour, what next, mademoiselle?’

“ ‘And yet,’ said I, ‘Prince Maurevale would give much to know how it got into your possession.’

“ ‘Into my possession!’ ”

“ ‘Oh!’ said I, ‘forgive my boldness, but this is so great a thing to us. Did I not see just such a heart of green jade in your house at Chinon?’

“She was much amazed—quite taken back, and not a little frightened. For some moments she sat there swaying slightly in her chair, and evidently contemplating in what manner she should answer me. And this was the situation, poor little me, almost wild with excitement, the old lady, perplexed to confusion, the house as silent as the grave, when there came a sharp ring, thrice repeated, upon the electric bell, and the almost immediate entrance into the room of the little Egyptian boy of whom I have already spoken. Whispering a few words to madame in a tongue of which I knew nothing, he brought the blood to the woman’s cheeks and such a fire of anger to her eyes that I might have been alarmed for her very reason. Then I heard her say in French, ‘No, no: I will not see him, I will not see him,’ and she pushed the boy from her as if he, and not the unknown, were the intruder. When he had gone out I perceived that a card had been left upon the table by her side, and I was trying to read this when she rose from her chair again with the plain intention of terminating the interview.

“ ‘Mademoiselle,’ she said, as one in despair, ‘I must leave Strasburg: I must go immediately. Tell your friend, Prince Maurevale, that I will write to him presently and invite him to my house. Something has happened; I cannot speak of it! Will you please leave me now. I am not able to talk to you any longer.’ ”

“I saw that it was indeed true. The poor old lady appeared to be in a state of agitation surpassing words, and even as I held out my hand to her a further interruption added to her distress. This was nothing else than a crooning voice—I might have said the voice of a woman crying from a sick-bed, coming to us from the room at the back. Raised in accents most dolorous,

the unknown cried out again and again, in French, and so plainly that I know I am not mistaken when I tell you that I distinctly heard Jack Ferman's name not once, but many times, repeated.

"Here was the final surprise of this most astonishing interview. I see a woman, at one moment calm and collected, the next plunged into an abyss of dread and despair; I hear her almost frenzied appeal to leave her; I listen to a strange voice crying the name of Captain Ferman, as one who wailed for him upon a bed of sickness, and would not be appeased until he came. Madame herself turns from me to the door and back again, as though driven by conflicting impulses, and willing but unable to obey them both. In the end I say 'Good bye,' and go; but not before I have read the card upon the table and learned that the name of her visitor was Michel Ghika, and that he had come to her from Paris.

"This, prince, is my story. I am here at the Grand Hotel, waiting for your letter. Oh! advise me, or come to me as soon as may be, for I believe that we stand upon the brink of the great inspiration, and that any hour may reveal the secrets we have so long pursued."

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### THE LADY CONSTANCE PLAYS

PAUL, the Russian, who had crossed from England by the night mail, entered Maurevale's bedroom at half-past seven next morning, and was surprised to find his patron already dressed and writing. Foreign to his usual mood at this hour the prince was in the highest spirits, and rallied his secretary in a way that surprised that good fellow very much.

"Well, Paul, so you are becoming an economist and travel by the cheap route, I see. Did you find Dieppe amusing?"

"Then your Excellency knows that I have been to Dieppe?"

"Certainly, I know. You arrived there yesterday at three o'clock, and, having discovered the person you sought, came on by the night train. Is not that a correct account?"

"Absolutely; but I must beg your Excellency to speak, not of one person but of two."

"Of two—then it would appear that the amiable Dr. Walther joined the maid Berthe in that desirable locality, Paul."

"Your Excellency is always right; nevertheless you astonish me very much."

The prince turned in his chair and bade the Russian ring the bell.

"We will have our coffee," he said lightly, "and then talk about it. I have a busy day, Paul, and to-morrow I should arrive at Lausanne."

"I am glad that you say so. The rumour is abroad already that you will not be there—in which case the Germans will claim a moral victory."

"And the rest of the world will merely call me an impostor. Admit that it is so, and say that, after all, I may do nothing.

The dreamer of dreams finds few to listen to him even when he carries a bludgeon in his hand. I am such a dreamer, Paul, and there is but one nation which understands me. Did I go to Berlin to-morrow, mine might be the greatest name in Europe. But it will never be so—the dead and the living forbid. I serve a humbler cause—it will be something to serve it faithfully."

He rose with a sigh and drank a cup of coffee. Paul meanwhile reflected upon the thankless task of giving a man to whom the most treasured secrets of his work were so secret, and who met him with the story he had crossed the sea to tell. Such a reception was little less than humiliating.

"Your Excellency serve all causes well," he admitted a little ungraciously; "at the same time I am very curious to learn how you came to know of my visit to Dieppe. Surely none of my assistants—!"

"Not one of them, Paul. Be under no anxiety. The Countess Berthe whom I told you to watch, being now in France, it is natural that you should try to find out what she was doing. I do not believe that she came at Dr. Walther's bidding, I expect to hear of no other in her company. So you see, that this magician is a very ordinary person sometimes. There are other occasions, however, when he is prone to eccentricity—which reminds me, Paul, that I am at this moment looking for some of the cleverest and most unscrupulous card players in Paris. Would you, in conjunction with our friend Faber, permit me to touch with such undesirable people at a short notice? My assistants, they must be quite respectable—such people are not to be seen at this hotel to dinner, to-night at a quarter past seven."

He came across, a cup still in his hand, the Countess's secretary with twinkling eyes. The Countess had given her any a bewildering command since he had seen the Countess's review of Dara, but not on which he insisted he would obey. At the same time he was far too clever to permit his patron to detect anything of the kind.

"Clever and unscrupulous gambler—your Excellency desires the company—"

"Certainly, my dear Countess, I will be back to dinner. Such people as can

seen at my table, Paul, and whose history is not likely to be known to Englishmen. Do you understand me?"

"Perfectly; have you any other commands for me?"

"I have one of the greatest importance. You will leave as soon as may be for Strasburg—go to the Grand Hotel there and put yourself to Miss Insole. Make yourself responsible for her safety, for she is alone in the city. I shall come to you in ten days at the latest, and let Miss Insole wait until I do so; but ere I go, Paul, remember that she may be matched against a dangerous enemy. I can tell you little of the man, or know a great deal of them; but if you can trace a certain number of names, do not hesitate whatever the cost, and let me have the most accurate information. Is that also clear to you. Then you will have found me my card players—for I have given them the licence to turn gambler."

He had lightly dismissed the Russian upon it, enjoying the outspoken perplexity and wondering at his own humour. Kitty Insole, who came down to breakfast half-an-hour later, could say that this was the Maurevale they had known during the happy summer days at Highlands and upon his yacht. He spoke as though her own return to England that morning were but the prelude to the great, great news. She must return to Park Lane and wait for her sister.

"And who knows," he added, "Jack Ferman will not descend to be of the party, Kitty."

She would not question him upon it, was afraid then as from the beginning to admit those hopes and fears which had humiliated her so often. But she left Paris with a lighter heart; and was content to know that it was well with Stella, and it might even yet be well with the man whom the world had called her lover.

Maurevale, upon his part, returned from the station wondering if he had done well to make such promises, and if the facts could by any possibility justify them. As a vision intangible, the scenes of Anna's death would pass and repass through his mind and leave him appalled at the hazards which attended his quest of the truth. Would he find the murderer as he had promised or would discovery come too late? That question time alone

could answer. He waged a war against the very moments, which had become more precious than the years of old time.

Who had murdered that gentle woman, and with what object?

Suspicion raised a dread finger and pointed to Jack Ferman.

This man had loved and tempted her: these were motives enough, it would seem, and to spare, to satisfy a British jury. Desire of gain, jealousy, anger, shame, what further incentives did common sense require? Ferman had killed her because she had turned upon him. Admittedly, but at whose bidding, and why at such a moment of her career?

Was it because he believed that Maurevale would marry her and put an end once and for all to the schemes of the intriguers? A jury might say so and arrive at a verdict which studied no subtleties.

And this jury would be summoned almost immediately. Counsel might be unable to postpone the trial by a single day. The maid Berthe would give her evidence, and the man Blandy would come forward to speak of the House of the Five Green Shutters and of its secrets. Maurevale did not fail to perceive what a black interpretation might be put upon this, or how large a use the prosecution might make of it.

Where must the people who kept that house be sought? Would it serve to say that it contained the portrait of Tahir Pasha's sister, now lying at the point of death and unable to speak of the simplest things?

What, in God's name, could these people have to do with Anna Maclain—even if it were admitted that they had knowledge of the house upon the marsh? Was it possible that Anna had intrigued against the English as a mere girl in Cairo? Maurevale could believe no such story.

And yet there was the woman Prevost—perhaps the one woman in all Europe who could tell him the secret of the house.

Why, then, did he not hasten to her at Strasburg? Never, perhaps, did he show a greater sagacity than in refusing to do any such thing.

For Maurevale believed, rightly or wrongly, that a great drama was being played, and that time alone would permit the story to arrive at its climax. What Madame Prevost could tell him he thought that he knew already, and he resolved to make her the final instrument of detection. About her, henceforth, would this surpassing tragedy revolve. All might be ruined by any premature intervention upon his part.

He was convinced of this, and yet too sound an investigator to forget the others involved or the measure of the suspicion they invited. Just as the ascertained evidence made it possible that the Egyptians had known of Anna's death, so was it permissible to say that the Count of Fours or Frederick Walther, the Lady Constance or madame the countess had committed the crime for a reason which the study of human motives might reveal. Each could contribute something to the story of the doubtful years. Each had hated or feared or fawned upon the dead woman. And all but Frederick Walther, it would seem, had known her in Egypt, where men named Ferman for her lover and stood aghast when it was known that he would never marry her.

In this very complexity lay the almost insurmountable barriers to detection. Maurevale perceived that any of these people might be guilty; whereas, on the other hand, not one of them might know, not even Tahir's sister nor Madame Prevost, the name of the criminal. As for Madame Prevost, she had already spoken wild words which seemed to say that she thought Ferman to be guilty, while little Zaida would hardly be the confidant of intriguers. Should this be so, he was driven back upon his original determination—to let the facts speak, to add to them daily if he could, and by them to seek at last that inspiration which, he had no doubt, would unlock the door in an instant and show him the secret place of the truth immutable.

He spent the afternoon in a round of visits, working a little impatiently, as a man upon whom the hours were gaining. A call upon the great specialist, Dr. Morenceau, whose work upon poisons is a European text-book, was rewarded by the discovery of that great scientist and a profitable hour with him. Thence



he went to meet the young man Allulah at the Café Heinrich, where he had the latest tidings of the Egyptian girl Zaida, disappointing as they were. There seemed a doubt whether she would live; while, if she lived, her reason might be threatened. Maurevale had hoped so much from the friendship of this charming and amiable girl that the news came to him as a profound disappointment. Of what use her testimony if her sanity were to be questioned?

Naturally, the police had made much of this case, and declared war upon the revolutionary Egyptians in Paris. The crime was already emblazoned on the newsbills and Paris delighted by the story of the baboon—for this was a monster after its own heart. The police, meanwhile, were doing their best to discover the would-be assassin of Mlle. Zaida, though they admitted that they were without any clue whatsoever. Tahir Pasha himself had returned to the house in the Rue Dauphine and shown the tenderest solicitude for his sister. This was a bold act, which defied the police; and, indeed, the official view rapidly turned to the theory of accident, and offered a new argument against the pernicious habit of drug drinking—especially of those nostrums against headache in which Frenchwomen are wont to indulge.

Meanwhile there was no news whatever of Mme. Sabine, who was thought to be in Switzerland. No doubt Tahir had shielded his wife as far as he was able, and, while admitting the political purposes for which the house was used, had denied that those purposes were criminal. More than this, Allulah agreed that Tahir had separated himself finally from the Young Egyptian Party, and, he added with naïveté, “he is leaving Paris immediately if the police permit.” To which Maurevale answered that he saw no objection to such a course, and that, if his own influence with the Prefect were worth anything, he would secure the requisite permission without loss of time.

Maurevale liked this youthful Egyptian, and did what he could to cheer him. A boy and girl “passion” is ever one of those roseate windows of life through which the most gracious pictures of humanity are reflected. And such a passion had been upon

the verge of consummation when the blow fell and the worst was known. The prince could not but remember the promises he had made, and the grim irony with which destiny had replied to them. None the less he was convinced that Zaida would live, and upon that point the assurances of Dr. Morenceau were emphatic.

Allulah heard them as one who dreams dreams which none of the accidents of the common life can change. "She is already my wife," he said with a dignity which no Western could have matched.

Maurevèle gave him an address in Lausanne to which news of Zaida should be sent, and added the offer of his own yacht for their honeymoon, which, as he declared with a laugh, would be an event before the year had run. Then he returned to his hotel to dress, and at half-past six precisely made the acquaintance of two smooth-tongued young men whom Gustave Faber introduced as the Baron Cortot and M. de Baltard. With these he had a little conversation of quite an amusing kind, and, reminding them that they were to dine with him at half-past seven, he dismissed them and went to dress. Half-an-hour later Lady Constance appeared, well ahead of her time, as he knew that she would be.

"We have so much to talk about," she said, with a sigh of profound weariness, "and I knew you would have friends to meet me. A man is never embarrassed by a woman; do forgive me."

He protested that there was no greater pleasure in life than in forgiving a beautiful woman, and then bade her make herself comfortable in one of the deepest of his arm-chairs. She was superbly gowned in a wonderful creation of purple and black lace, and a tiara of diamonds shone proudly upon the crest of her jet-black hair. For all that she had changed much since they met at Wargrave; and her glances aside, her sudden starts and pauses, spoke of a nervous system which had been tried profoundly and now threatened to break down altogether. This Maurevèle detected at the outset. He wondered at the same time that she could carry herself so well and so cleverly in the face of so many excitements.

"I want you to tell me," she began, with an assumption of candour which was pretty to see—"I want you to tell me just what happened on that night you came to Wargrave. Do you know, my doctor declared that I had been drugged."

Maurevale smiled, and drew the lamp a little nearer.

"And you remain a friend of the medical profession?" he asked. She bit her lip and tried again.

"Now really—was not I very ill?"

"That would depend upon your nervous system. Some of us are very ill when we scratch a finger."

"Oh, but you don't say——"

"I am saying nothing. You had a fainting attack, and, when you recovered, you talked a lot of nonsense to which I paid no attention whatever. Why should I remember it?"

He took a cigarette from the silver box at his side and offered her one. It was a new excuse for scanning her face, and opportunity served him well. He could see that she was asking herself what nonsense she had talked, and wondering whether it had been incriminating.

"Oh, but you make me very curious," she exclaimed. "Did I really talk nonsense? Won't you tell me whom it was about?"

"I—my dear soul—what a memory I should want. But I do remember one thing——"

"Yes, yes."

"That you were evidently dreaming of the East."

She fanned herself for a moment, plainly reassured. Then she said:

"Did you know that Anna was some time in India?"

"We all knew it, I think."

"And that she would never speak of it?"

"Why should she? Are we reduced to a recitation of Cook's gospel for the enlivenment of our dinner-tables?"

"No, no; but when one has been a long time in a country it is curious if one never wishes to talk about it—even to one's friends."

"Anna was not a long time in India—but little more than a year, I understand."

"Yes; but she spent some time in Ceylon, I am told."

It was Maurevale's turn to be astonished.

"In Ceylon—indeed! I never heard of it."

"Possibly you would not. But Archie Kerrington is sure of it. It was good of you, by the way, to ask Archie to-night."

"I always try to make my friends happy. Is he as fond of baccarat as ever?"

"Incurable as I am."

"Then I must see that the subject is not mentioned to-night. The men who are dining with me are my hostages. I must really keep them out of mischief."

She laughed with him; but it was not a winning smile.

"Do I know them?" she asked.

"I think not—unless you met the Baron Cortot at Nice last year. Baltard is a young gentleman of fortune who should be locked up by his friends. But, of course, he will not play cards here at my invitation."

"Archie is sure to ask him," she remarked, as though casually; "what a pity you invited him."

"But is he not the best and the dearest of your friends?"

"The dearest, certainly—why talk of him when I have so much to say to you and the time is so short?"

"Oh," said he, "I am entirely at your disposal. It concerns poor Anna, of course."

"Who else?—and poor Jack Ferman as well. It is impossible to speak of one without the other. I saw Jack's sister before I left London, and it quite wrecked me. His friends think there is no chance for him—even Sir Horace will not promise anything."

"He is a wise man who performs but never promises. The trial, I think, is coming on almost immediately."

"At the next—what do you call them?—assizes. We shall get a postponement if we can."

"Ah, I like your interest; but why 'we'?"

"Just what I have come to tell you. Do you remember that old German gentleman—did you not tell me he was the father of one of your scientific friends—oh, yes, of the young man, Otto, whom I saw at Highgate? Well, I have seen him again, and he has some great news. Shall I tell you what he thinks?"

"By all means do."

"Well, he is of the opinion that this is a political crime, and that the truth of it could be bought."

"How—for money?"

"Just that. Dr. Walther knows a great deal of the foreign political clubs in London, and has some odd friends—patients of his, I think they were. One of these has told him something which is very curious."

"May I hear it?"

She tapped the table with her fan, and seemed to hesitate.

"It is very difficult for a woman to talk of these things; but Archie knows, for he was with me when the doctor came. As far as I can understand it there is an Indian—I believe he is an Indian—in London who could tell us just what Anna did while she was out of England."

"How very interesting; and this person is not an altruist. He is sufficiently vulgar to speak of money."

"That's the mischief of it. I suppose you might call him a blackmailer in a way. Well, we know how these things happen. Dr. Walther says that five thousand would buy him."

Maurevale smiled—he could not help it.

"Am I to understand that this saintly person will let poor Ferman die if he is not paid five thousand pounds?"

"The doctor says so. You see he stands at an advantage. He believes that Anna has friends who will pay that much for the possession of her secrets. The earl certainly would if he were at home."

"Possibly. Have they any news of the earl, by the way?"

"He is still cruising in the Pacific. In any case he cannot return until after the trial. If Ferman is to be saved we must do it. Don't you think his friends could find the money?"

Maurevale said that it remained to be seen—but he could say no more, for the Baron Cortot was announced at that very moment. Five minutes later Monsieur de Baltard and Archie Kerrington arrived together, and the five went down immediately to dinner in the restaurant.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### THE CHÂLET BY LAUSANNE

THE Peace Congress at Lausanne attracted few to that beautiful town on the banks of the Lake of Geneva, for in truth the world is but little interested in peace and much in war.

Perhaps the belief that little would be attempted and nothing done was responsible for the general indifference.

Had not the greatest advocate of disarmament recently underlined his own principles by a declaration of war, and were not the humorists still busy upon the farce that has been played at the Hague?

Nobody, in truth, credited any of the amiable old gentlemen who now foregathered in Switzerland with anything else but a desire to have a little holiday at the expense of their respective Governments, and, when this were over, to enjoy one at their own.

Could a fillip be given to the proceedings, the presence of Maurevale of Dara would do it, men said, for of his earnestness there was no doubt whatever. It was another matter when the scientists came to speak of his inventions and to doubt if there was much in them.

He had, it was true, invented a torpedo controlled upon Marconi's system, but then news came from Italy of a similar engine, and this might be at the disposal of the Powers.

As to his studies in high explosives, there were experts to say that the value of artillery was already over-rated, and that no high explosive, whatever its nature, would count very much during the next European war. For all this the impression remained that the fortunes of the Conference were in Maurevale's hands, and that upon his presence and his influence its success depended.

He had taken a little chalet upon the banks of the lake early in the year, and paid the briefest of visits to it during the month of April. An exceedingly picturesque place with a beautiful garden running down to the water, it yet seemed too unambitious for a man of such known wealth and hardly to satisfy the expectations of those who had expected some display. But more disappointing still was the fact that the very eve of the Conference arrived, and that none but a few Swiss servants were the tenants of the chalet. Maurevale, after all, might not come to Lausanne. And that would be a *débâcle* indeed.

Public curiosity is quick to seize the vitals of a situation and to fix upon them. The play of "Hamlet" with a Prince of Denmark who did not deign to send either apologies or explanations dismayed the serious and delighted the *farceur*. Telegrams were sent pell-mell by zealous correspondents, giving this or that version of the affair. Some said that German diplomacy had prevailed, and that Berlin had bought the prince, body and soul. Others declared that the British Admiralty had won a sweeping victory, and had purchased the inventions immediately after the trials at the Maplins. The more envious were cock-a-hoop with their cries of "I told you so." These frankly avowed that the man was little more than an impostor, and that he dare not come to Lausanne. The few spoke of the woman in the case, and remembered that Maurevale's friend, Lady Anna, had been murdered in the country of his adoption.

This excitement waxed high upon the eve of the Conference, but higher still when it was opened next day by the Grand Duke Paul, in the name of the Czar, and blessed by the bishops of the Churches. Many well known in the diplomatic world had descended upon the town, but not Maurevale of Dara. Urgent messages to the chalet by the lake were answered evasively by well-instructed servants. The prince had sent no telegram, they said, and it was not known if he were even in France. The one item of importance was the news that Herr Otto Walther, the prince's famous assistant, had come to Lausanne, and was then installed in the lodgings which had been prepared for him. Of this the gossips made much. They believed that Otto Walther

had been deputed to act in his master's name; "but," said they, "the Conference will not hear him."

This was the state of things upon the morning of the second day. Enthusiasts in the cause of peace still hoped that Maurevale might attend; they pointed to the fact that he had lost nothing so far by his abstention. The opening ceremony had proved a lame if picturesque affair. Some very fine uniforms were to be seen thereat, and a wonderful array of gowns and hoods, worn by learned professors who would reduce all humanity to a problem in logic. These made a fine show in the Congress hall, where scholars walked proudly to slow music. Certainly, if it depended upon them, war would have become but a sorry game.

Such had been the first day. The second opened with greater promise. To begin with, a patriot from Serajevo was to voice the opinions of the "little nations," showing how they were the playthings of the giants, and what they suffered by the differences between their more powerful neighbours. Then Professor Arnhaut, of the Hague, was to speak upon that thorny subject, general disarmament, and its possibilities. There would be critical hours and difficult moments, and it would need a light foot to skate over the very thin ice which covered the diplomatic ponds. If Maurevale meant to come, this was his opportunity. But the day opened, and there was no news of him. It was not until twelve o'clock that his car set him down at the door of the ch<sup>^</sup>alet, and by that time the Congress hall was already full of people.

He was very tired and very dusty, and went immediately to his bathroom—thence to a table spread almost at the water's edge, upon a terrace which afforded a glorious view of the lake and of the distant snows of the Dent du Midi. A hearty meal spoke of his pleasure at reaching Lausanne and the ch<sup>^</sup>alet. He had a card of the Conference upon the table, and had already arrived at the conclusion that the speaker from Budapesth would permit him to lunch in peace. Then the servants announced Herr Otto Walther, and he perceived his assistant coming across the grass to meet him.



Otto had been called the handsomest lad at Zurich in his student days, and the years had done little to discredit the flattery. Pale of face, his eyes were those of an Italian mother, his curly black hair that of the luxuriant south, his soldierly figure a tribute to the excellent training he had received as a mere boy in Germany. His voice also won him many friends, for it was soft and caressing, and had all the Italian qualities. Conscious of great learning and of considerable achievement, he wore his independence in a manly way, and showed servility to none. His attachment to Maurevale was the supreme satisfaction of his life. He would have gone through fire and water for such a master.

"Well, Otto, and so you made the journey safely. It must be a pleasure to you to return to Switzerland. Come and drink a glass of wine with me—it's the only reasonable thing to do on such a glorious day as this."

Otto bowed and sat upon the other side of the table. A certain nervousness of manner, a twitching of the muscles of the mouth, and a complete insensibility to his surroundings were evidences of his desire to speak and of the urgency of his message. He had changed since Maurevale saw him in Paris—was worn and obviously weary.

"I wish that I could answer as you wish, sir," he said, hardly sipping the proffered wine, "but the truth is that I am in trouble."

Maurevale thought immediately of the lad's love for Stella, and looked at him earnestly.

"It is not trouble of which you cannot speak to me," he suggested in a kindly way, and then—"Come Otto, have we any secrets from each other?"

"We should have none, sir. I came here to tell you everything."

And then he said quite pathetically:

"But I thought it would have been so different."

Maurevale pushed his plate from him and took a cigarette from his case. Then he passed it to the young man.

"I see that your trouble is not your own," he rejoined with a

smile; "take a cigarette and let me tell you what you did come to say, Otto."

Otto stared incredulously.

"I cannot think—" he began; but Maurevale silenced him immediately.

"You must leave the thinking to me, Otto. Now, I'll be very frank with you. Duty sent you to this place this morning—a sense of duty and of what you owe to me?"

"I cannot deny it, sir."

"At the same time your duty costs you very much, for you come to speak of your own father."

Otto shivered as with cold. He did not dare to look his questioner in the face. None the less Maurevale observed that there were tears in his eyes.

"Yes," he said slowly, "it is about my father."

"Whom you suspect, with reason, of intriguing against me, Otto?"

"I do suspect it, sir."

"There is also in your mind a graver thought, one you shun and from which you would flee. That is natural. The man who would willingly harbour a doubt in such a case would be a faithless son. But this idea has grown upon you; it has obsessed you, and now you can suffer silence no longer. Am I a true prophet, Otto?"

"So true that every word falls like molten lead upon my heart."

"Ah, my poor lad; and yet you have done well to be frank with me. There is nothing like talking things over when one is in distress. Perhaps I can make you happier, Otto. If a contrary opinion can do that——?"

"A contrary opinion, sir? Then you know——"

"I know that Dr. Walther is in the pay of the German Government. I have known it for a long time. At the same time I am far from believing that he could tell us anything of Lady Anna's death. I should be very much surprised if he could. Now, frankly, Otto, did you not come here to speak to me about him?"

"It is so, sir. I am compelled to believe that my father murdered that poor lady, and I can keep silent no longer."

"You are right not to do so. Be quite frank with me and tell me everything. It will help me very much, and I have few to help me, Otto. You know that you have my sympathy."

The lad sipped a glass of wine and then began; his eyes were turned toward the lake, but his manner was still that of the dreamer.

"I must go back some months," he said, "to the Lady Anna's visits to Highlands. My father had often suggested in a vague way that a great deal of money could be made by your inventions; but he had never dared to speak of treachery. Then Lady Anna came, and I heard from him frequently—chiefly words of warning. He assured me that we were being spied upon, and that the English Government was well aware of what was being done. I saw that he feared Lady Anna's influence, and believed that she would succeed where others had failed. Then came the day when he told me that I was a fool for my pains, and that if I did not make the money, others would. I did not see him for some weeks after that, not, indeed, until the days immediately after the murder, when I went to London to the meeting of the Italian Society."

"Did you go alone, Otto?"

"Oh, sir—then you know?"

The question came to the young man as a great surprise. It dawned upon him in a moment that Maurevale knew of all this.

"I went with our German cousin Gretchen, who was then staying in Welbeck Street."

"Ah, I thought so; and your visit to the Italian Society came afterwards. Well, now, what happened there?"

"My father was in the company of a man I had never seen before. He did not mention his name, but I obtained it from Gretchen afterwards. He is a certain Michel Ghika, and, I believe, a Roumanian—one of your own countrymen, sir. With the Roumanian there was quite a lad—one whose face was very familiar to me, though for a long while I could not remember it. Then I recollected him perfectly. He used to be employed in

your London stables, and was at Highlands a little while, I think."

The news interested Maurevale greatly. He had ceased to smoke, and listened intently.

"This is most important, Otto; go on, please."

"Well, sir, my father spoke of the Roumanian, and declared that he was in England to negotiate for the new torpedo. He said that he feared him and would watch him for your sake. I saw at the same time that he did not wish me to know much about him, and that made me curious. So I set to work on my own account, and I discovered that both my father and Lady Constance saw this man several times, and that he was intimate with more than one member of the Italian Society. Then for a little while I lost sight of him until I discovered from Gretchen, who has been my confidante in the matter, that he and my father proposed to go to Dieppe together. This was some days ago; but I came to Paris by Dieppe on purpose, and, going to the hotel which I had been named, I discovered the maid Berthe there, and was unfortunately recognised by her."

"That was distinctly unfortunate, Otto. Well, what next?"

"I tried to question her, but found her very frightened and reserved. She would say nothing but repeat her belief in Captain Fermat's guilt, and her determination to tell all she knew at the trial. I told her I loved Lady Anna very much—every one who knew her would—and she hinted to me that some news was in her keeping which she would tell only to you or to Miss Stella."

"There was no word concerning the news—you made little of her, Otto?"

"I could make nothing, sir. My visit alarmed her, and she was on her guard. The one thing she did tell me may be of much or of little importance. You shall be the judge. My father, it appears, was greatly disappointed because Miss Stella did not come to Dieppe. They had telegraphed for her, so the maid says, to tell her of their discovery. When she did not come the doctor went on to Paris, and now I believe he is in Strasburg."

He uttered the words without emphasis, and was astonished

at their effect. Maurevale had started to his feet—he who was so seldom the victim of a declared emotion—he had started up as though a blow had been struck.

“Your father is in Strasburg? Good God! I had never thought of that!”

“Then you thought he might go?”

“It never occurred to me. I have been a fool, Otto. He who plays a waiting game should be quite sure that others are not playing it as well. I see that I have made a great mistake. Thank God, Paul is in Strasburg by this time. He will do my work. But I have risked much, and much may be lost. Am I not a vainglorious person after all, to waste my time here among these talkers when a woman's good name may be at stake?”

“I do not think that you are, sir. I do not believe that it would be right for you to make such a sacrifice.”

“The sacrifice of all my hopes, of a dreamer's hopes to save a woman's reputation and perhaps the life of one man. It's a problem for your philosophers, Otto. Meanwhile we are here and must make ourselves known. You will be at my side when I deliver my address this afternoon.”

“I have not the courage to be, sir.”

“Nonsense. Remember that I differ from you altogether in what you have been telling me, and that whoever may be found guilty of this crime, it will not in my opinion be any of those at present suspected.”

“Then you do not trust the maid Berthe, sir?”

“Far from it. I believe she is quite honest, even when she lies. And remember she has been lying from the beginning. Charity would say that she does not understand the English language, and so fails to distinguish between Wednesday and Saturday. Ferman, we are told by her, was the last person who saw Anna alive. I don't believe it; the woman mixed up the weeks, and all that she told us happened upon days prior to her dates. That dear old gentleman, the coroner, was quite aware that something was wrong, but between her French and the count's English he made nothing of it. It will be very different when Sir Horace cross-examines her. If I thought that

Ferman's fate depended upon the maid's story, I would say that he is already acquitted. But it does not. It depends upon the letters he wrote and their significance. Of that a jury will decide. Berthe, no doubt, is shielding a village lover. Her confusion was entirely in the interests of that young man who walked home from the stationer's shop, where she bought paper after the shutters were up. Unfortunately, the name of that favoured individual escapes us at present. But I think that we shall discover it at the trial, and, if we do, it may mean much. Your part, Otto, is to continue as you have begun, and never to forget that you have earned my confidence and my gratitude."

He emphasised the gesture by a kindly hand laid upon the young man's arm, and would have spoken a further word to him but for the arrival of the carriage which was to take them to the Conference. There was now no time to lose, and Maurevale set off at once, wondering, perhaps, at the indifference with which he approached a task which once had seemed so worthy of his ambitions. Truly had he said that he might be called upon to sacrifice all to this obsession, and that the discovery of Anna's murderer might yet become a greater thing to him than the applause of an assembly which cried for peace but made ready for war.

Nevertheless, he went, as he had sworn to do, and when he entered the splendid hall of the Congress a hush fell upon the crowd, and whispers were heard saying, "There is Maurevale of Dara."

This was the moment also when the secret-service agents and the spies drew nearer, and began to wonder that such a dreamer should have cheated them so long. It was the moment also when the prince, from his place upon the platform, espied among the audience a woman with whose face he was now familiar—no other than Mme. Sabine, who had fled from Paris on the night of the tragedy.

## CHAPTER XXX

### PEACE, BUT NOT GOODWILL

MAUREVALE had all the graces of the Latin race, and a natural eloquence too rarely employed. Men used to declare in London that it mattered little what he said, and that, if he had delivered an oration to prove that the earth is flat, his audience would have listened with interest. This was a tribute, and a worthy one, to that personal magnetism which is the true orator's indispensable equipment. He held his hearers spellbound by the grace of his diction, the beauty of his gesture, and, above all, by the force of an irresistible will. Never had his gifts been employed in a nobler cause than the one which sent him to Lausanne. The best years of his life had been obsessed by the dream that war must cease between the nations and humanity enter into the true heritage of peace.

Neither a fanatic nor a sentimentalist, he faced the charge both of fanaticism and of sentimentalism when he stood before the audience at Lausanne and spoke of the wars in which he had taken part. The danger of such a charge became the graver when he passed on to plead for the women and children upon whom the passions of war are visited. "Better," he said, "that a nation perish than that one little child be sacrificed to a false conception of a people's honour."

They heard him in silence at the beginning, the diplomatists a little scornfully, the women with throbbing hearts. This was an address to the people of the world, and he knew that his appeal must be to the emotions. It would be well enough afterwards at the private conference of the delegates, to discuss the mere ethics of the question, to state the case as practical politics permitted it to be stated. Meanwhile, he took full advantage of

his opportunities, denouncing the war-makers with a tempest of invective before which the stoutest quailed.

Such eloquence could hardly fail to serve its purpose. As the moments passed it was to be observed that even the diplomats were listening. Personality had conquered, and they had become its slaves. The threat which they awaited was never uttered. Maurevale made no mention for the time being of his own discoveries, nor of the master-key with which he was accredited.

Invective gave place to the cooler logic of reason. He appealed to the natural law of evolution, and asked what nation could stand against it. He pointed to the world's democracies and cried, "There are your volcanoes." The day was at hand when those who toiled would remember the blood which had been spilt and hear the cry of the dead for vengeance. "These will accuse you," he said, "by these will you perish."

There was another thought, and it was, perhaps, more immediately vital to the argument. How did they stand in the face of Science herself? Of what value was this treasure poured out, this holocaust of youth upon the altar of militarism in face of what science might do, nay, had done. One man working alone in a remote laboratory might destroy in a day the edifice which millions had built up. That man would be the true autocrat; he the arbiter of life or death. He begged them to remember it in the days immediately before them. They by a word could achieve what all the priests and all the prophets had failed to do. They could do a work as great as Christianity. What, then, forbade—what human madness or human desire withstood the will which he must call Divine?

The speech ended with an appeal to their common humanity which none could resist. He sat down amid a tempest of cheers; and so sure was the effect of his eloquence that all who followed obtained a hearing with difficulty. None the less, the diplomats were perplexed, and when they had shaken off the spell they admitted the cleverness of his reservations. A boaster would have invited mockery. He had done nothing of the kind, but had spoken in parables which all must understand. If he



did not hold the master-key, as enthusiasts claimed, none the less it was certain that the Power which first made use of his inventions would achieve the hegemony of Europe. Upon whom, then, would they be bestowed? It was a question which had been asked in the cabinets of Europe since first the spies had made them known.

Many grouped themselves about Maurevale as he left the hall, but the old German diplomatist, Herr Kreissman, managed to elbow the others aside, and he was upon the prince's right hand when they pushed their way through the crowd. Now for the second time in this press of the people Maurevale detected the Roumanian woman, Sabine Ghika, and observed that she watched him closely. Had he not thought her incapable of such weakness, he would have declared that she had been weeping; but this suggestion flattered his vanity, and he would have none of it. Such a woman could know little of sentiment, and, if she wept, every tear might be a menace. In truth, he wondered sometimes that his work during these exciting weeks had been attended by so little personal danger. The paths of the altruist are not strewn with roses in these days of an awakened democracy.

Madame, however, was quickly lost to view as they surged toward the open, and Herr Kreissman begged the prince to share his carriage. Perfectly aware of the old diplomatist's desire to beat the iron while it was hot, and perhaps amused by his candour, Maurevale accepted the invitation and consented to go up to the hotel for a cup of tea. He had been waiting for these overtures for many weeks, and, it may be, had suffered some pique at their delay. Now, however, he understood that the decisive moment had come, and he fell to speculating upon what the German would have to say in his own interests and in the belittling of others.

"A most successful meeting, prince: do you not think so?"

"If success be the measure of a vanity which is satisfied, I am altogether of your opinion. But you should not put the question to those who did not speak."

Kreissman smiled a little sardonically.

"The English are wise in that," he said, "they pay no attention to words. In my country we weigh them."

"And arrest men at street corners because of them. I do not think you are sagacious. It is true that the fools talk, but wise men may also have something to say."

The German nodded.

"We have heard one of them this afternoon."

"My dear Kreissman, I beg of you, do not let us begin with that. If you are here to flatter me, your labours are already wasted. I have cried my message into space because I could not rest until it was delivered. But you do not suppose that I am unaware of its futility. The world will go on fighting until the end of time. It is in men's blood, as other crimes which will continue."

"Including the crime of numbering the fools; but I see we have arrived. Come to my room; we shall be at ease there."

He stepped nimbly from the carriage, and a lift carried them to the first floor of the hotel, where the Germans had engaged a beautiful suite of rooms overlooking the gardens. Tea was served upon a balcony covered by a striped awning, and it was possible from this to obtain a splendid view of the lake and of the mountains beyond. Maurevale had ever been a lover of Switzerland, despite the vulgarities which have overtaken that beautiful country; but he found Herr Kreissman little willing to share his enthusiasm.

"I prefer the plains," said the German, with a shrug; "the mountain is a barrier, and the restless mind is always climbing. Besides," he added with a laugh, "these Swiss are very obstinate."

"And successfully obstinate. When you redraw the map of Europe you will have to consider them. Is there any other nation of which I could say the same?"

"You could say it of—but here is the tea. Do you take it *à la Russe*, or have the English corrupted you? For myself I find their cuisine a little brutal. These Frenchmen certainly are demoralising."

"But exquisite," said Maurevale, as he helped himself to milk. "Let me recommend you a snipe cooked in the flame. It is the *dernier cri* and delicious."

"I will try it next time I am in Paris. Let me see, we were saying——"

"That there is one nation you may have to consider when you come to redraw the map of Europe. Again, a cuisine which is a little brutal, Excellency, though a diplomatic dish."

They laughed together and lighted their cigarettes. Presently, as though it were the most casual thing in the world, the German hazarded a question he had been wishing to put to Maurevale for three months.

"What is your interest in these people?" he asked. "You are one of us by birth and taste. What perversion sets you down in a country where they never see the sun and eat flesh at dawn? May I ask that, for I am curious? How do you live in the darkness and the rain of England? Frankly, I am perplexed."

"My dear sir," said Maurevale, "your perplexity is the most natural thing in the world. There is not a man alive who could answer it—not even the English themselves. I live in England because I must—just as that fellow down yonder lives in a hut because he must. Call it fascination, imbecility, what you will—there is an atmosphere in London which is irresistible to such a temperament as mine."

"Then you like the English people?"

"I am bound to like those who like me. And, you see, when I do not like them I go away."

"Remembering then that you have a country?"

"Assuredly, as you are remembering the existence of Germany at this moment."

It was a subtle thrust, but it did not disturb the equanimity of the placid Teuton.

"Oh," said he, "we Germans are not nomadic. If we travel it is to return. Our sentiment is true and is not bestowed upon strangers. You, for instance, may like these English people, but I do not suppose you would wish to see them dominant in

Europe? It is a fair question, and I am not ashamed to put it to you. How would it serve you in the East? What would your own countrymen make of it?"

"They would say that the house of Maurevale was ever mad. But, frankly, my dear sir, they would not quarrel with me—as things are at present. If, on the other hand—but we are becoming a little less abstract than we might be, and I fear my words. Shall we remember the sunshine? It might be wiser."

He accompanied the diversion with a gesture of the hand which indicated the glory of the lake and of the light upon it. Herr Kreissman, however, was warmed to his subject, and would not be turned from it.

"The greatest wisdom is honesty," he rejoined bluntly. "I believe in the man who, having something to say, is not afraid to say it. You ask me what would happen if you followed the trend of events and turned your thoughts to Germany. My answer is that the world would say it was the only thing a prudent man could do."

"Why prudent, Excellency?"

"Because prudence is on the side of the biggest battalions. You are an advocate of peace. Then come over to those who have both the will and the power to keep it."

"And you in return?"

"We shall be able, perhaps, to tell you the story of your dead friend."

He spoke in low tones, but without reticence. This was his last card, and he played it with a diplomat's caution. Useless, nay, insolent, it would have been to speak to such a man as Maurevale of Dara of money or the common rewards. High authority in Germany would not have tempted him. There was hardly a European decoration he did not possess; there were few honours which the Governments and the universities had not bestowed upon him. And this had been the barrier which defied the subtlest minds in Europe. How could they buy him, and at what price? Lady Anna's death had supplied the answer. They would buy him with the name of the assassin if they could learn of it, but at least with the story of her life.

It is no discredit to Maurevale's acumen to say that this offer came upon him like a thunderclap. Perchance, in a sense, it wounded his vanity. He had grown to believe that the mystery of Anna's death could present no new phase, and here was a new phase admittedly. His own method of investigation had seemed so sound; he had become so accustomed to rely upon the inductive method for all his results, that the suggestion of extraneous aid took him wholly by surprise. Now, indeed, were many things made clear which had perplexed him. Now did he understand what part the dear Lady Constance and her patriarchal ally were playing in this affair.

"So," he exclaimed, with all the sang-froid he could command, "the German Foreign Office has become a criminal investigation department. Well, that is really very interesting. And it promises to do the work upon which my friend, Sir Malcolm Morrison—to say nothing of the excellent police at Reading—are engaged. Am I to look at it in that light? Your Government will pay me in this coin for a public declaration of my interest. Please make it quite clear, Herr Kreissman; it is most important."

Kreissman was by no means rebuffed. He had anticipated such a reception of his offer and was prepared for it.

"You have stated the case accurately, if not very seriously," he rejoined. "All that concerns us is the master-card in the delicate negotiations which the farce in this town has made possible. The English must not seem to possess that sentimental interest in them. On the other hand, you are greatly concerned to discover the murderer of a lady who was one of your friends, and whose honour you would safeguard. We could help you there, prince. I must speak with a certain reticence, but I believe that in a few weeks' time we shall be able to tell you exactly what you desire to know."

"Being the name of the criminal and the motive of his crime?"

"Possibly both."

"Which implies, Excellency, that you are at this moment as ignorant as I am?"

He laughed lightly, and for the first time the German showed a little impatience.

"Not so," he retorted hotly. "We know enough of the dead woman to astonish and dismay your countrymen, and especially your countrywomen. It may be incumbent upon us to make that knowledge public."

"A threat. Oh, please understand I am not the man to be threatened. What, after all, is it to me?"

"It is this—that because of it you have learned to laugh at your own ideals, and to forget even your ambitions. Admit that I speak the truth, prince."

"If truth be candour—yes. I am to barter my honour at the bidding of curiosity. But I will put that aside. A question occurs to me, and it should be of interest also to you. If I refuse to enter into this bargain, what then? Are your people at Berlin such a'truists that they will save Captain Ferman—or will they let him hang? That's a barrier which concerns you closely, Excellency. Let it be known that you could have saved this man and were silent, and guess what decent opinion will say of you. I leave it to you to answer that."

"Then you must not expect my answer to be delayed. We shall publish the story in its entirety. There may be none of the reservations which friendly intentions might make possible. I am putting it to you brutally, but sentiment does not bring us together. In your hands much might be done which we have not, shall I say, the leisure to do. In return you make it known publicly that you are not at the disposal of the English Admiralty. I could not put it plainer, prince."

"Nor I answer you with greater decision. I refuse your offer, Herr Kreissman."

The German rose and shrugged his shoulders.

"Then, my dear sir," he said quietly, "I am very sorry for you."

Maurevale rose in his turn, and for a moment the two faced each other in the sunshine.

"Why are you sorry, Excellency?"

"For two reasons. One, that we could have made you the

greatest man in Europe—the other, that we could have saved the honour of a woman whom you loved.”

“Ah,” said Maurevale, “the reasons are just two too many. My ambitions do not soar to the Teutonic heights you bid me scale, and, frankly, I do not believe that you know who murdered my friend, Lady Anna. Let us part upon it. If I come to you again, it will be upon my knees. But do not expect me, for I am not given to genuflexions.”

He held out his hand, and Kreissmann made no attempt to detain him. The work had been done, and, as he thought, done well. Maurevale would return—if he lived.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### A GLASS OF WATER

**M**AUREVALE was very tired when he returned to the chalet, and he went immediately to his bedroom, hoping to rest for an hour before he set out for Strasburg.

Perhaps he blamed himself now for coming to Lausanne at all, and was ready to quarrel with the motives which had delayed him. What but vanity had forbidden him to go to Stella's help immediately? True, he had sent Paul, his secretary, and there was no shrewder or more faithful fellow in Europe; but, then, it was Stella who waited and watched for him and to whose urgent call he had been deaf.

Was it logic or madness which permitted this drama to unfold itself in his absence? Did his true instincts err when he argued that Mme. Prevost's secret was no secret so far as he was concerned, and that he had guessed it on the very day he went to the marshes? He did not believe that it was. The unknown actors must group themselves about this simple old Frenchwoman in the end, and whither she went there would they follow. All this, however, might be changed if he, Maurevale, were to declare himself prematurely.

They would laugh at such a child as Stella Insole, and plume themselves upon the folly which sent her to Strasburg. Her presence would be no bar to their plots, and they would neither fear her nor measure her cleverness. Let them scheme, then, as they might. The net was spread, and sooner or later they would be taken.

Maurevale thought of all this as he lay on his bed and courted sleep vainly.

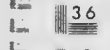
He believed that he could write the greater part of poor





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Anna's story that very night if he had the will to put it upon paper. Sentiment, however, forbade, and a sense of futility. Of what value the story if the name of her assassin did not figure in it? That name he had yet to learn; but he had brought his figures within a narrow circle, and he believed there were three now to watch—three whose names should give that one name for which he had searched so patiently.

Meanwhile there was the German and his astounding offer. Maurevale had been greatly frightened by this when it was made, and a memory of it still haunted him. How if the Germans knew Anna's secret? What use would they make of it? Would the secret agents of diplomacy play the bold game and sacrifice even an innocent man that they might frustrate for the time being the hopes of those who preached peace? It was not impossible. Or, if they feared the charge which secrecy might bring upon them, would they publish such a story as would dishonour the friend of Maurevale of Dara? He feared it exceedingly.

That Frederick Walther had been the instrument of this knowledge was not to be doubted. Maurevale retraced the thread of this man's connection with the mystery; his intimacy with Heliers; his attempts to bribe his own son; his acquaintance with a go-between, some scamp from Cairo perhaps, who had heard the tittle-tattle in the bazaars. Such a scamp had Maurevale seen when he visited Heliers at Wargrave. And by him the doctor had come to the possession of facts or fictions which he had sold to the German secret-service men. Oh, it was a clever plot—a bold move, and might yet undo all!

Mental concentration is often followed by reaction, however poignant the anxiety which provokes it. A new sense of the burdens he carried, a determination to let nothing henceforth stand between him and his goal, was followed in Maurevale's case by a sudden consciousness of utter weariness, of a state almost of mental inanimation in which he lay with eyes closed, but not yet wholly conquered by sleep. In which condition he remained for a full hour, and was on the very point of com-

plete insensibility when a shuffling sound of steps waked every faculty, and warned him not to move a hand.

What hallucination was this? And how curious that it should visit him at such a time!

A profound disbeliever in all so-called occult mysteries, a staunch disciple of the plainest realities, Maurevale was at first disposed to attribute the deception to Stella Insole and to her letters. Had she not spoken of such mysterious sounds from the very day upon which she began her work? He, Maurevale, had caught the infection and permitted it to play with him. The sounds were imagined, the play of a tired brain. And yet he heard them with wonderful distinctness, passing across the gravelled path and then upon the verandah before his window. Curiosity bade him lie and listen. He must know the truth this time—must not be tricked by his own ears as he had been when he returned from Asherton House and had thought to hear the steps upon the pavement before his own door.

He lay wonderfully still, feigning sleep, but watching the window with piercing eyes. Oddly enough, the sounds ceased as mysteriously as they had arisen, and it might have appeared that they ceased directly he became conscious of them. A glorious night of summer permitted him to hear voices from the lake itself, the sirens of steamers, and even the splash of oars. But those intimate sounds which addressed themselves directly to his sense of mystery and of peril were no longer audible.

Vainly he waited for them, at one time blaming himself for his reticence to search the garden; at another saying that his prudence was justified. Nothing would be more difficult than to detect a stranger in that labyrinthine shrubbery by the lake, and, if the fellow were detected, twenty excuses might make it difficult to deal with him.

Maurevale, however, did not believe even then in the reality of the sounds, and when half-an-hour had passed and they were not renewed, he pooh-poohed the whole thing, and, turning upon his side, he fell fast asleep, to be awakened ultimately by his valet with the intimation that it was a quarter to eight and time for him to dress.

He rose at once, reminding the fellow that he was leaving directly after dinner for Strasburg, and that Lazzarre must be ready to make the journey to the frontier at a moment's notice. Resolved now to go to Stella without further loss of time, he would have changed the clothes he wore at the Congress for a rough travelling suit, and he was about to do so when he espied upon his dressing-table a tumbler half-filled with sparkling water. Sleep and fatigue had provoked thirst, and it would have been the most natural thing in the world to have lifted the glass to his lips and drained it. Indeed, he was in the very act of doing so when, as in a very vision, the circumstances of Anna's death recurred to him, and he stood trembling at the reality of the monition.

"Good God!" he exclaimed. "A glass of water here, in this room!" And the steps he had heard and the images they had conjured up. Even his iron nerve quailed before the subtlety of this. A glass of water!

Under what circumstances had one of the dearest of his friends lifted such a glass to her lips upon that fatal night? Was it, indeed, a revelation from the dead, or had he imagined every phase of it?

Very carefully, as one who understood its significance, he lifted the glass and held it to the light. Its odour was very familiar and could move him strangely. No scene played by living actors could have been more real than this his imagination created. Highlands Castle at dawn. The ghostly shadow of death upon the empty room. The pale faces of the awakened servants; the whispers of possible tragedy. And then the glass of water which he alone of them all had detected upon her dressing-table. Truly, had he been hard put to it to evade the kindly coroner and that obliging and lord-loving jury of his whose verdict of "Wilful murder against some person unknown" had seemed so prudent.

From that scene, so vivid, he passed to the realities about him. The water seemed a precious thing now, and he husbanded it, filling a flask in his dressing-bag and pouring the residue upon the flower-beds before his window. Then he sent for his valet and questioned him.

"Who has been to this room while I slept?"

The man could not believe his ears.

"While you slept, sir?"

"Yes; whose footprints are these upon the parquet? Do you not see them?"

"Well, now that you point them out, sir; but I can hardly believe my eyes."

"Ascertain from the servants if any suspicious person has been seen about this house during the past twenty-four hours, or at any time. Then bring me the news."

The valet left, and returned almost immediately with the Swiss steward Tellier, a well-trained silent servant, who did not waste his words.

"Your Excellency sent for me?"

"I did. Some one has entered my room from the verandah while I slept."

"Entered your room, Excellency; I cannot believe it!"

"Possibly not, but it is so. Look at the clues he is so obliging as to leave behind him."

The steward bent down and examined the steps carefully.

"There's no doubt about it, Excellency—a woman's step."

Maurevale shook his head.

"A woman's or a lad's—and one who wears slippers or sabots. Inquire of the gardeners if they know anything of it—then return to me."

"I will do so. It is first necessary to tell your Excellency that there were strangers in the gardens yesterday. Maurice ordered them away; he said they had come up from the lake by mistake."

"Did he describe them to you?"

"I don't think he paid much attention to them; they appeared to be foreigners. One, I think, was an Italian."

"Maurice told you so?"

"As far as I remember, Excellency."

"Then go again and inquire just what he did see. Meanwhile you will send a messenger to the police, who will come

here and measure these steps. On no account let any one remove the traces of them. Is it quite understood, Monsieur Tellier?"

"It is quite understood, Excellency."

Maurevale dismissed him and went on with his dressing. He could not hide it from himself that the occurrence had shaken his nerve, and that he had been imprudent. But for that sudden vision of Anna's rooms he would have put the water to his lips, and then— Never, it may be, had his desire of life been stronger. He would live to vindicate the dead woman's memory. He would live because Stella Insole had yet to tell him her secret.

He dined alone, enveloped in the shadows of the mystery. This lonely *châlet* suggested unknown terrors which he would willingly have fled. Strasburg might bring him to the heart of the drama, he reflected, and yet, who would deny that the heart of it might be here at Lausanne after all?

A woman's footstep, or a lad's, upon the verandah! A glass of water as its concomitant! A child would have thought of Mme. Sabine at such a moment, and named her both for the assassin of Lady Anna and the would-be assassin of Anna's avenger. The deduction was so plain that Maurevale stood aghast at it. Had he laboured by night and by day that this revelation should come in an instant? Was the woman mad that she should betray herself so completely?

Again and again he put the question to himself, and shrank from the answer. Not thus is the mystery of a great crime revealed; not thus, he said, would revelation come. If Sabine Ghika were the murderess of Anna, she would not be here in Lusanne this night. Nay, the blacker the case against the woman the less credible his instinct found it.

And if it were incredible because so obvious, what then? Were there others who might have come stealthily to the *châlet*, or was Otto Walther the only visitor the day had brought?

Maurevale remembered the Russian's words—"Let us hope that Otto will not be found unfaithful"—and he

reproached himself bitterly that he should remember them at all.

Nevertheless they were still in his mind when the more astonishing thing happened, and a message was brought in saying that no other than Mme. Ghika had called at the house, and was then waiting to see him.



## CHAPTER XXXII

### A WOMAN'S WISDOM

TO Maurevale the moments were precious, but this amazing *coup de théâtre* overwhelmed his considered plans and made nought of them. Mme. Sabine in his house!

The woman who, whatever might be named against her, was wanted at that very hour for an attempt to poison the young Egyptian girl, Zaida, on the Rue Dauphine at Paris.

Incredible, and yet obviously true! She had dared all and thrown down the glove to him. A madman alone would have neglected to pick it up.

He commanded them to show Madame into the small salon by the library, and followed them after a brief interval. The room looked very cheerless in the gathering darkness, and had that odour of neglect which never fails to depress. Moreover, the servant had lighted but a single lamp, and when Maurevale entered he could hardly identify the veiled figure in the shadows.

"Madame," he said curtly, "let me at least have the privilege of a little light." And then as curtly:

"It would be a commonplace to say that I am surprised. Will you not sit down, madame, remembering, if you please, that I have little time at your disposal? Indeed, I leave Lausanne almost immediately."

"For Strasburg, monsieur, undoubtedly?"

He expressed no surprise, but drew up a chair and watched her narrowly. The days had changed her but little, and the same savage face that had repelled him in Paris here appeared beneath the heavy black mantilla she wore. A woman of genius, he thought, and a worthy antagonist.

"Why do you say Strasburg, madame?"

"Because you have persuaded my husband to go there."

"I have persuaded him?"

"Certainly, there could be no other. Let me tell you that it is quite useless. I could have said as much in Paris if you had asked me."

"Ah," he said slowly, "and I was without curiosity." And then looking at her earnestly he remarked:

"But much happened in Paris in which I was interested, madame."

She nodded her head.

"And you still hold me to account for some of these events, monsieur. So little justice is there in the world."

"Justice, madame."

"I say justice. What word should I use? You bring ruin upon my house, and when the weaker mind cannot face it, then you stoop to suspicions unworthy of your intellect."

"My intellect being the subject under discussion, my dear madame, I really thought that you had come here to speak of your sister-in-law, my friend Mlle. Zaida."

"I have come to speak of her. She attempted to take her life because of the ruin with which our house was threatened. And you, monsieur, speak of murder to the police. Do you owe me no reparation for that?"

"Every reparation, madame, when you have convinced me that the young lady attempted to take her own life with a subtle poison of which she could have had no knowledge. Pray proceed, though it is right that I should advise you to direct this defence to the Prefect of Police, and not to me."

"I will do so in due time. M. Lépine is already in possession of the facts, and will draw his own conclusions. To-morrow, monsieur, I return to Paris to face every accusation brought against me."

"A wise thing to do, madame; I cordially approve of it. And I trust that you will find your sister-in-law out of danger."

She was not unaware of the irony, and for an instant her eyes blazed with anger. This mood, however, she quickly controlled, for it would have been fatal to her plans. Let Maureval

be provoked and a word from him would deliver her to the law. She had calculated as much when she came to the ch<sup>^</sup>let, and risked it because she believed that the word would never be spoken.

"My sister-in-law is already out of danger," she said quietly; "had it been otherwise I would not be here. What I came to speak to you about does not concern her at all. I will mention it when I have your word that I may leave this house as I came."

"Oh, my dear madame, I am not a *sergent de ville*. Those who do me the honour to visit me are for the time being under my protection. Speak freely; I am very willing to hear you."

"As freely as you could desire. In Paris, you will understand, it was different. I did not know you; there were reasons why I should be reticent. Here it is otherwise. The work I would have done for my husband's country, my passionate desire to win freedom for Egypt, must be pursued under other circumstances, it may be, more favourable, and among a people who will understand and protect me. That is neither here nor there. You came to me to ask if I could tell you who murdered your English friend, the lady Maclain, and I am here to say that I can. But, monsieur, I am in no way concerned; the lady was nothing to me, and I shall look to you for some return which will recompense me both for the wrong you have done to Tahir Pasha and for the service I am about to render you."

She paused for breath, for her words had run away with her, and cupidity uttered every one of them. Maurevale, who had listened with closed eyes, asked himself how many adventurers had come to him during the course of his life, and uttered their feverish promises in just such a tone. Not for an instant did he believe that she could do what she promised, but none the less he imagined her self-deception to be honest and possibly helpful. For which reasons he heard her to the end, and even then answered with hesitation.

"In other words, madame, you have something to sell me?" She would not deny it.

"Pay me ten thousand English pounds, and I will put into

your hands within a week the means not only to discover the man but to convict him of the crime."

"But, madame, I have only your word for that."

"I can give you no more. But, see, you shall not pay me one franc, not one, until I have made my promise good, and the German has been arrested by your police."

"Then you wish me to believe that a German has committed this crime?"

"I must wish you to believe it, for it is so."

"And his name, madame? But why do I ask it? His name is Frederick Walther. Is it not so?"

She did not seem displeased that so much of her secret was known, and nodded complacently.

"I will tell you," she said reflectively, "he would have sold you to Germany—he would sell you now if he could. My husband knows of this; Dr. Walther came to us many weeks ago, and it was understood. Then there was the lady Melvain and the story that she had succeeded in the name of the English Government. If it was so, the doctor would have nothing with which to repay those who had advanced him money upon the strength of his promises. From which time he lived in a fever of impatience, seeing his hopes grow less day by day, while Captain Ferman and the English woman were triumphant. So you will understand what happened at last. He determined to remove the first and most dangerous obstacle to success. An agent is chosen—his son. I do not know just what happened at your house, prince; that is for the police to judge; but I have been blest with some intellect, and am able to imagine many things of which I do not know. The lady is poisoned, and your friend, Captain Ferman, is accused. It is natural, but it is not justice, since Dr. Walther is the guilty person, and his guilt can be proved to the judges."

She looked up to him appealingly as one who should say, "Is it not all quite clear?"

Maurevale, however, had been studying the woman's manner rather than her story, and certain traits of it betrayed her unmistakably. Indeed, she related the whole affair in that

false note of monotone which suggests both unreality and abstraction—the prepared discourse rather than the serious denunciation. When she paused, it was to look at her auditor critically, as though seeking to know the impression she had made upon him. Of that, however, he gave no indication whatsoever. The oldest advocate might have been deceived by his manner.

“This is really very interesting, madame,” he said presently. “I will be honest enough to say that something of the kind has occurred to me already, as, indeed, it must have occurred to any one who has studied this case intelligently. But I would point out to you that between conjecture and proof there is a great gulf fixed. Where, then, are your proofs, and how do you propose to produce them? Tell me that much and I will reply to your proposition. How are you going to convince the English judges, for if you do not convince them, madame, then would my ten thousand English pounds be wasted indeed?”

She did not deny it, the mention of the money inflaming her cheeks and quickening her heart.

“Give me a week,” she said, “and I will answer you. One week, monsieur, and you shall know this astonishing story to the last line. Is it agreed? I come to you in seven days and show you the secret which, alive or dead, shall save your friend—in return for which you will pay me ten thousand pounds?”

“Yes,” he said decisively, “for which I will pay you ten thousand pounds—with one reservation.”

He stood up and faced her—she, also, had risen to her feet.

“A reservation, monsieur?”

“Certainly, a reservation—that the secret shall be living.”

She swayed slightly, conscious in an instant that this man knew and would judge her. The fight she waged against the gathering hosts of disaster was not yet won; but even now her courage might win it.

“It shall be as you wish,” she said in a low voice, “the secret shall live, monsieur, whatever the cost to me and mine.”

And with that she went out and left him, a stern figure of the shadows before whom even such a woman quailed.

Maurevale heard the outer door open, and as it opened the hum of the Mercédès waiting to carry him to Strasburg.

If the hours had seemed precious before dinner, they were doubly precious now, upon the eve of the culminating act of one of the greatest dramas in which he would ever figure.

To Strasburg for what? To save the life of a man who had the will but had not the wit to murder his dead friend Anna. Or to save one more helpless, one about whom these passions played; one who stood for both the comedy and the drama of love and of hate!

This woman, Sabine, was she worse than the others who had played their parts, willingly or unwillingly, in the story of the years which had brought Anna Maclain to her death?

A murderess in intent if not in achievement, how had he the patience to hear her at all? What forbade him to call in the police and say to them, "Take her to Paris to answer for the crime of the Rue Dauphine?"

Was it the desire to confirm meticulously that theory, not only of Anna's death but of her life, upon which all his actions had been based from the beginning? He knew that it was so; he would have admitted, perhaps, that the desire to appear before the judge at Reading and to say, "Not thus, but in this wise," was driving him on even when his work seemed to be done.

And yet honesty would have accredited him with a finer motive. Did he not, in truth, strive with all the ardour his intellect could command to save the dead woman's name from the jeers and reprobation of the multitude?

He knew that this was so. Already he shrank from the vulgar talk, the jests, the cant, the sham moralities, which this story must provoke. Anna Maclain had loved him, and the memory of her love inspired him to save her from this if human wit could win salvation. Nay, he would have sacrificed the half of his fortune if by money he could have purchased that silence which alone might save her honour.

He took a heavy fur coat from a footman and gave brief

instructions to the steward concerning the chalet. Possibly he would revisit it during the winter when the skaters at Caux were making a new Switzerland, and one which the world seemed to like better than the old. For Otto Walther there was a brief letter, and for himself a bundle of his correspondence which he tossed negligently into the car, while the steward referred again a little apologetically to the events of the afternoon.

"I have ascertained, Excellency, that the under-gardener, Ponson, not knowing that your Excellency was in the house, was imprudent enough to cross the verandah to see to the hydrangea in the pots. It is inexcusable and he is very sorry."

"Then his were the steps——?"

"Undoubtedly, Excellency."

Maurevale entered his car without another word. It may be that a certain sense of contempt at his own judgment attended this complete answer to those phantasmagoric fears which had afflicted him before dinner. An under-gardener and a glass of water! Upon what a sorry foundation had he built up that theory of the unknown intruder and the poisoned glass.

And how if, in Anna's case, all that he had done or surmised were thus shattered in an instant by the cold logic of reality? Would it be better so? Would it save Anna's name and Ferman's life?

He lay back upon his cushions and tried to shut the dream pictures from his eyes. Was he not going to Stella—would he not hear her voice again?

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### MAUREVALE ARRIVES AT STRASBURG

AN old traveller has said that a railway carriage is the best place in the world in which to read and to smoke. Maurevale might have admitted the truth of these observations as the morning train carried him from Bâle to Strasburg. He had not thought it would be so. The desire to see Stella again, and to pursue upon the spot those investigations he had bidden her take up, promised an impatience which performance belied. In truth, that very correspondence he had thrown so lightly into his car at Lausanne occupied his attention so closely that he was astonished to see the old German city loom suddenly into view, and to discover that he had arrived.

His reserved carriage was by this time a litter of papers. Long rambling letters from busybodies in England lay unheeded on the floor. The pious hopes of beggars that he would remember them because he also knew the meaning of misfortune shared no better fate. Had the Russian been in England these things would not have reached him ; but underlings were generous and feared the prince's displeasure.

Let it not be thought that any of these documents had made the journey lighter. One correspondent alone claimed a hearing, and he, perhaps, the greatest specialist in France upon the subject of poisons. From Doctor Morenceau, whom the prince had seen but a few days ago in Paris, the illuminating missive had come—an exhaustive epistle compiled with a scientist's exactitude and bristling with facts.

Maurevale read this to the last line, and when he had read it he began upon it a second time. Very cleverly and with a wealth of illustration the doctor capitulated the methods and the motives



of the more famous poisoners who had come under his notice. He showed how they were among the most cunning and the most daring of criminals. He pointed out that those, who have once made use of poison to satisfy their vengeance or their greed, will employ it again in the most trifling need. He recalled the case of the French monster Zalin, who had visited the cafés of Paris and dropped poisoned tablets in the cups of the idlers of the boulevards; he spoke of Mme. Goulange, who had poisoned husband and son for a petty affront administered in a theatre; he named Canivoleau, who poisoned a dearly beloved sister on the eve of a marriage to which he objected. In every case the assassins had made subsequent attempts, successful or unsuccessful, to repeat their crimes upon the slightest provocation.

"Thus, prince," the doctor wrote, "is the law vindicated, thus is the safety of society assured. The very facility these people enjoy is their undoing, and few of them go free. I have studied this case of your friend, the Lady Anna in England, and I accept your assurance that the gravest motives of jealousy and self-interest appear to have inspired the crime. But be sure that there will be some attempt to repeat it, if there has not been already. In the meantime, it may be profitable to you to review certain very remarkable instances within my own experience, and others which are known to all the world. Particularly would I underline the story of the execution of the Chevalier Langerville at Brussels in the spring of this year, and the quite unusual ferocity of the ruffian Ferré, whom, you will remember, was guillotined at Rheims in the month of June. Sometimes by analogy it is possible to arrive at conclusions even in cases far removed from the prototypes. This I leave to your judgment and experience, adding, monsieur, my devoted sentiments and my earnest good wishes for your success."

The letter was signed "Valentine Morenceau," and had evidently been posted to Lausanne upon the morning of the previous day. This despatch and the labour which it implied convinced Maurevale of the doctor's interest, as he was already convinced of his knowledge. Nor were the documents, the newspaper cuttings, and the pamphlets by which it was accom-

panied less interesting. Maurevale read them to the last line.

To begin with there was a list of all the chemists in Europe who dealt in dangerous or patent preparations, and the prescriptions upon which they based them. Great English houses were mentioned, famous chemists in Berlin, in Vienna, in Paris, in Rome. One paragraph was devoted to the distinguished house of Baro & Malquevart, whose unfortunate differences with their workmen had led to riots at Rheims, still forgotten. Another reviewed the evidence in a recent poisoning case at Budapest, where no fewer than twenty victims had perished of a nostrum for sleeplessness, vended by the established house of Kossarluth. But in every case there was the closest analysis of the drugs employed and a precise account of the manner in which they were sold.

To Maurevale these documents were precious just because they supplied that one link in his chain of evidence which none but a scientist could forge. Much of the matter, it is true, had at first seemed irrelevant, for how could stories of French crime throw light upon that tragedy which had visited his own house, and what was it to him if twenty ruffians had been hanged at Rheims for murders without motives? None the less he perceived the doctor's meaning, and remained grateful for his labours. Whatever the evidence did or did not prove concerning Anna's death, the reality of the motive would appear to be unquestionable. Human passions spoke in her story with a voice which compelled a hearing, the voice of jealousy, of greed, it might even be of outraged love. There had been similar voices in some of the cases which Dr. Marenceau indicated, and they could not be without their lessons.

From which of these great houses had the deadly drug which killed Anna been purchased, and by what channels had it come into the murderer's hands? Reason might have answered, "Possibly from none." If a doctor were concerned in the crime he, surely, would make up his own prescriptions and destroy all traces of it. In the same way it was possible to argue that such a man might choose his instruments craftily, selecting those who

would not know what they were doing, and taking good care that they were in his power before the choice was made. Here was a direct incentive to recall the name of Frederick Walther and to ask who of those at Highlands had become the willing or unwitting partner of his crimes? Maurevale could name no one, closely as he applied himself to the task.

Of Otto's fidelity he had now no doubt. The others were the Count of Fours and his wife, and the Lady Constance. If the latter had poisoned Anna, she did so for a motive which few would find sufficient; in other words, she had killed Maurevale's friend that she herself might become his friend. This he could not believe; nor was it credible that a Frenchman who passed for a man of honour, the Count of Fours, would become the accomplice of a doctor working in the German cause. Safer, surely, to come back to these Egyptians, to recall the name of Sabine Ghika, and to remember that she herself had denounced Walther as the murderer.

He put back the list in his despatch-box and took up some of the newspaper cuttings. They were of little interest, save as morbid reading, of which he had enough and to spare. The Chevalier Langerville, who at Brussels had poisoned the woman he loved with a brutality not to be matched, had undoubtedly been a madman of a kind with which criminologists are familiar, but whose very names should be kept from a gaping public. So, too, in the case of the miscreant Ferré, with his reckless vengeance upon those whose very names he did not know. It was idle to read of him or of what he did or did not say upon the scaffold. In the case of Mme. Goulange there was the temperament of a highly hysterical woman to be considered, and of a long series of petty insults put upon her by men who were without sympathy if not without affection. None of these cases afforded that parallel for which he was seeking, and he had already dismissed them when the train entered the station at Strasburg, and his secretary Paul, with Stella Insole by his side, came to the carriage to meet him.

Long weeks had passed since he had seen Stella, and he found her wonderfully changed. The child of Pangbourne had

become the woman of Strasburg, proud of carriage, alert, and a beautiful woman as the world has borne witness.

When he took her hand their eyes met, and she did not shrink from his glance as she had done at Highlands. Pleasure, relief, desire to tell him, joy at his coming, were all marked in her heartfelt exclamation when she realised that he had kept his promise.

"Oh," she cried, "if you had disappointed me——"

He smiled at her frankness, and bidding Paul follow them, led the way to her carriage.

"You have been telling yourself for more than sixty hours that I am an ingrate. Is it not so, Stella? Have you not thought very badly of me?"

"No, indeed, but I have wished you to come, oh, so very much. It all seemed so urgent to me, so very dreadful and true." And then she said with a heavy sigh, "And now I fear it is too late."

"In which case," rejoined Maurevale, "it is anybody's fault, but not little Stella's. Has the woman left Strasburg?"

"Paul thinks so. If so, it would be this morning, for she came to the hotel last night."

"She did? I am astonished, or perhaps I should say I am pleased to hear that. It was to ask for my protection, of course?"

"She told me she must leave Strasburg immediately. Some danger which she could not explain threatened her and hers. I told her that she was wise to go if that was the case; but I begged her also to let me help her. She would not consent, though she actually went so far as to admit that her life was in danger."

"Did you tell Paul of this?"

"Every word of it. I knew that it would be your wish. I think he has been watching the house ever since. Madame's flat is shut up; there is no one in the house at all except the brother, and he refuses to tell us anything."

"He would do so. You, however, gave the woman the best advice you could, Stella? You promised her my assistance, I am sure."

"I could do nothing else. She asked to see you, and I gathered from your telegram and from the letter Paul gave me that she would do well to return to England. If she has left Strasburg, I feel sure it is to go to London."

Maurevale smiled quietly with that pleasure of realisation which the fulfilment of a well-considered scheme may justify. They called him a magician, but he knew himself to be no magician, but merely an observant worker who travelled upon the broad lines of human probability. Had he wished to flatter himself, he might have told Stella that he had delayed to visit Strasburg just because he knew that all this would happen in his absence. But he did nothing of the kind, leaving the whole credit of it to her.

"All this is very well done, Stella," he said presently. "Perhaps you begin to understand now why I left you in Strasburg. Do you know that I could desire nothing better than this news? Mmc. Prevost is upon her way to London. Very well, I shall return immediately and interview her there."

"But will you know her address, prince?"

"I am as certain of it as of my own. She will go to a house on the marshes near Ely, a house known as that of the Five Green Shutters. There she will meet some one she has never seen before—which reminds me that I must send him a telegram without loss of time. Have you forgotten Mr. Blandy, my old steward? Well, he is the tenant of that very house."

She opened her eyes widely while Maurevale gave a direction to the coachman and drew up presently at a telegraph office, whence he sent a special cable in cypher to his private bureau in London. This being done, they went on to the hotel, at which they arrived in time to order dinner in the restaurant and still have plenty of leisure to dress. Stella had much yet to tell him, he was sure, and he judged by the excitement of her manner and an elation quite foreign to her, that it was a matter of great importance. It would be time enough, however, to hear the rest of her story when they had dined; and so he took Paul to his own room and there told him very plainly both what he feared and what he hoped of his visit.

"So Mme. Prevost has flattered me by running away, Paul? Is it ascertained beyond doubt?"

"I cannot tell you, Highness. The affair has become a great mystery. The house has been visited by the police to-day, and the man Prevost appears to be closely watched. I might almost say that the authorities have made it their business to do our work. I paid him a call, but could not obtain a hearing. Unfortunately, one of our old friends is engaged in the same occupation. I have seen him twice since noon yesterday in the Wilhelmstrasse. Can your Highness imagine who it was?"

"I can well imagine it—our learned friend Dr. Walther."

"Your Highness is not to be taken by surprise. It was no other."

"You yourself avoided observation, I hope—not that it matters. They must be well aware that Miss Stella is here."

"They are perfectly aware of it, sir. This permits me to say that I think I came to Strasburg just in time, as your Highness imagined might be the case."

Maurevale ceased to smile, and for a little while made no remark. The thought that he had exposed Stella to this peril struck him a blow.

"Are you telling me that she has been spied upon, Paul?"

"I must say so, sir, by a man who bears the name of Michel Ghika, a Roumanian, I think."

"Can you describe him to me?"

"He is of the middle height, very dark, and might be mistaken for a Greek or an Italian."

"And about thirty years of age, Paul?"

"I would say so, Highness."

Maurevale reflected a moment, and then called for his despatch box.

"Do you remember the episode of the maid Berthe and the man named Jules Farnot, who met her in London, Paul?"

"Perfectly well, Highness. One of my assistants obtained a photograph——"

"Which I had developed in Paris. The prints are among

the correspondence I received at Lausanne last night. Let us have a look at them, Paul. Now would you recognise——”

He stopped abruptly, the surprise of the revelation choking his words. Once before in his life had he seen the face of the photograph. As in a flash there came to him a memory of the summer-house at Wargrave, of the bungalow, and the silent river beyond the garden. From the window of that arbour a man's face had looked out at him—it was the face of the picture he held in his hand.

“I see that your Highness is greatly interested,” said the Russian, who waited patiently for his patron to speak. Maurevale answered him by passing the print and begging him to examine it carefully.

“Is that the face of Michel Ghika, Paul?”

“It is undoubtedly the face. I am very much astonished, Highness.”

“And I no less. It is curious how early ideas afflict us, and how slow we are to part with them. When I saw that man at Lad, Constance's bungalow, I put him down as a ‘go-between,’ a fellow of no importance and quite beyond the scope of our inquiry. He had gone to Wargrave to deliver a message for another, I thought. It was a grave misconception, Paul, for unless I am wholly mistaken, this Michel Ghika is the very heart of our mystery.”

“Would you say that he is the murderer?”

“I would have said it this morning. If I hesitate to say it now, a word from a comparative stranger has changed my opinion. Indeed, Paul, the whole structure of my house threatens to fall and to leave me but a shattered foundation. I would be ashamed to tell the world just what is running in my head at this moment.”

“Then our work has been in vain?”

The prince rose up and began to pace the room. He was intensely agitated, and spoke as one from whom the words were wrung by an agony of mind he could not conceal.

“It has not been in vain. You are clever, Paul, and are perfectly well aware that I have laboured to guard the secrets of

Lady Anna's life, secrets for which this brave fellow Jack Ferman would go to the scaffold. I have striven to save her from the scorn of women and the pity of men. Until to-day, until I received a letter from my friend Dr. Morenceau of Paris, I was willing to believe that the means to do this were in my hands. The assassin, I thought, was known to me, and it might be possible even at the eleventh hour both to save Ferman and to secure the punishment of this man. But if he be no assassin, if the man who really killed poor Anna be beyond the borders of our inquiry, what then? This Ghika may or may not know the story as we know it, but assuredly if he does know it, then we are powerless; for in that case he will have sold it already to the secret-service agents, and they will not fail to make use of it. That is the problem with which I am confronted. The affair has passed beyond the limitations of private vengeance; it may readily become a weapon with which the diplomatists may war."

"And if it does so, your Highness believes that the whole story will be told?"

"It will be told to the last line. The aims are too evident; the purpose is too clear. They will tell it in the hope of adding one new indictment to that British rule in Egypt which is the keynote of their policy. Nothing but the barter of my honour can prevent that. Must I barter it, then, in the name of a woman who loved me?"

The question moved him deeply, and he repeated it again and again, as though its very reiteration would earn a response. Must he sell his honour? Must the pride of the house of Dara bend to these Germans, who had discovered so cleverly both the master key to the secret, and the price it might be worth to them? Maurevale saw no way out of it, and the measure of the abasement appalled him. He to sell himself, he who had treated their offers with such a just scorn. And yet for Anna's sake the sacrifice must be made. The dead commanded, and he would not disobey.

The Russian was quite unaccustomed to such an outburst as this, and it astonished him not a little. He would not venture a comment upon it, and he rejoined him with a commonplace that



a way would yet be found and that the man Ghika might be the means, despite himself. From which, in the hope of diverting the prince's gloomy thoughts, he spoke of Mme. Prevost and of her flight.

"Your Highness will see the brother, of course?"

"To-night, if possible, Paul."

"I doubt if he will hear reason."

"Then we must buy it, at a price. Let the house be watched until I come. You have assistants here, Paul?"

"The best in the city, Highness."

"Then bring me the news—shall we say at nine o'clock?"

They agreed upon it, and Maurevale entered the other room where Stella awaited him.

They had not been alone for many weeks, and he perceived in a moment that her impatience to speak would brook no further delay, and that she was about to tell him her secret whatever it might be.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### THE SECRET OF THE HOUSE

MAUREVALE knew perfectly well that Stella would be put to some embarrassment by the story she desired so earnestly to tell him, and his tact quickly responded to the difficulty. There were still some minutes to dinner, and making them an excuse, he drew her into an alcove by the window and began to speak of her visit to Mme. Prevost's house and of its fruits. Thus insensibly he approached the point at which it might be possible for her to tell him everything.

"You felt that madame was hiding something from you," he said, "and your wit has been at work ever since in trying to discover what that something was. You were conscious of this at Chinon, where you stood at a handbreadth from the truth; but the impression was confirmed here in Strasburg, where surmise became certainty. Shall I tell you how, Stella?—do you wish me to go on?"

She assented with a quick gesture, and he continued.

"When you last visited Mme. Prevost in the Wilhelmstrasse, you thought that you heard a woman's voice. It would be natural to make such a mistake. Some one cried out from an adjoining room, and you were deceived for an instant, but only for an instant. Then you said that the voice was not that of a woman, but of a child. Am I right in this conclusion?"

She was disappointed, perhaps, that her secret should be no secret to him, and that the truth should fall from his lips rather than from her own. But she had long ceased to wonder at his unmeasured powers of perception, and no longer envied them. He had known! None the less, she would not believe that her labour was in vain.

"You read my very thoughts," she said, looking up to him now without embarrassment. "The story is told almost in my own words. I heard a child cry while I was with Mme. Prevost, but my mind was so far from the thought of a child that I paid no heed to it. Even when I wrote to you I was in ignorance of what was passing in my thoughts, and it was not until I tried to sleep that I was undeceived. Then everything became so clear. I seemed to be in the room once more: I heard the woman asking me to summon you to Strasburg; I saw the open door, and I think that I looked upon a little child's face. Call it folly, nonsense, what you will, the dream was vivid, and it remained with me. I recalled my visit to Chinon, and remembered that the rooms there should have spoken of a child to me. I recollected madame's anxiety to conceal some one in the house from me; her hasty visit to the rooms above; her vague words. Here in Strasburg a little thought so opened my eyes that I could have cried for shame of my blindness. The woman Prevost conceals a child, and she travels from place to place because she fears for its safety. That is what I believe, prince; that is what I must tell you."

He did not respond immediately, and his silence troubled her. Had she done wrong to imagine this? Was the thought unworthy of her? Imploringly she turned to him with eyes which would read his judgment. And then she knew the truth.

"Yes," he said in a low voice, "there was a child at Chinon, and the woman Prevost brought it to the Wilhelmstrasse in this city. I will tell you more, Stella—the fingers of that child plucked the green heart from Anna's wrist and carried it to France. And that is natural, for it was her own child, and who had a better right?"

He stopped abruptly, fearing his words, and remembering that he talked with one who was but a child herself a few months ago. To Stella the revelation came as some black secret she had long feared but had been unable to comprehend. Her pity for Anna had been that of one generous heart for another; the pity of a woman whose sympathies are unfailing and whose love is

sure. And now, as it were in an instant, the curtain of the hidden life had fallen from her eyes and revealed a scene from which a woman's instinct made her shrink.

"Anna's child!" she cried, with drawn lips and flashing eyes. "Oh, I will never believe it—never, never! How could it be, prince? Who has thought such a thing?" And then as earnestly:

"May not even you be mistaken in this?"

He bade her sit again, and, covering her hand with his own, he told her much that he had done during the weary days of watching and of waiting.

"I guessed the truth of this at the house of the marsh," he said. "What did an old woman in such a place, and what was the meaning of her seclusion? The house had been furnished by some one of means, and yet this old peasant occupied it. The style of decoration, the food left in the larder, the very books, spoke of nurse and child. Then I saw that the woman had left the place hurriedly, and that she had left it because of a telegram containing an Arabic word which means 'danger.' So at once I thought of the East, and remembered enough of poor Anna's life to recall the years she spent in Egypt and India. I perceived that a great shadow lay upon her story, and that others might lift it with disastrous consequences to her name and honour if I was not before them. Chance, Stella—and there is always a chance in these things—brought the name of a man to my ears. I followed that man's story and came to a conclusion—that Anna was his wife, and, because she was his wife, was hiding the child from him. That is why I did not go to Chinon when you told me of your discovery. As I watched, so were Anna's enemies watching me. The truth I had discovered was the truth they were risking their very lives to anticipate; but I was before them, and I profited by my knowledge. Where I went, there they followed. And now they are in Strasburg, and we must come face to face. Do you wonder that I break my habit of reticence and share with you of all my friends the knowledge of this great secret?"

The meaning of this was not to be hidden, and Stella shrank

from it. His presence in Strasburg implied a certain personal danger. He would visit the house in the Wilhelmstrasse, but not without risk. And he had told her truths of Anna's life that she might tell them to others if he were killed. Such words affrighted her, and she would have made a woman's appeal to him but for one of those commonplace intrusions which often break the thread of drama and bring us in an instant to the realities of the trivial day.

A waiter knocked upon the door, and craved leave to inform his Excellency that dinner was served. Maurevale was glad that it should be so; and giving Stella no other opportunity to express her fears he conducted her immediately to the table.

Her dread, nevertheless, was not without reason. Maurevale could doubt no longer that a crisis had been reached, and that Ghika and his friends would play their last cards at Strasburg if they played them at all.

He perceived that the whole of this turbid drama must play henceforth about the child—Walther seeking it as an instrument of blackmail; Ghika relentlessly in his sister's name. And just because he did perceive it he had made that enigmatical offer to Mme. Ghika at Lausanne—ten thousand pounds if the secret were alive.

Such an offer would tie the woman's hands, but would it tie the man's? Maurevale had no doubt whatever that Michel Ghika had long since ceased to scheme solely in his sister's interests, and now worked wholly in his own. How, then, if Anna's child came into the custody of such a man? What would its promise of life be worth?

He looked back now upon the episodes of the last few weeks, and asked himself if he had done well to trust this secret to the keeping of Mme. Prevost.

It would have been possible to have gone at once into France and to have claimed the child; but had he done so nothing would have been known of Ghika's part in the affair; nor would that deeper plot of vengeance, which ran in his mind, have been possible.

Reflection convinced him anew that he had done well, and his scruples were quieted. It was another matter to find an excuse which should satisfy Stella that he ran no risk in visiting the house in the Wilhelmstrasse. Why should she wish him not to go? What new interest had come into her life to bend that daring spirit to these craven counsels? He feared to dwell upon it lest the impression should be false.

"You will wait for me in the lounge," he said as he left her. "I should not be more than an hour, and there are the Hungarian fiddlers to be considered; I can see that they would never forgive you if I took you away. We will talk it all over when I return, and perhaps start for England in the morning. Are you not anxious to get back, Stella? Do you not think of Highlands sometimes, as it is these summer days? I do, if you do not; I never remember a time when I thought of England so often, or with such kindly remembrances of its people. Ah, my dear child, in what other land is there such a home as the English people have helped me to make among them! If all goes well we will leave for England to-morrow."

Stella could answer that readily enough.

"If it should be so, oh, I could count the hours." And then she said:

"Must you go?—is there no other way?"

He bent and kissed her on the forehead.

"There is none," he said. "And there can be no danger."

His car was at the door by this time, and Paul awaited him with news of Israel Prevost, Mme. Prevost's brother.

The little man, Paul said, had been very much upset by his sister's departure, and was absolutely dumb concerning it.

Like all exiles who resented the dominion of Germany in Strasburg, Prevost feared the police exceedingly and obeyed them to the letter. Because of this apprehension, perhaps, he had shut and locked his sister's flat upon the first floor and allowed no one to visit it since her departure.

A man of bachelor habits, he lived himself in the little room behind the shop, and seldom emerged therefrom when the day's work was done. To all of which Maurevale listened with atten-

tion, and was still listening when the car arrived in the Wilhelmstrasse and set them down at the door of the house.

It was then about a quarter past nine o'clock, and the night being very fine and warm, the neighbouring cafés swarmed with benign and kindly Germans, who smoked their pipes and drank their beer as though all the world, to say nothing of their wives, waited upon their pleasure. Soldiers were everywhere, fine fellows in smart green uniforms; cavalry clinking their spurs; officers striding along with a due sense of what was owing to the Emperor's coat. And mingled with these were the earnest Frenchmen, moving sulkily amid the conquerors, but guarding the pride of their race always.

Maurevale glanced up and down the narrow street, listened while the musical bells of the old cathedral chimed the quarter after nine, and then entered the passage at the side of Israel Prevost's shop.

A quick survey of the house showed him that it was in darkness save for a twinkling light far above, in the room of a little sempstress whose day's work was unfinished. The shop itself was shuttered and barred; the passage by its side boasted a dim lamp which disclosed a narrow door giving access to the private apartments occupied by Prevost. Here there was a drooping bell-pull, at which the prince rang while he gave his instructions to his secretary.

"Do not be far away, Paul, in case I have need of you. The car must wait if the police permit. I should not be very long, but it will not be less than half-an-hour, perhaps."

"Your Highness is quite convinced that this is wise?"

"I am quite convinced. Now leave me, for some one is coming."

The crazy bell had reverberated through the drear house in echoes which seemed to fathom the very cellars. The sounds were followed by an interval of silence; then by a footfall in the corridor beyond the door. The clank of a chain was heard, and the harsh grating of a bolt which seldom left its socket. Then the door opened a little way and some one behind it asked, "Who is it?" to which the prince responded immediately:—

"I am Prince Maurevale, and I wish to see Mme. Prevost. I understand that she has left Strasburg, in which case it is necessary for me to see her brother without loss of time."

"Why is it necessary, monsieur?"

"That I may tell him that which he ought to know when the police put the question to him. Come, my friend, will you not inform Monsieur Prevost?"

He pressed the door with his hand as he spoke, and it gave way a little. Presently a face appeared, that of a bearded Frenchman, who wore pince-nez and had plainly risen from his bed at the summons. Upon any other he would have slammed the door immediately, but his sister had named Maurevale of Dara as the one man who could befriend her. And was there not, besides, this talk of the police?

"Well, monsieur," he said, his embarrassment speaking for itself, "but I cannot see you at such a time of night."

"Which means that you are Monsieur Prevost, and that you will permit me to leave Strasburg with my message undelivered. Assuredly, monsieur, that would be very foolish of you. It is not every day that I have a thousand francs to spend upon my curiosity and an unknown lady's predicament. I must carry them to England, after all, I see."

Prevost was not sure that he heard aright; but the word "francs" rang musically in his ears, and he opened the door at once.

"Is your Highness alone?"

"Quite alone, as you would see if you would do the favour to turn on the light. Shall I follow you upstairs?"

The man started and shuddered unmistakably.

"Why upstairs? My sister has left the house. Besides, there is another way at the end of the corridor. We shall do very well in my own room, monsieur."

"True enough; but the thousand francs I carry in my pocket are for your trouble, monsieur, in gratifying my very natural curiosity to see the apartments occupied by madame—and the child which she concealed in Strasburg."

He said it quite in a kindly way, but the effect was none the



less sure. Prevost was one of those sensitive beings who dread the smallest departure from the common way of life, however monotonous that life may be. His sister had brought an unknown child to the house and had refused him any explanation. What more natural, then, than that his dread of possible consequences should prove stronger than his reason? Why, the police might want to know about it, and to have the police in his house would never do.

"Do you mean to say, monsieur, that the little girl is known to you?"

"Perfectly; she is the daughter of one of my friends, and I have every reason to believe that her life is in danger."

Prevost nodded.

"You will understand how little I heard of it," he said, stroking his beard thoughtfully. "It is nine years since I have seen my sister, and then one day she comes to me like a bolt from the blue. She has money, and the apartment upstairs is vacant? What more natural than that I should receive her?"

"Did she give you no account of the child?"

"Far from it. She said it was the daughter of an English noblewoman, and that the mother was dead. She had been paid very well for her trouble, I understood; but that would be nothing to my sister Emily, for she loves this child as her own, and such affection is unusual. Even I was hardly admitted to her room—and, monsieur, I fear she is quite reckless where money is concerned."

"A good woman, I perceive. She was much distressed in Strasburg and afflicted by strange fears. Is it not so?"

"You could not put it plainer. There was a certain Michel Ghika called here twice, and because of him my sister returned to England. That is all I know about it. She feared this man, and would not permit me to speak to the police about him. And she left me secretly by the little street which is at the back. She went by the night mail, monsieur, and I have had no word from her since."

"A clever and discerning woman; I shall know how to reward her. Now permit me to see the rooms, if you please."

Prevost seemed uneasy. He changed his attitude several times, appeared about to speak, and then afraid.

"Well," exclaimed the prince, "why do you hesitate?"

"On your account, monsieur. I cannot be sure, but I have thought—well, perhaps it is not unnatural—but I thought to-night that I heard some one already in my sister's apartments."

"And you did not go up to see who was there?"

"Why should I? There is little of value there, and, to be frank, I am insured against burglary."

Maurevale laughed outright. The fellow was not only a craven, but an insured one as well. Perhaps he had hoped that thieves really would carry away some of "the antiques" which had decorated his sister's apartments.

"Ah, I see, you are a prudent man. But surely that is no reason why I should not go? How long ago was it that you heard a noise?"

"A few minutes before your arrival. I am quite convinced of it."

"Is there any other door but your own?"

"There is the passage of which I have spoken. They could get in by that."

"Then I must really protect your property, Monsieur Prevost. Now permit me to go up. We have wasted time enough."

The Jew was still unconvinced. He hummed and hawed, and made no movement whatever towards the staircase. Plainly the confidence was not complete.

"Certainly we will go, but as your Excellency was good enough to speak of a thousand francs——"

"Ho, ho!" cried Maurevale. "So it is that, my friend? You are thinking that I might be murdered, and another get the thousand francs before you. How far-seeing you are, Monsieur Prevost. What an excellent man of business!"

"Then your Excellency is offended?"

"By no means. I am amused, and any one who can amuse me is my friend. Please take your money — perhaps you

would like to run out and change the note while I am upstairs?"

"Certainly not, monsieur. If anything happened to you, which God forbid, the police would say I was a robber. I shall stop here, and I think you had better keep the notes until you come down."

It really was too droll. The little rascal was only too ready to trade upon his sister's misfortunes, and yet he found himself hedged about by difficulties whichever way he turned. When Maurevale went upstairs, the fellow returned to the inner room and shut himself up there. Why should he risk his skin for a crazy curiosity which could lead nowhere?

The prince had the keys, and, as he understood it, full permission to search the rooms which Mme. Prevost had quitted so recently.

These formed a little flat, with a heavy oaken door and a three-cornered hall, of the smallest dimensions. This vestibule was unlighted when Maurevale entered; nor could he detect a switch for the small electric lamp above the door. So he stood almost in total darkness, listening for any sounds from the room within, and wondering if Prevost had imagined his wild tale of footsteps. All seemed quite normal, and although he heard every sound from the streets without, the rooms themselves were silent as the grave.

He opened a door to the left and found himself in that very sitting-room which Stella had visited on her arrival at Strasburg. The blinds of this were drawn and the shutters closed, but not so closely that a ray from a street lamp did not enter obliquely and fall with startling effect upon a mirror to his right. This in turn cast the reflection upon another mirror upon the far side of the room, so that as he walked Maurevale saw his own face approaching him; just a vignette of it which loomed up in a ghostly way, to be blurred and lost immediately. Such an omen would have frightened Israel Prevost out of his wits, but the prince could smile at it, and say that by such means are spiritist conjured up.

He walked with a light step and made no sound as he went.

Listening from time to time, his belief that the rooms were untenanted increased every moment and gave him confidence. A pocket electric torch helped his search, and he cast its aureole of light to the right and left of him; upon the chimney and again to a bureau whose drawers had been emptied to the last shred of paper. Not yet would he turn on the electric light in the room and discover the true situation. It might just be possible, as Prevost had said, that another was before him in the rooms; and if that were so, the identity of this intruder might mean much. For which reason he worked stealthily, searching with the keen eye of a man who knows the worth of the very dust upon the furniture, whose trained eye missed no detail, however minute.

The search was vain, diligently as it was pursued. Maurevale came reluctantly to the conclusion that whatever were Mme. Prevost's motives, her gifts in another way were remarkable. There had been little enough in all consciousness at the house of the Five Green Shutters; but here in Strasburg there was absolutely nothing at all. Not a drawer that had not been ransacked, nor a cupboard which even a child's fingers seemed to have touched. Baffled and disappointed, he crossed with light foot and stood an instant by the door which gave upon the bedroom. Should he enter at once or turn on the electric light before he did so? The answer came all unexpectedly, from the far side of the half-open door. A man breathed heavily there; it was impossible to doubt that he waited for Maurevale to enter.

A shiver of excitement thrilled the prince as he realised the truth of this situation and recalled the danger he had escaped so narrowly. A step would have carried him beyond the door, and he had been upon the point of making it. The unknown spy, waiting in concealment, would have sprung upon him and had his hand at his throat before he could have uttered a single cry. Now, however, the situation was reversed. Maurevale had his hand to his revolver in a flash, then he raised it again as swiftly, leaving his pistol where it was.

An idea had come to him, and he preferred it to the other.

Standing there and listening to the quick breathing of the spy, he bethought him that a pistol shot would bring the police to the Wilhelmstrasse, and with the police that farce of inquiry which might undo all. He had many reasons for wishing to keep the German authorities out of this, and forgot none of them as he stood there in the darkness. If the spy were to be taken, he, Maurevale, must do it. And it could be done, he thought, for the advantage was with him.

Now was he quick to act and almost savage in this purpose of discovery. Springing suddenly against the half-open door, he pressed it backward against the wall, hurling all his weight upon it and trying to crush the unknown. There were few stronger men in Europe than Maurevale of Dara; few whose physical powers had been so little impaired by the life of cities—and this strength served him well at such a crisis. For a surety he had the fellow now. He could hear a startled cry, a guttural oath, then a shriek of agony as the corner of the door caught him and pinned the man to the wall. But it went no further than that. An observer might have said that Maurevale repented of his act as soon as he had committed it. The truth was far otherwise. A new idea had taken the place of the old, and it was more terrible.

The men had been fighting in the darkness, and save for the sudden cry when he realised the truth, the unknown had uttered no word. Indeed, there had been a moment's interval, when no sound within the room could be heard at all, and it was during this interval that the prince suddenly let the door go and released his prisoner. His quick ear had detected something of which he alone might understand the meaning, the sudden clang of a distant door, and the echo of a step in the corridor beyond the room. Convinced that a new figure had appeared upon the scene, Maurevale determined that this man should do his work. Rightly or wrongly, he believed that he had fallen upon as strikingly a dramatic situation as his life had shown him. And he would let it be played to the end, if end there might be.

A loud exclamation in the German tongue, in a voice with

which he was familiar, attended his change of plan and the prisoner's freedom. Frederick Walther, for the prince no 1 doubted that he was the man, pushed the door from him with a oath, and staggered across the room to the corridor upon the far side. The door of this also stood half open, showing plainly that the German had entered the flat from the back and would leave it by the same way. Terrified by this deadly antagonist, who fought with the brute weapon of physical force, the doctor fled headlong and disappeared in the darkness. Maurevale, however, stood quite still, waiting with that chill apprehension which speaks of death. Who was the third figure of the night, and what would he do? If it were Michel Ghika, and he discovered that another were ahead of him and had already rifled the nest from which he expected so much, then assuredly would his vengeance be swift. Maurevale could have counted the doctor's very steps as the German felt his way down the dark corridor to the street. It might have seemed for the moment that his wild imagination had run away with him; that no new figure had appeared, and that the German would go free. But this was only for a moment. Presently the steps ceased, a new exclamation was heard, then a sudden cry of terror which none could mistake. From this the prince turned with a shudder to find Israel Prevost at his side. So absorbed had he been in the drama which the darkness hid that he had not even heard the Jew's step upon the parquet.

"Good God, monsieur! what is happening here?"

"You put my own question. I think your house has been burgled, and that the burglars are now quarrelling. Do you hear that? Oh, surely it is time that we went to that man's help, Monsieur Prevost, or I fear he will be past any help at all."

Prevost's face was ghastly pale, and his legs trembled so that he could hardly stand. He made an effort to turn on the electric light, and succeeded so far as the lamps by the chimneypiece were concerned. It was clear at the same time that nothing would induce him to enter his sister's bedroom, and his one idea was to summon the police. Maurevale

meanwhile had already crossed the floor of the bedroom and gained the passage beyond. His electric torch showed him the whole scene plainly. A man lay dead there, stabbed to the heart, and that man was the father of Otto Walther, his servant.

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## CHAPTER XXXV

### ACROSS THE FRONTIER

PREVOST stood exactly where Maurevale had left him a few minutes previously, and so great was his perturbation that the question he tried to ask died away upon his lips.

This was the moment when the Minster bells struck ten ; as Maurevale listened to the chime, it seemed every stroke ticked off one of those seconds which had become so precious.

He must get out of Germany, flee the country that very hour ; do this, or admit that his work had been in vain and that the Germans had outwitted him. Clearly as though the facts of it were written down, he put the issue to himself.

Walther was dead, the man Michel Ghika had stabbed him in the darkness of the corridor. That silent house would be filled by police before many minutes had gone by—and then !

Maurevale saw that this excuse might serve to detain him in Germany either until Captain Ferman were tried, or he himself had entered into the understanding pressed upon him by clever agents of the secret service. And from this, flight, instant flight, could save him.

“Monsieur,” he said to Prevost in a grave voice, “a man has been murdered in your house, and I think the police should be sent for immediately. My servants are below, and if you prefer it——”

Prevost tried to stammer “Yes,” but his lips would not frame the word. He was dreadfully afraid of being left alone in the house, and every moment added to his fears. The dim light in the room, the horrible suggestion of the empty bedchamber, and the black corridor beyond it, appalled him by the visions they suggested. Incredible that his own sister should have brought this upon him.



"Come," said the prince. "We have no right to delay. Let me give you my arm, for I see you have need of it. That is good; now we shall do very well. Here are the stairs, and this is the balustrade. Lean upon me, my dear sir, and do not be afraid. Oh, come, are you not a man? Then play a man's part, and try to remember that this night's work is none of your doing."

Step by step he helped the craven to the shop below and to his own little sitting-room behind it. There, as Maurevale had expected, the fellow collapsed altogether and fell in a dead faint before the empty fireplace. It could have hardly happened better. Immediately now the prince left the house and went out to the car which waited for him in the Wilhelmstrasse. There he perceived the welcome figure of his secretary, and, as he stood for a moment to breathe the pure night air, it seemed to him that the race for liberty had already begun.

The Russian was not slow to understand that something of grave importance had occurred at Prevost's house, and he could not restrain the exclamation which expressed his curiosity.

"Well, Highness?"

"Ah, my dear Paul, it is very far from well. To begin with, are your assistants still here?"

"I have young Faber, Gustave Faber's son, with me; he is quite a boy. There is also Barat on the box with your driver."

"Send the lad immediately for a doctor. M. Prevost has need of him; you yourself will accompany me to the hotel. I am leaving for Paris immediately."

"Immediately, Highness?"

"As I say. You must come with me in the car, for I have a letter to send to the police here, and it should reach them as early as possible to-morrow. We, however, must be across the frontier by that time. Is it possible, do you think?"

"It is quite possible, unless there should be any reason to think——"

"That the police will detain me—exactly. Well, there is every reason, Paul; so, you see, if your doctor does not reach M. Prevost for an hour——"

"I will see that he does not get there before."

Maurevale nodded his head and waited while the Russian gave his orders to the lad. Then they entered the car together and set off for the Grand Hotel. It was a quarter past ten and Stella already in her bedroom. She was amazed to receive a summons from Maurevale at such an hour, but doubly amazed when he told her the news.

"We are setting off for England in ten minutes' time," said he. "Your luggage can follow; my servants will see to it. I think it wise that you should come with me, Stella. It would be dangerous for me to remain any longer in Strasburg, and you, I know——"

Her eyes spoke her answer, and she left him without one word, the woman's heart saying: He is in peril and will not confess it. The hotel people themselves were too well acquainted with the caprice of touring motorists to be surprised at any whim, and knew very well, moreover, that the custom of Maurevale of Dara must not be trifled with. Of all attending him, the valet alone was in despair. What could he do for a master who would hardly wait for a travelling-bag?

"You will follow me to Paris immediately, to the Ritz," the prince said. "If I have left there, go on to London until I come; I shall do very well with what I can buy. Let my travelling-bag go in the car with me. And that reminds me, Edward, are you capable of taking charge of Miss Insole's maid? Then do not forget that the good woman thinks all foreigners to be cannibals, and mind you bring her safely."

Edward hardly replied, so irregular did he consider such proceedings. Maurevale, however, went to work methodically, and a quarter of an hour had not passed when the big limousine drew up in the courtyard of the hotel, and Lazarre, the chauffeur, announced that all was ready. Then Stella appeared, wrapped from head to foot in a great fur travelling-coat, and entering the carriage without a word they set off for the frontier.

The habits of the German citizen are much changed these later years, and he is now given to late hours. Strasburg was just beginning to think of supper when the car left the Grand Hotel,

and all the glamour of a soldier's night had fallen upon the city. Not only were the omnipresent artillerymen responsible for this, but fat and prosperous citizens, who managed somehow to work all day and to drink beer far into the small hours. Pretty women were to be seen everywhere—in cabs, at the doors of the beer-gardens, or holding up their dainty gowns as they tripped upstairs to the supper-rooms, where the fiddlers were busy. Such a going and coming filled the more public streets with carriages and motor-cars, and through a press of these Lazarre steered the car to the western gate and to the high-road.

Hardly an eye followed them, scarce a head was turned as they went. Of all these thousands none knew—and certainly none would have cared—that a man lay dead in the Wilhelmstrasse, and that he had been foully murdered. Helmeted police marched their rounds proudly, and paid no attention to the fugitives. The sentinels at the outer gates cared not a straw who went into France at such an hour. The very attitude of the officials might have reassured Maurevale and bidden him laugh at his haste. It did nothing of the kind, however, and there was not an instant when he did not ask himself the question: Have we time; shall we outwit them? Possibilities of failure appalled him, for they implied weary weeks of delay, the subtleties of the German police and the pursuit of an advantage to the last point of legality. As a climax, there would be Jack Ferman's trial and his conviction.

Stella had been told nothing of the flight, but she would not question the prince. It seemed so wonderful to be out upon this lonely way with him, alone with the man she loved in the watches of the night; the silent, unquestioning partner of his anxieties, the friend of his hopes and the enemy of his fears. In good time he would tell her; but she could not put away the thought that they were racing to England for her sister Kitty's sake, and that the issue must be beyond all words momentous. So she watched her companion with eyes which burned to read the truth. What had happened in Strasburg; what tragic circumstances had sent them forth like this?

They had left the outworks of the city behind them at this time, and happened upon a wide country road bordered by

acacias. By here and there the lights of a house showed up between the trees, and a beer-garden could be discerned, nestling in a ring of shrubbery. Music came faintly, but was often drowned by the hum of the motor; they passed some market-carts going into Strasburg, and a squadron of cavalry which had been executing night manœuvres. The latter spectacle quickened Maurevale's heart and set him thinking again. Would he make the frontier safely? Would this bold coup, indeed, be rewarded by success?

So far, perchance, the excitement of it all had shut a thought of Stella from his mind; but he now remembered her, and began to realise the kindlier side of the journey. How odd it was that Anna's death should have sent him out to this remote high road, and that Stella should be his companion upon it. Never before, unless it had been upon the day of the inquest, had such an hour of intimacy been possible; and he could welcome it despite that memory of the years which seemed to mock it. Then he remembered the scene in the Wilhelmstrasse, and what it might mean to her if the lad Otto were other than her friend.

Of all the women he had known, of those who had been his chosen companions in Vienna, in Paris, in Rome, in London, none had spoken to his heart so truly as this mere child, who sat silently by his side upon the road to France; whose eyes tried to read his secrets whenever his own were turned upon her. For here was that rarest fruit of a woman's love, true sympathy, the message of a woman's soul to a man's; the intimate understanding of which mere passion knows so little. Nor was Maurevale insensible to this, although he did not dare to speak of it. As at Lausanne, so here in Germany, the years mocked him. What right had he, what title to forget, that she had been as his own daughter, the child of his house, which had been honoured to shelter her?

He put such thoughts from him, and reflected that it was his duty to speak of Frederick Walther whatever the consequences. As briefly as might be he told her the story of his visit to the Wilhelmstrasse and of the drama which had been played there. His

own acts had seemed well enough at the time, but they accused him now, when the glamour of them had passed, and he could ask himself if he had done right to let the German die. This point he put to Stella quite frankly. Would she, a woman, accuse the vengeance which he had taken? Would her mind revolt against the inevitability of the tragedy? He waited almost as though she had been the judge to whom he must answer. There was none other in all the world whose approval he so desired.

"Consider," he said. "Was this not the judgment of God? The man went to the Wilhelmstrasse—for what? To search for Anna's secrets and to sell them. If they were shameful secrets, which I do not believe, so much the greater would have been his reward. He would have dragged them into the light; such a man does not know the meaning of the words mercy and honour. He had schemed from the first moment of this to enrich himself by a noble woman's dishonour. Pursuit of the dead—for I must put it so—sent him to Strasburg. I meet him in the house which he has entered like any common thief; he waits there to kill me if I give him the opportunity. And then, I hear a footstep, and I know that I am not to be the avenger. Tell me, was I wrong to let him go? Have I his blood upon my hands?"

She shuddered at the recital, and hid her face from him. For quite a long time he waited for her to speak, believing that it was even as he had feared. Then, as swiftly, she reassured him, speaking in a low, sweet voice which fell as music upon his ears.

"I think you have done what God willed," she said. "Had I been in your place, Anna's spirit would have gone with me to the house, and I would have heard her voice. We are her servants; our duty is to her name and her memory. If I were a man, I would think that a woman's honour was the true altar of my worship; I would give a hundred lives for it if I had them. What is a woman's faith in a man's friendship if sacrifice, at least, may not be asked of it? You were not your own master in the Wilhelmstrasse. Anna herself was there. I am sure of it, and it was her voice that you heard."

He liked the mysticism of it, and mused upon it a little

while. Science had done nothing in his case to rob him of a hope that some mighty truth might lie at the heart of all these dreamings, and that mankind would discover it eventually. He did not deceive himself, played with no false gods of a material superstition, but yet maintained his faith and found it uplifting. Anna herself might have been in that house, as this little friend suggested; she might even be with them upon the journey they were now making to save a man who had loved her.

"I shall try to believe that it is so," he exclaimed presently, turning to Stella and drawing her arm through his own. "Perhaps I have been conscious of it from the beginning, and it has helped me. How otherwise can I account for the impulses which have overtaken me, irresistible and ever sure? When I set out to follow Arthur Blandy to Ely the monition to go was unmistakable, and I heard Anna's voice in my ears as surely as though she had walked by my side. It was heard again when I sent you to Paris to the house of the Count of Fours; I obeyed it then, I know not why. Common reason would seem to say that, if the dead can direct us, their mandates would be neither obscure nor fitful. We should hear the truth once and for all, the clear word which could not be misread. Against this is the obscurity of Nature herself, her own fitful moods; her contradictions, and her final truths. We must be content to leave it at that whatever our impatience or our desires. At least you and I, Stella, may say that impulse is no poor friend, for it has carried us safely out of Strasburg to-night, and may yet win the frontier. I pray for that; I do not remember any hour which has cost me so much."

He leaned back against the cushion and expressed his weariness in the gesture. The car was passing through a forest road by this time, and the blackness of the later night prevailed about them. Such vehicles as they passed were wood-lorries harboured by the roadside or carriers' carts plodding toward the villages. The heat and ardour of escape had abated for the moment, but was to be recalled all too soon. This was at the German Custom House, two hundred yards beyond which lay France and freedom.

Lazarre stopped the car slowly, calling back to his master and

telling him just where they were. As the car rolled up to the station the prince could distinguish the outlines of a low building, in the window of which a light burned dimly. Getting down at once, for he knew the value of personality at such a moment, he went up to the door of the house and knocked loudly. Presently a gruff voice was heard asking what was wanted, and this voice did not become more pleasing when an answer was given.

"To sign the papers for my car, mein herr."

"Then you must wait until the morning. What do I know about papers at this time of night! Come at a reasonable hour and I will sign them."

"But I have paid a deposit to your Government, and, if you do not sign my papers, I shall lose the money."

"Then you must lose it, as far as I am concerned. Is this the time to ask me such a thing? You should know better, mein herr."

The prince smiled to himself and turned away. A hundred yards down the road lay the French douane, and here they arrived just as a bad-tempered official had called his assistant Jules to the telephone to see who rang them up at such an hour of the night. To him Maurevale introduced himself.

"I am Prince Maurevale of Dara, and I hurry to Paris upon an affair of some urgency. I am sure your chiefs would be grateful for any courtesy you can show me."

"But, monsieur——"

The man shrugged his shoulders and uttered a loud oath under his breath. The telephone was still ringing violently, and Jules, hearing the call at last, lurched in and took the receiver in his hands.

"Halloa, halloa, halloa!"

"I say, monsieur, that I am upon Government business—cannot you help me? If there is anything to pay——"

The prince put his hand into his pocket and produced a roll of bank-notes. Knowing men, it may be that he knew also exactly what would pass in the mind of this official, who now for the first time began to connect the bell with this stately personage who was in such a hurry to get on.

"Who is it, Jules? What do they say?"

The man Jules, still halloaing at the instrument, put it down and turned to answer his chief.

"I think it is the police of Strasburg, monsieur."

"Then what do they say, Jules?"

"That we are—halloa! halloa!—I beg your pardon, monsieur, but I do not quite hear them."

"Then what a fool you must be. Write the message down and bring it here."

"Certainly, monsieur, when I can understand it."

And once more he resumed his methodical "Hallos!"

This byplay might have amused Maurevale at any other time, but now it left him shivering with dread. He was as a man who had one foot in a land of freedom, but knew not from instant to instant when he might be dragged back. The bell rang the knell of his hopes.

"Well, monsieur, shall we resume? You are keeping me a long time, and I do not think that my friend, M. Lépine——"

"Lépine—Lépine—who, then, is Lépine?"

"Is he not the chief of the police of Paris? If you are in any doubt about me, would not a message to him——"

"I see exactly, Excellency. We must be plain with each other. You are leaving Germany in a hurry, and the police of Strasburg desire to detain you. Very well, I must hear what they have to say."

"By all means, but I have not the leisure to wait. Perhaps you will hear them in my absence."

He rose with the words, leaving on the table before him two notes of the Bank of France, each of the value of twelve hundred francs. The chief, pretending not to see them, essayed the difficult task of addressing his servant Jules and this dubious traveller at one and the same time, a proceeding which added nothing to his dignity, but much to Maurevale's fears.

"Sit down, monsieur; I insist upon it. What do they say, Jules? You cannot tell me? Imbecile, have you no ears? Write it down, I say, and bring it here. You, monsieur, please to wait. I shall not permit you to continue your journey."



Maurevale sat immediately with a nonchalant air which suited the occasion very well. Jules at the telephone was halloaing and bawling "*Et alors*" at the top of his lungs. The chief, eyeing the notes covertly, speculated as to the meaning of this mystery and the real name of the traveller. Perhaps he did not believe that he was Maurevale of Dara at all.

"I cannot permit you to go, monsieur. It will be necessary to make inquiries. Do you not see how I am situated? Certainly I must do my duty." Maurevale nodded.

"By all means—but is there not a simple way of doing it?"

"How a simple way? Are you coming, Jules? What a man—he has the ears of a pig and cannot hear—my word!"

say a simple way of doing things. Send one of your men to Nancy on the box of my car. There we will telegraph to Paris. If they wish me to be detained, very well; you have the police at your disposition. If not, you may apologise to me, while I shall remember the trouble to which you have been put."

He glanced at the notes upon the table, and the chief's eye followed him in the act. Jules apparently had now got into touch with the Germans, and was listening intently to their story. Of all the moments since the beginning this was the most critical. Maurevale could almost feel the emotions which influenced the man upon the opposite side of the table. Was he not saying that, after all, the police at Nancy were the proper people to see to this? And a man could go with the car, in which case the two thousand four hundred francs would continue to lie upon the table.

"I shall apologise to nobody," he exclaimed, a just tribute to his office; and then, "If it is as you say, the police at Nancy must know of it. Have you any one in the car with you, monsieur?"

"A lady."

"Ah, then, permit me to verify the fact."

He smiled cunningly, and, rising at the words, made straight for the door of the bureau, quite forgetful of the patient Jules, who was now writing down the German message as fast as

his clumsy fingers would permit. The bank-notes lay just where Maurevale had left them. There were two of the junior Custom House officers in the road, and the sentries who guarded the frontier. The chief himself, borrowing a lantern from one of his men, lifted it up that he might look inside the limousine, and when he espied the pale face of the young English lady, a smile illumined his taciturn features. This would only be some love affair after all. And might it not be worth some thousand odd francs to him?

There was no irresolution in his acts from this time, and calling loudly, "Albert, Albert," he gave one of the young fellows a whispered direction, and the youth mounted the box immediately, sitting by Lazarre, who offered him a cordial welcome. The prince himself, perceiving how matters lay, yet hardly daring to hope that all had been won, entered the carriage immediately and gave the signal to go on. The chief, bowing for the first time, stepped back to make way for the car, which moved off silently toward the great dark high-road, and in two minutes had made of the station nothing but a cluster of lights upon a hillside.

Maurevale could hardly believe his eyes or his ears while these things were happening, and even the roar of the Mercédès engine could not quite convince him that so great a victory had been won. For some minutes he did not speak a single word to Stella, but continued to look back toward the frontier as though pursuit were inevitable and this but an interlude. When he discovered that this idea was but a chimera, and to be dismissed, he felt as a man who has crossed some mighty ravine and gained a haven upon the far side. Reaction came in a flood of high spirits which was irresistible.

"Well, my dear child, and what do you think of it all?"

"Oh," she cried, "I think I have been in the torture chair; it seemed an hour. If you knew what it meant to wait out there and look at that horrible man. He was just like an ogre."

"Thank Heaven ogres are human. I bought him for a thousand francs or so, and would take a profit on the trans-

action. Seriously, Stella, life would be very dull if every one were honest. It would also be very difficult."

She did not try to understand it.

"I could see every thought passing across his face," she said. "First he was very angry, then he was pleased, then he just did not know what to do. The Follies would have loved him; it was a perfect pantomime."

"With a Heaven-sent clown to cap it. May I be spared such an entertainment for a long while to come. I really thought that we must return to Strasburg."

"And if we had?"

"If we had, ah, if we had, then I fear there would be no good news to carry to Kitty in England."

Stella hardly followed him. Was it possible then, that this flight implied the final victory, which would prove Jack Ferman innocent and vindicate him before the world? Would not the prince have told her plainly if that were so? She could make nothing of it, and feared to ask a question; while he, understanding perfectly what was in her mind, hastened to explain himself in a commentary which betrayed his most secret thoughts.

"I am going to England, Stella, to tell as strange a tale as a law court will ever hear. I am going to show that there were at least six people interested in Anna's death, and that three of these were quite capable of murdering her. Of this I hold the most convincing proof: and yet I must declare at the same time that none of them murdered her, and that the secret of her death is still hidden from me. This, I hope, will not affect Jack Ferman, but I cannot keep it from you that it might do so. Juries are rarely afflicted by much common sense, and any obstinate imbecile with a loud voice is able to sway them. My story may be disbelieved, in which case God alone knows what will happen. But I continue to hope, and I tell myself that just as inspiration came to you at Strasburg, and you divined the existence of a child, so may it come to me before the trial—in time to save from the scaffold one of the bravest men I have ever known."

She listened, wondering, and with a great hope she would not confess. There had been so little sunshine in her life since the dreadful day of the tragedy at Highlands, that these words were as a message of salvation. Never had the man she worshipped secretly seemed so worthy of her homage or so truly the hero that her childish imagination had made him out to be. She believed that he would save Jack Ferman, and her faith was never dimmed.

"If one could but go to Kitty now, this instant, and tell her," she cried, her eyes blazing and her cheeks on fire. "If we could but fly to her."

"You believe, then, that she loves him; you have never doubted that, Stella?"

"Can any one doubt when a woman loves?"

"I think it quite possible."

"Must she then wear her heart on her sleeve? No, no, I don't agree with you. A woman may both love and be beloved, and the world no wiser."

"Does your own heart tell you that?"

"Why should my heart speak to me to-night?"

"Because the night is one when the secrets whisper the truth to us and we, in turn, repeat them to the stars. It was on such a night as this, I remember, that a man spoke of his love for you. Shall I confess that my own secrets came out of their hiding-places then and stood all about me? But you would not be interested; you forbid me to speak of it perhaps?"

She sat very still, her head thrown back upon the cushions and long drooping lashes shielding the bright eyes from him. Who, then, had spoken to him, and who had dared? she asked rebelliously.

"I do not forbid you," she said presently. "Will you not tell me the man's name?"

"It was Otto Walther. What could I say to him? His sincerity forbade rebuke. He asked if he might speak to you when we returned from Switzerland. Could I answer that I was not the keeper of your heart, Stella—dare I say as much? I had no right, no title to forbid him. Was not I merely the friend upon whom your sympathy had been bestowed? How,

then, could I answer the man who told me that he loved you?"

"You did answer him, though—tell me that you did?"

Her tone amazed him. He looked down upon her half-closed eyes and wondered at her beauty. She was tremulous with excitement and her lips quivered. The hand which touched his own was hot as though a fever consumed her.

"Yes," he said at last, "I answered him as I thought you would have wished, Stella!"

She neither moved nor spoke. The car rolled on over the broad road towards the city; the cold light of dawn struck upon the distant hills and showed them the drear landscape in all its loneliness. And as though these two had been cast out by fortune to this remote land, there to learn and to confess the supreme truth which dominated their lives, they fell to great silence wherein the secrets were but a sigh, and the story of their love had no other record than that which their beating hearts might write.

It was late in the afternoon when the young man from the douane returned to the frontier to tell his chief that he had done well to let the prince pass, and that M. Lépine wished to see him in Paris without a moment's loss of time.

This also was the hour when Maurevale received from Lady Constance Heliers a telegram in which she implored him to visit her at her hotel as soon as might be.

"I am in great trouble," the message went. "Of your charity come to me."

This message, however, provoked but a smile, and, when Stella came down from her room in the hotel at Nancy to continue the journey, he showed it to her as though he had achieved a triumph.

"The amiable Constance wants to borrow money of me," he said. "Well, I am going to Paris to lend it to her. But she will find me a dreadful usurer—tears of blood, and genuine tears this time. Let us get on, dear child, the hours grow exciting and I would lose none of them."

She entered the car with him, and set her little handbag on the opposite seat. A sudden lurch, when Lazzarre missed his foot upon the clutch, sent the bag to the ground and its contents were scattered. Maurevale picked them up with a light word upon a woman's needs; but discovering at the last a little round bottle of tablets, he looked at it curiously and read the name upon the label.

"Why," he said, "and what is this, Stella? I have never heard of it."

"Oh," she said, laughing with him, "it is Seronal. Anna, you know, used to take it for her headaches."

He did not answer a word for many minutes.

The names of the firm of chemists who had sold the drug were Baro & Malquevert, of Rheims. Maurevale must have read this name twenty times before he handed the bottle back to her.

"How interesting," he said, "how very interesting."

## CHAPTER XXXVI

### HELIER'S AT BAY

ONE of Archie Kerrington's maxims for a happy life was to spend little money when you had plenty, and to spend a great deal when you were in that embarrassing condition commonly known as "stony."

This advice he gave to all and sundry, particularly to his dear friend, Lady Constance Heliers, who acted upon it with all a woman's daring and recklessness.

This pretty pair had come to Paris at the invitation of that benevolent old gentleman, Dr. Frederick Walther, who had hinted to them in the politest terms that, while he would not think of blackmailing such a fine fellow as Maurevale or Dara, at the same time the prince might be very ready to pay for certain secrets in his possession, and to pay for them handsomely.

And now what should happen but that this idiotic German must disappear and leave both the discerning Archie and the expectant Constance in such a devil of a mess that the brains neither of the one nor the other were equal to the emergency.

Things had gone badly; they could not have gone worse. To begin with, there was that awful bungle about the maid Berthe, who had been used as a decoy and had failed most dismally.

The pretty scheme to keep Maurevale from Lausanne, most certainly had proved a bad egg; for had he not appeared at the Congress, and was not all Europe still discussing the masterly speech he delivered? Clearly that was not one of the doctor's triumphs nor had he done any better with his mysterious

dabbling in the goods of an adventurer who came out of Cairo. Both Heliers and Archie had been led to believe that this fellow, a certain Michel Ghika, whom the doctor met at one of the foreign clubs in London, knew Anna Maclain's story to the last line, and would recite it for a few paltry sovereigns. What easier, then, than to sell it to Maurevale for as many thousands? It had sounded well enough in London, but here in Paris that adorable creature, Heliers, had found it less convincing. And upon that came her losses at cards, to two men she had never seen before, and whom she hoped devoutly that she would never see again.

This surely was the culminating misfortune. To come to Paris in the hope of making some thousands of pounds, and to leave—if she might leave it—owing as much, seemed to her an ironical turn which might yet overwhelm her. For how was the money to be found, and by what vigilance might she escape these lynx-eyed Frenchmen whose manner was so bland and whose cards were so good? She had not an idea, nor had Archie.

"Let's change the pitch," he said, the day after Maurevale left for Lausanne. "Let's move on to an expensive hotel and work the confidence trick. I'll play 'em again if we get the chance, and take deuced good care they don't salt me a second time. It must have been Maurevale's fizz, Conny—I never had such a night."

She agreed to this, and added pleasantly that the day had not been brighter than the night of which he spoke. His idea of moving on to the Hôtel Gloucester pleased her, and they were installed there in a couple of charming suites of apartments before many hours were passed. Meanwhile Heliers sat down to write to her dear papa, the duke, beginning as ever with the words, "My dearest father," and immediately proceeding in tragic fashion to continue, "The misfortunes we have suffered so many years seem really to have come to a head in this horrible city, where, as you know, I am staying with my friend, Lady Gladys. Money, money, money, is it not terrible to be compelled to write always of that? And yet as you, dear father, understand so well——" &c., &c.



The old duke did indeed understand it all too well. He had been three days in bed with the gout when this epistle reached him, and was at his wits' end to satisfy the mortgagees of almost the last farm in Norfolk which remained to shed lustre on his house. So it was a matter of congratulation that his daughter heard none of the words with which he received her dutiful address. Money—why, were not his own creditors sufficiently numerous to be whipped up into a regiment of yeomanry—if the rascally Jews could stick on their horses, which he doubted.

He dictated a rambling answer, pitying himself and cursing a Government which would tax the very teeth in his head, as he put it elegantly. The enclosure of £50 seemed shabby enough, but as that had been recently borrowed it represented some generosity. Clearly the affairs of the house of Alton were *in extremis*, and nothing but radical economies could avert the smash—a fact of poor consolation to Constance, and of none whatever to Archie Kerrington.

To be sure, this promising couple were at their wits' end. They had just lost over four thousand pounds between them to the suave Baron Cortot and the equally amiable M. de Baltard, and nothing short of flight would save them from the importunities of these clever gamblers. But whither should they fly, unless it were to London; and how would that help them to avoid the baron and his friend, who had announced in clear terms their determination to be paid, or to post the pair as rogues and vagabonds in every club in London and in Paris?

Archie, perchance, cared little about this threat, for his character was very well known in both cities, and it would not have been the first time that his title to the designation "rogue" had found eloquent defenders. But for the Lady Constance it was another matter, and the man had not sunk so low that he would not make some effort to save her. Proffering loquacious excuses to the baron, he asked for a month's delay. The answer was a challenge, carried by Captain Lorraineaux to the Hôtel Gloucester, and one demanding an immediate response.

Such was the state of things on the day after Maurevale left Strasburg. Archie, who had boasted of his adventures in many

a London club, received Captain Lorraineaux a little insolently, and was inclined to treat the whole matter as a joke.

In England, he said, men fought with their fists; and if the baron liked to put up a "pony" he would box him twenty rounds at the National Sporting Club. When the grave Frenchman failed entirely to understand the joke, and went on to ask what message he should carry to the baron, Kerrington declared, with some effrontery, that if the "old sport" wanted to be shot, he would meet him next morning at Auteuil and bring the largest pair of horse-pistols he could lay hands on. To which Captain Lorraineaux, understanding merely that pistols were chosen, bowed gravely and responded:

"Your friends, monsieur, with whom I shall arrange this?"

"Oh, anybody you like. If ladies are not objected to, I name my friend, Lady Constance Heliers. How does that suit? These are rum times, and we might set the fashion. Are women barred?"

Lorraineaux shrugged his shoulders. He was almost too astonished to speak.

"It would be irregular," he stammered, "but we should offer no opposition. You will, however, wish for another friend——"

"Oh, then, go to Bobby Stanyers at the St. James. Wait a minute and I'll give you a card. Fine chap, Bobby, if you find him sober. If you don't, order a bottle of fizz and put some brandy in it. That's up to Bobby; he'll be all right on that."

The Frenchman could but answer that he would visit this entertaining person without delay, and so he took his leave. Perhaps it would be needless to remark that Mr. Archibald Kerrington had no intention whatever of presenting himself in the Bois next morning, and that his immediate concern was to get out of Paris with what credit he could. When he told Constance about it, her indifference was so absolute that there seemed no longer an obstacle to flight. Who would hang about a woman who did not care a hang? as he remarked to Stanyers when he met him.

Heliers, be it said, was so very anxious upon her own account that she had little sympathy to waste upon Archie. When he tried to tell her, tragically, what had happened she began by laughing, and concluded with the expression of a pious hope.

"At least," she said, "he could not expect us to pay him if you were wounded. Would not he have to leave Paris or some thing? I am sure it is so. It would be as good as a receipt in full."

Archie did not see it in that light at all.

"And what about me?" he asked lugubriously. "A fine lot I should care about the money if I were skewered. You don't think much about that, Conny; you women never do."

"Oh, my dear boy, I am thinking about it all the time. These French duels are nothing; they just scratch one another, and then retire upon their laurels. Think what a tale you would be able to tell in the clubs—and, Archie, couldn't you take gas?"

At any other time Archie would have laughed uproariously at the sally, but this day he took it ill. What an unfeeling brute, he muttered to himself, and after all he had not done for her. Well, it was the old story—believe in a woman until she is found out, and then believe in another. He felt like taking the next train to Gib, where his elder brother was stationed. He did not expect a cordial reception; but, after all, this Paris which would skewer him was no desirable city.

"I'll tell you what," he said, "suppose we make out that I am called away to London and am coming back in ten days' time. That will give you time to wheedle the old man, and perhaps I can get a bit from Moss. You might go to the Bois to-morrow morning and do your best with the baron. I believe he'd tear up those precious documents if you just looked at him, as you can look, Conny. Don't you think it's a fine idea?"

"Most noble, if you won't take gas. But I would have thought you might have put up with a scratch under the circumstances. They tell me it's no worse than a hatpin."

"Hatpin be hanged! I've chosen pistols."

"You've chosen pistols?"

"Yes; had to choose something. He couldn't speak much English and I couldn't speak much French, but I knew what a pistol was, and so I got it out. Suppose he hit me, Conny—by Jove, I should want a new non-skid, shouldn't I, now?"

"Really, my dear man, I don't know what to say to you. You are most incredibly foolish."

"Of course I am; you're just the one to tell me so. Pistols go off, don't they, and so do women. Well, I'm hanged if I know what to do. Why, we've hardly got our fares——"

"And the hotel bill to pay——"

"Oh, we'll owe that. Talk about the duke and have it sent to Wymondham Manor. That'll do all right; but I can't walk to Gib, can I? A deuce of a walk that, Conny, and I'm not in training."

"Then you would leave me alone here——?"

"Well, not exactly that; but, you see, people might talk about our being so much together, and say that old Lady Gladys is a long time coming back from Trouville. Besides, she's half blind when she gets here. And it don't look well, Conny—I've got to think of your reputation."

"I see that you have been thinking of it for some time past," she said, and with so much scorn that he could not answer her. The matter ended by the departure of the noble youth to call upon his friend Stanyers, and his promise to return to dinner. But Heliers knew that he would not come; she was quite convinced now that the last days of this evil friendship were at hand.

Had she moments of self-reproach, of reflection, even of regret? It is difficult to say. Her life had been lived upon a stage where nothing was real, neither the pretensions of her house to greatness nor the popular estimation of its riches. Poverty had given the old duke strange friends. His familiars had been taken during recent years from the ranks of the rich and vulgar who had patronised him at the cost both of his dignity and his honour. Sycophants moved about him and the riff-raff of the moneyed classes, and among these Constance had

been compelled to choose some of her acquaintances. Her mother had been dead for twenty years; her eldest brother enjoyed the unique distinction of being considered the biggest blackguard in London; while the younger was in India with his regiment. In such a school were her wits sharpened and her social lessons received.

Superficially, then, it might be said that self-reproach, reflection, and regret were not among the emotions of that difficult hour. But the bald statement would have done her an injustice. No woman could have been at Wymondham Manor and remained insensible to its great traditions. There were hours when she accused her father bitterly, rebelled against her destiny, and knew herself. These hours she dreaded, for it was necessary to her life that she should remain the frivolous woman of fashion, the bewitching creature of the salons, the decoy about whom wild ducks should hover. And this necessity was all-exacting, ceaseless—so that when she awoke one day to discover that an honest man loved her, she could have laughed for very irony of the circumstance.

Rupert Wally, the young Australian sportsman, whom a kindly gossip credited with the possession of something like a million sterling, what chance placed him among the sycophants? There he was, however, and Heliers was clever enough to know that she might marry him any day she pleased.

If the obverse of the picture was not satisfying, her own life was responsible for that. Rupert Wally meant to return to Australia and to settle upon his estates, and with him must go the wife of his choice, to dazzle the gaudy salons of Sydney or to pose as the society queen in Melbourne. Heliers had pouted at the prospect, and refused to hear of it. The glass-house of triviality held her a sure prisoner: its foetid atmosphere was as a breath of life. Better, she had thought, to make a pure marriage of convention, to marry one of the pretty little boys with the silver (or plated) spoons of an unquestionable ancestry. At least he would remember that England was an island and London the capital thereof.

Here lay the obstacle which sent Wally temporarily to the

right about, and set her steps upon a more dangerous path than that of marriage. Now, however, at this the nadir of her misfortunes, she could dwell with her memories of the flirtation and find them welcome. Rupert Wally was a man at any rate, and would have played a man's part. His sense of chivalry would revolt at all this mean scheming, this despicable intrigue. And to such a one she had said "No" not a month ago in London. Oh, irony of circumstance, if she had but foreseen!

Clearly, it was much too late to think of all this, and there could be but one agent of her salvation in the critical hour. Had not Walther, the wily doctor, flattered her by the most generous of promises; had he not for months past dwelled upon her advantages at Highlands, and the use she might make of them? Deceived in his own son, whose unfilial scorn it was difficult to bear with, he had bethought him that a woman might well take that son's place and bring the affair to a better issue.

Chance had dealt kindly with the doctor some years ago, and had delivered one woman at least into his hands. He would never forget the day when he had been called secretly to a house not very far from Hyde Park, and had discovered a handsome and wilful girl whose arm was broken and whose temper was heroic. Vainly her people prated of an unlucky accident; of a headstrong young lady and of her tomboy tricks. The truth was not to be kept from the wily physician; he knew as much as any one before three days had passed.

The plain truth was that the headstrong young lady in question had been attempting to escape from her father's house that she might join a boy of similar temperament, bolt with him to an unknown shore, and there, being married under the shade of a palm-tree, might live in felicity for ever and ever.

Walther got the secret to the last line, and used it cleverly. He, who had not a shred of title to such an honour, was received affably by the old duke and tolerated by the obliging brothers. He picked up both acquaintances and patients under that historic roof; pushed himself in the world, and promised to become one of the most famous physicians in London. If he did not become so his personal character was responsible. There are some men

whom all the world suspects, and those who are thus suspected are doomed.

Queer tales got about ; there were diplomatists to say that the fellow traded in State secrets and found them more profitable than drugs. Important matters, known to the duke, became known also at Berlin, it was alleged, through the doctor's agency.

He haunted women who clung with both hands to tottering reputations, and helped to keep upright the sagging walls of their honour. But society said that he was well paid for doing so, and it turned upon him a shoulder that was more than chilly.

With all this, Heliers remained indisputably in this man's power. She was more afraid of that secret of her youth than of all the stories of her later life, and they were many. Perhaps she had loved the boy with whom she would have fled to Arcady, and would keep the memory of it as an altar at which she might worship. However it was, she deferred to Walther, helped him in all his schemes ; was the means of introducing his son Otto to Maurevale, and latterly the agent by which he had learned the whole story of Anna Maclain's influence at Highlands, and its possible consequences. She it was who had said to the old doctor, "Beware, for Anna is to become his wife" ; she who had foreseen that if this event happened, then good-bye to all the schemes which Archie Kerrington and this sage Teuton concocted so diligently.

Let it be said in justice to Heliers that she had not brains enough to understand the nature of the game she played. It never occurred to her that her acts were treasonable towards her own country, or likely to be attended by disastrous consequences. The doctor was a scientist and so was the prince. She regarded them as two savants who were rivals, and must hate each other accordingly. Archie Kerrington, on his part, knew perfectly well what he was doing, and was not ashamed to do it. Vice had robbed him years ago of the last shred of his honour. He played for money and valued nothing else in all the world.

These being the circumstances, Kerrington fled from Paris as Heliers believed, her money spent, the fine plot at Dieppe frustrated she knew not how, it is to be understood with what

impatience the driven girl waited for Frederick Walther in her room at the Hôtel Gloucester.

She had seen the doctor for a few hours only since her arrival at Paris, and he had spoken of a visit to the South, but of an almost immediate return. Still convinced that Maurevale would buy the secret of Anna's life at a high price, or that if he would not, then the German Government would be customers, the doctor had indulged in the wildest promises to his dupes.

They were to share substantial plunder and to share it equally. More than this, the old man still clung fondly to the belief that his son Otto would yet be won over and the greater triumph secured. Let him go to Berlin with the plans of Maurevale's torpedo; let him know what progress the prince had made in the science of high explosives, and the day indeed would be won. Never, to be sure, did Frederick Walther set off upon a journey in better spirits or with an optimism so blatant.

If this departure were in some way a triumph the immediate sequel was not so satisfactory. In vain Archie and his dear friend waited for word or telegram which should speak of the great man's return. He left them there in Paris to live upon his promises and to feed upon their hopes. And now this chivalrous youth had deigned to imitate him, and the woman stood alone.

Heliers thought of doing many things that day, but the thing which she actually did was surprising. It was nothing less than to pay a visit to the apartments of the Baron Cortot, which were situated, as the hotel porter ascertained for her, in that fashionable quarter of Paris known as the Avenue d'Eylau. Here, in a charming flat, adorned by a thousand trophies of sport (which the baron had not won), she astonished that grave personage by appearing just two hours after Archie had left her at the Hôtel Gloucester.

Now the baron had been upon the point of going out when his man handed him the card, and if he had been told that an archbishop had sent for him to give him the Apostolic blessing, he could not have been more astonished.

The English lady in his apartments! What an indiscretion, what an intrusion! But then, were not all English men and



women, by implication, quite mad; and was not this daring something of which he had read in the papers devoted to the "highlif" of London? He made sure that it was so; he would hope for no advantage of the circumstance.

His second thoughts declared that she had come there to make a scene on behalf of the young man who was her lover—the truly French idea—and that the sooner he was quit of her the better. This sent him to the little drawing-room with a fine air of dignity which became him well; but hardly had he set eyes upon the lady than her charms asserted themselves, and he bowed and leered with all the art of the veteran.

"My dear mademoiselle, I beg of you do not rise. The honour which you do me is one I could not possibly forget—never, mademoiselle, unto the end of my life. Behold me altogether at your disposition. Consider, I beg of you——"

His bows and flourishes carried him round and round until an abrupt assault upon an ancient arm-chair pulled him up suddenly and brought him to reason. Heliers had need of all her self-possession to keep her gravity, and certainly one less well bred would have laughed in his face. She, poor soul, was wondering what she should say to him, for now that she was here the ridiculous, nay foolish, nature of her intrusion could not be denied.

"Monsieur le Baron," she stammered at last, "I came to explain to you a circumstance which has led, I fear, to a great misunderstanding, and may lead to something graver. Shall I say at once that it concerns my friend, Mr. Kerrington, and the message which you sent to him this morning——?"

She paused, and the baron bowed. "Here it comes," he thought; "she is afraid for the young man and will weep presently. Well, it cannot be helped, and, after all, it is quite English."

"You must know, monsieur," she continued, "that Mr. Kerrington is both a foolish and a ridiculous young man, and that when I picture him fighting a duel with such an experienced soldier as yourself, I really do not know whether to laugh or to cry. On the whole, I am tempted to laugh."

The baron stared aghast. Was it possible—did his eyes deceive him—could he credit his senses when they would have convinced him that this beautiful girl was laughing, yes, laughing at the young man for whom she had come to plead? The truth struck him like a shock from a battery. He sat bolt-upright, and could utter but the most meaningless of exclamations.

“*Comment*, mademoiselle, you laugh?”

“Yes,” she exclaimed, a sense of humour prevailing, “I laugh,” and, suiting the action to the word, she leaned back in her chair and laughed so prettily that the baron would have to number the very ripples on her peach-like cheeks.

Now, laughter is infectious, and Monsieur le Baron Cortot was by no means proof against so desirable an ailment. He, in turn, laughed loud and long, so that the very passers-by in the avenue below might have wondered what it was all about. And this amusement continued for some minutes, first Heliers going off and then the baron.

“Oh, my dear baron, he chose pistols——”

“*Mais*, mademoiselle,” and here a very shout; “he chose horse-pistols.”

“He is most terribly frightened, baron.”

“Mademoiselle, I will make him run all round Paris, I will have a *nouveau cirque*.”

“But you would not kill him, baron, for a few paltry francs?”

The baron became a little serious at this. After all, there was the money to think about. He must be careful what he was doing; for it was by no means certain that if he failed to get the debt out of Kerrington, his new acquaintance, Maurevale of Dara, would redeem that young man's honour.

“Certainly,” he said; “there is the money, and much money, mademoiselle. Do you know that between you, you owe my friend Baltard and myself more than one hundred thousand francs? It is a large sum; we cannot speak lightly of it.”

Heliers at once protested that it was impossible to speak in any other way.

“What I am thinking of, monsieur, is my dear father's

agitation when he comes to write me a cheque for this amount. Oh, if you knew—if you could imagine what a scene there will be! And I am three hundred miles away. Is it not distance which lends enchantment to the view? My poor papa!”

She said this so drolly that the baron was convulsed. After all, her father was an English nobleman, and although Maurevale had said that he had not a penny, the baron thought that he knew English noblemen better than that. What forbade him, then, to make love to a pretty woman, and at the same time to keep her I.O.U.'s in safe custody?

“Ah,” he said, recovering at last, and wiping away the tears of laughter from his face, “you will write to Monsieur le Duc, no doubt—or shall I say that you have already written to him?”

“Of course I have—were he not so ill, his answer would have reached me before; but as it is, what can I say but that I expect it hourly?”

“And if it should disappoint you, mademoiselle, what then?”

She shrugged her shoulders.

“Is our family one that does not pay its gambling debts?” she asked. The baron did not know what to say.

“Ah,” he cried at last, “I have an idea. Your answer, no doubt, will be received to-day. Very well; shall I call at your hotel to hear of it—shall I do myself the honour?”

She raised her eyebrows; a flush crept upon her face.

“No, no!” she exclaimed; “I may be all alone, monsieur.”

“The better reason a thousand times—I will present myself at six o'clock: you shall give me a cup of tea; is it understood, mademoiselle?”

She neither answered yes nor no. The temptation to laugh was irresistible; but her dignity forbade. Then, slowly and deliberately, she left the room, turning as he held the door to say to him—

“But what of my dear friend, Mr. Kerrington?”

The Baron thought that an excellent joke.

“I will be the bogey to drive him out of Paris, mademoiselle.” And he gave a great guffaw, the merry fellow he was.

Heliers had laughed in the Avenue d'Eylau ; but she shed tears upon her return to the Hôtel Gloucester, and they did her credit. Nothing but the direst necessity would have driven her out upon such an errand, and assuredly nothing but the same necessity forbade her the luxury of boxing the baron's ears.

There was an indulgence she yet hoped to enjoy, when he came to her hotel and Dr. Walther had returned.

For, of course, the doctor would return before to-morrow. She had not a doubt of it ; and she thought that his Teutonic wit would be quite capable of dealing with this embroglio.

Meanwhile she was very much alone and very miserable. Her friend, Lady Gladys Carleon, under whose protection she was supposed to be in Paris, had been called to Trouville by the illness of her son—or more possible by the chance of a flirtation with Algy Horton, the captain of artillery who had such a fine opinion of her. There was no one whom Heliers knew at the Embassies in such a month—for was not all the world still at Dieppe or Aix, at Trouville or Etretat ? Certainly she was very much alone, and as though to emphasise her loneliness, what must happen but that a visitor was announced almost immediately she returned to the Hôtel Gloucester, and she heard to her amazement that this was no other than the maid Berthe, the agent of the conspiracy which had failed so disastrously.

Of course she consented to see her. It would have been madness to shut the door upon a woman who had been admitted to the doctor's confidence, and in a way to her own. A certain thrill of apprehension accompanied Heliers to the interview, however. She seemed to anticipate ill news.

Berthe was just a typical Frenchwoman—young, quite pretty, and consistently loquacious. She had eyes of a deep brown tint, and a skin which Southern suns had browned. Her eyelashes were unusually long and becoming, her mouth rather ugly, and her nose a little prominent. But, none the less, men found her attractive, and the number of her admirers had been large.

Usually, it should be said, she was a merry creature, full of laughter and good-humour, and always ready to oblige. To-day

Heliers found her in tears, and when a Frenchwoman weeps the world does not remain in ignorance of the fact.

"Oh, madame, madame—she sobbed, and then looking up with swollen eyes—"but you have read the news, madame?"

"The news of whom?"

"Of monsieur—of the Doctor Walther—do you know that he is dead, madame?"

Heliers did not answer a word for many minutes. She simply sat and stared at the girl as though scrutiny would reveal her secrets.

Dead! Frederick Walther dead! And she was waiting for him here in Paris—her one hope of making a creditable exit from the city; her sheet-anchor. And he is dead! The girl had come to tell her so.

"But, my good creature—come, be reasonable. How do you know that the doctor is dead? Who told you?"

"Oh, madame, madame, it is true—the police tell me so; I know that it is true. Listen, I have waited two, three days for the news—the doctor leave me and say he will come—my money is spent and I have no more. When I see him at Dieppe he say that it is to Strasburg that he go, and if the Prince Maurevale do come to my hotel then shall I send him a telegram. Yesterday afternoon the landlord say I may stay no longer and must go away immediately. What should I do, how shall I say to him—but, no, I telegraph to the doctor and wait, wait, wait all the day for the answer. This morning when I have not slept at all for waiting, I get my answer. Madame, a policeman, a *sergent de ville*, do bring it and tell me news. The doctor have been murdered in Strasburg—last night at ten o'clock. Then what shall I do—what shall I say to monsieur le propriétaire? No, no, I think of you in Paris, where the doctor have spoken of you, and I go to the Hôtel St. James, and here I am, madame—and you shall say if I have done wrong—you shall tell me what to do."

She sobbed bitterly, as though she had lost a father while, in truth, she had merely lost a benevolent old gentleman who promised to find for her a certain faithless lover who used to

meet her at Strealey. Heliers but half comprehended this, nor did she care anything for the girl's grief. The blow had fallen with crushing effect. She could see the room now as a woman at her wits' end, asking the girl a hundred questions and hardly waiting for her spontaneous replies, lamenting. In the end she came to the resolution which would have been better taken at the beginning. It was noth- ing to telegraph to Maurevale and bid him come to her. But how to find him? Would he be still at Launne or had he returned to London? But what the girl would do she did not know. The messenger and she had him long to the Lord. How they would know surely. And as it was they would come. They would come that very hour from Naples speaking of his arrival in that town and advising her of his return.

Heliers sent her telegrams and then she was left. Her curiosity was insatiable. What a calamity! What a disaster! What a catastrophe! What did it all mean? How could she find Walther's tool? And what was Walther's tool? To whom would she turn, to whom could her confidence be bestowed?

Heliers perceived in the new full of danger the situation was. If this girl's secret should not be secured, the whole story of the conspiracy might be made public. Maurevale would then leave the country and be concocted at Dieppe, and of its sequel. It was more than the police in England might get to know. It was a matter of life and death.

She found the maid just as she had left her, crying quietly in a deep chair, and coming away not only by her own will but by the hand of the apartment into which she had been taken. To French women death is ever terrible, and even of a remote fatality. Berthe wept for the death of the man but for herself a great deal.

"How terrible it is. I cannot believe it—I would not believe it at all if the policeman have not told me—he is a good man, a good man, a good gentleman who have so much regard for me—I am glad."

Heliers did not answer this; she was watching the woman's face narrowly and trying to find some hint of the truth there.

"Tell me," she exclaimed presently, drawing a chair near and beginning to think of many things which the maid might be able to tell her, "when did you first meet Dr. Walther?"

"When did I meet him—*mais*, madame—when he come to the castle to see his son—I have met him the many times——"

"Yes, but after that terrible affair—when did you hear of Dr. Walther then?"

Berthe thought about it. "I was in London—I am very interested after what have happen to my poor mistress—I think of the doctor, for he is the only one I have meet. I go to him—he is very kind to me, and speak of my dear mistress—ah, madame, my dear mistress, will I ever forget that beautiful lady that I love so much—will I ever know such a kind friend again?"

Heliers was not moved by the outburst. She allowed the woman to weep a little while in silence, then she said :

"Were you alone in London?"

"*Mais*, madame."

"I asked you if you were alone in London—when you thought of calling upon Dr. Walther?"

Berthe flushed to the very roots of her smooth black hair. Her eyes were downcast, and their lids quivered when she replied :

"I have a friend in London, madame."

"I supposed so. Was he an Englishman?"

"No, madame, he was a Frenchman—Monsieur Jules Farmot." And then she said quite simply, "But he have been a long time in Egypt, madame——"

Heliers started at the intimation. A long time in Egypt—and a Frenchman! A rush of strange ideas came to her brain.

"Did you ever see this man at Highlands, Berthe?"

Berthe's eyes were still upon the carpet when she replied :

"*Jamais de ma vie*—no, never of my life, madame."

"Have you seen him lately, Berthe?"

"Madame, it was because I hope to find my friend again that the doctor send me to Dieppe——"

"And what were you to do at Dieppe, Berthe?"

"I was to have met the prince and to say to him that I shall prove the Captain Ferman to be the assassin."

"But how were you to prove it?"

Berthe shook her head.

"The doctor would say that Monsieur Farnot know—then I see Monsieur Farnot and do tell the prince."

"But this French gentleman—did not you tell me that you were alone in Dieppe?"

"*Mais*, madame, my friend do not come—I am alone. Then I know that the police will have follow me from England—I see them watch me at the hotel—I am frightened—I come to you. Madame, will you tell them? Will you say what is necessaire for me?"

"But, Berthe, what charge do they bring against you?" Berthe looked up; she had ceased to weep.

"I do not know, madame," she said; "I am a good girl; I do not fear anybodies."

"You are quite sure, however, that the police watched you at Dieppe?"

"Quite sure, madame—monsieur le proprietaire say so. I am watched all the day—and now they follow me to Paris."

"To Paris—here, to this hotel?"

"I have say so, madame—here, to this hotel."

Heliers was greatly alarmed. She knew little of police methods, either French or English, and had not wit enough to see that the police followed this girl just because she was an important witness in the case against Captain Ferman—and also because there were those who disbelieved her evidence at the inquest and would know more of it. She had, in fact, been under close observation from the very beginning, an attention bestowed also upon other figures of the drama, notoriously the Count of Fours and Otto Walther.

Heliers knew nothing of this, and the intimation terrified her beyond words. She began to see that the part she had played might bring upon her the gravest accusations of complicity and conspiracy. A woman's instinct already connected this mysterious Jules Farnot with the strange personage whom the doctor had



asked her to see at her house by Wargrave. She had always protested against that interview, but had been unable to resist Walther's insistence and his assurance that a woman could do what would never be done by a man. And she now knew the truth of her own fears.

For if the police had been following the maid Berthe, would not her lover—the man must be her lover—have been followed also? And if they had followed him, would his visit to Wargrave have escaped them? She believed that it would not. The veil dropped suddenly from her eyes and disclosed the pit at her feet. The hour might yet come when the world would say—but Heliers would not think of that.

“Are you staying in Paris, Berthe?”

“With my aunt, madame, at the Rue Verlaine, number five.”

“And you propose to remain here?”

“Until Captain Ferman is tried—for that shall I return to England, according to the oath I have made to the jugé.”

“You remain of the opinion that Captain Ferman is guilty?”

“Madame, how shall I doubt it, when the captain's name was in all her thoughts, in all her prayers? He kill her because he think she love the prince—he do it the night he come to Highlands, and I hear him talking to her—madame, do not you believe it yourself? The captain have kill her because he was the jealous man—I tell the jugé that, and I say it at the trial. He have killed my beloved mistress because he hate her—ah, the assassin, will they not punish him?”

Heliers did not attempt to restrain the maid's outburst; but, finding that she had nothing more to say, she dismissed her at length, having first written down her address, and promised to tell Prince Maurevale of her arrival in Paris directly he returned. When she had gone, with many tears and reiteration of thanks, Heliers went to the window to watch her cross the Place Vendôme—and, sure enough, a young fellow in a dark straw hat and a sombre travelling suit immediately began to follow her, and continued to do so until the Rue St. Honoré hid the couple from view. There could no longer be any doubt. The police had Berthe under surveillance, and, it might be, would even yet arrest her.

So grave a possibility drove a woman, already at her wits' end, almost to distraction. Heliers hid nothing of the truth from herself. If the maid were arrested, out would come the whole conspiracy in which she had played so frivolous a part. Not only would the story of this mysterious Jules Farnot and his visit to Wargrave be told, but also the hurried journey to Paris and its intentions. What would a critical world think of such a thing? Would it not say that possibly one was as guilty as the other? She believed that it might come to that.

To give her credit for what little honesty she possessed, it must be said that Heliers had never doubted Jack Ferman's guilt. She believed that he had killed Anna Maclain because of some old love story in India or Cairo, and she did not see why she should not profit by this story if her wit could discover it. Others would do so if she did not—and, after all, Maurevale was very rich, and owed her some recompense for her friendship and its attendant flirtations. More than this, it had never been her intention to trade upon the dead woman's secrets except in so far as they concerned the prince's inventions and her friend's desire to get hold of them. They, she thought, were fair game, and she had schemed consistently to wheedle the truth out of a man who was supposed to be unable to resist a pretty woman.

Had not Walther told her that Prince Maurevale of Dara had invented the most deadly torpedo in all the world, and that he would pay £5000 to know how the thing worked? What woman could have resisted such a tempting lure? Why, the very pursuit of the secret was a pleasure of itself, and caused her wild days of excitement and sleepless nights.

And now it had brought her to this—this isolation in a Paris hotel—this flight of the one man upon whom she had counted; debts, difficulties, a hopeless sense of loneliness and despair such as afflicts a foreigner without money in Paris. Beyond all, it threatened to bring upon her the watchful eye of the police at no distant day.

The police! To such a woman, schooled in the high places of the world, the very name suggested the ultimate degradation.

She who had drawn her skirts to let the vulgar pass; who

had looked down upon the common life from the altitudes which the elect peopled; who had moved in an atmosphere of tradition and stately luxury; she to hear the word police! Surely this was the ultimate humiliation. It needed but their entry to the hotel to complete all. She was convinced that they would come.

The long afternoon passed in alternate moods of reckless daring and the most profound despair. She went out about five o'clock and drove for an hour in the Bois in a carriage supplied by the hotel, and worthy of its name. The desert city, the famous avenues, now thronged by voyageurs of the "circle Cook," did nothing to reassure her—for her own world was not here, and if she would seek it, she must hasten to Homburg, to Marienbad, or to the watering places of the North. When she returned, just as the sun was setting, she hurried through the great corridor of the Hôtel Gloucester as though observation were a peril.

She went at once to her room, telling herself that the ridiculous Baron Cortot would present himself at the hotel during the afternoon, and that she would be compelled to receive him. Her promise to meet this man had been the maddest act of a mad day, and one which now afflicted her with the most profound despair. What could come of it but flimsy protestations of a flimsy passion, and a response as direct and provocative?

Heliers was perfectly ready to tell the man that she never wished to see him again in any city of the universe—and that as for making public the story of their little game of cards, he might shout it from the house-tops if he were so disposed. What the result would be, she had not an idea. But the man was a scoundrel; and when a woman fights a scoundrel alone—then is her womanhood no safe armour.

The fellow had said "six o'clock," but six o'clock came and went and there was no news of him. The clock chimed the quarter when a servant opened the door and carried in a letter—but so silently that Heliers cried out aloud when she heard him, and then flushed crimson at so ridiculous a betrayal.

The note proved to be just a scrawl from her friend, the Lady Gladys, saying that she really would be in Paris in two days'

time, and begging forgiveness for her delay. "You know, my dear," she wrote, "that I really have not been able to travel these last days, and I am sure you are getting on very well without me if Archie is there."

Heliers put the note down, and began to change her dress. Her maid Forest, a stern, gloomy Scotchwoman, from whom all the wonders of the East would not have drawn a single exclamation, noticed her mistress's abstraction and ventured a comment which was ill received. Much that had happened these latter weeks had puzzled the good Forest sorely, and now affairs appeared to have come to a crisis. All her hints, however, were lost upon her mistress, who dressed as one in a dream, and was dreaming still when she went down to dinner.

For Archie's flight she cared nothing. His telegram in which he promised an immediate return to the Hôtel Gloucester did not deceive her at all. She knew that there was little chance of seeing the fellow again, and she had small desire to see him. Vaguely she began to long anew for the friendship of an honest man—of a man who would command and compel her obedience. But it might be too late for all that. Evil tongues had told strange tales of Constance Heliers these many years, and would hardly be stilled at the eleventh hour. She could have no hope but of her own wit—her resources seemed quite exhausted.

They awoke her at ten next morning to say that there was a telephone message from the Hôtel Ritz, and that it demanded an immediate answer. For a moment her fears of yesterday returned and set her heart beating wildly.

Whence had the message come—and was it from the detestable baron? She had not caught the words "Hôtel Ritz," and the maid repeated it.

"From his Highness Prince Maurevale, my lady; he has returned to Paris, and would see you immediately."

She sank back upon the pillow, and burst into a passion of tears. Surely the worst was over.

## CHAPTER XXXVII

### THE BARON IS SATISFIED

MAUREVALE wore a smoking suit of crimson twill, and had a cigarette between his lips when Lady Constance entered his private sitting-room at the Ritz. He apologized so charmingly for summoning her and appealed with such boyish candour to her pity that all the dignity of her distress vanished in a moment, and she remembered but his friendship of the olden days.

"I have just come through from Strasburg," he said quietly. "Stella is with me, and we are leaving by the two o'clock train for London."

She was sagacious enough to make no comment on the statement, but the irony of it proved irresistible. What a bungler that old Walther had been. And he had paid for his bungling with his life.

"You come from Strasburg," she said, "then you know all the news?"

"As you say, I know all the news. Under other circumstances I might speak of it as dreadful news. But I am unable to do so. Your friend Walther is dead—murdered by a man who came to your house at Wargrave upon the night I visited you there. I cannot say that I pity him. He deserved his fate, for he was a scoundrel."

She shuddered at his coldness. Walther murdered! And by the man who came to her house. It was inconceivable!

"How do you know all this?" she asked in a hollow voice. "Who told you the name of the murderer?"

He crossed the room and stood by the window.

"My common sense. There were two in Strasburg seeking

a woman's secret. Another woman had been there before them, and she had done the work they came to do. So two of the thieves fell out, and one murdered the other. There could be no other explanation—and, since it interests you, I will show you the picture of the man."

He opened a despatch case on the table, and took several things from it—a bundle of telegrams, a little glass bottle which provoked a smile; lastly, the print of the photograph which had reached him at Strasburg.

"Do you know that face?" he asked her, passing the picture. She trembled while she held it.

"I have seen the man before."

"Where have you seen him?"

"In London—once—at Dr. Walther's house."

"Did you ever see him at Highlands?"

She shook her head.

"Never at Highlands."

Maurevale was satisfied.

"Then you are less fortunate than the maid Berthe, who, I think, called upon you yesterday at the Hôtel Gloucester?"

She flushed with choler, but did not dare to remonstrate.

"Oh," she exclaimed, "am I to understand, then, that I am watched?" He would not deny it.

"We are all watched, my dear lady. There is not a man nor a woman who was under my roof at Highlands when poor Anna died who is not a *persona grata* to the police both of London and of Paris at this moment. Do not complain of your good fortune. Had they passed you by it might have been serious—for the world would have talked. As it is, they know."

"Know—what do they know?"

"That a charming woman has some undesirable friends, and that she is about to turn her back upon them."

He left the observation where it was, and diverted the conversation cleverly. In his hand was the small glass phial which he had taken from the despatch box. It seemed to afford him considerable amusement.

"Look at that," he exclaimed, averting her angry protest and

riveting her attention instantly. "That phial contains excellent water of the Lausanne district—but it was put into a glass which had not been properly washed. Do you know that I had a dreadful nightmare because of that glass—upon my word, I thought some one was trying to poison me. And it proved to be the maddest chimera. Morenceau declares it to be absolutely harmless. I might have drunk a quart of it and done myself no harm."

It was her turn to be ironical.

"Does this concern my friends—is it also part of the sermon?"

He put the phial down and crossed the room to her side.

"My dear Constance," he exclaimed, "it does concern one of them—myself. Will you believe that?"

She was very pleased; hope gave colour anew to her cheeks, and she looked up at him with grateful eyes.

"I have always wished to believe it—what then?"

"Ah, then the parable. Here am I frightened out of my wits because I discover a glass of water upon a dressing-table and think that I hear footsteps upon a verandah. The water proves to be quite harmless—the footsteps to be those of an undergardener who would not wake me. All my theories are dashed to the ground. I must begin anew, from the very beginning. Can I then complain of the fact—should I not rather say that a greater than I turned my sleep to this purpose, and that the hand of Almighty God directed me? If that be so, admit the application of the parable elsewhere—the beginning anew; the end of the old dispensation—and friendship. Is it so, or was I wrong to send for you?"

She did not answer him at once, swaying slightly in her seat and seeming lost for an expression which should not humiliate her. This was vain, however, and anon she said as one speaking in a reverie:

"Does the answer to that rest with me?"

"It rests with you absolutely."

"Amnesty and understanding——"

"I said friendship."

"I am not worthy of your friendship, Maurevale."

"Permit me to say it—every woman is worthy of a man's friendship when she is honest with him."

"Then you doubt my intentions?"

"I do not doubt them—I am sure of them. You have served hard taskmasters; now you will serve a friend."

"How can I serve him?"

"Then you are willing?"

"Oh," she cried, "if you knew how willing."

He liked her enthusiasm, and, drawing up a chair, he sat beside her.

"First," he said, "of your own affairs."

"Ah, there's a volume."

"Not at all. I want to speak to you about the amiable Baron Cortot. Well, he is fond of big-game hunting, so I sent him to Africa. You will never see him again. His friend Baltard has a fancy to visit America, and sails for New York by the next steamer. As for Mr. Kerrington, who, I must suppose, has gone to Homburg to try to borrow money of his uncle, Lord Wenderham, he would have done much better to remain here. There is another of whom you will hear, and speedily—shall I tell you who that is?"

She assented with a nod—for herself she had not the remotest idea.

"It is the murderer of Frederick Walther—the man named Michel Ghika, whom I found at your house at Wargrave. He is the friend in question."

She was quite too astonished to answer him. For the moment it seemed that she had been invited to the hotel to suffer the profoundest humiliation of them all; but a glance at the prince's face forbade her to think so. And yet the mystery of it!

"Why will the man come here?" she asked, with a hudder.

"Because if it is as I suppose, and his friend Tahir Pasha refuses him money, he will come to you for it."

"To me—for money—that would be grotesque."



"But he will come nevertheless. You may ask me—it would be natural—why you should not in that case immediately call in the police and have him arrested, since he is wanted in Strasburg upon a charge of murder. Let me tell you that if you did so, the story of a good woman's life would be blazoned all over Europe in three days' time, and you would not be one penny the better. That's what sent your friend Walther to Strasburg—to keep the story from the German secret-service agents, that he might sell it to them afterwards. There are just three people in Europe who might be tempted to betray us, and one is the man who is coming to you. So, you see, I am entirely in your hands—you will receive this Michel Ghika when he arrives, and you will give him one hundred pounds and this message. Do I ask too much of you?—does our friendship justify me?"

"It certainly does—if I have the courage. But I shall be dreadfully nervous."

"My dear lady, I know you too well for that. There is no one in Europe who has better brains for this kind of work when you choose to use them. Remember, it is for me now. Walther is dead—but I remain your friend. There are few, I think, who would not wish to have that said of them—Maurevale is her friend. Very well, then—you undertake the commission?"

She thought it over, her quick brain debating the various issues with lightning-like rapidity. Certainly, she had no other friend left in Paris, and she could not fail to profit by such an association. Maurevale's generosity was known far and wide; she would be a fool to forget that.

"And if I do—the message?"

"You will hardly forget it, but in case you should do so, here it is written down for you already."

He passed her a slip of paper, and she read the words aloud:

*"The child is at the House of the Five Green Shutters, in England."*

Neither spoke for some minutes. The woman, perhaps, reflected upon the irony of circumstance which revealed so dramatically the master secret long pursued.

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THE BARON IS SATISFIED

There was a child, then, and Anna's child! And for knowledge of this Frederick Walther lay dead in Strasburg, and she herself had passed through the valley of humiliation in Paris. But more wonderful still, the secret was told by the man to whom they wished to sell it. The truth dazed her—she paid silent homage to the genius which had unravelled this mystery; her very tone expressed something akin to awe.

"Then you wish Michel Ghika to go to England?" she asked in a low voice.

The prince answered her with head averted.

"Yes, I wish Michel Ghika to go to England"

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

### THE EVE OF THE TRIAL

LONDON had forgotten the death of Lady Anna during the holiday season; but remembered it when October came. This was to be the supreme sensation of the autumn, and society flocked back to town as to some function which could not possibly be missed. There had been nothing like it for years, the gossips said. You could not attend any gathering at which conversation did not soon come round to the mystery.

Men discussed little else at their clubs, women at their "afternoons."

Jack Ferman had been one of the most popular young officers in London, and alike amongst soldiers and civilians he found warm sympathisers. The general verdict seemed to be that he could not be guilty; or that if he were guilty, then he were assuredly mad. None doubted that he had been violently in love with Anna, and that she had refused to marry him. But with all this the mystery remained—how and when had he given her the poison, and how could the prosecution bring it home to him?

Here the police court proceedings had helped the amateur detective but little. Local magistrates heard the case, and under no circumstances would they have kept it from a jury.

The evidence seemed at once clear and perplexing. Ferman had been seen at Highlands immediately previous to the murder; one of his letters had used the amazingly compromising expression, "I would sooner see you dead than that this should happen." He was supposed to have been the last man who saw her alive—and yet he made no mention of her death.

If it were suicide, as the charitable supposed, assuredly had this poor woman been determined in her purpose.

For had she not in this case employed the rarest poisons, so rare and subtle that they perplexed even the scientists of the Home Office, and left the prosecution wondering how even her assassin procured them.

A modern woman who commits the terrible sin of self-murder either acts with cool deliberation or the most reckless madness. Had Anna Maclain determined to take her own life, most certainly she would have profited by her knowledge of modern drugs, and have taken one of those many preparations of morphia by which death is won so sweetly.

Moreover, it seemed to be established beyond doubt that she entertained no such idea, and was the last woman in all the world who would have made an end of herself. Witty, gay, brimful of life, the admired of every salon, the friend of the greatest, what sudden tragedy could have come upon her life to turn her thoughts to death?

Did not her very correspondence speak of approaching engagements, of hopes and promises and the pleasures of the hour? If it were possible to speak of trouble, none the less her letters spoke of it hopefully. "All will be well," she had written to Ferman; "don't worry yourself, Jack, and, above all, don't worry me."

And this was the woman who killed herself, according to the evidence, a few minutes after she had seen Ferman secretly at Highlands Castle upon the night of the murder.

This latter statement promised to be the turning-point of the trial. Ferman would answer neither aye nor nay when it was said that he had seen Anna on the Tuesday evening. The maid swore as roundly that he had done so to her knowledge. Cynics said that Sir Horace Rupert would have a fine chance here; but others admitted that the outlook was not very promising. How came it that Ferman could not prove his statements? He had no witnesses to swear he was in London during the critical hours. His statement that he was alone and indisposed was openly mocked. And if that fell to the ground, woe betide him!

Of course there were a hundred amateurs ready to solve the whole thing; and these wrote every day to the lawyer, for the defence, and to Sir Horace Rupert.

The oddest suppositions were made. Men suggested in all seriousness that the poison might have been already in the boat; that it might have been in the paint; that the poor lady had not really died of poison at all, but of a mysterious malady which defied the faculty. Others affirmed as soundly that the maid Berthe knew too much, and that the sooner the police put her in the dock the better.

A few continued to believe that the French count had something to do with it, and suggested that had he not been under the protection of the French Government—a man of high place and ancient family—he would have been arrested. They were quite unable, however, to say why he should have murdered the unhappy woman, or how a murderer could be so very careless as to leave such damning evidence of his guilt—if guilty he were—behind him.

All this discussion, this controversy, helped the general excitement. Men said the trial would be the greatest for twenty years past, and when they heard that Mr. Justice Nonagen was to be the judge upon the circuit, they pitied Ferman the more. For was not this tearful old man the most impossible of all impossible judges, and were not his screeds against the social follies of the day the most ridiculous which even the law had indicted?

Of course every one who was anybody at all meant to go to Reading. Rooms had been engaged at all the hotels since the last weeks in July. Caversham was to have its parties, and the famous hotel at Sonning would reap a rare harvest. Women spoke of water picnics despite the month; and the most venturesome of the youths engaged launches to run up from Henley or down from Goring and Wallingford.

Such was the state of affairs upon what the newspapers called the Eve of the Trial, although as a matter of fact the Assizes were not to be opened for three days. It was generally known at this time that Maurevale had returned to London and was at

his little house in Park Lane ; while the other witnesses were at the disposal of the police, especially Arthur Blandy, the steward, and the maid, Berthe. The only one who was missing appeared to be the old Count of Fours, said to be lying seriously indisposed in Paris—a fact which loosened many a tongue, and inflamed opinion as nothing had done from the beginning.

This rumour reached London upon the night Sir Horace Rupert called, for the second time that day, at Maurevale's house in Park Lane and asked anxiously for the prince.

To his great content the footman now announced that his Highness was at home, and begged the great advocate to come into the private study. It was just nine o'clock, and the prince was alone in the house. Sir Horace thought him much changed, and did not hesitate to say so.

"My dear fellow, have you been ill?"

Maurevale replied by indicating the great arm-chair and pushing forward a box of cigars.

"Every one is ill when he has the time to remember the fact. I have been very busy, so busy that I am hardly conscious of my own existence. Sit down and let us talk about it. I can give you just an hour—then I must answer that telegram."

He tapped a folded telegraph form on the table before him, and smiled as one who would hide his own anxieties beneath the shallow mask of a jest. The advocate, however, had no doubt that the telegram was of great importance—he would have given a good deal to have read it.

"Of course you have read about Sir William's report from the Home Office?" he began, eyeing the paper covetously, but hesitating to ask a further question. "They say there never was such a case. Whoever poisoned that poor lady used the oddest mixture of drugs that could occur to the mind of man. Don't you think that points to insanity? I do, and it's half my case."

"Then you really have a case, Sir Horace?"

The question was asked with a quiet cynicism which would have amazed the lawyer very much at any other time ; but he

was too anxious to hear what Maurevale had to say to quarrel with him to-night.

"Have I a case?" he exclaimed, "why, the very best—or the worst, as the jury take it. If they cannot prove that my man was in the boat with her, I don't think they'll prove anything at all. The question is, can they prove it?"

Maurevale indicated that he followed him, then he said:

"But that is not the line you are going to take at the trial?"

"Not the line I am going to take?"

"I think not—when you have heard my evidence."

"But that's just what I came here to get. I know you have been half over the Continent these last three months, and the solicitors hint that you have learned a good deal. Then why isn't it in the brief—why is it kept from me? Surely, my dear fellow, you are not against us?"

Maurevale smoked quietly for a few minutes. Then unlocking a drawer upon the right-hand side of his writing-table, he took a packet from it.

"I meant to send you this by special messenger to-day," he said. "Then I heard that you had called. A similar document goes to-night to the counsel for the prosecution and to the judge. Read it when you get home; it is the story of Anna Maclain's life."

"The story of her life—good God, another story!"

"Do the solicitors know nothing of it?"

"Oh, they think they know everything. She was in Egypt and in India. In Egypt she met Jack Ferman, and, if the whole truth is to be told, she bolted with him to Ceylon. That's the damning testimony. She bolted with him, and then left him. When he came back, naturally he would have resumed the old relations if he had found her willing. But she was not willing, and so the mischief began. Anyway, that's how Wilson, who is prosecuting, will put it—and a pretty case to answer. We can't even suggest a sudden quarrel. Don't you see that this is no tiff, or that sort of thing, but a determined passion lasting over many years? If you were in the box and Wilson were putting the case to you, I don't think you'd hesitate long.

I shouldn't, and that's candid. And yet they expect me to get the man off, to work a miracle and all that sort of thing. Now, my dear Maurevale, do you really envy me?"

"I may be tempted to envy you before the trial is over. Read that document very carefully, even at the neglect of your brief. You will find it some account of an old friend, one Tahir Pasha, whose name was mentioned in this room the last time you were here. There is a very fine fellow, Sir Horace—I will introduce you to him some day."

"You will introduce me to him?"

"Certainly, I will introduce you to him."

The advocate stared as though some one had struck him a blow. The document which the prince had delivered to him lay in a limp hand; he was tempted for the moment to believe that all this was a jest, and that his friend played with him.

"But," he stammered, "we are told that he is dead."

"Who told you that?"

"I don't know—Sir Malcolm seems to think so. Anyway, how does this man count? He was an Egyptian soldier with whom some of the Englishwomen in Cairo were in love five or six years ago. We know that certainly—but what follows after? And why write it down for such an old friend as myself? Why not a little more frankness? I repeat, you are not against us, Maurevale?"

"You know that I am not. I have written Anna's story for you and for the others that you may be its keepers. If you deem it necessary to blacken the memory of one of the kindest of women, I am unable to stay your hands. You, I know, will not consider that story necessary to your case; I am hoping that neither Wilson nor Nonagen will adopt any other course. It is the story of a mere child's mad infatuation for a singularly handsome man—but it is not the story of her murder. That I shall hand to you on the morning of the trial. Such evidence as I possess is good, but I have yet to make it overwhelming. Possibly you may say to me when you hear it, that I should have communicated both with you and with the prosecution before.



I differ from you there. Just as the whole world has heard a brave fellow accused, so shall they hear him vindicated. That is my message to-night. Believe me, my dear Sir Horace, there is nothing more."

He rose as one who would indicate politely that the interview was terminated. Sir Horace himself was too astounded, in a way too affronted, to utter even a remonstrance. He had come there to discuss with an old friend all the subtleties of the most subtle case which had ever engaged his intellect. And here he was dismissed like a schoolboy; rewarded with a bulky packet which might contain the truth or might contain a fairy story. Surely it was incomprehensible.

"You say that you know how Anna Maclain died?"

"I am perfectly aware how."

"And you will not tell me?"

Maurevale smiled.

"I will tell you when all my witnesses are in England," he said.

Sir Horace gave it up and left the house reluctantly. To an acquaintance met in his club, he confessed candidly that Jack Ferman's case was in a poor way, and that, if any testimony hanged him, it would be that of his friends. Then he went into a quiet corner of the smoking room and opened the mysterious document. It was very late when he ceased to read—and he had hardly put the papers down when he took them up again.

Whence had this strange story come? By what magic had a master intellect woven the threads into this perfect whole? The advocate could not answer. He recalled the plain and straightforward story told by the police; the direct nature of the evidence; the simplicity of the issues. And he shook his head. The truth, it appeared, would not help him. He saw nothing in this story which should save his client from the gallows. There was no hint of murder.

The prince, meanwhile, had turned to those occupations in which the advocate interrupted him, and found them engrossing. That fabled telegram—how often he read it. And what a world of dark suggestion and earnest hope it revealed.

*"Michel Ghika left Paris at eleven o'clock this morning."*

And upon this, how significant that brief note delivered to him but an hour previously from the hand of his secretary Paul.

*"Michel Ghika is in London at the St. Pancras Hotel."*

The man in London; the assassin of Walther; this mysterious Roumanian whose sister was the wife of Tahir Pasha—this man in London ready to sell his secrets to any who would buy them—if any there were, now that irony had robbed him of his best customer.

Earnest as were his anxieties, this phase of circumstance could not but flatter Maurevale's vanity and stand in a measure at his triumph. He had told the German, Herr Kreissman, that he would never return, and his word would be fulfilled. For how could even the secret-service agents of Germany trade with an assassin, or buy information from one whom their own police were seeking?

A mad act of vengeance in the Wilhelmstrasse had destroyed this intricate conspiracy in a moment, devastated it, mocked its originators. And it had set him, Maurevale, free as nothing else could have done.

If this were so, what forbade that he should go at once to Scotland Yard and say: "Here is a man wanted for a murder in Strasburg—arrest him until you can communicate with the German police?" He knew such a course would be fatal to all his schemes, an act of treachery towards Ferman and Anna; the very surest road to that publicity he would have given so much to avoid.

No, indeed, his must not be the hand which arrested Ghika; his must not be the hand which avenged Frederick Walther. And if not his, whose, then? The night would tell him—the night of chance and of mystery—the fateful hour for which he had schemed since he fled from Strasburg with the murdered man's cry in his ears. The night would tell him—and after the night the grave.

## CHAPTER XXXIX

### AFTER THE NIGHT THE GRAVE

THE October night felt chill and raw, with a wraith of fog above the marshes, and a cloudless sky, wonderful in stars. This was the season of the year when the hand of winter is put out to touch the earth, and often withdrawn as quickly at the bidding of that kindly saint whom the churches hymn at Martinmas.

Frost holds the land by night; the glow of summer is on the fields by day; there are white mists above the waters, and the flutter of rare wings drawn to the marshy places from the sterner north.

Some would have it that the dirge of the dying year is sung at such a season rather than in drear December. Gloom is the note of it and the sadness of farewell.

Upon such a night came Michel Ghika to the town of Ely, astonishing the officials at the sleepy station, and causing some heads to turn as he pushed his way to the street, despite the yawning entreaties of belated porters. Men remembered afterwards that they had thought him to be "a little queer"; while one lady declared very positively that he was a madman.

He had travelled from St. Pancras by the train which leaves at nine fifty-five, arriving in Ely shortly after midnight, whence he set out upon an errand at which none of those who discussed him could so much as guess. It remained for a humble porter to declare that he had seen the stranger before, and presently to insist that the fellow had then asked him the way to the marshes in the very queerest tongue man ever spoke. But for an obliging curate who had once been at Boulogne, and who volunteered to interpret, they would have got on "nowhow."

This remembrance did something to satisfy a common curiosity and to silence the bumpkins' tongues. Evidently this queer fellow had friends or acquaintances in one of the farms over there by the marshes; but it was odd that he carried no luggage and arrived at such a late hour of the night. Perhaps, had it not been so late and every one so willing to get to his bed, some one would have thought it worth while to mention the matter to the police. As it was, no one said any more about it, and Michel Ghika went off as he listed.

He walked fast because of the coldness of the night, stopping by here and there to listen for any footsteps upon the fog-bound road behind him, and bending his head instinctively whenever a shadow fell upon his path. The bitter cold searched his very bones despite the fur-lined coat he wore and the heavy wrap about his throat. He carried no stick, and his hands were thrust deep into his pockets as he walked.

Possibly the more wonderful thing was the way he kept to the road he sought, and his unerring instinct for locality. Now and again, to be sure, he would come to a halt at a cross-road and examine every by-path, just as a dog might have done. But invariably he took the right path in the end, and when he came out upon the great marsh itself he quickened his step as though already sure of his destination.

He sought a house with five green shutters, and he knew that it lay not very far from the inn which Cambridge oarsmen frequent when they pull their boats from the university town to the cathedral city of Ely. If any considerable check were met with, it was at the turning which led from the broader high-road to the narrow track by which you gain the Marsh House Farm. This turning perplexed him considerably. He was twice down a cul-de-sac, and once went near to falling headlong into the great dyke itself. In the end he came upon the right path almost by accident, and following it with a firm tread, stopped presently, as a hound which marks its quarry but will not stir a step lest it be winded. For the House of the Five Green Shutters was but twenty paces from him; and one light burned brightly in an upper window.

It was nearly two o'clock of the morning by this time; the mists a little drifted by the sudden stirring of the north wind, the heavens just flecked by a handbreadth of mackerel cloud which promised half a gale on the morrow. None the less, a profound stillness reigned above the marsh. The very rabbits which scuttled away at Ghika's approach might have been shod with velvet, so ghostly was their rapid flight.

He had crossed Europe, had dared the police of Paris and of London, to reach this destination; and now he stood at its doors frightened that a light should speak of waking sentinels, and yet more resolute than ever in his purpose.

Who guarded the house, and in how far would they be able to oppose themselves to his determination? All his information pointed to the fact that it was occupied by an old Frenchwoman of the name of Prevost, and that with her was the child whose possession might mean so much to him. If a man shared the vigil, it would be that tawny Englishman whom Ghika had seen before during the summer months, but did not desire to see again—the prince's steward, Arthur Blandy. For him he cared nothing at all—the stake was too great that a human life should count.

He opened the crazy garden gate, and stepped within. A harsh sound from a rusty hinge brought a curse to his lips and a hand to the hip-pocket where he carried his revolver. He had hoped to accomplish his purpose with one blow struck, it might be with a woman's loud cry and a child's whimpering; but that there should be a brawl in the open, a warning uttered where even this remote countryside might hear it, had not been in his reckoning.

The minutes passed and found him still irresolute. At one moment, a sound from afar broke upon his ear and filled him with a new apprehension. He thought that he heard the hum of a motor-car across the marsh, and was so sure of his idea that he stepped over the low wooden fence and stood for a while in the road to wait for the motor's approach. In the end he came to believe that he had heard a train and not a car, and, when the marsh sent him the echo of a distant railway whistle, he was quite convinced that this was the true explanation. So he returned to

the garden once more, avoiding the gate with the rusted hinge, and stepping over the low fence to the soft mould of the flower beds beyond. Then, without further hesitation, he crept up to the front door of the house and listened.

Not a sound came from within, not a sound but that of the ancient clock which ticked drowsily as though it also slept through the witching hours.

This discovery put new heart into Michel Ghika, and he began to spy about for a means of entry which would not betray him, a window ready to his hand or a door that would yield. Perhaps it was a little ominous that the shutters of the ground floor were closed and barred, and the door itself obviously bolted. Formerly, when he had come to this place he had found this same door yield readily to his touch; but now it withstood him, and seemed to say that the old Frenchwoman might not be as unprepared as he had hoped.

This was not in his calculations; but the fact did not dismay him, and, passing round to the back of the house, he remembered the kitchen window and made sure that it would suit his purpose.

He was no trained burglar, but just a subtle Eastern with the tread of a cat and the cunning of a fox. Quite convinced that he would succeed, he imagined himself scudding across these marshes presently to some wayside station whence he could get to Harwich and the Continent. Fear of the issue did not trouble him at all. The East had made him a fatalist, and the stake he played for was beyond all question momentous. Why, then, should life count at all in such a game? Michel Ghika had courage beyond ordinary, and there was but one man in all the world whom he feared. Ironical, then, that he should stand at the door of the house wherein that man waited for his coming.

He found the kitchen readily enough, and examined the window with crafty fingers. To his surprise he discovered this also to be shuttered and barred, and even the small opening in the wall of the adjoining wash-house had a wooden cover to defend it. The door alone remained and attracted him by its flimsy

structure and ancient appearance. Convinced that he might force it without effort, he took a heavy iron jemmy from his pocket and inserting it in the crack above the lock, began to apply steady pressure.

The moments which followed were long and trying. More than once Ghika ceased to work, and started back as though some sound upon the road warned him of his danger. Reassured he would continue to prise the door, panting at his work as one unaccustomed to manual labour, and clumsy above all at such labour as this. A trained cracksman would have laughed at him, so maladroit were his efforts. Nor did the silence of the night help him at all. Every sound of strain and stress echoed ominously upon the still air; he wondered that those within had not discovered him long ago; but was not quick-witted enough to guess the truth. When the door yielded at last with a great sound of rending wood and bursting locks, he stood still for many minutes waiting for the challenge; for the voice which should cry "Who is there?" But no voice was to be heard, and, fearing with a new apprehension that his search might be vain after all, he entered the kitchen and so gained the hall beyond.

Step by step, pausing at every effort, listening intently for the lightest sounds, Ghika climbed to the landing of the little house, and looked about for the door of that room wherein, but a few months gone, he had seen a child's cot and so had learned the truth of Anna Maclain's life.

It was very dark upon the landing, and for a while he was baffled; but anon he recognised the door, and trying the handle he discovered it to be unlocked.

This was the critical moment of the night, and such Ghika felt it to be. Many times he paused, afraid to enter the room and yet unwilling to return; his fingers played caressingly with a knife he carried in his belt, and he withdrew it from the sheath at last and took a firm hold of the haft; then he appeared to find his courage and, opening the door boldly, he advanced toward the place where the cot had been--then stood as abruptly with a muttered oath on his lips.

What had alarmed him? For a little he would have been quite unable to say; but he had the idea in his head that a light had flashed in the room, not, as might have been expected, from the landing behind him, but from the garden below. Clearly he saw it, the bright rays striking through the half-closed jalousies and showing the emptiness of the room and the vanity of his quest. The latter was now unmistakable, for there is a sense of emptiness as of fulness—and Ghika had been almost sure that the room was untenanted the moment he set foot in it. Now the mysterious light revealed the fact beyond dispute, and was in itself the greater concern. Whence had it come—what did it portend?

He walked to the window, and, believing that he had nothing to fear within the house, he opened the shutters and looked out. His astonishment was great to see a large covered motor-car at the garden gate, and a chauffeur who was busy lighting up the acetylene lamps. Ghika had the threads of this story at his fingers' ends, and it may be that the presence of the car reassured him. Another, then, was abroad upon a similar errand—and who could that other be but Maurevale of Dara. He rejoiced in the opportunities this meeting would afford him, and determined to come to terms with this enemy there and then. The prince should pay a heavy price, he thought, for the secret of the house. Why, then, not pay it immediately?

He thrust the knife again into its sheath, and, having touched the pocket wherein he carried his revolver, he made ready to retrace his steps and meet the owner of the car upon the threshold. This was a journey which he was not destined to accomplish, for hardly had he turned about when another light was flashed upon his face, and no sooner had his eyes recovered from its blinding rays than he recognised the man who carried it, and uttered such a cry as had not been heard in that house from the beginning.

Tahir Pasha—for it was he who carried the lamp—stood like a figure of bronze in the doorway, neither moving nor speaking, but watching his enemy with an Oriental's burning eyes, and seemingly devoured by a passion of animosity which paralysed





# MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

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his acts. A splendid man, never had he stood to greater advantage than when he barred the door to the assassin who had come to murder his child that the ultimate vengeance of the revolutionaries might be accomplished. Silent and terrible, he was the one antagonist in all Europe whom Michel Ghika dreaded the last he would have desired to meet in that lonely house. And he must pass by this man to win freedom—he must accept the ordeal, and instantly, or those terrible fingers would be at his throat.

He stood swaying, dazzled by the light and wholly irresolute. Not without courage of a kind, he found his courage impotent against this obsession, this belief that Tahir Pasha had come there upon a mission of vengeance and that it was fated that he should die.

He had always feared this terrible Egyptian, had ever acknowledged him for his master even when the dens of Paris stupefied his faculties, and the revolutionaries had passed him as a "man who was"; but to-night, in this lonely house, Ghika's dread became almost a phase of madness. No thought of a contest, no memory of knife or pistol helped him in that awful moment; but seeing only the avenger and knowing that the vengeance would be terrible, his heart froze within him, and the very blood seemed to dry up in his veins. What a death to die he thought, the death that Tahir would contrive for him.

The tension of the scene endured a full minute; then passed as swiftly. Speaking in a low tone and in Egyptian, Tahir asked why Ghika had come to that house and what he would do there. When he was unanswered, he repeated the question in a louder voice, advancing across the room step by step and holding the light high above his head that every movement might be witnessed by his cowering enemy. Ghika, in his turn, essayed to speak, but discovered that his lips would utter no word. Driven and desperate, he fumbled for his revolver and tried to draw it from his pocket; but his hand had hardly been lifted when the lamp was dashed out and the room left in black darkness. Then he knew that death had laid a finger upon it, and dreading the unseen presence, shrinking from that terrible figure, he uttered a

loud cry and flung himself from the window to the garden below. At the same moment a shrill whistling was to be heard, and the cry of man to man across the marshes—and so Michel Ghika knew that a trap had been set for him and that the police were upon his heels.

He had fallen upon a bed of mould beneath the window—lightly, for the drop was inconsiderable; and no sooner was he on his feet than he scudded away toward the plantation at the rear of the house, hoping thus to gain the open marsh and the shelter of the fog.

Fortune favoured so bold a dash for freedom at the beginning, and although a man tried to close with him as he crossed the garden, Ghika flung him aside with a savage blow, and leaped boldly at the fence which shut the little plantation from the water. Here fortune deserted him; for he tripped at the rail and fell heavily—and when he would have risen, an intolerable pain in his ankle forbade, and he knew that the bone was broken. Thenceforth he lay shuddering, fear assailing him once more, and the figure of Tahir rising as though the mists recreated it in a hundred shapes, and the face of the night made it more ghastly. This man would kill him, and kill him horribly.

He heard the steps of others drawing near, but feared them not at all. Sweat gathered upon his brow; his limbs quaked as with an ague; he listened for the well-known voice as for a sentence of his doom. When at last he heard it, ringing out loudly in command, his resource was at an end, and drawing his pistol with firm fingers, he raised it to his forehead.

The night was ended—and after the night the grave.

Maurevale followed Tahir Pasha to a room upon the upper floor, and there for the first time he looked upon the face of Anna's child. The beauty of it astounded him; the sweetness of the vision shut from his eyes all memory of the garden and its secrets. He bent and kissed the white forehead and left the room as he had come.

Below, in that apartment where the thought of a child first had come to him, where the portrait of Zaida had hung, and old

Madame Prevost had waited through the months of exile, he spoke to the Egyptian of the morrow and of his plans.

"You will take her to Cairo," he said quietly. "Remember that I hold you to account, and that all that money can do shall be done in your name. Henceforth you are a servant of the English, but above all my servant—and as your service is faithful so shall I reward you."

Tahir assented willingly. He was a child in the hands of this strong man who had dragged him from the darkness to the light; who found again the daughter he had lost, and who showed him anew the road to honour and to fortune.

"Your Excellency shall be obeyed in every particular. As to my little girl, I will answer for her welfare. My own life shall not be more precious. God has put this misfortune upon her, and I bow my head to destiny. She will never see the sun, Excellency; she was blind from birth."

"We shall prove that in due course when the physicians of Vienna have seen her. I must ensure their attendance, and, of course, Madame Prevost will accompany you. As for Sabine Ghika, my information leads me to believe that she is returning to her own country. In that case, I will see that she does not leave it again. There is but one thing more to be said, and it is this, the secret of your life shall be kept as the price you pay for amnesty. Let it be broken, and the compact is at an end. Guard it, and I will make you great among your fellows. Is it understood; is that the oath to which we bear witness?"

The Egyptian swore it, his hand uplifted and in his eyes the look of a man who had found his goal and knew not the meaning of retreat. The new day would set him upon the way to his own country, reconciled to the English and about to be received by them.

And with him would go the little daughter he had desired so ardently and had sought so long—the child of the woman he had loved and would remember while he lived.

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## CHAPTER XL

### THE TRIAL IS CONCLUDED

THE Assizes at Reading are often interesting, but invariably picturesque. Possibly there is no more stately Assize Court in the kingdom than the old grey stone building upon the site of the ancient leper-house. Cheek by jowl it stands in the Forburg with that fine old Norman Gate which can have few rivals in the kingdom. And opposite lies the recreation ground—and beyond the prison.

All this is of profound interest to the antiquary, but of small account to those who assemble in the Court at the time of Assize. Human emotions, real and vital, are then the dominant incentive. The mere curiosity which fills the public galleries has the study of mankind at the back of it. People go because they must or because they will—to save or condemn, to pity or despise. A savage desire for justice and vengeance quickens the steps of the few; hope and fear and prayer lead others to the tribunal, before which they tremble and are afraid for those they love.

Here mothers plead for their sons and fathers for their children. Here are faces grown ashen white, the sweat of sorrow, and the muttered cries of despair. Here also is a standing witness to that profound love of justice and of fair-play which animates the British people and will continue to guide them to the end.

There have been few Assizes at Reading about which so much public interest moved, as the one which witnessed the trial of John Philip Ferman for the murder of Lady Anna Maclain.

A mystery which baffled the public intelligence from the beginning; the days but added to it, fathering many stories and permitting that flood of falsehood which attends the notorious event. Never was such shoddy legal nonsense talked; never

were theories more abundant or more ridiculous. The general public believed that Captain Ferman had killed the woman he loved, and stood staunch to its opinion. An inner circle also remained faithful, wondering at its credulity, perhaps, but utterly unable to believe that so fine a soldier had become so dastardly a miscreant.

This faithful minority was amongst the earliest to arrive at Reading. It numbered many idlers who find the occasion novel and to be improved upon. And it flocked to the larger hotels to Sonning and to Caversham, spending the intervening hours upon the inhospitable river, and shuffling the cards long after midnight had struck.

A larger audience was that of the general public, impelled upon the journey by curiosity, and refusing to admit that a fine traitor and sycophancy dictated the journey. These worshipped a lord and lady no less; and among their number were the sportsmen, who remembered that the affair took place in "Maury's" house, and that they must support him. "Good old Maury"—how many times they drank his health at the bars, and with what fervour they recited the story of the races he had won. Nothing, however, was said of those which he had lost, for thus is the sportsman's way.

Reading itself hastened to welcome this immigration and to share the excitement of the day.

The shopkeepers did a fine business in pretty trinkets and in the knick-knacks which the tourists purchase; tea "cabins" were packed to suffocation; the river people could hardly believe their ears when they heard the orders for boats and launches—this far from merry month of October. Even the clergy rose upon the occasion, preaching discreet sermons and addressing kind words to the well-intentioned. The whole town indeed felt that this was an event of events, and that no such dramatic trial had taken place in the old Court-house for many a year.

These Assizes are ever events of magnitude in a country town, and their contribution to the picturesque is welcome in the days of the commonplace.

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carries him off in the state coach? Who does not listen to the heralds as they stand at the street corners and blow their trumpets? Then, too, is not the Assize sermon an event, and does it not all add something to that majesty of the law which we do so well to preserve?

In this respect Reading is not one whit behind its rivals, and alike in the dignity of its procedure and in the stately courtesy of its welcome, need fear no rival. Unhappily neither dignity nor welcome imply anything to the unhappy prisoners over yonder in the jail beyond the recreation-ground; nor do they mean much to the young barristers who flock down from town by the early train, or haunt the precincts of the Queen's Hotel, whereat the law is wont to eat. These talk a jargon incomprehensible to the layman and pleasant in its jocund subtleties. And those, be it said, would have wagered all Lombard Street to a china orange that Jack Ferman would hang when the third Sunday had been numbered.

Truly was opinion against him where lawyers foregathered, against him at the dinner-tables of the rich and in the haunts of the poor. He alone could have done this thing; the wild stories, mere hints, of romances in India and the East, plainly had nothing to do with so simple an affair. He had given the poor lady poison because he was jealous of Prince Maurevale, and she would not steal the secrets at his request. So they argued and so it seemed to be. Probably not one in a thousand as much as read the account of the "strange affair" near Ely, recounted in the papers on the very morning of the trial, and by them made much of.

The press, to be sure, was much perplexed by the Marsh House tragedy, and put forth many theories.

That the wretched man who had shot himself on the edge of the dyke was wanted for the murder of that esteemed practitioner, the late Frederick Walther of Welbeck Street, there could be no doubt. It was apparent in like manner that he had taken his own life rather than fall into the hands of the English police, and so suffer extradition. But some of the more shrewd perceived a deeper story, and could speak of Egyptian revolutionaries in Paris, of their differences and of the crimes which



they had committed. Such crimes, unfortunately, did not come within the province of Scotland Yard; and as the fellow Michel Ghika killed himself before the police witnesses, nothing further was to be said.

Of the many who read this report, and read it with satisfaction, none was more gratified than Maurevale of Dara.

That shrewd and terrible judgment, which foresaw that Michel Ghika would follow Anna's child to England, which chose the father of the child for its guardian, which planned the dramatic coup and brought it to so inevitable a conclusion, that judgment had been vindicated finally. The men who would have sold the story of Anna's life to the Germans lay dead, the one at Strasburg, the other at Ely. And the woman had fled to Roumania, where the police would answer for her. Maurevale was aware of this—the burden had been lifted from his shoulders. He was another man when he alighted from the train at Reading and drove at once to the rooms which had been prepared for him.

This was early in the day, before the pomp and circumstance of Assize had amused the groundlings. Early as it was, the public galleries of the Court, and also that other gallery devoted to the favoured auditors, were besieged by an eager crowd such as the theatres can show upon the opening of a *première*. Barristers many alighted from the inn, and took their way to the Queen's Hotel. Special reporters, the chosen writers of the greater newspapers, descended upon the town in flocks and promised themselves unique opportunities. There were lady journalists to deal with the dresses, and military experts in case the affair should take a professional turn. Such a galaxy of talent in fact, never descended upon a provincial town before, nor carried with it so much genuine excitement, so much real feeling.

In the town itself the sentiment was rather one of expectation than of curiosity. Tradesmen thought more of their shop windows than of a soldier's guilt or innocence. The influx of strangers pleased the idlers in the streets and gave them much to do. It was something to stand at the station gates and try to recognise the celebrities; to say, "There is the Duke of Alton

daughter," "That is the Duchess of Asherton," "Yonder goes the Bishop of Overdeane." Prince Maurevale was recognised immediately, and cheered heartily—heaven alone knew why—as he left the precincts.

None, however, recognised Stella Insole, veiled as she was and dressed in solemn black; nor did they know that her sister Kitty had remained in London, having no courage to face this ordeal nor any part of it.

Maurevale himself was quite alone at the station, but Paul awaited him at his rooms in the County Hotel, and with him was a courtly old gentleman who spoke unimpeachable English, the famous Dr. Morenceau, the greatest expert in France on the question of poisons. There was also waiting in the anteroom, two French detectives from the town of Rheims, and a representative of the house of Baro & Malquevert, who had reached England last night and come straight on to Reading according to the prince's instructions. With each of these Maurevale had a little talk; but his conversation with Dr. Morenceau was long and earnest, and it ceased only when Paul informed him that it was time to go to the Court.

This was the hour when the solemnities of Assize were concluded and the solemn business begun.

All who could by wit or will obtain admission to the Court were now in their places, packed in serried masses and already complaining of the atmosphere. Rows of bewigged barristers faced tables littered with papers and ornamented by monstrous bags. A cynic might have mocked that derision of circumstance which flung notorious ladies almost into the laps of other ladies not less notorious whom they hated. There was a world of laughter in that play of chance which thrust wives "who had been" almost into the arms of husbands who "were." But neither laughter nor cynicism marked an occasion so solemn. Even the puny wits held their tongues, for they had no courage to speak of death.

Upon such a scene, before such an audience, the first act of this tremendous drama was played. In solemn tones a solemn judge recited the story of Anna Maclain's death to the sub-

servient grand jury in the galleries above, and left them to find true bill. When the trial itself opened, and the bill had been returned, a hush fell upon the Court which was as the very stillness of the tomb. All eyes turned to that little door by which the prisoner must enter. How would he bear himself; how would he plead! Women trembled, men's lips were dry while they waited. The lightest sound was resented.

He came at last, the Jack Ferman so many had known, so many had loved in the old days. Carrying himself as a soldier, quick and resolute in all his acts, stepping into the dock with a boy's foot, he looked about the court and seemed already to cry "Not Guilty." And then a sigh, almost of relief, went up. Whispers were heard again; a rustle of excitement; a momentary slackening of a tension which had been almost unendurable.

John Philip Ferman, accused of the murder of Anna Agnew Iva Maclain, by the administration of poison, on the first day of July in the year 1908!

What a drama of love and hate, of gain and loss, of desire and defeat, these very words suggested! And how they drew every eye upon the prisoner, as though the eye might reach his heart and search it.

Had this soldierly man with the frank open face, the florid countenance, the clear eyes, had he gone down into this hell of jealousy and despair, and emerged therefrom a murderer? What could tell? What gesture of his betrayed him; what movement of the hands, of the head, what searching of the keen eyes? He was pale, it is true, pale to the point of wonder; his lips trembled from time to time; and when his solicitor spoke to him he seemed hardly to hear him. But what of that—had he not been more than three months in prison, charged with the murder of the woman he revered, despised by his fellows, branded with the brand ineffaceable? Must he cry aloud, then, and protest his innocence? Not so. He answered, in a voice that was neither loud nor low, "Not guilty." And the words were hardly spoken when Montagu Wilson was upon his feet, and the great trial had begun.

People settled themselves down to listen now, believing that

the opening would be both lengthy and profound. They expected moderation from so great an advocate; but with moderation a cold and pitiless statement of fact to herald the case for the prosecution. This would not be an impassioned appeal to the jury—if one were made it must be later on, just before the judge's summing-up, and following such a brilliant defence as Sir Horace Rupert could not fail to deliver. For which reason, perhaps, there was some coughing and shuffling in Court during the opening sentences, just as though people had not really settled down and were indifferent as to the text. Then as quickly and as remarkably the scene changed. Something momentous had happened—every ear was bent, every eye strained.

There is an atmosphere of a law court as there is an atmosphere of Parliament, and it is apt to be electrical in moments of great drama.

Little may be spoken, there may be but an indication of events, and yet those present are sensible of change and sometimes of excitement. They know that a word, a statement, has changed the issue. They watch the counsel, and their opinion is confirmed. A great K.C.—so confident, so majestic a moment ago—has now become as soft as a cooing dove. There is whispering among the solicitors; the judge looks to the right and to the left, and perhaps cries "Silence." Then comes the truth, in halting periods, but the truth none the less. Newspaper reporters send hurried telegrams—boys are despatched with strips of copy. The whole city knows of it before many minutes have passed, and the world will read it that night.

If this be not a faithful picture of John Philip's trial at Reading, none the less it will give some idea of the change which attended Montagu Wilson's opening speech.

He was there to indict the prisoner and to state the bare facts of the crime—known to every one, but unknown to this Court. Beginning with the statement that this unhappy lady had been one of the most admired and most revered of the society of our time, he went on to describe how she had been found dead in a boat by the weir at Pangbourne, how the defence pointed unmistakably to poison as the instrument of death.

and how necessary it had been that the facts should be investigated by the jury. But not a word, behold, of prisoner's guilt; no reiteration whatever of that damning evidence brought to light at the inquest and the subsequent investigation before the magistrates. An unbiased observer would have said that Montagu Wilson resembled a man afraid of his own case, quite uncertain how to handle it, and a very amateur in the matter of its presentment. But this was to misunderstand him wholly. A bomb had fallen at his feet and had shattered his brief beyond repair. He picked his way amid the rubble of argument with what credit he could. And the Court listened amazed and incredulous, and only Jack Ferman was unmoved.

Investigation—upon that the great advocate harped. The jury must hear the evidence and be satisfied of the truth. A very astonishing story would be told; it was for them to say if the story satisfied them, if they found it reasonable, and what their bearings must be upon their verdict. For the moment they were faced by the fact that a terrible crime had been committed. Let their consciences answer for their judgment when the evidence was before them.

He sat down almost abruptly, and the ushers cried the name of Joseph Huggins. In the interval of waiting a babble of hushed talk, and the high falsetto of a splendidly dressed woman in the "privileged witnesses" box were to be heard. Then Huggins, dressed neatly in a suit of dark-blue serge, and carrying a very small bowler hat in his hand, entered the box and was sworn.

He was very nervous, dreadfully afraid of counsel, and haunted by the figure of the scarlet-robed judge above him upon his right hand. The jury, being somewhat of his own class, seemed to him as a dozen good friends in a very small box, and he addressed them directly, to the great annoyance of Mr. Justice Nonagen who commanded the wretched man to answer counsel and be careful what he was doing. Such a threatening exordium confused the poor fellow utterly, and he began very badly indeed.

"At a little after six o'clock——"

"Six o'clock!" sternly interposed Montagu Wilson, looking at his brief. Huggins corrected himself immediately.

"I should say five, your honour—a begging your pardon."

"If you are going on like that," said the judge, "you will certainly get yourself into trouble. Take your time—think before you answer counsel."

"I'll try to, my lord—well, it were a little after six o'clock—I should say five—when I see the boat agen the wear, and says to myself that it were a lyin' queerly—then I run round by the lock bridge, and there was the poor lady as surely dead as I'm standing in this Court."

His emphasis gave him courage, and he dared actually to look up to the judge as though to say, "I'll show you yet what I can do." In the main, however, his testimony was just what he had given at the inquest. How he had been astonished that the dead woman should be in evening dress; how he had found her lying on her side and detected the broken chain at her wrist; how he had run to the Swan Inn, awakened the boatman Jarvis and returned with Dr. Travis to the scene. All this came pat enough, for he had recited it a hundred and fifty times since he first recounted it at Highlands Castle. Not until Montagu Wilson began to press the examination did his old confusion return; but in the end he made a kind of triumph even of that.

"Now, sir, can you give the jury any help on certain matters? Can you tell them, to begin with, how the stretchers of this boat were placed—were they set for a man or for a woman?"

Huggins scratched his head.

"I didn't rightly observe—if anybody had asked me, I could have measured them, for that's my business."

"Then nobody thought of that——"

"We wanted you there, Mr. Wilson."

A titter arose, and even Jack Ferman joined in. He said something to his jailer at this point, and they laughed together—an act which was observed and commented upon by many. Huggins, meanwhile, was very pleased with himself, and the judge not indisposed to enjoy the joke.

"The learned counsel is evidently something of an athlete," his lordship remarked—an observation which set the Court tittering again, since the learned counsel in question weighed at

least seventeen stone. When the latter retorted, "But your lordship and I do not row in the same boat," Mr. Justice Nonage shook his head, for he was quite the smallest and the most shrivelled of the judges.

The jest passed, and the examination was continued. Counsel seemed surprised that no one had thought of such an obvious thing as the position of the stretchers, and when he had harped upon the point, he turned to speak of the river itself and the possibilities of a skiff drifting upon the current from the landing-stage at Streatly to Pangbourne.

"Do you know the river well at this point?"

"I'd know her if I was asleep."

"You have been up and down many times?"

"Since I was a child I've lived on water more or less."

"Then tell me plainly—is it your opinion that this boat could have drifted from Streatly, where we must suppose it started, to Pangbourne where it stopped, unless it had been guided by human hands?"

Huggins scratched his head.

"I don't know nothing about no human 'ands—I say it can't be done."

"The thing would be impossible?"

"I'll arst you this——"

"Oh, come, come," cried the judge, "you must not interrogate counsel. Answer the question."

"He ain't arsted no question, my lord."

Wilson shrugged his shoulders.

"I'll put it another way—Was this boat rowed down from Streatly or did it drift to the place where you found it?"

"Why, 'ow should I know—I wasn't in it."

"But cannot you form an opinion, my man?"

"I could if you give me time—I'd want to think about that. If she didn't row it, who did? That's what I want to know."

"Then you are convinced that it was rowed down the river?"

"Of course I am—nar boat would git round they corners unless you did row her—it ain't to be done."

"Exactly what I wished you to say. It is not to be done. The boat, then, was rowed or sculled from Streatly to Pangbourne?"

"Yes, and shoved off pretty hard, too. Didn't you see the mark where the boat-hook was?"

"Didn't I see the mark—but I wasn't there. Tell the jury what you mean—don't bring me in, sir—tell the jury what you mean."

Huggins rubbed his chin as though really these people were very dense. Then he said :

"Her was pushed off——"

"Her—who was pushed off?"

"The skiff, my lord, what we're talking about."

"But you were speaking about a mark, not about a skiff."

"Acause of the learned counswill interruptin' of me, my lord."

Montagu Wilson controlled his despair with what grace he could. Mr. Justice Nonagen again advised the witness to be careful, and then motioned counsel to proceed.

"Now come, my good man, just pull yourself together and try to tell the jury what you do mean."

"That's what I'm a tryin' to do, sir."

"Very well, then, we will go back, if you please. The skiff carried a mark—where was that?"

"Inside of the bow, and on the bow-side, too."

"Inside of the bow, and on the bow-side, too. What am I to understand by that?"

"Well, I can't put it plainer. There it were, though nubbody but me sawrit—a fresh mark wot hadn't been made by no waterman, I'll swear."

"You say there was a mark on the skiff, and a fresh mark on the bow-side. That would be the right-hand side, looking from the stern, would it not?"

"Of course it would—any ninny knows that."

"Don't be impertinent, sir. Answer my question."

"Well, then, arst me a question."

"Did you see a boat-hook in the skiff, such a boat-hook as would have made this mark you speak of?"



"Of course I did. There wus a paddle boat-hook stuck in the wood when I come up to the place."

"Oh, a paddle boat-hook stuck in the wood when you come up to the place. That is most important, that is very relevant."

And then, with a theatrical wave of his gown, the learned counsel cried:

"But you said nothing of this to the magistrates—it is not in the depositions?"

"Well, I didn't made no depositions."

"Come, come, you know perfectly well what I mean. You held your tongue about this, although you must see how important it is. Do you deny it?"

He pointed a lean, bony finger at the amazed boatman, who glanced along it as a surveyor along a level. Huggins could not make head or tail of it. He thought he had been rather clever to keep this to himself.

"I don't deny it," he blurted out at last; "no one arst me, and I didn't say nothink."

"But you thought it important?"

"I didn't think about it noway—her wasn't going to be shoved horf without a 'ook, surely."

"But don't you see that if this poor woman had died in the boat, she could not have used a boat-hook?"

"Why, of course I do."

"And you put no construction upon the fact?"

Huggins scratched his head. A glimmer of perception helped him.

"If you mean as there wus some one else in the skiff along of her——"

"Ah, at last. Of course I mean it. There was some one else in the skiff with her. Do you hold to that?"

"Well, I can't say rightly—but maybe there was."

The answer satisfied counsel, who perceived that he could obtain no other. Nor, for that matter, was anything further to be got out of this very stupid fellow who was so proud of his own cleverness. A question concerning the count's stick terminated the examination—and then, to the surprise of every one in court,

Sir Horace Rupert rose and said that he had no questions to put. Huggins was dismissed, to the delight of half-a-dozen muscular boatmen in the gallery, who took him at once to the nearest public-house and there regaled him with ale as though he had been a hero.

Dr. Travis was the next witness; his evidence was of little value. Pressed to state how he came to the opinion that the deceased might have succumbed to *angina pectoris*, he declared at once that the opinion had been expressed on the way from the inn to the weir, and before he had seen the patient.

"Did you correct it afterwards?" he was asked.

"Certainly," he said, "no woman of that age would be likely to die of *angina pectoris*, which is a disease incidental to old age."

"Are you able to tell the jury exactly how long the poor lady had been dead?"

"I should put it at seven or eight hours."

He went on to establish the point technically; but, being merely an ordinary practitioner, no one paid much heed to him. To the surprise of every one in court, the next witness was Arthur Blandy, the steward, at one time suspected by the police, and still an object of suspicion to many. Blandy, however, was quite himself to-day, and he gave his evidence with a candour which amazed an astonished court.

"When did you last see the deceased alive?"

"At about a quarter to ten o'clock on the night of Tuesday, the thirtieth day of June."

"Where did you see her?"

"In her dressing-room at Highlands Castle."

"What was she doing there?"

"She was pouring water into a wine-glass."

"Oh, she was pouring water into a wine-glass? Will you tell the jury how you came to see this lady pouring water into a wine-glass in her dressing-room on the night you speak of?"

Mr. Blandy flushed to the very roots of his hair.

"Gentlemen," he stammered, "I went upstairs to get the name of a 'oss."

The Court laughed outright. It was so human, so complete. Even Montagu Wilson started as though some one had tapped him upon his portentous chest.

"To get the name of a horse—why, what do you mean, sir?"

Mr. Blandy became confidential.

"Child, the butler, said his Highness was a-givin' tips to Lady Anna like one o'clock during dinner. He saw the names written down upon a piece of paper, and then she put 'em in her busum. I'm a bit of a sportsman, and so I did what many another would have done—I went up to her bedroom where I knew she'd gone after dinner, hopin' to find the writing when she went out agen."

"And did you find it?"

"I did, sir, and here it is."

It was a dramatic coup, and tickled the fancy of the Court. At the same time it had a significance more solemn, and many must have reflected that the bent and twisted strip of a menu card, upon which the horses' names had been written down, lay for a little while near the heart of a beautiful woman who had been foully murdered. For which reason the laughter was quickly subdued, while the card was passed from the judge to the jury, and by them to counsel again.

"So you found this strip of paper; but where did you find it?"

"In her ladyship's bedroom."

"Did any one discover you there?"

"Yes, the Frenchwoman—the little liai."

The judge looked up sharply.

"What is that?" he cried. Mr. Blandy begged his pardon, but affably, as one who merely obliged him but did not retract.

"Asking your lordship's pardon, but that young woman don't tell the truth, not by a long way; it's her bringing up, I suppose."

Mr. Justice Nonagen smiled in spite of himself. His rebuke, however, was properly stern, and when Mr. Blandy had bent before it, Montagu Wilson continued.

"The French maid found you. Well, what then?"

"I left the room, going round the corner into the corridor a tip-toe. Then I saw the Lady Anna."

"What was she doing? Be careful now. Tell the jury precisely."

"She was standing by the dressing-table pouring water into a wine-glass."

"Did you see if she drank the water?"

"I did not, sir."

"You are quite positive about that?"

"Quite positive, my lord."

"Are you able to say if she was alone in the room?"

"I think she was; I could not see very plain."

"But you, yourself, saw no one with her?"

"Oh no, sir, I saw nobody."

"And what next?"

"I went down to my rooms, which lie across the far side of the quadrangle."

"Did you meet any one?"

"I met some of the servants; Mr. Child was one of them."

"No one else?"

"Why, yes, if it comes to that, I saw one of the stable-boys."

"Can you tell the jury his name?"

"Well, we always called him the Prophet—they used to say he was an Egyptian."

"Did you speak to him?"

Mr. Blandy drew himself up haughily.

"No, sir; I didn't so far forget myself."

"Well, well, you didn't speak to him. Were there any others whom you saw in the quadrangle?"

"No, sir; I saw no one else."

Counsel nodded and stopped for a moment to speak to his junior. There was a movement of relief in Court, and some whisper of talk. Perhaps the effect of the evidence could hardly be judged by the lay mind; but the general opinion decided that it was neither for nor against the accused. Jack Ferman's impeachment, so to speak, must come later—every one believed that when it did come it would be crushing.

"Now, Mr. Blandv," said the advocate, taking up the thread when his junior had prompted him, "we come to the morning of the day. At what hour did you first learn that Lady Anna Maclain was dead?"

"It must have been after five o'clock, sir."

"Who told you?"

"Willis, the boatman. He woke me up to say one of the boats was out, and he was uneasy."

"And what then?"

"Why, I told him not to make a fool of himself, and to get to bed again."

"Did he do so?"

"No, sir; he didn't. He's a wonderful careful man about his boats is Willis, and he went into the house and woke up Mr. Child and the maids."

"And what did they say?"

"A good deal, as women will."

"Yes; but how did you come to know of it?"

"Why, Willis returned by-and-by to say that Lady Anna Maclain had been out all night and must have took the boat."

"She must have taken the boat—so then you were interested?"

"I was very frightened. It didn't take long to get me out of bed, be sure."

"And being out of bed, what did you do?"

"I sent up to the prince and told him all about it."

The point satisfied the advocate. He muttered a few words to the junior again, and then, adjusting his gown and assuming a more serious air, he began to speak of another subject altogether.

"You did not tell the truth about all this at the inquest, Mr. Blandy."

Blandy looked at the jury sheepishly.

"No, sir; I did not," he said, licking his lips nervously.

"And having told a great many untruths, you left the castle?"

"That was so, sir."

"Where did you go?"

The steward wiped his brow, looked around the Court, coughed, and then began to speak. His recital was complete and faithful. He told exactly where he had been, and what he had done at Streatly and at London. Then he stopped and coughed again.

"Go on, sir; we are waiting. You drove to St. Pancras Station. And after?"

"I went to Ely, to the house called the Marsh Farm."

"You went to Ely, to the house called the Marsh Farm? Will you tell the jury why you went?"

"I will, sir—I went because Captain Ferman asked me to go."

"Oh, Captain Ferman asked you to go? When did he ask you?"

"Many a time. 'If ever Lady Maclain is in trouble about anything, Blandy,' says he, 'just you go down to this address I shall give you, and let the people there know about it.' That's why I went, my lord."

The judge nodded. To the surprise of the Court, which found this evidence both damning and conclusive, Mr. Justice Nonagen seemed entirely unmoved by it. Not so Mr. Montagu Wilson, who, carried away by professional habit, detected drama in the evidence and pursued it.

"You went to Ely because Captain Ferman asked you. Had you ever been before?"

"Never, sir."

"And when you got there?"

"When I got there, the birds had flown."

Montagu Wilson waved his hand in a contemptuous gesture.

"Your ornithological studies were interrupted, I see. Do you mean that the house was empty?"

"I do, sir."

"You visited it, I think, at the moment when a warrant had been taken out for your arrest. Were you aware of that?"

"I was indeed, sir—and a rare fright it give me. Lord, to think I might have been a murderer."

The thing was said so naturally that every one in Court including the judge, laughed outright. The outburst nettled counsel, and he was very angry when he continued.

"You will have some good reason to be frightened, perhaps, before this case is done with. So you knew of the warrant, and, knowing of it, what did you do?"

"I put myself in the hands of my master."

"Ah, you put yourself in the hands of Prince Maurevale. And what then?"

"I went aboard his yacht, sir."

"The act of an innocent man undoubtedly. Did it not occur to you that this cowardly proceeding could lead only to the confirmation of your guilt—did not that occur to you?"

"It might have done, sir, if any one but the prince had been concerned in it. But I knew his Highness would be too sharp for 'em. You don't meet a man like him every day."

"And this very sharp gentleman helped you to flee the country. Where did you go then?"

"I came back again, sir."

"For what purpose?"

"To be at the service of the police whenever they might want me."

The retort took the wind out of counsel's sails. He disliked the titter which attended it, and again addressed his junior. Perhaps he had not meant to carry this examination so far, for now, to the surprise of the whole court, he intimated that he had no further question to ask the witness. Sir Horace Rupert immediately rose.

"What kind of a glass did Lady Anna Maclain use when you saw her in the dressing-room on the eve of the murder?"

"A plain wine-glass, sir."

"Would you know it again?"

"I should, sir."

"Is that it?"

"It is, sir."

The glass was passed across to the judge, then to the other side, and finally to the jury. It was an ordinary sherry glass,

quite plain, but a little curious in shape—and it carried the crest of the house of Maurevale.

Every one, however, examined it as though its structure were significant, and many a neck was strained in the gallery above that the curious might catch a glimpse of it. Meanwhile Sir Horace had resumed.

“You went upon the prince’s yacht. Did he tell you what you must do?”

“He did, sir.”

“What was it?”

“That I must hold myself at his disposition, and, if necessary, go to Scotland Yard at once.”

“If necessary—what do you mean by that?”

“If the authorities insisted.”

“Then they did not insist?”

“No, sir, the warrant was withdrawn, I understand.”

“Upon the prince’s undertaking that you should be here to-day?”

“Yes, sir, upon his Highness’s undertaking.”

Sir Horace intimated that he had nothing further to ask, and after the briefest re-examination Arthur Blandy left the box, some twenty years younger in mien and step than he had been when he entered it. The next witness was Sir William Wentworth, from the Home Office—one of the greatest chemists living, and a man who gave his evidence with such a wealth of learned illustration that there was hardly a barrister living who could stand up to him. Montagu Wilson paid great deference to this witness when he rose to examine him. He might have been addressing one of the potentates of Europe, so low was his voice and so restrained his manner.

Briefly and quietly Sir William stated his reasons for believing that the drug which had poisoned the Lady Anna Maclain was a preparation of that deadly poison aconitine. “But,” he added, while the Court listened with profound interest, “there were traces of other poisons in the system—of strychnine, of the deadly rhus, and even of arsenic.” Of these he gave the percentages, and then made the further statement that such poisons



appeared to be associated with commoner drugs, chiefly with phenacetin and caffeine—a preparation known to every one, and commonly taken by women who suffer from headache. The main point was this, that while the amount of strychnine and arsenic found in the body would not account for death, the aconitine would do so—and to this poison Sir William attributed the fatality.

A hush fell upon the Court; the evidence was so amazing, so different from what had been expected, that even counsel could make little of it. Common rumour had said that the case against Jack Ferman rested upon the fact that a preparation of coniine had been found in his rooms. But here was no word of coniine, not a trace of it. On the other hand, the theory of suicide could no longer be entertained even by a child. Every one was agreed upon that long before Montagu Wilson put the point.

“Will you tell us, Sir William, if in your opinion this could have been a case of suicide?”

“I think it absolutely impossible.”

“Upon what grounds?”

“Upon those of common reason. Few women have heard of aconitine. The preparation is used sometimes in the form of an ointment to be applied externally for neuralgia. But in the form in which I must imagine it to have been taken, few women would know of it.”

“Does the same statement apply to the poisonous rhus?”

“Certainly, but the percentage of that is very small. You have the figures there.”

“Can you account for the presence of that?”

“Upon a supposition, yes. The poison is often found in the paint used by the Japanese and the Chinese to colour the inside of the small boxes which are exported to Europe. If the other drugs were carried in such a box, some trace of the poison might be found upon them.”

The advocate had not expected this, and he passed over the dangerous ground quickly.

“But the arsenic and strychnine—to what do they point?”

Sir William shrugged his shoulders.

"To the act of a maniac, I would say."

"Ah, you think that? They might have been administered by a person who had lost his reason temporarily?"

"Or permanently."

"Yes, or permanently—a man resolved to kill this unhappy lady, one without any knowledge of drugs except such as is traditional, one who meant to make sure. Is that what you would tell us, Sir William?"

"It is a mere supposition, but plausible. I have not looked at the case from such a point of view."

"Quite so, but you are ready to tell the jury that the analysis defies all common expectation and may speak of madness, temporary or permanent?"

"I should not be unwilling to say so."

Montagu Wilson was pleased and plainly showed his pleasure to the jury. He was almost radiant when he continued.

"There is a further matter, Sir William, upon which I must trouble you. The contents of a glass, apparently containing water, were sent you by the Reading police, I think?"

"Yes, I received them."

"And you have subjected them to analysis?"

"That has been done."

"Will you tell the jury the result of that analysis?"

"Certainly; the poisons contained in the body were all found in the water submitted to me."

"And in the same proportions?"

"Yes, in the same proportions."

"Was there any trace of the commoner drugs, of caffeine and phenacetin?"

"There was none whatever."

"And how soon would death result if that water was drunk?"

"In a few hours at the latest—possibly in an hour."

"But not on the spot?"

"No, certainly not."

"The victim would be quite capable of leaving the house and walking, say, the best part of a mile?"

"It is possible—especially if her will compelled her."

"You imply that she might have suffered some great mental excitement which momentarily conquered the drug?"

"Yes, that is what I would say."

The advocate sat down and Sir Horace rose, calmly and with unusual deliberation. In his hand he held the heart of green jade; a thrill went through the Court as he held it up.

"Is that the kind of box to which you refer, Sir William?"

The great chemist took the green heart in his hand and examined it closely. Many a pair of eyes watched him as he did so. The heart of green jade! How much had been made of it.

"Yes," was the answer, "that is the kind of box."

"And is it painted with the kind of paint to which you refer?"

"I could tell you that only upon analysis."

"Admittedly; but if I told you that the paint upon that box had been analysed, and if I put the analyst into the box, would you hold his evidence to agree with your own surmise?"

"If the poisonous rhus has been discovered, certainly."

"Then I have nothing more to ask you, Sir William."

The heart of green jade had been passed up to the judge by this time, and when he had examined it in all lights, he handed it over to the council for the prosecution, who fingered it caressingly as though it might even now provide them with that clue which their case still lacked. This afforded an interlude, and some moments passed before the ushers cried for the maid Berthe, and the Frenchwoman stepped into the box. She was heavily veiled, and so terribly afraid of judge and jury, to say nothing of the bewigged advocates, that her first words were gasped rather than spoken. To the question whether she preferred to speak in her own English or to have the assistance of an interpreter, she replied immediately that she would prefer the latter; and it really seemed as though the presence of a fellow-countryman gave her the necessary courage to continue.

Having answered to her name, and given the place of her birth as Caen in Normandy, she was next questioned as to her length of service with the Lady Anna and the circumstances of it.

"You were two years and nine months with Lady Anna. Is that so?"

"Yes, sir, two years and nine months."

"Was she an indulgent mistress?"

"I loved her very muc' sir."

"And you enjoyed her confidence?"

"Oh yes, sir, she told me many things."

"She spoke to you of her friends, I suppose?"

"Very often, sir."

"Will you tell the jury the names of some of those friends?"

The girl considered.

"There would be Prince Maurevale's name. Madame adored him."

"And consequently she spoke to you about him?"

"Always, sir—she spoke of him every day."

"And after him?"

"It would be Captain Ferman's name."

"She mentioned Captain Ferman's name. Did she see Captain Ferman often?"

"In London many times. At Highlands sometimes."

"Oh, he came to Highlands. How did he come—to lunch, to dinner?"

"No, sir, he came secretly—by night."

"He came secretly—you swear to that?"

"Certainly. I myself have carried the messages to him when madame could not meet him."

"When was the last time you carried such a message?"

The girl reflected—her demeanour impressed the Court and greatly excited it. Here was the case against Ferman, surely!

"It would have been about a week before the accident."

"A week before the accident. Where did you meet the Captain?"

"In the little wood behind the stables."

"Was the message verbal or written?"

"It was verbal, sir."

"And you said——"

"That madame was going to dine with the prince and could not get away."

"What did Captain Ferman answer?"

"He said he was very sorry; then he asked me a question."

"Tell the jury what that question was."

"He asked me if madame had any trouble."

"What did you reply?"

"I told him the truth—she was ill, weary—and then I said something that I had wished to say for a long time. I told him she was in love with Prince Maurevale."

"You told him that. What did he reply?"

"He did not answer me, sir; he walked away."

Counsel nodded and turned over a page of his brief.

"Now, when was the last time you saw Captain Ferman at Highlands?"

"That was the last time, sir; but I heard him later on."

"The last time you saw him, but you heard him later on? Explain yourself, if you please."

She did so, volubly, as at the inquest.

"I had gone down to the village to buy notepaper. When I return and would take the short cut to the house, I hear voices by the path to the boat-house. They were those of Captain Ferman and of madame."

"What day was that?"

The girl flushed crimson.

"It was the night of Tuesday, sir."

"The night of Tuesday, June 30th. But have you not sworn at the inquest and before the magistrates that it was the day of the murder?"

"It was because I spoke the English language, sir."

"Ah, because you spoke the English language. You were confused, perhaps?"

"Yes, I have it in my head that the murder is on the Tuesday, not on the Wednesday. Monsieur le Comte, who spoke for me, did not understand, and when I spoke for myself in the English language I made a mistake."

The admission was attended by a hum of talk, which caused

the judge to look up sharply and to call for silence. Every one perceived the curious significance of the girl's evidence, though whether it went for or against Ferman none could say. Mr. Justice Nonagen himself was much impressed, and addressed a word to the jury on the point.

"It is evident that the girl does not understand English very well. If she were much agitated and tried to express herself in a strange tongue the mistake would be natural. We all know how easily such mistakes are committed. I myself have taken the wrong ticket at a French railway station when the press had been considerable, and have failed to get my money back. You gentlemen understand that she saw Captain Ferman at Highlands on the Tuesday night—that is enough for the present."

Counsel agreed, and continued his examination.

"Had there been anything like a quarrel between these people on that day?"

Sir Horace objected sternly. Mr. Justice Nonagen, however, admitted the question.

"We certainly should know the state of things existing between the parties," he said. "If there had been a quarrel, we should know of it."

Sir Horace persisted in his objection, but the question was put and answered—volubly and with more passion than the girl had shown from the beginning.

"There had been many quarrels. The Captain's letters made my lady cry—ah, the bitter tears! Then there was the telegram, and that upset her very much. Oh, she was much distressed; she suffered because of him surely."

"Of what telegram are you speaking?"

"Of the telegram my lady received on the Monday morning."

"Do you know its contents?"

"Yes, sir, I read it; it said, 'If not Tuesday, then Wednesday.'"

"Was her ladyship distressed upon receiving that?"

"She cried a long time, sir; she was very much upset."

"Did she remain at the Castle on that day?"

"Yes, sir, until the Tuesday."

"And upon the Tuesday, the day before her death?"

"She went away very early, and came back in time for dinner."

"Did you help to dress her that night?"

"I did, sir."

"In what state of health was she?"

"She was very bright and gay, sir; but I think she was suffering a little from neuralgia."

"Did she tell you that?"

"No, sir, but I have known her so long that when she held her head in her hands when I say that madame is not well."

"So what it comes to is this—that she is better in spirit but that she suffers from headache?"

"I should say so, sir."

Montagu Wilson seemed pleased. He consulted his junior a little while, and then suddenly he asked—

"Did you see madame after dinner—otherwise than upon the path to the boat-house?"

"No, sir; but I thought that I heard her in the dressing-room while I was talking to Mr. Blandy in her bedroom."

"Then she must have entered the house almost upon your heels?"

"That would be so, sir."

"Do you know when she left it for the second time?"

"I do not, sir."

"But her movements upon the day are otherwise quite clear to you. There is her journey, the return, she dresses for dinner, she meets Captain Ferman on the road to the boat-house; she re-enters the house, leaves it again, and is next found dead. Do you agree to that?"

"Ah yes, my poor mistress, she is found dead, and I shall never see her again—never, never."

The Celtic temperament prevailed and the girl suffered a tempest of tears to rob her of her self-possession. So real was

the grief which provoked it that a hush fell upon the Court, and for some minutes Montagu Wilson ceased to examine her. When next he asked a question, it was one which had been expected by all for some time.

"Did my lady tell you whom she met in London on the Tuesday?"

"She did not, sir."

"You are quite clear about this?"

"Oh yes, sir."

"Then if it had been necessary to summon her, to send a message or anything of that kind, you could not have done it?"

"I should have sent to her dressmaker—to Madame Cyrene in New Bond Street."

"Ah, then Lady Anna was going to visit her dressmaker?"

"Yes, that is so."

"And she left no other address?"

"None whatever, sir."

The answer did not altogether satisfy the advocate, but he would not pursue the matter further. His next question concerned the rumour that the murdered lady had been in the habit of taking nostrums, and that possibly an overdose of some popular drug might have killed her. This was a return to the matter of health and cleverly managed, as the defence admitted.

"Now you have said that you thought Lady Maclain was suffering from neuralgia on this Tuesday night; do you know if she took anything for it?"

"No, sir, she could not have done."

"Could not have done—what does that mean?"

"I will tell you, sir. She was in the habit of taking the tablets which she got from France. But she had finished the bottle and there were none left. I know it was so, for she asked me for them upon the morning of the day."

"Ah, she asked for them on the morning of the day—you are speaking of the Tuesday?"

"Yes, of the Tuesday."

"And she had none then?"



"No, sir, she had none then?"

"Do you not think it possible that she purchased some of that day while she was in London?"

"No, sir, they always came to her from Paris."

"They came to her from Paris; but all the same she might have got this medicine from London. Will you please tell us the name of it?"

"It is seronal, sir—very well known in Paris for the headache."

"And you are ready to swear that she had none of this medicine on the day of the murder?"

"Yes, sir, for, if she had, the bottle would have been there."

"And no bottle was discovered. Was it looked for?"

"Every one looked for it; his Highness insisted."

"And nothing was found?"

"No, sir, nothing was found."

"So that we come to this, that the poison which this poor lady took must have been provided by some person she met during the course of the day, either in London or at Streatham?"

The girl shook her head.

"I have not thought of that, sir."

"But, now that it is put to you, you do see it?"

"Yes, sir, I think that I do."

The answer pleased Montagu Wilson and he sat down. Sir Horace in his turn was less brisk than usual when he rose, and he turned twice to speak to his junior before he began to cross-examine.

"Were you alone when you went to the village to get this notepaper on the Tuesday evening?"

The question was put in a stern voice and it startled the Court. The girl flushed crimson—her confusion was beyond all question amazing.

"No, sir, I was not alone."

"Who was with you?"

"Monsieur Jules Farnot."

"What was he?"

"An engineer—the motor driver of a great French nobleman."

"Did he tell you the nobleman's name?"

"Yes, to his Highness Prince Eugenie."

"Did you discover that story to be a lie?"

"A lie! it is impossible. It is no lie."

"Would you be surprised to hear that he was not a chauffeur?"

"But, sir, it is impossible, for he was."

"I see you are unconvinced. Would you know Monsieur Farmot if you saw his picture?"

"Yes, sir, certainly."

"Is that it?"

He passed a rude photograph across the table, and it was handed up to the maid. For a little while she stared at it curiously then she passed it back.

"Yes, that is Monsieur Farmot."

"Did you ever hear that Farmot was not his proper name?"

"Oh, Monsieur——"

"You never heard it?"

"No, sir."

"And if they had spoken of him as Michel Ghika, you would not have known him under that name?"

"How could I, sir, since his name was Jules Farmot?"

Sir Horace waived it aside with a light gesture.

"How often did you see this man at Highlands?"

She tried to think.

"Three or four times, sir."

"When did he come?"

"After dinner, sir."

"When it was dark, I suppose. Where did you receive him?"

"In my room, sir,"

Where is that?"

"In the old wing of the house, sir."

"How far from the servants' hall?"

She was dreadfully agitated by this time, but managed never-

theless to stammer that her room lay on the opposite side of the house to the servants' hall. Sir Horace, not wishing to call matters too far, paused and made a divagation.

"On this Tuesday night at what hour did this Jules Ferman visit you?"

"At nine o'clock, sir."

"Did he say where he came from?"

"He was staying with his master near Henley."

"Oh, he was staying with his master near Henley. Would it surprise you to know that his master had not been in England for some years?"

"I do not believe you," she rejoined, but so fiercely that the Court tittered.

"You saw him at nine o'clock—what then?"

"He walked down to the village with me."

"The whole of the way?"

"No, sir, a little way; then he had to catch the train."

"What train would that be?"

"At nine minutes past ten, sir."

"He left to catch that train. You swear it?"

"Yes, sir, I swear it."

"Are you aware that the nine minutes past ten train only runs on Wednesdays and Saturdays?"

"Oh, sir, it is impossible."

"Everything apparently is impossible. We will come to another point. You say that you saw Lady Anna and Captain Ferman on the path which leads to the boat-house. Shall I remind you that you have led the magistrates to believe that she was at the boat-house itself?"

"I do not speak English well, sir—I do not understand them properly."

"But you had an interpreter?"

"It is his fault, sir, not mine, if I am not clear."

"Tell the Court exactly where you did hear this interesting conversation."

"Just at the entrance to the little plantation, sir."

"How far is that from the house?"

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"About a hundred metres, sir."

"We'll say about a hundred yards, in English," this to the jury. "Was it dark there?"

"Very dark; oh, *vraiment* dark!"

"So that you could not see the speakers' faces?"

"I could not see them, sir."

"Then how did you recognise them?"

"My mistress was speaking when I came up."

"Oh, she was speaking; and the other?"

"It must be Captain Ferman. I recognise his figure."

"Indeed. Did you hear his voice?"

She hesitated, and her face changed colour again.

"I hear, but not very well."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I hear his voice but not the words."

"Now come, my girl, on your oath will you swear that you heard Captain Ferman's voice?"

She paused an instant, then replied almost in a whisper—

"Yes, I will swear it."

"Was it by his voice alone that you recognised him?"

"Yes, by his voice."

"You could not see him?"

"No, sir, I could not see him."

"Are you able to tell the jury a single word he said?"

She shook her head.

"I did not hear the words. I did not wish to be discovered."

"How long did you remain on the spot?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I am a good girl; I do not listen. I went away at once."

"You went away at once. Were you there for a minute?"

"Perhaps."

"For two minutes?"

She shrugged her shoulders and answered with temper—

"I have not got a watch in my hand."

"Then shall we say it was a minute?"

"If you please——"

"Or perhaps half a minute?"

"I have told you, sir; I cannot say any more."

Sir Horace accepted it.

"I will ask you another question," he exclaimed, changing his voice cleverly, as great advocates are wont to do. "Have you seen this mysterious Jules Farmot since the murder?"

"Yes, sir, I have seen him."

"Where was that?"

"In London."

"When did you last hear from him?"

"At Dieppe in September."

"He was at Dieppe in September. Well, after that?"

"He went to Strasburg."

"And that was the last time you heard of him?"

"Yes, sir, the last time."

"Do you read the newspapers?"

"I read the *Petit Journal* when my sister sends it to me."

"Then you did not see what the English papers said about this Jules Farmot yesterday?"

"No, sir, I did not read them."

"In which case, my good girl, you do not know that the man is dead?"

She did not hear him properly. The interpreter repeated the question twice, but she did not answer it. Presently she began to cry out in French, then to sob bitterly. One of the ushers, seeing her condition, stepped over to the witness-box and opened the door. They carried her from the Court in a dead faint, while a hundred tongues were loosed to recite again the points of her evidence.

"Silence," cried the judge; "I must have silence in the Court." The cry was repeated everywhere, and was still to be heard when Montagu Wilson rose and intimated that he would re-examine the witness later on, Sir Horace upon his part declaring that he had no further questions to put to her.

It was now near the luncheon hour, and but two witnesses, whose testimony was expected to be brief, were called—the first a ticket-collector from Goring Station; the second one of

the farm hands from the Highlands estate. Of these the first was a cheery, red-haired fellow, who clipped his answers as he clipped his tickets, and impressed the Court very much by his obvious sincerity and good nature. Having answered to his name and calling and being duly sworn, Montagu Wilson soon brought him to the point.

"You were on duty at Goring Station on the night of Tuesday, June 30th?"

"Yes, sir, I was."

"You took the tickets of the passengers who arrived at Goring by the 6.10 train from London?"

"I did, sir, naturally."

"Have you recognised any of the passengers by that train since the day in question?"

"I have, sir, to be sure."

"Where did this recognition take place?"

"At Reading Police Station. I had a day off, d'ye see."

"You went to Reading Police Station; when was that?"

"That was the last week in August—the 24th, to be particular."

"We require you to be particular. What did you see at the Police Station?"

"I saw nine men in a yard—a pretty poor lot too."

"Behave yourself, sir," from the judge. Montagu Wilson continued—

"Did you recognise any of these men?"

"I did that, sir."

"Which one?"

"The gentleman in the dock."

He was put through the usual searching cross-examination, but stuck to his point. Captain Ferman had travelled by the train—moreover, he had given up a newspaper with his ticket. This cheery, red-haired fellow was not to be shaken. "What have I got to get by it?" he asked Sir Horace, who had teased him. The question was quite unanswerable. His evidence impressed the Court greatly, and caused many a sympathetic eye to be turned toward the prisoner. How would this be

answered? What had taken John Ferman to Highlands at such a tragic moment?

The second of the two witnesses was a farm hand from Highlands. He spoke an uncouth dialect, and but for the gravity of his evidence would have tickled the Court. It came to this in the end—that he had seen the Lady Anna Maclain with the prisoner in the little plantation by the stables just before dusk on the Tuesday afternoon. More he could not say, and though counsel drove him from pillar to post on the question of time, he stuck to it that it was “just when the sun were a settin’,” which, as Sir Horace remarked, was to liken that majestic planet to a fowl. In truth, the great advocate put his questions more as a matter of form than of anything else, and he alone of those present appeared to ignore the damning nature of this testimony. When it was given, Mr. Justice Nonager immediately departed to partake of the succulent chop; and the others streamed out to the hotels and restaurants.

How was the case going? None quite knew. The maid's evidence had been shaken, and a jury would hardly convict upon it. None the less, it was proved conclusively that Ferman had been at Highlands on the night of the murder—and that was what the prosecution desired. As to Sir William's testimony, it was amazing enough and almost beyond argument. None but a madman would have poisoned a woman so brutally or so recklessly. If Ferman had done it, love of Anna Maclain had driven him mad, and he had been no better than the assassins who run amok in a frenzy which is beyond reason. Opinion generally inclined to this belief. The letters were to come and they would hang him. Maurevale might be as clever as he pleased—had he not sworn to save the young soldier? His evidence would never combat that of the letters and of the witnesses who had seen the Captain at Highlands on the night of the murder.

How dramatic are these trials, and how little the great public knows of their drama!

Reading of them in the newspapers the imagination helps

but little to an understanding of the swiftly changing emotions they provoke, of their contrasts and their reflection of human nature profoundly stirred. Life is at stake; life shall be given or taken by the judgment of twelve who see the prisoner, perhaps, for the first time; twelve who have looked upon the crime of murder hitherto as little children look upon the fables. But here crime is very close to them. They may be listening to the very voice of the man or woman who did another to death brutally. They live again through the scenes of tragedy; hear the cries of the murdered; breathe in the darkness of the house.

As a reed bent by the wind the spectators surrender themselves to the evidence and its kaleidoscopic pictures.

The prisoner is guilty, is innocent—O God! save him; surely he is innocent. But no, listen to the witness now speaking. How damning is the testimony—can innocence be imagined after hearing it? So they are bent again, and the blast of conviction sweeps over them.

The air of the Court is hot and fetid; faces are white in the ghastly light; hearts beat fast, or seem almost to stand still, when momentous words are spoken. The figure of the scarlet-robed judge towers above all. God, what a burden he bears! But he will dine comfortably to-night, and perhaps sleep an untroubled sleep afterwards. This is human nature; we do not complain.

And six months afterwards all this will be a vista of the past, enveloped in the shadows of fading memory—half forgotten; a sensation for the historian, not for the dinner-table.

The guilty has perished; the grave closed upon him. His very body is no more. He sleeps even as his victim, eternally.

The first witness after lunch was the detective inspector who had searched Jack Ferman's rooms in London immediately after the murder. As had been expected, this officer's evidence was overwhelming in its strength, and had the trial terminated upon it, the prisoner would have been convicted without the jury leaving the box.



B. efly, and without the slightest trace of emotion, the officer declared how he had found five letters in all written by the Lady Anna Maclain—as it was alleged—and that these five letters were those now produced. Very slowly and without emphasis an official read them aloud to the astonished Court, which listened as to the very words the dead woman had spoken.

To begin with, there was a letter dated the fifth of June. It asked for patience and for sympathy, begging him to try to understand her, and winding up with the ominous words, "The thing which you ask me to do, Jaek, I will not do for any living man, even for you to whom I owe all." It was followed three days later by the briefest of notes, in which she said, "Your threats do not move me at all; I am resolved upon it, for whose sake you know." To this note the enigmatical postscript had been added, "Pray that the green heart will hide me when the hour comes." Thus ran the true version of a statement which the public had had in many forms since the first rumour of it had been bruited.

A third letter spoke of considerable alarms. One sentence mystified the Court utterly. It was the intimation that if "White Hill really goes to Paris, then all is known." But a cheerful tone of optimism followed the words, when the writer added, "But I do not believe he will go; and you, Jaek, must really cease to worry yourself and me." Then she asked naïvely if she were not doing her best, and if he really wished her to leave England and to live in the Arctic regions.

The fourth of the letters was perhaps the most interesting of the budget. It reproached the captain bitterly for his injustice, and declared that nothing he might say would deter the writer if she felt a certain course to be her duty. From what she would be deterred, however, was not stated; and the jury was left to form its own opinion, and to say that a certain threat had been made against the dead woman, and that she had defied it. The last of the documents repeated this defiance in milder tones, but also named other matters and the private doings of certain personages at the Castle, and this paragraph was by mutual consent suppressed.

The official finished his cold, unimpassioned reading, and then counsel intimated that he would call evidence to establish the authenticity of these documents if the defence wished it; but Sir Horace immediately admitted them, and said that he did not propose to cross-examine the witness. A similar intimation attended the reading of Ferman's own correspondence—three of his letters having been found at Highlands immediately after the murder.

They were perplexing documents, inspired, it might seem, by a passionate devotion to the dead woman, and yet quarrelling with all that she did. The vagueness of the terms excited suspicion and created a bad impression in Court, so that the hopes of the captain's friends fell to the nadir. Evidently the Lady Anna had proposed to do something which he much disliked, and when the startling line was read, "I would sooner see you dead than that you should do this thing," a murmur of real feeling stirred the audience and was felt even by the judge.

What a damning accusation! How real and vital a piece of evidence! The dullest perceived its significance. The man had threatened her when he could not persuade her; he had visited her stealthily at the Castle; he had gone there upon the night of the murder; it was probable, though not proved, that he had been in the boat with her. Would any jury acquit such a man? Was his life worth a month's purchase at any price? Men said it was not. Women, pitying him, wept silently.

The rest of the evidence was purely technical, that of police inspectors, of the boatman Willis, whose concern for his boat had kept him up half the night, but who had not a ghost of an idea if any one accompanied the dead woman upon the river—of these and of such as were necessary to the formality of the law. When Montagu Wilson at length said, "That is the case for the prosecution, my lord," an interval of two or three minutes followed before Mr. Weld, who was with Sir Horace as a junior, rose to inform the Court that the Earl of Farrard, the Lady Anna's brother, was expected to arrive at Tilbury on the following Monday morning, and would be at the Court's disposal if necessary. "But," he

added, "we do not propose to call his lordship, nor do we think his attendance will be necessary."

This was about four o'clock of the afternoon. The sun had set, and so heavy a cloud of an October storm had gathered, that a candle was brought for the judge, and burned dimly at his desk as a taper at a shrine.

Ferman's face was in shadow, and few could read the hope and fear which were written there.

Perchance, had he spoken aloud, and told them that all his hope lay in the genius of the man he had wronged, derisive laughter would have attended his confession.

But such was the truth. He stood upon the edge of the ravine of death, and but one hand could draw him back. The verdict of innocent or guilty must be spoken, not by the commonplace creatures in the jury-box; but by that master to whom the world had listened and would listen in the years to come.

The hours of the day had cost him much, and yet not all he had expected them to cost him. In a way the very damning gravity of the evidence fascinated him, and he could disassociate himself from it all and listen entranced as to a fairy story with whose end he was unacquainted.

He had murdered Anna. Good God, that men could believe it for an instant! He, a soldier who wore the king's coat and whose heart was that of a child!

He had murdered her because she would not obey his will, he who had laboured night and day to save her from dishonour. And this brainless jury was prepared to say as much—he could see it in their faces. They would accept the lie and plume themselves afterwards upon their cleverness. As in a dream of sleep he saw the prisoner—not himself, but an imagined prisoner—leaving the dock with quick steps to return to Reading Jail. He could hear the warders telling this prisoner to step into the van, could depict the cell they would open for him—the condemned cell from which he would pass to the gallows. And all this because of a train of circumstances over which that prisoner had no control and could not deny. Such was the law and

justice even in an English Court. Ferman smiled a little ironically, and remembered that he had been a soldier.

Was death so very terrible? That swift passing to sleep, to the God who knew, was it not Nature's law, and are her laws ever terrible? This night, if all were well, he would sleep, and in what did sleep differ from death?

This was heroic enough, but the mood of it passed swiftly, and was succeeded by a passionate desire for life. What right had they, in God's name, to hang him for a crime he had never committed? By what right did that eloquent knave of a counsel distort the truth, and so present the facts to the jury that conviction must follow? His letters he knew to be innocent enough; a just anger thrilled him as he remembered the circumstances under which he had written them, and the pain which had attended the task. And here they were accusing him, pushing him headlong toward the grave, and heaping shame and ignominy upon his name. To-morrow he might awake in the condemned cell, knowing that he had looked for the last time upon the faces of those who loved him. The day would no longer have a meaning for him—the night would be eternal.

And from this fate one living man could snatch him. Oh, he believed wholly in Maurevale now, trembled when he muttered his name, and had no eyes but for the door by which he would pass to the witness-box. Would they never call him? What meant this delay—and why, in Heaven's name, did Sir Horace continue to talk to the white-haired old solicitor who was smiling? He could have beat the iron rail with his fists—the room before him was black dark; he no longer saw the people.

“Call his Highness, Prince Maurevale.”

A thrill went through the Court; every eye was strained, every neck bent. The prince—the man who had sworn to save the prisoner—he was coming, then, they could hear his very steps in the corridor. Even the judge looked toward the door by which he must enter, and continued to gaze upon it until it opened. Then a heavy sigh issued, as it were, from all assembled. He had come, he, the last hope of the accused.

Many have likened Maurevale of Dara to Byron the poet, and the women, perhaps, would have admitted the truth of this when he entered the box and bowed, as is the custom of his country, first to the judge, then to the bar, and lastly to the jury. This, however, was done without any affection whatever, such a charming and graceful act that insular prejudice was not affronted. The people loved "Maury." Many of the sportsmen at the back of the Court would have given a week's wages to have seen him triumphant that day. They hoped so much from him—and yet they did not dare to believe that he could do other than disappoint after the evidence they had heard. For the rest the people simply waited in breathless expectation—the junior bar alone was ironical.

He wore a long frock coat and the button of that famous order, the White Cross of Austria. The pallor which had been noticed by Sir Horace Rupert, when last he visited the little house in Park Lane, had now disappeared, and a warm glow of colour illumined the handsome face. The curly hair was brushed high upon the forehead; the head thrown a little back; and the shoulders squared as those of a man long accustomed to military discipline. For an instant his eyes rested almost with affection upon that haunted face which looked up to him from the dock—then he took the book in his hand and was sworn, the words being just audible though the voice was musical enough.

Sir Horace Rupert was upon his feet by this time, his hands upon the shoulders of his gown, his manner earnest and his voice grave. Asking the usual questions concerning the prince's position, his connection with the house of Dara, and the number of years he had resided in England, he then half turned that the jury might hear him, and speaking with obvious emotion, he said:

"Your Highness has come here to tell us the truth of this great mystery—is it not so?"

The prince bent his head.

"I am here for that purpose."

"You believe, Highness, that you know the name of the man who assassinated this unhappy lady?"

"I am perfectly acquainted with it."

He paused an instant, looked round the Court, and then fixing his eyes upon the prisoner, he said :

"The Lady Anna Maclain was assassinated by Henri Chadrin Ferré, a chemist in the employment of the firm of Baro and Malquevart of Rheims."

No one in Court uttered a word ; you could have heard the ticking of a watch ; people seemed to hold their breath. Then all looked at Ferman, who was shaking as with heavy sobs. And so the storm burst.

"Silence in the Court," cried the judge ; "I must have silence in the Court."

The ushers quelled the tumult, and in truth it quelled itself, so anxious were the people to hear what Sir Horace was now saying. For many minutes afterwards they listened as though their own fate depended upon the musical words which fell from the witness.

"Will your Highness tell the jury how you came to that belief?" The prince turned toward the judge.

"My lord," he said, "you have before you an analysis of the poisons which killed my dear friend. I shall show you by the evidence of the great French savant, Dr. Marenceau, that those were the identical poisons used by the assassin Henri Chadrin Ferré that he might be revenged upon his employers, then at war with their workmen. I shall show you that this monster was trapped by the French detective, Gustave Faber, in the very act of inserting one of these poisoned tablets into a bottle of the medicine known as seronal. I shall show you how the Lady Anna had been in the habit of taking this preparation as a remedy for the neuralgia from which she suffered so frequently ; I shall endeavour to make good my contention that, although there was at my house on that fatal Tuesday night a man who would have stood at nothing, who would, I doubt not, have murdered that poor lady without compunction, who may have gone to Streatly for no other purpose than to assassinate her, I shall show you how this man was confronted by a dying woman, and saw his purpose achieved, as it were, by the act of a malign

destiny most favourable to him. Such are the contentions which, if your lordship pleases, I will now make good to these gentlemen of the jury."

No one objected—all were fascinated both by the personal magnetism of the man and the astounding revelations of which he spoke. Already, as in a flash, he had destroyed the hypothesis which Montagu Wilson had built up, half-heartedly, it is true, and as one who had been warned of the truth. None doubted that a master-mind was speaking.

"My lord," the prince continued, "there is in every life a page to which one would turn with reluctance. If I speak for a moment of such a page in the life of the Lady Anna Maclain, it shall be with reverence. She was a very noble lady, my lord, beloved by many and entitled to the veneration of all. But the page was written, nevertheless, and many years after it was written there came upon the scene to return it, those human parasites, known to all countries, feared in all lives, the pest of our civilisation and the enemies of our race. Certain girlish escapades in the city of Cairo must, my lord, be the beginning of what I have to tell you—follies of which any mere child might be guilty were the food upon which these monsters hoped to fatten. My lord, if it be your pleasure and the pleasure of the learned counsel that I speak more intimately of those things——?"

He paused with hand uplifted, waiting for their answer which meant so much to him and to the prisoner whose eyes were searching his own in awe and wonder. Must the truth, the whole truth, be told? The judge was quick to reassure him.

"It is obvious that the story of this poor lady's childhood can be of little concern to this Court; but I must leave it to counsel," he said, looking at Montagu Wilson, who gave a grudging consent.

"I am of your lordship's opinion at present," was his admission. "If this story has nothing to do with the prisoner's guilt or innocence, we certainly do not want to hear it."

The prince acknowledged the courtesy with a graceful gesture.

"My lord," he remarked quietly, "let there be no misapprehension. I am speaking of everyday affairs, of such episodes as

might occur in the life of any young girl plunged suddenly into the foetid atmosphere of such a city as Cairo. If we start from that our progress will not be difficult—I have your lordship's consent?"

Mr. Justice Nonagen knew very well that the witness was veiling the truth, but he made no comment upon it.

"Proceed," he exclaimed briefly; "we shall form our own impressions as we go along."

The prince resumed.

"From this city of Cairo there went to Paris some months ago a certain Michel Ghika, a Roumanian long associated with the revolutionary party in Egypt, and one of the most dangerous of its leaders. This was the man, my lord, who, knowing something of the dead lady's story, determined to profit by it and to seek her out in England. He so sought her for several reasons, the first of them being his belief that she was an obstacle to the political organisation with which he was connected. This is more readily understood when I tell you that the chief of the Egyptian revolutionaries in Paris, the noted Tahir Pasha, had been acquainted with the Lady Anna in Cairo; that he considered himself her friend, and would have persuaded her if he could to intercede for him with the English Government. There is a great figure in the Egyptian story, my lord, and one which the British people will yet learn to admire. If I speak of this man briefly, it shall be with admiration none the less. Tahir Pasha will return to Cairo under the ægis of the Government this present week, and will return with honour. And the man who would have thwarted him lies dead in the mortuary of the city of Ely, an assassin and a self-murderer."

He paused, the heat of the recital momentarily overcoming him, and the necessity of deliberation putting a bit upon his tongue. Neither side asked a question. The irregularity of the narrative—if irregular it were under circumstances so strange—moved the judge to no protest. The Court listened with an interest which would not brook an interruption.

"Michel Ghika is dead," the prince resumed, "but to Michel Ghika indirectly is this fatality to be set down. My lord, cir-



cumstances were kind to the miscreant and chance helped him. When he arrived in England, there were in London two people whom he had known well in the city of Cairo six years ago—speak of the Count of Fours and of Madame his wife. The count he called upon, and from him he learned not only of his friendship for the dead lady, but of her frequent visits to the Castle. Even a more fortunate *rencontre* was that with the Doctor Frederick Walther, whom he approached at one of the foreign clubs in London and with whom he soon became intimate. This man, my lord, Michel Ghika murdered a Strasburg in the month of September last. The circumstances of that crime will be familiar to many—let it suffice that I record them, if it be but to show you how reckless were the assassin's methods and how resolute his purpose. For the moment I am content to see him in England, to know that Lady Anna Maclair is the obstacle to his ambitions, to believe that he came to these shores to kill her, and that nothing but this intervention of a malign destiny forbade him to achieve his purpose. And from that I shall pass swiftly to the week of the crime and to its events."

He turned about as though looking for some help, while from the press by the witness-box, his secretary, Paul, handed him a little bundle of papers and a cardboard box. This the prince laid upon the rail before him, and opening it with care, he took from it various objects—some links of gold chain, some broken fragments of a bottle, a plain deal pencil, and a woman's glove. These an usher helped him to arrange upon the desk, and, when they were spread out and the Court had searched them with wondering eyes, Maurevale continued :

"It is known to us that the Lady Anna visited London on the Tuesday. There she saw Captain Ferman and received from him the counsels of a friend. He begged her to have nothing to do with Michel Ghika and his gang—he implored her not to temporise with such a scoundrel. Of this visit the Court has heard; but what it has not heard is that upon the previous Saturday her ladyship had visited the town of Ely, gone thence to the House of the Five Green Shutters, and there called upon

an old Frenchwoman of the name of Prevost. Such facts, my lord, are to be established by the evidence of many persons who are at the pleasure of the Court; by the evidence of the innkeeper whose servant drove her to the house; by that of the ticket-collector who knew her well; by that of the guard to whom both her name and her station were no secrets. These will tell you that she visited Ely on that day, drove to the house we speak of, and returned thence to London. But more important than this fact of her return, is her interest in the old Frenchwoman and in her child. I know not, my lord, how many charities are to be set down to the name of this truly benevolent lady; but that she should journey so far to visit a lonely old woman whom she had known in Egypt is not a little to her credit. To us the fact is vital, for in that house the Lady Anna lost the heart of green jade, and a child's fingers plucked it from her wrist."

He stooped and picked from the desk certain links of a gold chain which the steward, Arthur Blandy, had put into his hands on the occasion of his second visit to the House of the Five Green Shutters. These links he passed up to the judge, who examined them closely—then handed them to the prosecution, whose interest was no less than his own.

"This chain was found at the farm?" his lordship asked. The prince assented.

"By my servant, Arthur Blandy, whom I left there, my lord, in defiance of your conventions—a fault for which I humbly apologise to the police."

A titter went round the Court, but a titter almost of triumph. Some looked up at Sir Malcolm Morrison, who occupied a prominent place near the judge; but he, good man, was quite unconscious of their irony.

"And do you say that this chain belonged to the heart of green jade?" his lordship asked. Maurevale replied by a request that the ornament in question should be passed up to him.

"If your lordship will be good enough to compare the two," he said, "I think you will have no difficulty in coming to my opinion. The workmanship is Chinese in both cases—but I have here another heart of green jade that you may compare

them. Permit me to say that the same hand which made present of the one to Lady Anna Maclain, bestowed the other upon the Egyptian Tahir Pasha from whom I have obtained it. Such is the evidence of Madame de Fours—should your lordship wish to bring that lady from France?”

“We shall see,” said his lordship, knowing quite well that would not be necessary. Then he harked back to the matter of Arthur Blandy.

“You took this unusual step of keeping this man out of the way because you thought it might help justice. I must assure you that?”

“If your lordship pleases—I took it because I believed from the first that this house would reveal that which my own house concealed.”

“You ran some risk of a serious charge,” remarked his lordship. Maurevale smiled.

“The pursuit of justice requires some courage,” he retorted. “In this case I hope to convince your lordship that conventional methods would not have helped us.”

He appealed to Sir Malcolm, who feigned not to see him. The heart of green jade had been passed round by this time, and now came again to his hand. When next he spoke he held it up so that all in Court could see it.

“This chain was broken by a blind child at the House of the Five Green Shutters,” he said with emphasis. “The swivel lock was already weak, and surrendered to persistent fingers. In the heart itself there is a box—that box, my lord, contained upon the day of which I speak, three or more tablets of the preparation in question. It was one of those tablets which poisoned the Lady Anna Maclain.”

“But,” interjected his lordship, “you say that the child obtained possession of it?”

“Admittedly, but not of the drugs. What woman caring for her children would forget a fact so obvious? The Lady Maclain had abstracted the tablets from the box and put them into her gloves. Of the three—supposing there were three—I shall show you that two contained the essence of this medicine—caffeine and phenac-

cetin—the third was that which killed her in the manner Sir William has described.”

He dwelt upon the point, giving to judge and counsel the opportunity to examine him if they would. His statement was *ex parte*; he knew it and would support it presently.

“The story is plausible,” said his lordship presently; “but by what evidence is this theory of the glove supported?”

All waited to hear Maurevale’s answer. The desire to see him triumph had grown upon the Court. It recognised the master-mind.

“It is supported, my lord, by the evidence of my friend, Miss Stella Insole, who searched the rooms at my instigation, and discovered in Lady Anna’s dressing-room this tablet—or rather what is left of it, that I now have the honour to submit to you.”

He passed the fragment up as he had passed the green heart, and a critical scrutiny was bestowed upon it. The prince, however, did not pause.

“That tablet, my lord, contains the simple drugs I have named. But upon the coat of it we find a definite trace of the poisonous rhus, a poison discovered also at the autopsy. Permit me to say, then, that it was so discovered because the interior of the heart of green jade has been treated with the paint commonly used by the Chinese and the Japanese to decorate such trinkets, and this paint has infected the coating of the tablet. So the links in our evidence are welded together. The Lady Anna Maclain went to Ely; she left there the heart of green jade; she returned with three or more tablets of seronal in her glove. I say three or more because the number that she took between her visit to Ely and the night of the murder is unknown to me; but it will suffice to say that there were two left upon the evening of June 30th, and that one of these is now before us. The other, my lord, she hastened to take when she knew that Michel Ghika awaited her in the grounds of my house, and insisted upon seeing her immediately and alone. That fact I shall now establish to the satisfaction, I trust, both of your lordship and these gentlemen.”

“Do you mean to tell the jury that the Roumanian came to Streaily upon the night of the murder?”

"It is beyond question, my lord. He came to Streatham under the name of Jules Farnot, as he had come on several occasions. The maid Berthe, deceived by his ready tongue and rejoicing in the opportunities of speaking French to him, became his unwitting ally, his dupe. By her he obtained admission to the Castle, secreted himself from general observation, and was able when the right time came to confront and threaten the Lady Anna. This hour we shall fix as ten o'clock approximately on the evening of June 30th. Captain Farnot had visited the house previously, and in a secret interview with the dead lady had warned her, nay implored her, not to see these Egyptians, of whose arrival in England he had further news since their earlier encounter. Possibly he told her to call the police to her aid—I do not know. He is a brave man, and the part he has played in this affair has been that of a soldier and a chivalrous gentleman. Suffice it to say that my friend was warned by him and was afraid. Then followed the dinner at my table. She tried to keep up; there was the persiflage concerning my horses. I wrote down for her the names of three who could not possibly win races. At length she was able to support her anxiety and distress no longer; she left the table, forbidding others to leave, and in her true womanly fashion pooh-poohing her indisposition. From that moment, my lord, the true act of the drama begins. She stood on the threshold of death, this unhappy lady who was my friend."

He had shown little emotion hitherto; but it conquered him at this point, and for an instant his voice quavered and his hands gripped the rail before him convulsively. Such a tribute to his friendship and affection could not but win upon the sympathy of the Court, and in the interval of profound silence the sound of a woman weeping could be heard. Then Maurevale resumed, speaking in a low voice and seeming unconscious both of the scene and of the place.

"I follow in my guest's steps to the great conservatory, thence to the gardens. A man is lurking in the shadow of the trees. He approaches her; she bids him begone. But the man is insistent, and her curiosity prevailing above her prudence—or

should I say her courage prevailing above her fears—she tells him to go down to the boat-house, and that she will speak with him there. Thus would she escape the observation of her friends; thus would she hear in secret the threats this miscreant has to utter. There is a hurried visit to her dressing-room; in her agitation, seeking some relief for her trembling nerves, she dissolves the tablet in a wine-glass of water while she looks for a shawl to cover her head. Acting throughout as one distracted, she drinks the water but leaves a third portion of it in the glass. Then passing by the rarely used staircase behind the library, she goes to the boat-house and the river. My lord, she is a dying woman when she arrives there. And she is one pursued now by all the phantoms which this secret rendezvous can suggest. In her mad desire that none at the Castle shall know of this meeting, she bids the man get into a boat and row her down the river. I see him astounded but obedient, wondering, perhaps, at the amazing fortune which is his, and preparing already the knife with which he will kill her. Hid from his observation by the darkness, failing to see that she is in the agonies of death, the man passes under the railway bridge, goes on toward the islands, and then *he knows*. My lord, his victim lay dead in the boat—the Lady Anna Maclain had ceased to be. As though the very powers of darkness were helping this monster, he discovers the truth and it appalls him. His work is done; the night and the unknown have done it. He is adrift with the dead; the shadows veil him about; fear comes upon him; the superstitions of his race create the phantoms which bid him flee—yet whither? He knows this scene but ill. We may suppose that all is distorted; he perceives the hills and the woods, and the dread of them is inexpressible. The river has become a Styx, and he himself is Death grinning with his burden. So is the assassin who is not yet an assassin driven. Boats pass him by upon this summer night; he hides from them in the pools of the darkness. A train vomits flame upon the railway; it suggests the road to liberty and freedom. And ever before him is the hunched figure of the woman he had come to slay—the miracle which affrights his senses and bids him press on. When the end comes, my lord, it is a light from the

cottage window beneath the railway embankment at Pangbourne, which bids the wretch hope, and shows him the door. Perhaps he fears men no longer. That awful burden which answers no appeal, stirs to no touch, is sightless, livid, horrible, from that he would be gone, cost what it may. With frenzied arms now he impels the boat to the grassy bank, steps from it, drives it with a powerful thrust of the boat-hook out into the stream. And there the current catches it and it drifts idly, bearing the dead woman to those who shall mourn her truly, but carrying with it a message as of doom to the man who would have saved her. My lord and gentlemen, such is the story of my friend; such is the message my conscience bids me deliver. With you henceforth shall the verdict be, in the sight of Almighty God who has willed this thing."

The upraised hand fell to his side, the silver voice died away to a whisper. He, Maurevale of Dara, had delivered his message, he had vindicated the dead as he had sworn. And now the tribute should be paid. What availed the judge's stern appeal for order, the cries of the ushers, the despairing looks from the barristers concerned? Such a cry has gone up in the Forburg at Reading as never shall be heard there again.

And wildly from it dash the messengers to wire to all the world the news that John Philip Ferman is innocent, and that Maurevale of Dara has saved him.

Suasion and threats at length had done their work, and there was silence once more in Court.

Such brief questions as had been put to the prince by Montagu Wilson were hardly heard by the excited spectators. The inevitability of the story had been felt by all, even by the counsel for the prosecution.

None the less it was an *ex parte* statement, and must be made good by other witnesses.

These now appeared upon the scene, the first of them that courtly old gentleman, Dr. Phillip Morencieu of the University of Paris. This was a man whom all the world honoured, and to whom the Court gladly paid homage.

"You are Dr. Phillipe Morenceau of the University of Paris, official analyst to the French Government, and the director of the National Laboratory—is that so?"

The doctor bowed gravely; his English was almost without accent.

"It is so, monsieur. I occupy those positions."

"You were called in, I believe, at the time of the unfortunate dispute between the firm of Baro & Malquevart, who quarrelled with their workmen during the spring of this present year?"

"I was the Government representative in that unfortunate case."

"Will you, doctor, be so good as to tell this Court something about it?"

The doctor advanced to the edge of the box and began to speak with the gesture and volubility of an eloquent Frenchman.

"It was a terrible affair. The workmen were, as you say in English, on strike. There were differences, grievances, the common story, alas! of our time. For six weeks the chemical works of Baro & Malquevart were closed; the men's leader was the assassin Henri Chadran Ferré. It was after the dispute was settled that these atrocities began."

"Will you tell the Court of those atrocities, doctor?"

"I will gladly do so. Ferré never agreed to the settlement which the workmen accepted. He returned to the works a disappointed man; one, unhappily, filled with ideas of vengeance so terrible that the mind shrinks from contemplating them. These ideas his position permitted him to put into practice. As superintendent of the laboratories his opportunities were many. He availed himself of them in a way which has shocked the whole world. Messieurs, he entered the factory by night, and employing the machine which moulds the tablets, he prepared to destroy for ever the reputation of this most estimable house."

The savant was clearly moved, and the Court respected his emotion. Some moments passed before Sir Horace put another question to him.

"All this, we are to understand, doctor, is upon the personal confession of the miscreant?"

"It is so; he confessed upon the scaffold. The records of



his confession are here, supplied by the courtesy of Monsieur Lépine, the Prefect of Police in Paris. Permit me to place them at your disposal, my lord."

He handed the roll of scrip to the judge, who placed it upon the table beside him, as though that were not the moment to peruse it. Meanwhile Sir Horace continued :

"Ferré, then, confessed. May we hear of this a little more intimately ; the exact nature of his confession, if you are able to help us so far ?"

"It is my duty to do so. Ferré confessed that he had employed a preparation of aconitine, the common preparation of our pharmacopœia ; that he had added strychnine and arsenic in small proportions, and had moulded the whole into tablets. These tablets were coated as the others, and inserted here and there in the phials of seronal ready to be put upon the market. Such was the man's method of vengeance upon his employers. I regret, gentlemen, that I should be speaking of a fellow-countryman."

"Was this dastardly proceeding soon discovered, doctor ?"

"Almost immediately, though the truth took some weeks to unravel. A woman died at Rheims, another in the town of Verdun, a priest at Goudrecourt, and a child at Les Laumes. Each had been taking this seronal—prepared by Baro & Malquevart of Rheims. The firm naturally was distressed, perplexed beyond all words. I was sent for from Paris ; it was I who discovered the truth."

"It would be very interesting to hear how you went to work, doctor."

The old gentleman smiled.

"I used my common sense. To begin with, I treated fifty of the bottles *en bloc* ; they were harmless. A second fifty had a measure of the poison. I perceived that a villain had been at work, and took my precautions accordingly. None of the workmen knew that such a thing was being done ; my materials were taken from the packing-house, where the boxes of this preparation were ready to be delivered to the public. Upon the contents of these I worked in the laboratory at Paris. The tablets were

poisoned ; but the poison was to be detected but in a very small percentage of the whole. I went through two hundred phials, testing the tablets one by one, and in seven cases I found the aconitine, the arsenic, and the strychnine. Then I told the firm the truth. 'You have an assassin at work,' I said ; 'let the police help you.'

"This was done, of course?"

"Immediately. The famous officer, Gustave Faber of Paris, went to Rheims ; his agents were engaged nominally as workmen. The rooms were watched night and day. On the fifth night, Ferré was seen to enter the packing-room ; he was arrested in the very act of inserting a poisoned tablet into a phial of the seronal. Messieurs, I analysed that tablet for my Government, and here is a note of my work."

He passed it round, and it was read by judge and counsel ; then by the jury. The proportions of the poison were identical with those of which Sir William had spoken. So overwhelming indeed was the truth that a question upon it appeared altogether supererogatory. Certainly Montagu Wilson had no intention of wasting his time.

"The assassin being discovered, I need hardly suggest that these mysterious deaths ceased in France?" asked Sir Horace. The doctor shook his head.

"Not immediately. The firm called in the drug from all the chemists, but the public had bought much of it. There were nine further fatalities in my country ; I hear, to my sorrow, that there was one in yours."

"You would have no hesitation in ascribing that fatality to the assassin Ferré if it were proved to you that the poor lady concerned had this drug in her possession, and that she was poisoned by those proportions of aconitine, arsenic, and strychnine?"

The doctor answered solemnly :

"I should as soon doubt my own existence."

He was thanked for his evidence, and left the box. An offer by Sir Horace to submit Gustave Faber to the examination of the court was declined by the other side and considered unnecessary

by the judge. So the next witness was a white-haired old abbé—one of the minor canons of the cathedral—who spoke of Ferré's death and of his confession.

Here was a picturesque moment, and one which awed the people. To see this white-haired old man, a glimmer of golden light upon his face, his hand upraised, his cassock and bands speaking of no modern age, to see him and to hear him was to be carried from the twentieth century to the Catholic age of England. His words were uttered in a low solemn tone; and his voice was very beautiful when he spoke of death.

The assassin Henri Chadran Ferré had confessed upon the morning of the execution. Of that confession, of course, the abbé would tell the Court nothing, and he was careful to explain that what he might have to say had no reference to anything disclosed under the seal of the confessional.

"I went into the unhappy man's cell about half-past four o'clock. The sun was shining upon him, and he slept. I do not think he had hoped for pardon. We awoke him, and he started up with the wild look of one who is hunted. Perhaps he had not realised the whole meaning of his crime, for he had seen nothing of the sufferings of those upon whom he wreaked his vengeance; but, messieurs, I discovered a real sentiment for his little daughter, Claudine, and some humanity in his expressions of regret. After he had been to confession and to the Holy Communion, he spoke to me of his crime, and if it be the pleasure of monsieur le jugé I will narrate what he said."

He waited for the judge looked from one advocate to the other. Such evidence was quite irregular—as indeed had been much which preceded it; but no one now deluded himself into the belief that Ferman was any longer upon his trial, and the abbé's narrative had excited all by its tragic simplicity. So no objection was made by Montagu Wilson, and the old priest continued:

"Ferré declared that the firm had won over the men by a trick. He preached the common doctrines of the socialists—the right of the proletariat to a living wage, and to a share of

the profits its labour created. I found him illogical, as are many of his fellows, and obsessed by the strange idea that sabotage, or universal destruction, would benefit the human race. His defence of his own acts was pitiable in its errors. He declared that wars kill millions and benefited none, while he had killed but two or three that Labour might be vindicated throughout the world. Messieurs, that is a madness with which it is idle to argue. When I asked in my turn what he would have said if his little daughter Claudine had perished thus, he began to see the wickedness of his deeds and to lament them. I followed him to the scaffold and saw the head fall into the basket—and then, messieurs, I sought out the child. May she never know that such a father held her in remembrance—such is my earnest prayer to Almighty God.”

The judge thanked him in a little speech full of grace and charm and worthy of his high office. It would have been almost an outrage to have submitted the old priest to cross-examination; nor could any useful purpose have been effected thereby. The next witness, one of the junior partners in the house of Baro and Malquevart, appeared to have come to England rather to benefit his firm than to throw any new light upon this mystery. Somewhat truculently, he declared that the whole affair had been greatly exaggerated by trade rivals; and while he could not deny that a certain number of deaths had followed the use of the preparation seronal, he hastened to assure the Court that further fatalities were impossible, and that he and his partners had lost thousands of pounds in recalling the outstanding stock. The main point was, however, that he admitted the truth of the case against Ferré, and could not deny that any one who used seronal during the course of the summer did run a certain risk from the machinations of this miscreant.

This young man was followed immediately by an undergardener from Highlands—a sawny, red-cheeked, bow-legged fellow, who laughed in a silly way while counsel addressed him, and was as far from the gravities of the case as the equator from the Poles. His chief desire appeared to be a kind of personal glorification and the establishment of the fact that a

particular variety of dahlia owed much to his genius and to something he had seen in a dream. When he was sternly rebuked by the judge, he smiled again in the old sawny way, and said, "Why, I thought as yer lardship would have liked to hear on't"—which both exasperated and amused the impatient Court.

"Now, sir," exclaimed Sir Horace in his sharpest tones, "tell the Court if you have ever seen this before?"

He held up a pencil, such a pencil as is to be found in many a pocket-book of a cheap kind, thin and pointed and capped by a nickel head. The gardener, whose name was Blow, looked at the pencil cunningly, and then nodded as though what he had to say was between counsel and himself.

"I'd know her anywhere."

"Then you have seen this pencil before?"

"Why, to be sure; I wouldn't know her if I hadn't seen her."

"Come, come, my man, don't play the fool here. You have seen this object before?"

"I've seed t'pencil."

"Where did you see it?"

"'Twere lyin' in the ole plantation, same as Bill Geeks planted three and twenty year ago."

"How did you come to find it there?"

"Why, by a lookin' fur it, in course—I wouldn't have found it if I weren't lookin' fur it."

"Is it your habit to be looking for pencil-cases in this plantation?"

The man scratched his head.

"Well, 'tain't no habit, so to speak; but, yer see, the guv'ner, he tells me to."

"Oh, your master told you to. And so you went into the plantation to look for something at his order? Is that so?"

"Well, certainly; I wouldn't have gone otherwise, for, yer see, I'm a glassus man, and it ain't my work ordinary."

"Not your ordinary work—so you were taken from some other occupation to this. What did your master order you to look for?—anything in particular?"

The fellow was puzzled.

"'Tweren't nothink in particler, to be sure. Says he, 'Keep yer eyes open,' and I kep 'em."

"For what were your eyes to be kept open?"

"Why, for that there pencil, silly."

The Court laughed, really heartily this time, and there was even a twinkle in Mr. Justice Nonagen's eye when he exclaimed: "If you do not behave yourself, I will commit you," a threat which was as water upon the back of this self-satisfied duck. Sir Horace, however, kept his temper.

"Did your master specify a pencil when he sent you to search the wood?"

"He didn't say narthen abart it. 'You keep yer eyes open, Blow,' says he, 'and likely you'll find summat. It's as good as a five-pun note in your pocket,' says he—and I'm jowned if it weren't."

"You certainly will get yourself into trouble," cried Mr. Justice Nonagen sternly.

The witness declared that he was very sorry to hear it. "Becos I must speak the truth, my lud; it's in me jess the same as it were in my old feyther before me."

The judge silenced him with an impatient gesture, and Sir Horace continued:

"You were sent to the woods to search them, and you found that pencil. Tell the Court just where you found it."

"About twenty rakes' length from the North porch; that's where I found it."

"About twenty rakes' length! What are we to understand by that?"

"Why, jess what I say—twenty rakes' length."

"Would it be a hundred yards?"

"It might be."

"Two hundred yards?"

"Put it fifty, and you're nearer your money."

"My money! Are you aware, my man, that you are a very impudent fellow?"

"Well, I don't mean no harm."

"Did your venerable father ever flog you in the course of his estimable life?"

"Ay, many a day—I've had his stick across my back more times than I can remember."

"Then I wish he were in court to repeat the process."

"I'm sure I'm very much obliged to your honour."

The sally being exchanged, the ruffled Sir Horace harked back to the question.

"The place where you found this pencil is about fifty yards from the North porch of the Castle. How was the pencil lying?"

"Half trod in the ground agen the roots of the old elm."

"You yourself picked it up there?"

"I did so."

"And handed it to the prince?"

"I did, and that's the last I seed of it."

He would have liked to tell the Court more about his knowledge of dahlias, and especially about his ideas of the "glassuses" at Highlands; but being summarily dismissed, he went up to join his friends at the back of the public gallery. The next witness was a solemn policeman from Ely, who gave his evidence splendidly, without a superfluous word.

"Do you recognise this pocket-book, constable?"

"I do, sir."

"Where have you seen it before?"

"On the body of the man called Michel Ghika, brought to Ely mortuary on Tuesday morning last."

"The pocket-book was on the body—where?"

"In the inside pocket of the coat."

"Examine it carefully. You are ready to swear that it is the same pocket-book of which you speak?"

"I can swear to it; the French name was read out at the time."

"Will you read it now?"

The man took the shabby green pocket-book which Sir Horace passed on to him, and holding it open he read the name

of its makers, written in silver, upon the central line: "Everard et ses Fils, Rue Vancourt, Paris."

"You read that name at Ely, and read it for the second time here—is that so, constable?"

"It is so, sir."

"Then that is all I require."

The man stepped from the box, and as he did so the advocate turned to the judge.

"My lord," he said, "if you will have the goodness to read the name upon the pencil to the jury!"

The judge fumbled for his glasses, and when he had arranged them and drawn the candle nearer, he read the name as requested:—

"Everard et ses Fils, Rue Vancourt, Paris."

Sir Horace made no comment; the Court itself reflected the profound admiration with which the details of this splendid fabric of evidence were being accumulated. Excitement ran high, and the cries of the ushers now added to it—for they were calling Stella Insole, and a moment later Lord Kerrimore's daughter stood in the box.

She was dressed very simply in a plain black gown with a black hat and feather she had last worn at Aizy-la-Belle. Very pale and self-possessed, it was clear that she also would be an ideal witness—if testimony at this stage were worth anything at all. Nevertheless Sir Horace examined her closely, and in a kindly tone which won general sympathy.

"You were one of Lady Anna's friends, I think?"

"Yes, indeed, she was a dear friend."

"How long had you known her?"

"Since she returned from India three years ago."

"Did you see much of her during that time?"

"I saw her very frequently during the last year."

"Where was that?"

"At my father's house in London, also at the prince's houses in Park Lane and at Streathly."

"Could you tell the Court if she enjoyed good health during that time?"



"I should not have called her a delicate woman. She suffered occasionally from neuralgic headaches."

"Are you aware what remedies she took for them?"

"Oh yes; Dr. Walther of London recommended her the tablets of Baro & Malquevert of Rheims; she used to send to Paris for them."

"Why to Paris? Are they not to be obtained in London?"

"She had the idea that the tablets were fresher when they came from France."

"And so she sent direct to Paris for them. Do you happen to know the name of the chemist to whom she wrote?"

"It was a house in the Rue St. Honoré. I cannot remember the number, but I think the name of the firm was Scheffer. She used to get them from there twice a month."

"Did she advise you to take the drug?"

"Yes, that is how I came to know of it. She gave me a bottle. I think it was as long ago as last April."

"Could you tell the Court when this poor lady last sent to Paris for any of this seronal?"

Stella shook her head.

"I am unable to do that."

Sir Horace accepted it.

"I will ask you another question, Miss Insole. Is it not a fact that you searched Lady Anna's dressing-room after the police had been at Highlands?"

She bent her head.

"Will you tell the jury just what you discovered there?"

"I discovered a tablet in one of Lady Anna's gloves."

"Could you swear it was her glove?"

"Oh yes; I have seen her wearing it."

"What was the tablet like?"

"It was a tablet of seronal."

"Are you quite sure of that?—is it possible to distinguish these tablets from others?"

"I think so; they are curiously shaped at the corners—not quite round, and often slightly discoloured."

"How did you manage to find this tablet?"

"The prince asked me to search the room ; he thought we might be able to discover something that had been overlooked."

"And so you found the glove. Where was it?"

"In the little drawer upon the right-hand side of the dressing-table. It was turned half inside-out, and when I opened it the tablet fell out."

"Do you know if Lady Anna usually carried these tablets in her glove?"

Stella shook her head.

"Not to my knowledge ; she sometimes carried them in the heart of green jade."

"Have you seen her carry them like that?"

"Oh yes ; she has given me one from the heart."

"When would that have been?"

"I don't believe I could possibly remember the date ; but, once, I think, at Park Lane in June, and again when we first went to Highlands."

"Did she, to your knowledge, attach any superstition to the possession of this trinket?"

"There were jests, of course. The Count of Fours used to say that any one possessing a heart of green jade could become invisible at will. I think he said it was a Chinese superstition—certainly he believed the heart to be lucky."

"Lady Anna thought that too?"

"In a way. She was wont to say that if ever she were in trouble, she hoped that the green heart might hide her."

"Meaning by that, I suppose, that it would make her invisible?"

"I think it must have been so."

The judge intervened to say that a good many people would pay a high price for such a trinket if its powers could be established ; and when this profound observation had properly amused the Court, Sir Horace put a last question to Stella.

"There was some foolish talk at the Police Court of shuffling steps heard by you on the night you searched this room. Is it true or false?"

"It is true ; the steps were those of the boy Hassan employed in the stables."

"How do you know that?"

"He has confessed as much to the prince and to me."

"What was he doing in Lady Anna's dressing-room?"

"I can't tell you, if he were not sent there by Michel Ghika, the Rumanian."

"But you heard his steps distinctly?"

"Quite distinctly; I think he was very near me."

Sir Horace said, "Thank you"; and after Montagu Wilson had intimated that he had no questions to ask, Stella withdrew immediately and disappeared through the private door behind her.

The next witness was a groom from Highlands, to whom, directly he had been sworn, Sir Horace passed a small wooden box, containing a complete bottle such as chemists use for tablets, and the portion of another bottle broken across the middle.

"You are a groom in the service of Prince Maurevale, I think?"

"I ham, sir."

"And a very nice, well-dressed ham you are—do you recognise those bottles, my boy?"

"Should know them anywhere, sir."

"Why should you know them?"

"Beecause they were worth five of the best to me."

Mr. Justice Nonagen asked what "five of the best" might be, and receiving the answer that the youth indicated a present of five pounds sterling, his lordship exclaimed that he would really like to send such an answer to the Board of Education, and to hear what it had to say for itself.

"I suppose," he remarked, "that we individually have had to make some contribution to this youth's education. And yet he comes to us and speaks of 'five of the best.'"

"I meant 'thick 'uns,' my lord," exclaimed the groom, quite unconscious of his offence. The learned judge succumbed at once in a philological agony of a distressing kind. Clearly, this young man was hopeless.

"You received five pounds for those bottles," Mr. Horace went on. "Why did you receive them?"

## THE TRIAL IS CONCLUDED

"For finding 'em in the muck heap."

"Muck heap—what is that, pray?"

"Why, where the ashes go, ain't it?"

"Don't ask me; I don't know."

"Well, then, it's there right enough. The prince told me to rake the stuff over, and I did so, and I found they bottles."

"When did this happen?"

"Not more than ten days ago."

"And you found the bottles you are holding now?"

"I did so, and took 'em in to his Highness at once."

"And he gave you five pounds?"

"He did so."

"You found no other bottles in the heap you speak of?"

"Yes, plenty—but not that kind of bottle."

"What were they then?"

"Mostly things as the ladies put on their faces—creams and paints—I don't know—I'm a batcheler."

"To the despair of the ladies, no doubt. These, then, were the only bottles of the kind?"

"They were, sir, indeed."

The titter of laughter had not died down when the horsey youth stepped from the box, and there followed another of those minor witnesses to contribute one stone more to this impregnable structure. Brick by brick it had been built up before the eyes of the astonished people, until it now stood a majestic whole, which neither logic nor rhetoric might assail. And the mighty architect, whose servants these people were, had gone from the precincts of the Forburg that others might hear the people's acclamations.

"Would Jack Ferman be called?" This was the question yet to be answered. The hour was late, and the court wholly lighted. None of those present, however, had a thought for dinner or for the trains which did or did not depart from London. Would they put the prisoner in the box—would he be heard for himself?

The question was answered after a dramatic instant of delay.

"Call John Philip Ferman."

The words rang through the court as though the prisoner were away on the recreation-ground, and not in the dock before them.

Ferman brushed the flaxen curl back from his forehead, buttoned the top button of his frock coat, and stepped into the box. He took the book firmly, and kissed it very earnestly. Then he turned right round and faced the advocate.

"You are John Philip Ferman, late of the 1st Battalion of the Manchester Regiment."

"I am."

"You were lately in the general staff—having been through the necessary examination, I think?"

"It is true."

Sir Horace allowed a moment to pass. He drew his hand back with a firm gesture, and looked at the jury and in a voice trembling with emotion he resumed his question.

"I ask you in the name of Almighty God, did you murder Lady Anna Martin?"

"I answer you, sir, in the name of Almighty God, I did not."

Sir Horace did not stir. He sat down waiting for Montagu Wilson. The Court held its breath in this moment of tense passion and expectation which passed.

"I have no questions to ask the prisoner."

"The court is adjourned," said Sir Horace, rising slowly, "that is the case."

He went to the door, and once more arranged the papers on the table. It mattered nothing that the foreman of the jury desired to communicate a decision to the judge. What must be said though a legion intervened.

"May it please your lordship."

There were many admirers of this great advocate in court, and not a few who knew his manner well. To-day they found him changed, and wondered at the profundity of an emotion which he was so proud to conceal. Not as one who would plead

with the jury, but who would remind them of their deliverance, did he begin that brief address. And in the same spirit he terminated it—the spirit of earnest thankfulness, nay, even of humility.

“Gentlemen, reflect—but for a master mind which has taken this great burden from our shoulders, I might be pleading with you at this moment for the life of the prisoner you are about to acquit. Such eloquence as I possess might have been unavailing in the face of the evidence you had heard, and the witnesses who had been called before you. You would, perhaps, on testimony that seemed good to you—perhaps in the certain belief that John Philip Ferman was a guilty man—have sent him to his death. From that calamity a stranger within our gates has saved us. He who has been a guest among us many years, beloved of the people, that courtly gentleman, that noble prince, has taught how little is the worth of much which seems convincing, how terrible are the possibilities of mistake even under the beneficent laws of England. And we have learned our lesson in all humility. We have bent our heads to that decree which bids us set the prisoner free, nay, which commands us to honour him.”

As a murmur of applause here; it would have grown to a shout but for the upraised hand of the judge and the usher who cries for silence. It had hardly died away when the speaker resumed.

“Gentlemen, you are about to acquit the prisoner, but never to the end of your lives forget that the wisdom, the perception, the intellect of one man stood between you and this crime against the truth. But for that intervention the name of John Philip Ferman might have been execrated through the land. I see him sent forth dishonoured, nay, branded, as the murderer of the woman he had loved, condemned by this Court to death, a felon of felons, a miscreant of miscreants. And you know that he was the truest friend this poor lady ever had. You know that he would have shielded her from all that would have given his life for her; would have gone to the gallows rather than utter one word concerning those difficult

her. Gentlemen of the jury, such is the prisoner. As the law has put shame upon him, so will those who make the laws atone. Be it yours to set the good example; yours to trumpet these tidings far and wide; yours to remember while you live that God Almighty has watched over you in this ordeal, and has sent John Philip Ferman not less surely to the honour and the homage of his fellow-countrymen."

He closed his papers and sat down. The trial was over. The jury found a verdict of "Not Guilty" without leaving the box. The last words were with the judge.

The police fought hard to keep the people from the carriage in which Jack Ferman rode to the hotel; but a mighty mob overpowered them and got the horse from the shafts. It was full dark by this time, and some of those who ran called for torches, which were procured, Heaven knew whence, and kindled instantly by the outposts. The sounds to be heard were as the roaring of a mighty sea. Women and children fled from the streets as though an invading army besieged them. The galloping of horses, the faces at the windows above, the grouping and regrouping of the idlers, the flaming lights, the hoarse voices, all were a multitude's witness to the truth, an answer to the appeal that justice should be done.

Ferman heard the cries; the garish light fell weirdly upon his haggard face. He sat with Stella Insole by his side, neither asking nor caring whither the journey would carry him, or what his destination might be. In her turn, Stella would speak of Highlands Castle and of the prince's wish that he would spend a few days there. At last she admitted that her sister Kitty was at the Castle, and at this name Ferman awoke as from a spell.

"Yes," he said quietly, "I'll go to Kitty—I'll go now."

He perceived that she had been weeping, and there were tears in his eyes now—tears of which his manhood was unashamed.

This frenzy about him, the wild cries, the lights, the exultation, nay, the very madness, affrighted him and broke down his

courage. He would have been hard enough had he gone out in silence and alone; but thus as a king among the people, oh, that was beyond all expectation and it unnerved him. His heart surrendered to such homage and its meaning.

Perhaps the greater trial was yet to come. They lifted him from the carriage at the door of the hotel, and bore him high upon their shoulders to the portals. Here Maurevale received him, and all his Southern temperament prevailing, he held out both his arms and embraced the man he had delivered from death. Then they entered the hotel together, Stella following with veiled face. The people, however, continued to throng the streets until midnight, and it was early in the new day before the last of the torches had been extinguished, the last of the honest rioters sent home by a kindly and sympathetic police.

In London at this time, the evening papers all brought out special editions containing Sir Horace's speech, the judge's address, and the verdict. These were on sale in the West End about the time the people were coming home from the theatres. A ready trade was done until the small hours, and the suburbs were awakened at the dead of night to hear the shrill cries, and to learn that John Philip Ferman was acquitted.



## CHAPTER XLI

### SIR MALCOLM REVISITS HIGHLANDS

THE train which carried Sir Malcolm Morrison into Oxfordshire arrived at Goring Station at ten minutes to three upon the third day after the trial, and a brougham being there to meet him, the distinguished officer was driven at once to Highlands Castle.

Perhaps he would have admitted to none the strength of the curiosity, nay, of the admiration, which impelled him to this visit. A master of investigation himself, one whose name stood high on the world's record of criminologists, none the less, he could admit the profundity of the genius which had saved John Philip Fernan, and had solved one of the most amazing mysteries of the age.

And now he himself would learn and profit by this genius if he could. There was neither shame nor humiliation in the motive. Sir Malcolm went to Highlands Castle to discover, if he could, the system upon which Maurevale had worked, and the nature of that inductive method by which he had achieved a victory so remarkable. And in this the prince encouraged him, answering his letter at once, and bidding him come to the Castle without delay.

The men met in the prince's room, that vast apartment in the west wing wherein he had talked with Stella on the day of the inquest. Hither a servant carried coffee and Russian cigarettes, and when these had been served and the common topics of the weather and the news they discussed, Sir Malcolm at once began to speak of "the affair."

"By the way," he said, "I have news from Vienna this morning which may interest you. The woman Sabine Ghika arrived there twenty hours ago."

The prince nodded.

"I think I know something about that," he said, with a suspicion of amusement. "Paul, my Russian friend, was here just ten minutes ago to speak of it—and yes, here is the telegram he left me."

He turned to the table and took a telegraph form from a mass of papers which littered it. When Sir Malcolm had read it also, that clever official was rather sorry that he had spoken of the woman.

"So they have arrested her, it seems?"

"It is evidently so—and really, she was very foolish to go to Vienna at all."

"Why foolish, prince?"

Maurevale sipped his coffee slowly.

"Do you remember the affair of the Archduchess Marie's emeralds, and the murder of her steward Franz?"

Sir Malcolm reflected upon it.

"Well, yes, I may say that I do; but that is ten years ago, is it not?"

"As you say, just about ten years ago. But they have long memories in Vienna—and there are others who think for them. Will you be surprised to hear that the Archduchess's emeralds were stolen by Sabine Ghika, and that the steward Franz was murdered by her brother Michel?"

"A pleasant family, prince—I congratulate you."

"Oh, don't congratulate me. The credit belongs to Paul. He has been watching the woman for me, and it was he who remembered the case. A great thing is a good memory—especially in criminal cases, Sir Malcolm. I am sure you must find it so?"

"I wish that I did—consistently. My memory is both good and bad. I remember surnames but have no memory for Christian names, recall dates but forget days. It has always been so with me. Anno Domini has nothing to do with it."

"The world would hardly guess as much by your record. Permit the expression—we are friends and alone. I have the greatest admiration for your achievements; but, my dear sir,

officialdom bound by precedent must often fail when the pinch comes. Then it is the free-lance who succeeds—the man without ideas, one to whom the field is fallow, who will plant the seeds himself and gather the fruit. I have been such a free-lance in this case you have come here to speak about. I started with empty hands and returned with my harvest. Why? Because I was without preconceived notions, listened to nothing which the facts did not establish, and positively denied myself the luxury of any theory at all. That is why I succeeded where authority failed. Do you not admit it yourself?"

The question was put with great good humour, but Sir Malcolm hesitated to answer it.

"If I could admit your premiss, yes. But did you start from nothing, Highness? Did you not start from a wineglass and a little water? I think it is fair to remember that."

The prince remained unruffled.

"Let us admit it," he said quietly; "I start with this wineglass and this water—it is the first of the facts upon which I work. You people heard of it upon the following day, however, and yet you persisted before the magistrates with your theory of coniine found in Ferman's rooms—an old preparation left by a medical student who was there before him, and obviously having nothing to do with this affair. Now, my dear Sir Malcolm, was not that official obstinacy?"

"Undoubtedly. I do not defend it. Zeal, my dear sir, is almost as dangerous in my profession as candour in a parson's. That is what I said to you three months ago. We are called in when the mischief is done. A bungler from the provinces gives the whole case away, and we must stand by him at the trial. I heard of the coniine and believed it good evidence—until I had the medical report. Unfortunately that came after the case had been opened at Reading. So there we are, tied to an absurdity from the beginning. You, on the contrary, started with the knowledge of the tablet. I consider that a very great advantage. You knew that she had been poisoned by aconitine—you almost told me so, I remember, at our interview."

The prince reflected, then he said with some deliberation—

"I think that I did, but it must have been with reserve. When the analysis was first shown to me, I thought the chemist an ignoramus; but he came from Zurich with the finest credentials. His obstinacy, his earnestness, at length convinced me. I saw that the poor lady had been poisoned by a madman. The very idea of so simple a fellow as Jack Ferman employing such drugs seemed to me untenable. And from that point I began."

"Having taken the opportunity of searching the poor lady's rooms before the police arrived?"

"Quite so, and why not? My house is my own. If the act were a conceit, it has been justified. I went to her rooms while the car was got ready to carry us to Pangbourne; I saw the glass of water upon her dressing-table. Was it not natural to safeguard it? For me the case began from that moment. I did not know that she was dead; but a premonition of her death went with me upon the journey. I was already at work before I looked upon her dead body."

"Then you must have known that there was a story?"

Maurevale looked up in surprise—the question troubled him.

"What I knew, her friends knew," he said quietly. "She had not been happy in her girlhood—she admitted as much to many. I observed that she spoke of the East, sometimes with longing, sometimes with abhorrence. I have seen her burst into tears before a picture of an Eastern garden; once in Paris, when Duviqne's great drawing of Wady Halfa was hung, her distress was pitiable to see. Yet I will confess to you that its meaning was unknown to me. That there might have been a man was the obvious deduction. I thought that she had been in love in the East and had never forgotten some girlish romance which any picture of the Orient could recall for her. More I did not know—until I first heard the name of Tahir Pasha."

"It would be very interesting to know where you first heard that name, prince?"

"There is no secret about it. I heard it at the Duchess of Asherton's reception in July, from the lips of Frederick Walther, whom, to my great amusement, my friend Lady Con-

stance Heliers professed hardly to know. The same night I heard it from my secretary, at a moment when I was haunted by illusions and half ashamed of myself for permitting them to influence me. The coincidence struck me as curious. I remembered the name of Tahir Pasha as the second of my facts, and from that moment I began to study the history of that remarkable man with all the diligence I could command."

Sir Malcolm smiled.

"It was a very profitable study—we know that now."

"Unquestionably, for it showed me that of the people concerned in this drama, two, who had been in my house at the time of the murder, knew this poor lady in Egypt, and were equally well acquainted with Tahir Pasha."

"And was that knowledge the third of your facts?"

"Undoubtedly. I began to take an interest in Egypt which became almost an obsession. My servants—and I have employed many in this case—went to work, alike in the East and the West. I discovered that Tahir Pasha had been considered the handsomest man in Egypt during the year Lady Anna was there with her brother. I found out that Jack Ferman was quartered in Cairo with his regiment during those significant months. I learned that the Countess of Fours had made advances to the Egyptian soldier which were little short of scandalous; that half the Englishwomen in Cairo were in love with the man and would have been at his feet for a nod. The facts were many by this time, and it needed an eclectic judgment to deal with them. I began to perceive a human motive and to say that, while the Count of Fours had been in love with Lady Anna, his wife, the Countess, was as certainly jealous of my friend. From that it was easy to go deeper, to sift the gossip of the time, the history of the persons concerned, their acts and the consequences. I learned that the Count of Fours, a loyal Frenchman, was suspected of some dealings with the Revolutionaries. Tahir Pasha fell into disfavour, was accused of treachery and fled from Cairo. The Lady Anna disappeared with her brother, the Earl of Farrand, and is not heard of for many months. Then she reappears in India—but a changed woman. The flirtations, the

girlish escapades, the originality of a spirited character are of the past. She is said to shun the society of men, to have become a recluse, to have joined the Roman Church. Then I begin to think that I know—even as you know at this moment.”

He threw the end of his cigarette away and took another. Sir Malcolm had been too interested to interrupt him, and almost resented the intrusion.

“Of course I read your letter to the prosecution,” he remarked quietly, “it was your wish, I understood.”

“Assuredly, it was my wish. There are secrets which all the town shares and yet they are secrets. At a hazard there are just about a dozen people in England who know that Anna Maclain was the wife of Tahir Pasha. There may be five hundred in a month; but the thing will be told in whispers and none will believe it. So we shall have saved her honour, as I meant to save it when I sent Michel Ghika to Ely and took good care that Tahir Pasha was there to receive him. To-day the last line on my page has been written—Sabine Ghika is arrested at Vienna. My influence in that quarter of the world will be responsible for her future. Tahir Pasha goes back to Egypt—he takes his child with him, and for the child’s sake will hold his tongue. He is reinstated and has a career before him—I do not think he will speak. We are left, then, with his sister Zaida—ah, my dear Sir Malcolm, I must introduce you to that young lady some day, for I assure you that she is a very charming creature.”

He laughed at the pleasant nature of his thoughts, and began to pace the room as was his habit. Sir Malcolm, however, sat as one in a reverie. The narrative had fascinated but left him without enlightenment. He had twenty questions to ask, and knew not which he should begin with.

“It is a pretty story,” he observed, with some natural hesitation, “and yet we are but upon the threshold of it. You knew that Tahir Pasha had eloped from Cairo; you guessed at a marriage—but it was all surmise, mere deduction—all the same you had nothing at that time to confirm the inference?”

“My dear Sir Malcolm,” said the prince earnestly, “I had everything. Was there not in Reading Jail a man accused of

this murder, a man who told me that he would hang before he would utter a single word about the mystery? What could such silence mean, if not that the scandal connected with Anna Mac-lain had been one affecting her honour and the honour of her race? I perceived as much at the start and began to act upon it. Then come the conspirators, these hawks preying upon our society, who also net the rumours and would land them. I meet that master of duplicity, Frederick Walther, and I understand that he is in hot pursuit of Anna's story that he may blackmail me into selling him my patents. My judgment tells me that Lady Constance Heliers is in his power, and that he is employing a woman's wit to do what a man's could never do. At Wargrave, at her house there, I first heard of the instrument of this conspiracy. Her ladyship did not expect me and I came. Her agitation served me well—I frightened and drugged her. Had I not the right to do it at such an hour and under circumstances so dramatic? She was expecting some one, I said, and that man would be the link. When he came and I saw him, this Michel Ghika whom they buried yesterday, I dismissed him as a go-between, a mere scullion in the kitchen of intrigue. But I was wrong—and I was wrong because I had then carried Tahir Pasha's history but a little way. Of Sabine Ghika, who was his second wife, I had not heard. I did not know that Lady Anna had fled to the desert with Tahir, driven by a girlish mania for Eastern romance, and duped by this fine fellow of a Bimbashi. Of her so-called marriage by the old priest Mahomet, I was equally ignorant. The fact that she lived for seven weeks with her soldier in the steam yacht which used to be the delight of the ladies of Cairo, was yet to be discovered. None of these things are now hidden from us. We know that when Tahir was tracked eventually, Jack Ferman was the man who tracked him, and swore before God he would shoot him if Anna did not return immediately to her brother the Earl. And she went because she loved the man, loved him with a passion of which the East knows all but the West knows nothing. The secret journey to Ceylon; the birth of the child there, which the old woman Prevost nursed; the subsequent visit to India—they are but the details of the

story, but they were the details I would have given a good deal of my fortune to have learned on the night I visited Wargrave and saw Michel Ghika for the first time."

"He being, so to speak, a new *point d'appui*. Obviously you had very much to do before you learned that."

"Obviously, but chance helped me greatly. Just as these intriguers grouped themselves about my own life that they might rob me, so did their attempts supply me with those cues which otherwise would have been wanting. I went to the Maplins to show my torpedo to the Admiralty, and Frederick Walther sent his agents after me. Of these the chief was that notorious woman-spy, Ludwig Monheim; a woman who robbed not only the embassies, but the very arsenals of Europe. She attempted to board my yacht, and failed—shall I tell you why? Because Michel Ghika killed her in the act, and her body rolled from the hawser, up which she would have climbed to my ship. But for the fog in the river that night I would have caught Ghika. He escaped from me by leaping to the bowsprit of a sailing ship and letting it carry him almost to the docks. I am more thankful than I can say that he did so, for, had I caught him then, it is very probable that Jack Ferman would be sleeping in Reading Jail to-night."

"At that time, however, you knew nothing of Ghika?"

"Nothing at all, save that Frederick Walther was haunting the foreign clubs, and that the man who attempted to board my yacht was an Egyptian. The crimson tarboosh proved that clearly. It also seemed to say that my work was done in England, and that, if I would master the profoundest mystery with which it has ever been my lot to cope, I must quit England and search the East. Again fortune stood with me and was my friend. A clever agent, the most excellent Gustave Faber, discovered that Tahir had arrived in Paris and was with the revolutionaries in the Rue Dauphine. I tracked him to an opium den, and discovered there the very double of the face I had seen at Wargrave. It was a woman's face, and she, they told me, was Tahir Pasha's wife. Let me confess, my dear friend, that if you had put me to the question that night, I would



have told you that<sup>3</sup> Michel Ghika had murdered Lady Anna. Sabine, his sister, I would have said, had sent him to England for no other purpose, and all that remained for me to do was to bring it home to these people, and then to communicate with my good friends at Scotland Yard. You know that I did nothing of the kind—the reasons will not be less evident to you.”

“Implying, of course, that there was no evidence against Ghika?”

“There was none at the moment ; but there was something which I valued more than evidence, and that was direction. I sifted the facts anew and added to them the knowledge which my friend Miss Insole imparted. Out of the mists there came to me an image of my suppositions. Various interviews with Tahir Pasha, the words let fall by the young man Allulali, helped me to deck out that image and to clothe it with new ideas. Tahir had been in love with the Lady Anna. His English sympathies were notorious. I perceived that he would give much to go back to Cairo to his home. I asked myself what forbade, and the answer was Madame Sabine and her brother. Their interest in the revolutionary movement went for much ; but Madame's jealousy, a very natural jealousy of the Englishwoman, went for more. Working backwards, I recalled the House of the Five Green Shutters at Ely, and its witness to the child that had been harboured there. From Aizy-la-Belle, at the same time, came the tidings that the old Count of Fours was much agitated because of an old Frenchwoman who travelled about with a little Egyptian lad. I am mystified, for this lad is too old to be Anna's child ; but I cling to my faith, and state that a child exists, and that I will discover it. By this argument I get nearer to my motives. If there be a child, if Tahir had clung passionately to the memory of his English wife, if he yet hoped by her influence to win favour with the English authorities, the rest is clear. Madame Sabine and her brother will stand at nothing to oppose that reunion. They will hunt mother and child to the death. The word “hasib,” telegraphed by Ferman to Ely, was justified indeed. A real and vital danger threatened Prevost and her charge ; do you wonder if I believed that Michel

Ghika had killed my friend, and would kill the child when he could find it?"

"The assumption was natural enough. Frankly, I should have called in the police at that point."

"And lost the case, my dear Sir Malcolm?"

"You admit, however, that you came near to losing it?"

Maurevale disliked the question.

"Is it impossible that one should conduct an affair of this sort without mistakes? I made many, and admit them. The first was the mistake of my own delusions. I believed in a sound of steps heard on the pavement of Park Lane, a sound which never existed. Miss Insole, on the other hand, heard these steps, and they were real, the steps of the stable-boy, Hassan, who had been terrorised by Ghika from the beginning. This lad was prying about Lady Anna's dressing-room upon the night Miss Insole searched it, watching her as Ghika commanded. He follows her, later on, to Paddington, and she hears his steps upon the platform; but, being small and quick, he evades her when she turns, and is unobserved. I have such a story in my head, and it deludes me twice; the first time purely by hallucination, the second when a gardener at Lausanne takes a peep at me while I sleep. So, you see, I have made mistakes, and I admit them. Conceit would have contrived a jest in Paris for which I am unable to forgive myself. That was the second of my mistakes, for which I have no apology. I should have waited for the revolutionaries to have dispersed, and then taken my chance of protecting the charming Mademoiselle Zaida. I did nothing of the kind, and you are aware of the consequences?"

"She was poisoned by the Roumanian woman, I think you said?"

"Indirectly, yes. She was told that her lover, Allulah, was dead, and that her brother Tahir had been arrested by the police. A hypnotic influence persuaded her to the truth of these things, and in the madness of despair she tried to kill herself. Can you imagine a circumstance so bewildering? I am looking for a poisoner; I incline already to the belief that Madame Sabine was the instrument of Anna's death; and here, in Paris, the

whole story seems confirmed beyond the last scruple of doubt. What was I to make of it but the absolutely obvious? Would you, yourself, have hesitated for an instant?"

"Perhaps not; but the clues were many, all the same."

"They were many undeniably."

"And you had not lost sight of the Count of Fours?"

The prince smiled at this idea.

"Very far from it. That amiable old gentleman had invited suspicion in a way that was ludicrous. To begin with, he leaves his stick in the boat. Then, in his great anxiety to know what the police had found in Lady Anna's dressing-room, he listens at the doors and drops the button of his order on the mat. An unfortunate old gentleman truly. He was lucky that you did not arrest him."

"We came near to doing so, I assure you."

"And did not do so because of your mistake about Blandy. Well, I am in your debt there; the compliment you paid my judgment in withholding the writ against Blandy is one I shall remember."

Sir Malcolm sighed.

"I took your word for him—I thought it better. We got all the light we could get, and your promise to make me interested me. Of course the case against him was very thin when the motives of the visit to Ely and to the bedroom were explained."

"Obviously they were, and yet others might have been suspected with some reason. Looking back upon the case now, I name five people whose part in this affair might well have mystified your men. This Count of Fours, who knew Anna in Egypt, who had been in love with her, the first man to whom Michel Ghika addressed himself in London—what were his thoughts upon the morning of the murder? I am not the keeper of his conscience; but I say at once that he feared one of two things, either that Ghika was the murderer, or that the crime had been committed by madame his wife in a fit of intolerable jealousy. Madame de Fours, on the other hand, may have believed that her husband had been making love to her old rival,

and had killed her in a fit of mad anger which passion alone would justify. Going on down the list, there is Lady Constance Heliers, who suspects that Frederick Walther may have been the murderer, and is dreadfully afraid that her intrigue with him will be discovered. My own assistant, Otto, is next on the list, and is suspected by those who know nothing of his character; but observe, my dear Sir Malcolm, that all these doubts and suspicions are not a matter of so many coincidences; they are directly attributable to the central fact of this Egyptian tragedy and its consequences. Putting Otto Walther aside, you discover that the Count and Countess were in Cairo at the very moment this poor lady surrendered to the impulses of her passion. Sabine Ghika is there with her brother, and is one of those who would win Tahir's love. The woman Prevost is actually in the service of two of the houses, and is chosen as the child's guardian because she knows something of the secret already, and may discover it wholly if she be dismissed. And so, you see, the threads of the drama are drawn together at this very house, and become the band which binds the sheaves of our inferences. It remains but to say that our circle is complete, and that within it we shall find the murderer."

"Who, as a matter of fact, stood outside altogether?"

Maurevale did not answer the question for a little while. The slight ironic tone did not annoy him, nor was he quite conscious of it. Perhaps he recalled that memorable morning when he had opened Dr. Morenceau's letter and first suspected the truth.

"Human judgment is a fallible implement," he said at last, "and mankind will be the victim of it to the end. We speak of right reason, but what an irony are the words. Astronomers gazing at the stars, philosophers searching the records of men, cry here is the truth, or there. We know upon what shallow ground they build, and how soon their houses fall. If truth be found, it is within us, in those impulses, those faiths, those inferences of which we are rarely master. I labour for a month amid learned men trying to discover this or that axiom of life, and the voice of a child reveals it to me. I cry aloud that I am

right, and the taunt not of reason but of ignorance mocks me. And so to the end time will laugh at our Infallibility, and mock the seers who are its worshippers. Let the didactic among us remember these truths, and humanity will find humility its handmaiden. Forget them, and the clock is put back, and the light becomes wan before our eyes."

He paced the room again, hardly conscious of the measure of his rebuke, or of the assent which silence implied. Sir Malcolm, perhaps, was reflecting how often infallibility had troubled his fellows, and how swift had been the punishments. But he said nothing, and when some moments had passed the prince answered that question which the interlude ignored.

"The murderer was without, yes. Had my intellect not cheated me, I should have known it from the beginning. For what man with a glimmer of reason left to him would have murdered a woman and then rowed half-way from Goring to Pangbourne in a boat with her? Would he not rather have fled at once, making the most of the precious moments, and so winning his own freedom? So much I overlooked in all my argument. It remained for a savant of Paris to recall me to the truth, to say, 'Your murderer is neither here nor there; but an assassin who never saw his victim, who slew her from the meanest motives of revenge, who is accused and judged, who is dead.' The rest the Court has told you. I am become a hero among your people, but have no title to their gratitude. The finger of God has shown me the road, and I have followed it—even as it was revealed to me. So to God be the thanks, for from Him is all truth."

He went to the window, and the sun of an October afternoon shone full upon his face, the face of a dreamer and a poet now.

And as he stood he heard Stella's voice in the garden, and with a word of excuse to his guest he went out to her.

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