

**CIHM  
Microfiche  
Series  
(Monographs)**

**ICMH  
Collection de  
microfiches  
(monographies)**



**Canadian Institute for Historical Microreproductions / Institut canadien de microreproductions historiques**

**© 1996**

## Technical and Bibliographic Notes / Notes technique et bibliographiques

The Institute has attempted to obtain the best original copy available for filming. Features of this copy which may be bibliographically unique, which may alter any of the images in the reproduction, or which may significantly change the usual method of filming are checked below.

L'Institut a microfilmé le meilleur exemplaire qu'il lui a été possible de se procurer. Les détails de cet exemplaire qui sont peut-être uniques du point de vue bibliographique, qui peuvent modifier une image reproduite, ou qui peuvent exiger une modifications dans la méthode normale de filmage sont indiqués ci-dessous.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Coloured covers / Couverture de couleur</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Covers damaged / Couverture endommagée</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Covers restored and/or laminated / Couverture restaurée et/ou pelliculée</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Cover title missing / Le titre de couverture manque</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Coloured maps / Cartes géographiques en couleur</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Coloured ink (i.e. other than blue or black) / Encre de couleur (i.e. autre que bleue ou noire)</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Coloured plates and/or illustrations / Planches et/ou illustrations en couleur</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Bound with other material / Relié avec d'autres documents</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Only edition available / Seule édition disponible</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Tight binding may cause shadows or distortion along interior margin / Le reliure serrée peut causer de l'ombre ou de la distorsion le long de la marge intérieure.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Blank leaves added during restorations may appear within the text. Whenever possible, these have been omitted from filming / Il se peut que certaines pages blanches ajoutées lors d'une restauration apparaissent dans le texte, mais, lorsque cela était possible, ces pages n'ont pas été filmées.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Additional comments / Commentaires supplémentaires:</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Coloured pages / Pages de couleur</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Pages damaged / Pages endommagées</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Pages restored and/or laminated / Pages restaurées et/ou pelliculées</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Pages discoloured, stained or foxed / Pages décolorées, tachetées ou piquées</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Pages detached / Pages détachées</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Showthrough / Transparence</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Quality of print varies / Qualité inégale de l'impression</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Includes supplementary material / Comprend du matériel supplémentaire</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Pages wholly or partially obscured by errata slips, tissues, etc., have been refilmed to ensure the best possible image / Les pages totalement ou partiellement obscurcies par un feuillet d'errata, une pelure, etc., ont été filmées à nouveau de façon à obtenir la meilleure image possible.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Opposing pages with varying colouration or discolourations are filmed twice to ensure the best possible image / Les pages s'opposant ayant des colorations variables ou des décolorations sont filmées deux fois afin d'obtenir la meilleure image possible.</li> </ul> |
|---|---|

This item is filmed at the reduction ratio checked below /  
Ce document est filmé au taux de réduction indiqué ci-dessous.

	10X		14X		18X		22X		26X		30X	
							<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>					
	12X		16X		20X		24X		28X		32X	

The copy filmed here has been reproduced thanks to the generosity of:

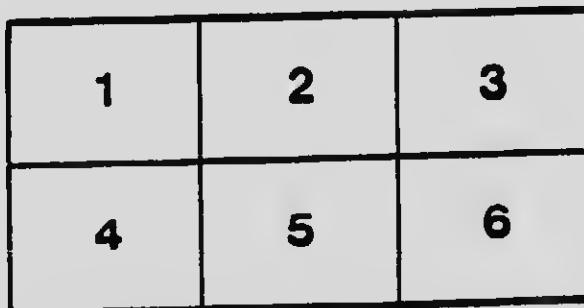
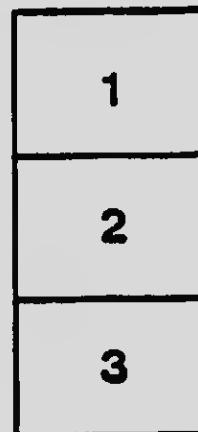
National Library of Canada

The images appearing here are the best quality possible considering the condition and legibility of the original copy and in keeping with the filming contract specifications.

Original copies in printed paper covers are filmed beginning with the front cover and ending on the last page with a printed or illustrated impression, or the back cover when appropriate. All other original copies are filmed beginning on the first page with a printed or illustrated impression, and ending on the last page with a printed or illustrated impression.

The last recorded frame on each microfiche shell contains the symbol  $\rightarrow$  (meaning "CONTINUED"), or the symbol  $\nabla$  (meaning "END"), whichever applies.

Maps, plates, charts, etc., may be filmed at different reduction ratios. Those too large to be entirely included in one exposure are filmed beginning in the upper left hand corner, left to right and top to bottom, as many frames as required. The following diagrams illustrate the method:



L'exemplaire filmé fut reproduit grâce à la générosité de:

Bibliothèque nationale du Canada

Les images suivantes ont été reproduites avec le plus grand soin, compte tenu de la condition et de la netteté de l'exemplaire filmé, et en conformité avec les conditions du contrat de filmage.

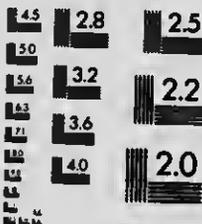
Les exemplaires originaux dont la couverture en papier est imprimée sont filmés en commençant par le premier plat et en terminant soit par la dernière page qui comporte une empreinte d'impression ou d'illustration, soit par le second plat, selon le cas. Tous les autres exemplaires originaux sont filmés en commençant par la première page qui comporte une empreinte d'impression ou d'illustration et en terminant par la dernière page qui comporte une telle empreinte.

Un des symboles suivants apparaît sur la dernière image de chaque microfiche, selon le cas: le symbole  $\rightarrow$  signifie "A SUIVRE", le symbole  $\nabla$  signifie "FIN".

Les cartes, planches, tableaux, etc., peuvent être filmés à des taux de réduction différents. Lorsque le document est trop grand pour être reproduit en un seul cliché, il est filmé à partir de l'angle supérieur gauche, de gauche à droite, et de haut en bas, en prenant le nombre d'images nécessaire. Les diagrammes suivants illustrent la méthode.

# MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



**APPLIED IMAGE Inc**

1653 East Main Street  
Rochester, New York 14609 USA  
(716) 482 - 0300 - Phone  
(716) 288 - 5989 - Fax





SCARLET RUNNER

BY THE SAME AUTHORS

THE LIGHTNING CONDUCTOR

THE PRINCESS-PASSES

MY FRIEND THE CHAUFFEUR

LADY BETTY ACROSS THE WATER

THE CAR OF DESTINY

THE BOTOR CHAPERON





# SCARLET RUNNER

BY

C. N. AND A. M. WILLIAMSON

AUTHORS OF "THE DUTYING CONDUCTOR" ETC.

WITH A FRONTISPIECE IN COLOUR BY

A. H. BUCKLAND

AND FIFTY OTHER ILLUSTRATIONS

WILLIAM BRIGGS

TORONTO



# SCARLET RUNNER

BY

C. N. AND A. M. WILLIAMSON

AUTHORS OF "THE LIGHTNING CONDUCTOR" ETC.

WITH A FRONTISPIECE IN COLOUR BY

A. H. BUCKLAND

AND EIGHT OTHER ILLUSTRATIONS

WILLIAM BRIGGS

TORONTO

PR5834

W6

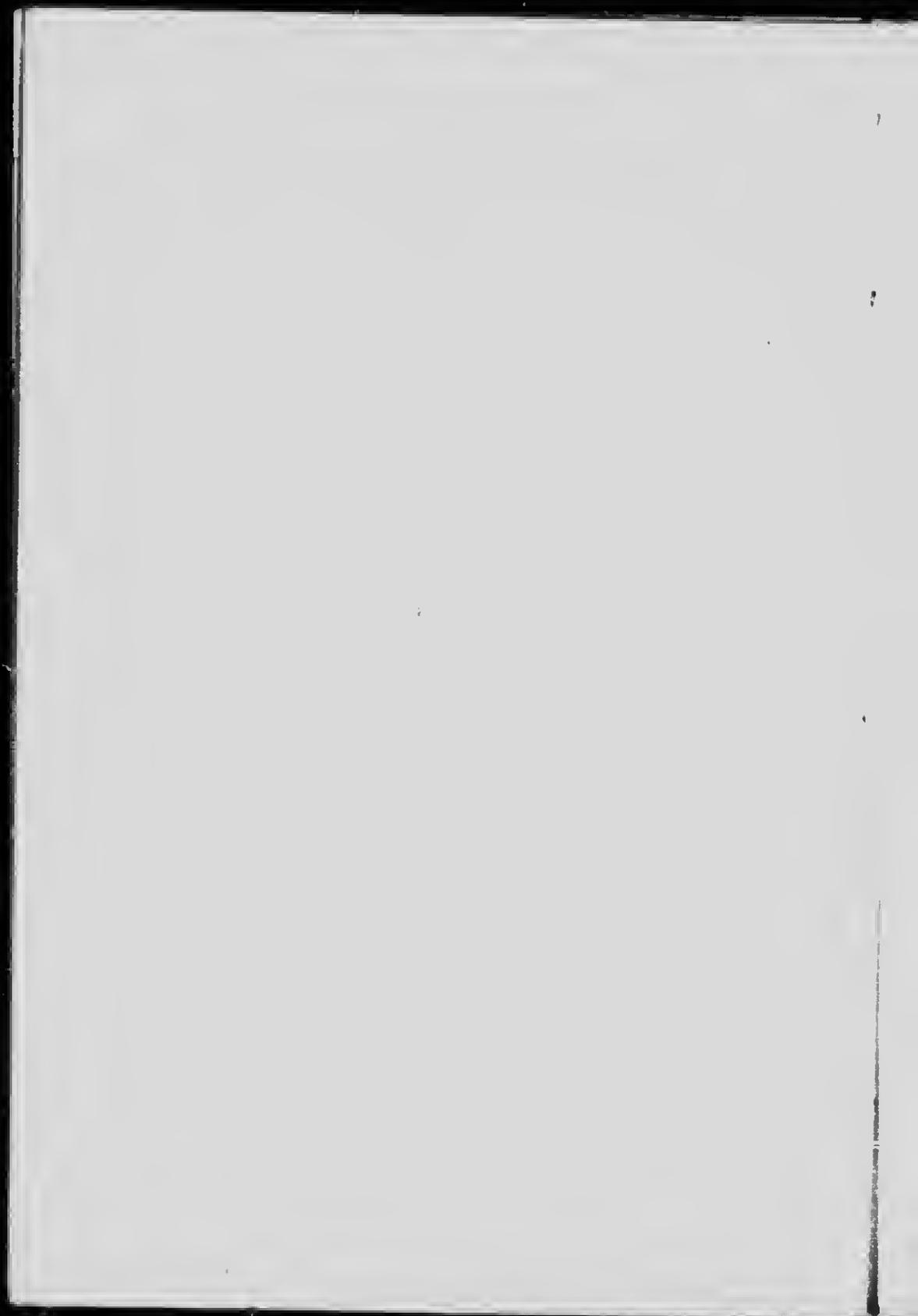
S32

C. 2

\* \* \*

*First Published in 1908*

TO THE MEMBERS OF A CERTAIN RIVIERA  
DINNER PARTY, WE DEDICATE THE  
"SCARLET RUNNER." ; THEY WILL KNOW WHY



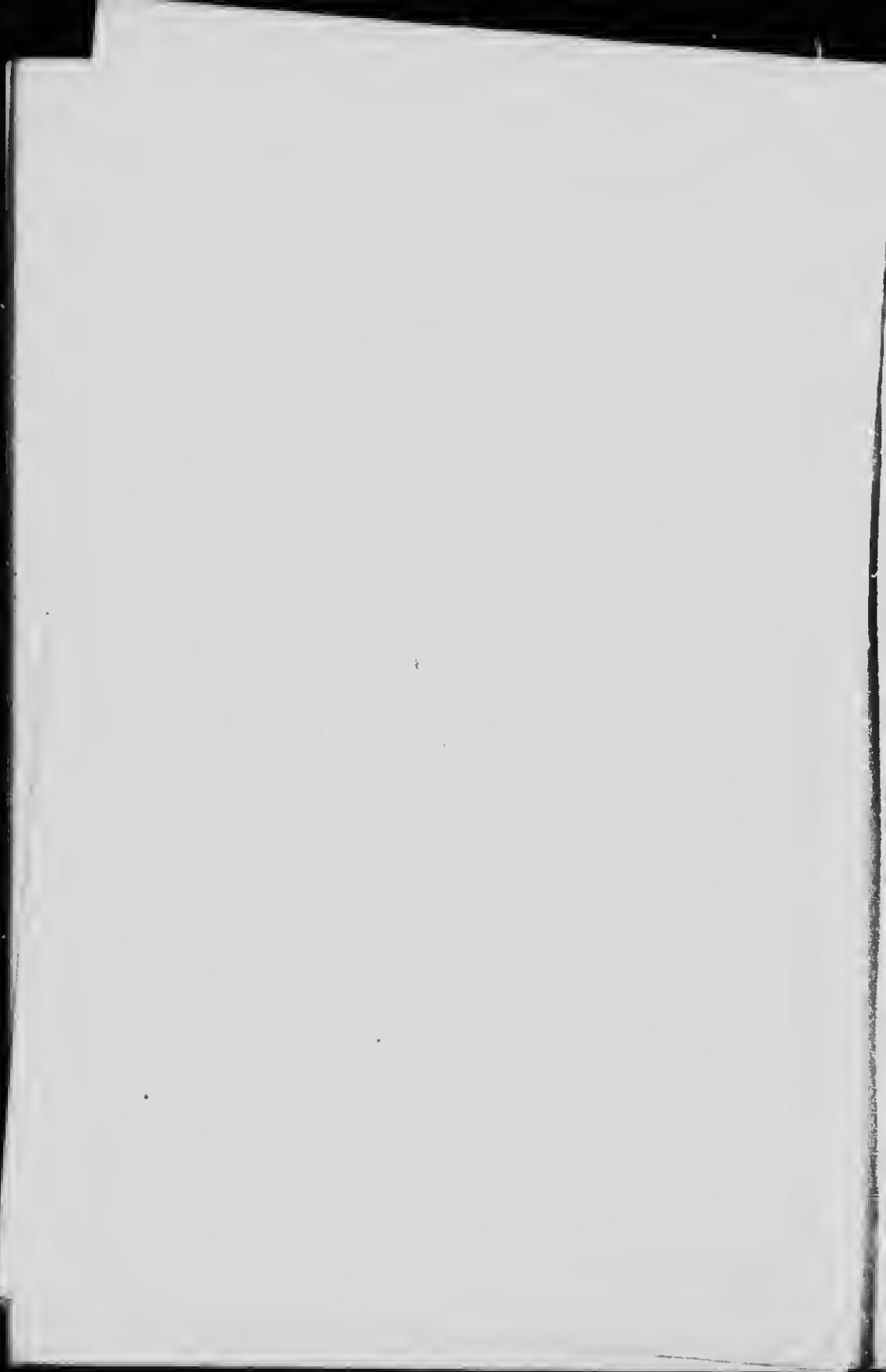
## CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
I. JANUARY: THE CAR AND HIS MAJESTY . . . . .	1
II. FEBRUARY: THE LOST GIRL . . . . .	32
III. MARCH: THE MASKED BALL . . . . .	65
IV. APRIL: THE HIDDEN PRINCE . . . . .	97
V. MAY: THE NUREMBERG WATCH . . . . .	130
VI. JUNE: THE GLOVE AND THE RING . . . . .	160
VII. JULY: THE MYSTERIOUS MOTOR-CAR . . . . .	193
VIII. AUGUST: THE RED-WHISKERED MAN . . . . .	223
IX. SEPTEMBER: THE MISSING CHAPTER . . . . .	251
X. OCTOBER: THE JACOBAN HOUSE . . . . .	277
XI. NOVEMBER: THE GOLD CIGARETTE CASE . . . . .	311
XII. DECEMBER: CHRISTOPHER AND THE CHAUFFEUSE . . . . .	354



## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
DOROTHY HERBERT . . . . .	<i>Frontispiece</i>
"THE VISITOR HELD OUT TO HIS HOST A SMALL REVOLVER" . . . . .	23
"CHRISTOPHER FLUNG THE WORDS SKYWARD AS HE FLASHED TOWARDS THE VILLAGE" . . . . .	35
"WITH HIS BACK TO THE GOLD CURTAINS, HE FIRED ONE BARREL OF ELOISE DAUVRAY'S REVOLVER" . . . . .	92
"'CONGRATULATE ME,' HE CONTINUED, AS RUDOVICS FELL BACK UPON THE THRESHOLD" . . . . .	129
"CHRISTOPHER WAS OBLIGED TO ASK QUESTIONS IN THE VILLAGE" . . . . .	147
"'DON'T RESIST—SAFER NOT TO RESIST, SIR!' HE CRIED" . . . . .	241
"'I THINK, SIR,' HE ANSWERED, 'THAT THE PERSON YOU EXPECT HAS ARRIVED'" . . . . .	278
"AN AMAZING VEHICLE WAS GLIDING, SILENT AND SNAKE-LIKE, TOWARDS THE EMPTY PLACE IN FRONT OF SCARLET RUNNER" . . . . .	365



# SCARLET RUNNER

## CHAPTER I: JANUARY

### THE CAR AND HIS MAJESTY

**I**T was such an unusually beautiful and striking car that everyone looked at it, then turned to look again.

This was what Christopher Race had counted upon.

"Good old Scarlet Runner!" he said, as he drove.

"Good old girl, you're making your impression."

Slowly the red car moved up Regent Street as far as Oxford Circus, where it turned to roll back, like some great, splendid beast pacing the length of a vast cage.

It was past seven o'clock ; but the sky was a blue and silver mosaic of stars, and electric globes pulsed with white lights that struck and glinted on the rich scarlet panels of the automobile.

The army of workers pouring home from shop and factory, the army of pleasure-seekers pouring into restaurant and theatre, all looked at the car, straining their eyes to make out the crest—gold and dark blue painted on scarlet ; and those among the crowds who were women looked also at Christopher Race.

He drove alone, but he was dressed like a gentleman, not in the glorified livery of a chauffeur. He was a thin, dark, eagle-faced young man, with an air of breeding

not contradicted by his evident self-consciousness. His mouth—clean-shaven—gave him strength of character, and his eyes a sense of humour and high daring.

The electric globes lit his face with the fierce intensity of theatre footlights, revealing in it not one mean line. But it was not only the good looks of the driver that attracted attention; it was his extraordinary behaviour.

He sharply scanned each passer-by, as if searching the crowd for some lost friend; and whenever he caught the eye of a well-dressed man who might, from his appearance, have a good bank account and a correspondingly good position in society, up went the gloved hand of the motor-driver in evident invitation. At the same time he smiled and slightly lifted his eyebrows, so that his whole face seemed to ask a question.

Those who were thus appealed to took the invitation in varying ways. Some stared, some nodded and smiled nervously, as if wondering where they could have met the brown young man. Others frowned as though vexed with a stranger who dared to play a practical joke. A few half paused, then hurried on again, turning their heads ostentatiously away. A few more grinned foolishly, and continued to take in every detail of the fine automobile, from the fat tyres, which were noticeably new and unsoiled, to the unusually large, luxurious tonneau, with its glassed-in body, and the glittering bonnet which hid no fewer than six cylinders of latest pattern. But all were equally puzzled by the man's beckoning hand, which must mean either a mistake in identity or a doubtful taste in jokes; and those who saw the car twice, as it passed up Regent Street and down again, probably decided that the driver amused himself while he waited for someone who did not come.

But the scarlet mystery did not repeat its late

manceuvres. It hovered as if undecided at Piccadilly Circus; then almost noiselessly threaded through the netted cross-traffic to spin on towards Pall Mall.

The white electric light was full now of silhouettes of men in evening-dress, who darted here and there alertly like small, dark fish in a great globe of sparkling water. Twice in the minute the motorist's hand was raised in invitation to someone whose eyes reached his across the chasm of roadway, but always with disappointing results. No one responded to his agreeable signals, and he arrived at the corner of Charles Street without stopping once.

In this quiet thoroughfare of respectable private hotels and better-class lodging-houses was drawn up an automobile, handsome enough to rival the red car. It was dark green in colour, and it stood silent and sad before a discreet-looking doorway—silent because the motor had ceased to throb; sad because, apparently, there was some malign reason for its silence.

The chauffeur, dressed in a smart but inconspicuous bottle-green livery with brown leather collar, had left his seat, opened one of the side doors of the bonnet, and was anxiously "tickling" the carburetter with his hand.

Christopher Race had not meant to enter quiet Charles Street, which, apparently, had nothing to offer him; but at sight of the car in distress he paused and gently swung round the corner from Regent Street. As he slowed down to pass the green car, the discreet door opened and a gentleman came out on the pavement.

He was dressed as an English gentleman should be when he is going to dinner on a winter evening in London; but, though he looked above all things a gentleman, he did not look like an English gentleman.

Under the sleek silk hat, and above the thick, white silk handkerchief that filled in the "V" of the black overcoat, was a face which an observant person could hardly have passed without a second glance.

It was pale, but bronzed by exposure, with a soldier's bronze; and one might with safety have laid a wager that this man was a soldier. He had keen, light eyes, with thick brows drawn together in a slight frown, and a fair, turned-up moustache, with long ends waxed to a fine point.

Never before had the young man in the red car beheld that face in the flesh, save once, when as a little boy he had been taken to a grand pageant to gaze in awe at those same clean-cut features (or others exactly like them) under a glittering silver helmet. But, unless he were egregiously mistaken, he had seen the face in a hundred photographs, in as many black-and-white drawings in illustrated journals; he had seen it caricatured in comic sketches, and flashed on to white sheets by biographs at music-halls.

"Could it be the real face?" he asked himself, with a quickening throb of excitement. Then he remembered reading, a day or two ago, that it might presently be expected in England, on an unofficial visit, during which—for all save its distinguished friends—it desired to be *incog*.

For a moment Christopher Race forgot all about his car, his errand with the car, and his interest in the car that was disabled. But the first words spoken by the gentleman with the shining hat and neat overcoat reminded him forcibly of all three.

"No better success?" asked a clear voice, in perfect English, enriched by a slight foreign accent.

"I am very sorry indeed, sir," apologised the chauffeur, "but I haven't been able yet to make out

what's the matter. Something wrong with the carburetter or the ignition."

"I'm late already," broke in the gentleman, visibly bolstering up his patience.

It was this moment that the driver of the red car chose for making his habitual gesture, which he accompanied with the usual inviting smile and questioning lift of the eyebrows.

Instantly the keen gaze of the man with the waxed moustache fixed his. "Why do you hold up your hand?" inquired the clear tones, with the un-English accent. At the same time the speaker tried to mask his face in shadow, backing away from the blaze of the two cars' acetylene lamps.

"I hold up my hand because I'm plying for hire," answered Christopher Race.

"Eh? Plying for hire with *that* car? You are joking, I suppose." Tone and eyes expressed astonishment, perhaps distrust. But the red automobile had come to a dead stop, and the gentleman in the tall hat had stepped to the edge of the pavement to examine it at close quarters, also to examine, incidentally, its driver.

"Not at all," said Christopher Race, "unless life is a joke. I'm out to gain a livelihood. I have no licence to live, but I have a licence to drive, if you would care to see it."

The other stared, though not offensively. There was even a twinkle in his eye, but a word might have kindled it to a spark of fire.

"You look like a gentleman," he remarked.

"I almost believe I am one," replied Christopher, and he let his eyes twinkle a little also, but not too much, for now he was sure who it was with whom he talked, though he did not intend to make it known that he knew.

"Ha!" said the other, "you are a remarkable pair, plying for hire—you and your car. May I ask if you are in the employment of some person who sends you out on this business?"

"I'm my own employer—under Fate. I drive my car; Fate drives me."

"Indeed? I'm inclined to think"—and the keen eyes flashed to the tinkering chauffeur—"that Fate intends you to drive *me*. What do you think about it?"

"I should be delighted to think that you are right," returned Christopher Race.

"Very well," said the other; "I will engage you—for the evening. You can take me where I wish to go, and wait. If my chauffeur can bring my car round later, you can go; but in any case you shall have the same money. What are your charges?"

"For the entire evening, five guineas," said Christopher.

"Good; that is settled." The gentleman stepped forward, and the owner of the red car and the chauffeur of the green one both sprang to open the door for him. But he waved them back.

"I shall sit with the driver," he announced, with the air of one accustomed to quick decisions, and never to have them gainsaid.

"Do you know Desmond House?" he asked, when he was in his place, and Christopher ready to start.

The driver was not surprised in the circumstances to hear the name of an historic place, owned by a man whose ancestors had helped to make not only its history, but the history of nations. He replied quietly that he did know Desmond House.

"Then drive me there, if you please, and as quickly as you can," said his employer. "I am late in keeping an appointment, and yet," he added, "I am not sorry

that, with the best driving, we shall be at least twenty minutes in reaching Desmond House. Do you take my meaning?"

"I think so," said Christopher, in the same spirit, and careful not to address his employer as "sir," lest he should guess that his identity was at the mercy of a stranger.

"You are not behind your car in quickness. Then you have divined also why I chose to sit beside the driver?"

"You pay me the compliment of feeling some slight curiosity as to my reasons for touting with my car in the streets for passengers," suggested Christopher.

"You have hit it. I should be pleased if you would tell me how such a strange thing came about. But, of course, if you do not choose——"

"Why not?" laughed the young man. "You shall know the whole story, if it amuses you—and not a penny extra, over the fare. The trouble is that you'll be disappointed, for, except in one particular, it's a very ordinary tale."

"Suppose that you begin with the one particular, since you are so obliging?" said Christopher's passenger.

"It is that if I had failed to earn at least the sum of five guineas before twelve to-night, nothing could prevent me from losing another sum, amounting approximately to one hundred and seventy-five thousand pounds."

"You are right," agreed the other. "That one particular is not ordinary."

"You see now why I named five guineas for the job," said Christopher Race.

"I should be delighted to pay ten for such a car," said the gentleman, holding on his tall hat as the car's speed increased.

"Thank you very much. That is a generous *pourboire*," said Christopher.

The other had not expected him to accept it. But he decided that to do so was of a piece with the young man's originality, not the proof of a grasping nature. And he felt that he was buying an evening of very good amusement at not too high a rate.

He invited Christopher to go on with the story, and Christopher did, in a way perfectly frank, simple, and a little humorous.

"The hundred and seventy-five thousand pounds—or thereabouts—are my uncle's," said he. "Also a rather nice house in the country, and a few other things which I was brought up to believe would eventually be mine. But my uncle heard stories about my life which didn't please him, and they were all true. He heard that I was lazy and extravagant with the allowance he made me; that I never thought of anyone but myself; that I did exactly as I liked; that I'd forgotten half what I learned at the 'Varsity; that I knew only things I'd better not know; that I was in debt; that I was altogether a worthless fellow. Besides, if more were needed, I'd refused to marry some girl he wanted me to take, to please him. So he sent for me, and all my deceitful meekness and sweetness of manner was of no use. He saw through me, and told me I was an incorrigible young scoundrel. Also, he told me his plan for my future. It was, to cut down my allowance from eight to one hundred pounds a year, just enough to keep me fed, clothed, and housed in decency, which, in his opinion,—and in mine, when I came to think of it,—was more than I deserved. As for the bulk of his money, my uncle had not quite made up his mind where to leave it. The one thing he thought he had decided upon was, not to leave it to me.

"I heard him through to the end, and then proposed a substitute plan. I admitted the young scoundrel, but denied the incorrigible. I said I thought that he might give me a chance to show that I had a backbone. As proof of its existence I refused the allowance, asking my uncle to keep his money and reserve his judgment. Said I: 'If within a year I'm a reformed character—that is, if I've shown that I'm able not only to make my own way in the world, but to make it like a gentleman—will you reconsider, and not leave the family house and the money away from the last representative of your name?'

"'All right,' said he, 'it's a bargain. But I don't believe you can do it.'

"I believed I could. So I sold the furniture, books, pictures, and ornaments in my chambers and got a tidy enough sum. I also sold my motor-car for what I could get, and bought another—for what I hoped to get. Already I was a fair driver; but I disappeared for months from public life and learned, in a good school for chauffeurs, how to be a first-rate one, and an all-round practical mechanic as well.

"My car was my fortune. She was built to please me, and I confess that I love her as Pygmalion loved Galatea. I don't believe she has her superior in beauty, or in the brains she wears under her bonnet.

"When she was ready to make her *début* I advertised largely, pictorially, and expensively for clients who wished to be conducted on tours round England in particular or the world in general. No serious answers were received. The end of the trial year and the end of my money were drawing to a close, when, to pile Pelion on Ossa, I had a letter from my uncle. He wished to know how much I had earned during my probation. 'Noth yet,' said I, in my answer. Then came a wi. 'I could not earn, and prove

to him that I had earned, by my own exertions, at least the small sum of five guineas before the year's end, the bargain was off, and he need wait no longer, before deciding on what worthy institution he would bestow his money.

"That wire was sent on two days ago from my last lodgings. I nearly missed getting it, but when I did get it I put pride in my pocket, started out, procured a licence, turned my beautiful Scarlet Runner into a conveyance for public convenience, and—had had two hours' bad luck when I ran across you."

"I am glad to be the one who brings you luck," said the young man's passenger. "I believe you must have bewitched my motor."

"I should certainly not have neglected doing so if I had thought of it," said Christopher Race. "I hope I haven't bored you?"

"On the contrary, you have entertained me," replied the other. "But we are in Kensington already, are we not? It seems impossible."

"In three minutes I shall land you at Desmond House," said Christopher.

And hardly as much time had passed before they were at the gates of that fine old place on the farther verge of Kensington.

As they arrived, so also did several cabs, which came in a bunch, and contained faces familiar to Christopher Race. He had seen them on the music-hall stage, where their owners were shining lights; and he deduced that they were to help provide amusement for the distinguished dinner guests. Evidently there was a good reason for making the dinner-hour early, and it was to be a long affair.

"You are at my disposal for the evening, I believe," said Christopher's passenger, as Scarlet Runner entered the drive and slowed down for its approach to the

door. "My car may come, or it may not. In any case, I wish you to wait. And—there is a question I should like to ask before going in—a question I could ask only of a gentleman. I have shown some curiosity in regard to you. Do you retaliate?"

"I have no curiosity," said Christopher.

"You mean——"

"I mean—whatever you would prefer me to mean, sir."

"Thank you. I'm sure you are as discreet as you are original. *Au revoir.*"

Christopher stood by the car with his cap in his hand, as two splendid footmen received the gentleman with the waxed moustache, the shining hat, and the neat overcoat. There was also a flashing glimpse of a welcoming host and hostess; but the door closed, and the glowing picture was gone.

It was only just on the stroke of eight, but no doubt all other guests had arrived; for one does not risk keeping Royalty waiting, even when Royalty is *incognito* and the entertainment informal.

One of the footmen came out into the cold to ask the chauffeur of the great personage to drive his car into the coach-house, where he would find a place for it, though there was no garage, and come himself into the house until the time appointed for departure. But Christopher courteously refused. He did not know at what time he might be wanted, and would prefer to wait near the door, out of the way of other vehicles in case any should arrive. He also declined food, though he had begun to be conscious that it was dinner-time.

After all, he thought, when he was left alone seated in his car, this was turning out to be a tolerably commonplace affair, not so interesting as he had expected it to be when it began. To be sure, the fare he had luckily picked up was one of the first celebrities

in Europe. But what was that to him, except that he had had an agreeable and sympathetic companion, and had earned the vitally necessary sum of five guineas very pleasantly?

The idea of mystery which he had scented in Charles Street, he abandoned at Desmond House. To be sure, it was a little odd that the great man should have come out from a private hotel in a quiet, unfashionable street, when he was staying—or said to be staying—at his own Embassy. But, after all, why not? Perhaps he had been calling upon friends; or perhaps his motor had broken down in front of the hotel, and he had preferred to wait in a warm room rather than endure the winter cold.

Ten minutes passed, maybe, and the thoughts of Christopher Race had glided from the affairs of his late passenger to his own. He was wondering when he might expect to get his dinner, when the one thing which of all others he did not expect happened. Close to Scarlet Runner appeared the figure which a few minutes ago had been ceremoniously ushered into the house. There it was—the slim, soldierly form, seeming taller than it was because of its upright bearing. There was the shining hat, shading the clear features; there the folded white handkerchief and the neat overcoat.

Surprised, but hiding surprise at sight of the guest of the evening, unescorted and out of doors when he ought still to have been engaged with his oysters, Christopher sprang from his seat and awaited orders.

“Saunders’ Hotel, Charles Street, Pall Mall—quick!” said the crisp voice with the foreign accent. But it was less crisp than before, and betrayed agitation.

Had his passenger’s last question been now repeated, Christopher Race could not have answered it truthfully

and at the same time decorously, for he was consumed with curiosity.

One had always heard that this celebrated personage was erratic and addicted to making decisions on impulse; but his latest caprice bade fair, it seemed, to break the record. A Royal gentleman is asked to a friendly dinner; he accepts, goes; and before he has had five minutes at his host's table out he pops, unattended, nervous in manner, and demands to be taken promptly back whence he came!

The one explanation which appeared plausible to Christopher was that a thing of importance had been forgotten in Charles Street—a thing of so much importance that no one else could be sent to fetch it, or even trusted as a companion.

Unconcerned outwardly, but inwardly wondering what must be the state of mind of the host and hostess, to say nothing of their guests, the amateur chauffeur prepared to start. This time the distinguished fare did not contemplate sitting beside the driver. He stood waiting in silence for the door of the tonneau to be opened, and got in without a word. Christopher helped him pull up the handsome fur rug which was not an "extra," and in another moment Scarlet Runner had whizzed between the open gates of Desmond House.

He had been told to go fast, and he did go fast. It was the "dead middle" of that quiet interval when restaurants and theatres are full and streets are empty, therefore he ran no risk in spinning from one deserted thoroughfare to another on the way back to Pall Mall. But he had not left Desmond House half a mile behind when his passenger tapped imperatively on the front glass. Slowing down, Christopher glanced round, and saw an upraised finger which motioned "Stop!"

He obeyed instantly, and lowered the glass to hear orders.

"You are driving too fast," said the Royal voice; "much too fast. I don't like it."

"I am sorry," returned Christopher. "I understood that you wished——"

"I don't wish to have my neck broken," was the answer. "Get on again, but no recklessness. Put up the window, please."

Again Scarlet Runner started, but this time with no burst of speed, and her driver was more curious than ever.

This was a new trait for the great personage to develop—timidity in an automobile! One might almost fancy him an amateur at the game, instead of an old motorist and a thorough sportsman. Of course, he might fear an awkward contretemps if stopped by the police; but there was no possible danger of such a catastrophe, and as an experienced driver he ought to have known it. He ought to be able to judge speed, and to know that theirs was not excessive enough at this hour of the evening to attract police notice.

However, Christopher drove on, in a reflective mood and at a pace to suit it, until he had reached Charles Street. There, at the door which had given him his fare and his adventure, he stopped.

"Go in and inquire if Lord Thanet and Lady Ivy de Lisle have come," the foreign voice directed brusquely.

Christopher's face made no comment on these instructions, but that was because he had the habits of a man of the world. Within, he was excited and curious, for the Earl of Thanet and his daughter were distant cousins of Christopher Race, and naturally he would have liked to know the why and wherefore of His Majesty's interest in their movements. If the name of Lord Thanet alone had been mentioned it

would not have struck him so oddly, for Lord Thanet had at one time been connected with the diplomatic service, and had spent years on the Continent. But why did one of the first gentlemen of Europe leave a dinner-party in the midst to inquire at an hotel for Ivy de Lisle?

His Majesty had a consort to whom he was devoted, and he was not to be tempted to a flirtation even by such a beauty as Lord Thanet's twenty-year-old daughter, who had been one of the successes of last season. But, then, a man highly placed is occasionally unselfish enough to interest himself in a girl for the sake of another man who needs an advocate. And there were two men whose names Christopher had heard coupled with Lady Ivy de Lisle's.

Either might have persuaded this Sovereign to plead his cause with the girl's father, for both could claim his country as the land of their birth. One was Baron von Hess, the enormously rich inventor of the latest quick-firing gun adopted by the Triple Alliance; the other was young Max Lind,—whom Christopher had known slightly and admired greatly at Oxford,—the son of a notorious Socialist who had adopted England for a country when banished from his own. A year or two ago there had been a *rapprochement* between Max the elder and an outraged monarch, and a place in the diplomatic service for young Max had been held out as an olive branch.

Baron von Hess was a good match for any girl below Royalty; Max Lind, on the contrary, would have difficulty in making his cause good with Lady Ivy's father, unless, indeed, a monarch should turn matchmaker.

As Christopher started to obey orders he hoped that this mysterious visit had to do with Max Lind and Ivy de Lisle. If it had he was glad that he was

concerned with it, for Max Lind—all unknown to Max Lind's clever and handsome self—had been the hero of Christopher's two best years at Oxford.

His hand was on the door, when a call from his employer gave him pause. "Stop!" said the great man. "I left a letter here for—let me see—was it for Lord Thanet or his daughter?—one of the two; I really forget to which I addressed it. That letter I want back. I have changed my mind and prefer to write a different one. If Lord Thanet has not arrived, or if he has arrived, but has not yet read the letter, I wish to have it again. Should you learn, on the other hand, that the letter has already been received, I will send a message."

Christopher went in somewhat bewildered, but knowing that somehow he must succeed in accomplishing his errand.

In the entrance-hall stood an old man and a girl, obsequiously attended by all the hotel authorities, from the elderly manager down to the still more elderly head-waiter.

The man's back was turned to Christopher, but there was no mistaking the silver sheen of the hair or the soldierly set of the shoulders. The girl, however, faced the front door, and looked up from a bunch of letters which she held in her hand, as the young man entered.

Christopher was only a poor relation, a mere "forty-second cousin," and, moreover, was under the ban of family disapproval. Nevertheless, Lady Ivy gave him a lovely smile of surprised recognition.

She was always more than pretty, and a radiant beauty when she smiled—smiled with grey eyes and pink cheeks, and a pair of dimples that gave new life and meaning to red lips.

"Why, father, it's Christopher!" she said.

"Naughty Cousin Kit! Have you come here to see us?"

"I came to see if you were here," he replied, hat in hand for her and for Lord Thanet, who had only the ghost of a smile, with no emphasising dimples. "I was sent," he added, "by a gentleman who not long ago left a letter to await your arrival."

Lord Thanet's eyes flashed surprise. "Do you mean that His Majesty has asked you——"

"To take him back his letter. He has changed his mind, it seems, and will write another. You have read it?"

"Not yet. We have been in the house scarcely more than five minutes. We have just been given our letters, and on one left by hand this evening recognised His Majesty's handwriting. I didn't know that you had the honour of his acquaintance."

"The story of how I made it would be longer than the acquaintance itself," said Christopher. "But what about the letter—will you give it to me unread? I fancy that is what His Majesty would prefer."

"Oh, no; we *must* see what's in it!" broke in the girl. "I can't wait. Kit, you knew Max Lind at Oxford——"

"Ivy!" warned Lord Thanet.

"Why shouldn't I tell, as Kit's in His Majesty's confidence?" asked the girl wilfully. "We hope—we think—that Max is to be thanked and honoured for a service—oh, well, I'm not going to say *what*—a secret kind of service, but most important. And if he has succeeded, father's promised that Max and I——"

"Really, Ivy, you are most imprudent—and premature," Lord Thanet cut her short. "As for the letter, of course I take your word for it, Christopher, that you're His Majesty's messenger; but——"

"He's waiting for me in a motor-car," said Christopher Race. He did not think it worth while to add that it was his own motor-car, for that would have meant telling the story. "You can get a glimpse of him if you choose to look through those glass peepholes in the outer door."

Lord Thanet's proud old face flushed faintly. "Give me the letter, Ivy," he said.

The girl gave it reluctantly. It was the one uppermost in her hand. Evidently father and daughter had just discovered it in their budget when Christopher appeared.

"I will take it to His Majesty myself," suggested Lord Thanet, and went to the door; but in an instant he had returned. There had been no time for him to do more than look through the double squares of glass and learn for himself who sat in the tonneau of the red car. "On second thoughts," he began again, "perhaps it is better not, unless a desire was expressed——" He glanced at Christopher.

"It was not expressed," replied the young man. "But no doubt——"

"You can take him the letter, tell him that my daughter and I have just arrived, that he can guess the errand which has brought us up from the country to town at this time; that I am completely at his service should he wish to speak with me instead of writing; and we will remain here in the hall awaiting his message."

Sympathetic now as well as puzzled, Christopher took the letter and carried it out to his passenger, who all but snatched it in his eagerness. "Good!" exclaimed His Majesty. "Now let us get away."

"But, sir," said Christopher, "Lord Thanet has come, and——"

The gentleman in the tonneau hastily examined the envelope. "It is still unopened," he muttered.

"Lord Thanet had not yet had time to read the letter. He wishes to know if he may have the honour of coming out to——"

"No," said His Majesty imperatively. Then, with less abruptness: "Go back, give Lord Thanet my compliments, and say that I regret not having the time to speak with him this evening, as I have an important engagement, for which I am already in danger of being late. My compliments also to Lady Ivy de Lisle, and I am obliged for their courtesy in returning the letter unread. They shall hear from me. That is all; and remember that I am in haste."

The message evidently gave disappointment both to father and daughter, though Christopher guessed that it was for different reasons.

"Oh, Kit, Cousin Kit—you'll be a good and not a naughty Cousin Kit if you will use your influence to make him *kind*," said Ivy, detaining the hand she had taken for good-bye. "Father has brought me to town because we're sure that all will be well—that Max will have succeeded and be in great favour, but—*his* coming and taking back the letter frightens me. How can I wait?"

Lord Thanet frowned and shook his head, but Christopher pressed the girl's hand as he let it go. Once he had come very near falling in love with Ivy, and still he had a tenderness for her. She was an adorable girl, and he felt that he would do anything to serve her interests. But he did not quite like the look on the face of his Royal passenger as he remounted the car. It radiated satisfaction, but it was not genial satisfaction; and Christopher was not sure that he admired the face as much as he had admired

it earlier. It was harder and less noble in expression than he had thought it at first.

He did not doubt that the "important engagement" for which his fare had declared himself "in danger of being late" was a continuation of the unfortunate dinner-party at Desmond House; therefore the order which came from the tonneau gave him a double surprise—

"The Wood, No Thoroughfare Street, Hammer-smith." The words struck sharply on Christopher's ears.

His Majesty was not going back to the dinner-party. He was going to the house of Max Lind the elder—Max Lind, the long-ago banished Socialist.

Once, years ago, when Christopher was an undergrad at Oxford, he had dined there with young Max, who had invited him on a sudden impulse, and he had never forgotten the circle of brilliant, eccentric men who had been his fellow-guests. Above all, he had not forgotten "Father Max," as young Max affectionately called the black-haired, heavy-browed, star-eyed old man who had been both father and mother to the boy whose English mother died at his birth.

Often Christopher had thought of that night, and of the old Socialist's eyes as he looked at his handsome son; and he had been glad, not long ago, to hear that young Max was in favour with the Government which had banished old Max when he, too, was young.

What did it mean, Chris asked himself—that the autocratic head of that Government was going to pay a secret visit to The Wood to-night?

Max senior was away from home and out of England. Christopher Race had read only a few days ago in the paper that the famous Socialist had gone to America on a lecturing tour. And young Max, so far as Christopher knew, was somewhere in the East on a diplomatic mission for his own forgiving country.

It was not, however, the part of a chauffeur to offer unsolicited information to an employer, especially such an employer as this, and Christopher drove towards Hammersmith, decorously keeping his private knowledge to himself.

Nothing could be more unpromising to visitors than the aspect of The Wood when the red car stopped before the tall iron gates. The house was set back from the road a distance of no more than forty feet; but so screened was it with huge old oaks and beeches that by night, unless the windows were lighted, it was invisible to passers-by. Now, not a single cheering yellow ray gemmed the black network of crowding branches, and the heavy iron lantern suspended over the shut gates was unlighted.

There was no drive leading up to the house, and Scarlet Runner must wait at the kerbstone in the deserted street appropriately named "No. Thoroughfare." Christopher got down to open the gates, half expecting to find them locked; but they swung apart with a rusty creak, and His Majesty was instantly swallowed up in shadow.

Christopher did not go back to the car, but paced the pavement. It was cold, and he was restless. Once he had been hungry, but he had forgotten his dinner now. Was he right, he asked himself, in letting such a person go into that dark house unattended? Was not his a great responsibility, and was he not using it ill?

It was well enough to argue that the affair was not his affair, and that, whatever happened, he must not mix himself in it. But there was no getting round the fact that His Majesty, who was famed for reckless daring, might have been lured to this desolate place for some evil purpose.

The Linds, father and son, were above suspicion of

treachery ; but Max senior was, or had been, notorious for his anti-Royalist ideas, and some firebrand friend might have taken base advantage of his absence.

What if the man had gone into a trap and should never come out alive ?

This idea alone was bad enough ; but Christopher could not help thinking of himself in connection with it. If His Majesty were murdered in a house to which he—Christopher Race—had brought him in his car, it might be difficult to prove his own innocence. A fine way of finishing his first evening as a professional chauffeur, if he were accused of complicity in an Anarchist plot to assassinate one of the most powerful Sovereigns in Europe !

Christopher could bear inaction no longer. Leaving Sarlet Runner to look after herself, he slipped through the gates and tiptoed up the path towards the hidden house.

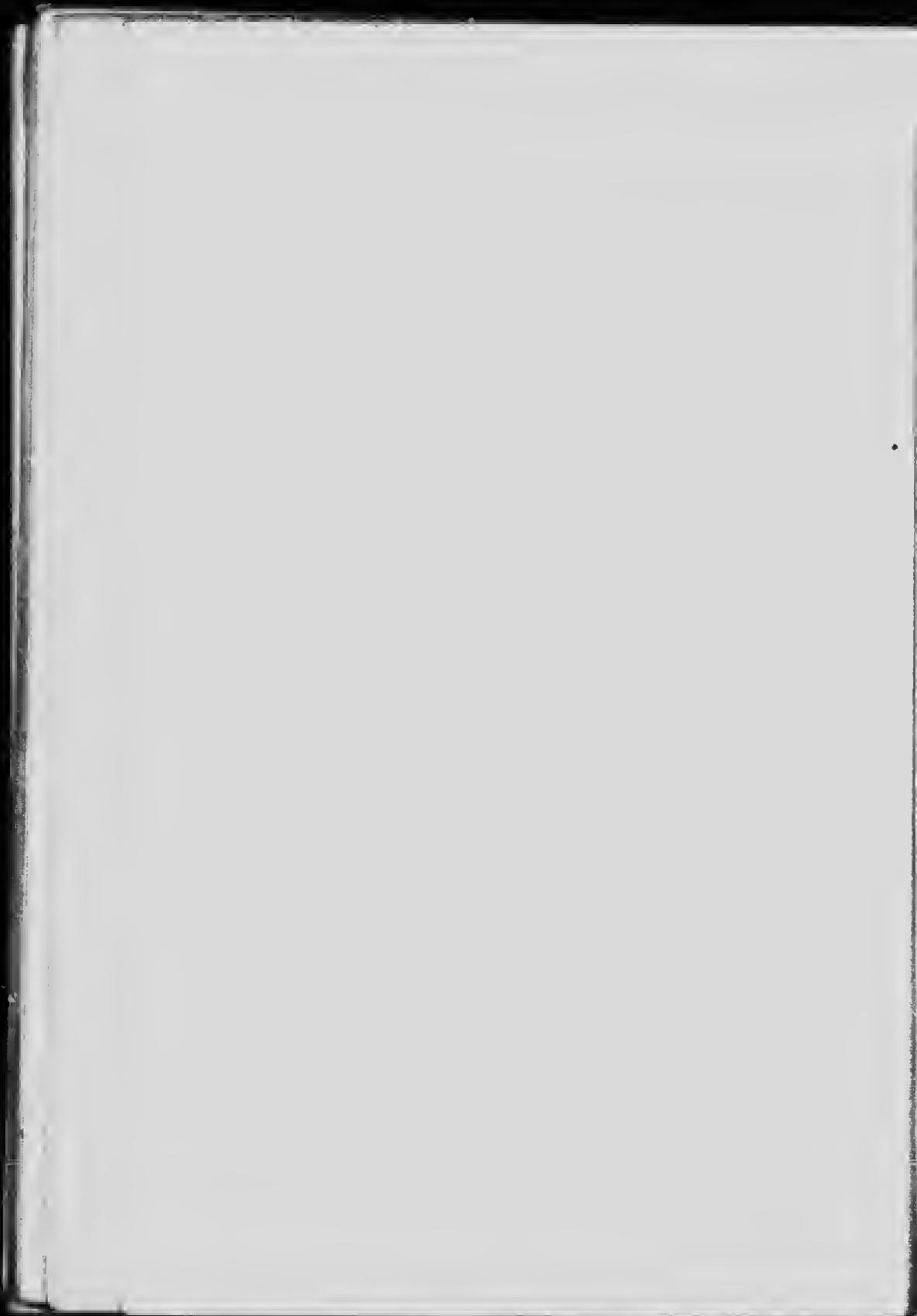
The night was clear, and the moon, sailing high, looked down over the tall tree-tops to strike with a bleak, white glint on the panes of a long row of unlighted windows. Gazing up at the dark, repellent façade, Christopher hesitated.

Ten minutes at least had passed since His Majesty was devoured by shadows. If he had knocked and found no one within, there had been more than time for him to return to the automobile. Someone, then, must have received him, but whether in loyalty or treachery Christopher could not hope to discover by blundering to the front door and ringing the bell.

Treading on grass to avoid gravel, he skiried the path round the house to the right, and was somewhat relieved to see a sprinkling of light on the frosted lawn. It was thrown from a long French window, which opened to the ground, and as the casements were ajar, the heavy green curtains half drawn back, Christophe. could see into the room beyond.



"THE VISITOR HELD OUT TO HIS HOST A SMALL REVOLVER"



He approached cautiously, absolving his conscience from any less worthy motive than a wish to defend his late passenger if need be, and if all seemed to be well he intended to move away again. But the lighted picture framed by the green curtains arrested him.

His Majesty stood with his back-half turned to the window, and facing him was young Max Lind, in travelling dress, his white face carved in stone, his eyes dark with tragedy. The visitor held out to his host a small revolver, and Max was taking it.

"It is the best thing you can do," His Majesty said, and through the open window the words reached ears for which they were not meant. "The only thing left for you to do in honour."

"Very well," Max answered dully. And he looked at the weapon. But Christopher thrilled as he felt that it was not the revolver which those tragic eyes really saw. "He sees Ivy," Ivy's cousin said to himself.

"You will do it?"

"I will do it. But——"

"There is a 'but'?"

"My God! Yes, sir, there is a 'but'—more than one. There is my father. He was so happy and proud. He believed that I should succeed—that I should be able to satisfy you. And there is—you know well, sir, there is another."

"It is better for them both that you should take this one way of wiping out disgrace."

"Disgrace! It's a hard word. I tried so earnestly. I thought—I was so certain, only a quarter of an hour ago, that I had done well—as well as a man could do."

"And now that I tell you you were utterly fooled, outwitted by men you should never have trusted, don't you see where you stand?"

"I see," said Max. "Perhaps you are right. Why should I go on living when my life's in ruins? And yet—I shall be breaking my father's heart if I do this."

"If I know him, he will thank Heaven for your sake and for his that you are out of the world, beyond criticism. If a man pays for a mistake with his life—he pays."

"I have said that I would pay," answered Max.

"When will you do it?"

"Is it your wish, sir, to see it done?"

Christopher started forward, but checked himself. His Majesty put up a protesting hand.

"No, no. But it should be while your blood is warm for it."

"Or cold for it? I ask only time to write two letters."

"Another mistake, and a fatal one," said His Majesty. "Are you mad, Lind? No one must know."

"You misunderstand me, sir. But you may trust me, at least in this little matter, though you say I have failed you in the big one. I shall say in the two letters—only good-bye; with my love; and that it had to be—nothing else. The writing of each one will take no longer than five minutes. Then—I promise that I won't fail again."

"You are wise. And, after all, what do you miss? What is life? A series of disillusion. I stay—to face those I have not had already. Good-night. I trust you."

"Good-night, sir. You will learn to-morrow that this time it wasn't in vain."

His Majesty took a step towards a door opposite the window, but Max reached it before him and opened it.

"I prefer to find my way out alone," said the visitor. His host bowed submissively, and stood at the door until the erect figure in the dark overcoat had passed out of sight. Then, softly, he closed the door, and as he came back to a desk which was placed between

door and window Christopher Race threw the case-ments wide open.

"Lind!" he exclaimed, before the other could move or speak, "it's I—Christopher Race. Don't you remember me? There's no time to apologise and explain, except to say that I drove *him* to the house, and—I've heard some things. I thought you were away, and your father. I followed to protect His Majesty in case of a plot; I've stayed to defend you from one."

"There is no plot," said Max Lind.

"I am not so sure. I've seen Ivy to-night—you remember we're cousins. She loves you. This will break her heart, poor child."

"Don't!" stammered Max.

"I wouldn't, if there were no hope, but, believe me, there is. I want you to wait. I want you to promise——"

"One such promise as I've made to-night is enough," Max cut in, his voice like ice. "You don't know——"

"I don't know what it is you tried to do, and failed in, if you did fail. I suppose you were sent on some mission—perhaps one of those which no Government will acknowledge if it fails, and——"

"You are right there. I, stupid fool, thought I had been a brilliant success, and expected a personal letter of congratulation. Ivy, too, and her father—but I cannot talk of it. It seems that I played into the hands of the enemy all the while I dreamed that they were playing into mine. I don't even now understand, but—one takes the word of Royalty. You overheard something, but I know you won't betray it. You meant well—though it's no use. You must forget this scene—wipe it off the slate. To-morrow—you must be surprised, with the rest of the world, when——"

"Yes, *if*. But it's only 'if.' Lind, I ask you to wait till I come back, with news which may make all the difference in the world to you."

The white face flushed painfully and the tragic eyes dilated. "If you mean to fetch Ivy——"

"I mean only to fetch His Majesty. No one else. I will speak to no one else. Give me an hour, just one hour, and then, if I don't bring him here, not to *forgive* you, mind, but for something better than that, it will be because I've had a mad thought, and have failed. Then, if you must, fulfil the promise I heard you make, but not before. Grant me this favour for auld lang syne, or I shall be sick of life and want to get out of it with you."

Max Lind looked at a clock on the high mantel. "Very well; an hour, then," he said, with a smile which Christopher Race would never forget. "But it will be a long hour. I would sooner have got it over within the next ten minutes. You had better go. If you drove him here, he may come back to look for you."

"He'll not think of my being with you. I know what I shall say to him," answered Christopher. "But I'll go. And you—are you in this house alone?"

"Alone," said Max. "The caretaker, an old soldier, has leave for the night. It's New Year's Eve, you know. I shall see the New Year in——"

"You will see it in here with me and another," broke in Max. "You'll see it in joyously—unless——"

"Yes—unless!" And Max laughed—a laugh that was sad on a young man's lips, and the heart in Christopher Race was stabbed by the sound of it. "I think it will be 'unless.' But I thank you all the same. Good-bye."

They grasped hands, and Christopher went quickly out by the way he had come.

There, by the car, stood the neat figure in the dark overcoat, the keen eyes looking this way and that, under a penthouse frown.

"I beg a thousand pardons for keeping you, sir," said Christopher, as he shot out between the half-open gates, "but something's gone wrong with the motor, and I went inside to look for you, just to say that I must get her to the nearest garage before I can take you on. I won't be long; not many minutes are needed for repairs."

"I could not think what had become of you," exclaimed His Majesty sharply. "I will go with you to the garage."

This was what Christopher had expected, but did not desire. His mind flew back to his passenger's surprising betrayal of amateurishness and timidity in traffic, and a wily thought crept into his brain.

"I'm afraid I ought to warn you that it may be—er—not exactly dangerous, perhaps, but risky," said he. "If you would spare me the responsibility by waiting here for a short time, I assure you I should be most awfully grateful."

"The car seemed in perfect condition when we came," said His Majesty. "What has suddenly gone wrong?"

"I'll show you, sir," replied Christopher, stooping beside Scarlet Runner, with his heart in his mouth. For this was to be a great bluff, and if the strange idea in his head were as mad as it might be, all hope for Max Lind and his life and his love was over.

He bent and fumbled, and with a few turns of a spanner loosened the joint of the exhaust-pipe near the silencer. Then quickly he turned the starting handle, and Scarlet Runner broke into a series of sharp explosions, dry as the barking of giant fire-crackers.

His Majesty stepped back with less dignity than

haste, and uttered some exclamation in his native tongue, which was lost among the explosions.

"I'll wait for you," he said. And not a word about the silencer.

Christopher Race could have shouted as he flashed away, the car yelping maledictions.

When he had turned two corners and was well out of earshot from No Thoroughfare Street he stopped and screwed up the loosened joint, then darted on again; but not to a garage.

It was well for him and well for Scarlet Runner that traffic had gone to sleep, and policemen had something more engrossing to think of than springing traps upon reckless motorists, for Christopher drove as if for the winning of a cup; and in eight minutes he was at the door of Desmond House.

There, too, was the green car which, by breaking down in Charles Street, had given him his chance. The chauffeur recognised him and grinned, not knowing, perhaps, that his rival was sure of full money in any event.

The man in green and brown had, like Christopher, refused coach-house accommodation, but preferred to be ready at an instant's notice for any impulsive whim of his master.

The carved oak double doors of Desmond House were closed now, and the superb footmen were no longer in attendance on the porch. All the activities of the mansion were concentrated within, and the many lighted windows were like eyes shining with proud content.

To the extreme surprise of the chauffeur in green and brown, the gentleman chauffeur sounded the big bronze knocker with the self-confidence of a prince.

The door flew open, and a footman stood revealed, staring.

Christopher wrote something on a visiting-card.

"This must be given instantly to the gentleman whose name I have written across the top," he said, pointing at an underscored line.

"Impossible, sir," replied the servant, though not without respect for a man so daring; and, then, Christopher was well dressed. "There is a dinner-party, and——"

"I know that," broke in Christopher. "But the card must be delivered, and without delay."

"It's as much as my place is worth—more, sir," stammered the footman, his respect increasing as the visitor's peremptoriness increased. "I don't see how I could manage it."

"I don't care how you manage it, provided you do manage it; but it will have to be managed," said Christopher. "Give me the card again."

The man gave it, wondering.

Christopher took from his pocket a five pound note (his last, by the way, but that was a detail) and wrapped it round the card.

"I will wait here," said he, "and I expect an answer in ten minutes at latest."

He got it in six; but it was neither verbal nor in writing. The man to whom he had sent the urgent message appeared himself at the door.

"You are very good," Christopher exclaimed. "But I knew you would come."

"Of course I came. I am not made of stone," said the other. "And you wrote that it was a matter of life and death for a man I valued."

"Do you value young Max Lind, sir?" asked Christopher.

"I do indeed, and intend to show my appreciation. He has just rendered me a great service, in accomplishing a mission tactfully, adroitly, as few other young

men could have accomplished it. And I have done my best not only to assure his career, but his happiness for the future as a reward. Why do you ask such a question?"

"Because at this moment Max Lind believes that you have doomed him to death, as a ghastly failure who has compromised the Government for which he was working. He believes that you have put into his hand a revolver and told him the only thing to do is to blow out his brains."

"Great heavens! But this is a madness."

"It will be suicide in less than an hour, unless you will consent to come with me, sir."

"Leave my friends who are entertaining me—to go—where?"

"To The Wood, Hammersmith, the house of the Linds, where a man who usurps your dignity and uses it for his own—or some other's—advantage is expecting me back every moment."

"A man who— Can you mean Gustav Krokesius?"

"If Gustav Krokesius is the living image of you, sir, has cultivated a voice like yours, and wears clothes copied from yours."

"He does, and for the best of reasons—because he is what you English would call my understudy. A man who naturally resembles me remarkably, and is paid to cultivate every detail of that resemblance, taking my place during my visit here whenever I wish it, before the public, that I may enjoy myself as I please and not be spied upon by reporters or—Anarchists. But he is off duty to-night."

"Officially, perhaps. Yet he has been at work. He went to the Charles Street hotel, got back a letter left by you for Lord Thanet, who is my cousin, and drove out to The Wood——"

"How do you know all this?"

"Because I took him for you, and acted as his chauffeur until I began to suspect. Then I came here to get you to save my friend, Max Lind, from misery and disgrace—my cousin, Ivy de Lisle, from a broken heart."

"That lovely girl! Ah, I guess the mystery. He is paid for this business by Von Hess, who loves Lady Ivy and hates Lind. But Von Hess shall pay more. He shall pay me. As for Krokesius—it's a pity. I shall never again find so valuable an understudy. But his engagement is finished, and his punishment is to begin. Did you say we should find him still at The Wood?"

"I said that I left him there—watching. When he sees you coming with me——"

"We will be too quick for him," said His Majesty, looking pleased.

And they were too quick; for he is a man whose prophecies usually come true.

He made several people happy that night; but Gustav Krokesius was not one of them, nor Baron von Hess.

As for Christopher, he was so charmed with himself and his friends, old and new, but more especially with the car by whose aid he had played his great game of bluff, that just as the bells rang in the New Year he poured a glass of champagne over Scarlet Runner's bonnet.

"That's a libation, my beauty," said he. And he paid for it with His Majesty's money.

He was glad that he had quarrelled with his uncle, glad that he had not pledged himself to look for the girl that uncle had wished him to go and find, somewhere in France;—glad that he was free, with a year of adventure before him.

## CHAPTER II: FEBRUARY

### THE LOST GIRL

CHRISTOPHER was scorching. He had engaged to do an impossible thing, or impossible with a car less sympathetic than Scarlet Runner, but he believed that he was going to do it.

He had had a tingling rush down a long, straight stretch of road when, slowing as little as might be for a turning, he shot through a wooded common and ran upon something interesting.

Mechanically he came to a stop, so suddenly that Scarlet Runner—her armour off for speed—waltzed in yesterday's mud, and put her bonnet where her driving-wheels should have been.

Above her head and Christopher's a charming balloon was poised, its anchor attaching it to earth in an adjacent field, while leaning over the edge of its basket-car, at a height of thirty feet in air, a young man drank a cup of tea and looked down upon the approaching motor.

"Halloa!" said he in the sky.

"Halloa!" replied he on the earth.

"That's what you call side-slip, isn't it?"

"Or its first cousin," grumbled Christopher, angry with himself and ruffled with the stranger. He wished now he had clad his darling for action, in her non-skidding bands.

"Side-slip's something *we* never get," said the young

man in the balloon, watching the motorist right his car. "Or tyre trouble; or——"

"*We* don't have to say our prayers every time we want to stop," said Christopher. "Good-bye. Hope you'll get somewhere."

"I'm in no hurry to get anywhere," answered the other. "I'm out for fun; aren't you?"

"No; for business. Good-bye again."

"Don't go," urged the balloonist. "Nice red assassin you've got—only a bit old-fashioned."

"Old-fashioned!" echoed Christopher. "Why, she's the latest thing out. She's——"

"Excuse me, I only meant old-fashioned in comparison with my Little Stranger. An automobile's the vehicle of yesterday, a balloon the carriage of to-morrow."

"Well, they'll both be out of date the day after," said Christopher, and smiled, for, after all, there was something engaging about the young man in the sky.

"Sufficient for the day is the balloon thereof," retorted the other.

"For me, the automobile thereof. I've no ambition to own a strawberry basket."

"Oh, I wasn't going to offer you one," said the balloonist. "But I should like to offer you some tea."

"Not on my head, please."

"Thy sins alone be there! But I'm in earnest. I've some Orange Pekoe and plovers' egg sandwiches fit for a king."

"I'm not in that business myself," said Christopher, "though I may look the part. And I've some nice penny sticks of chocolate in my pocket, which will keep my vital spark working."

"Don't think much of chocolate as a sparking-plug myself," replied the voice from on high.

"Ah! You know something of the jargon. Are you a motorist too?"

"I was, in dark ages. Have you tried the air?"

"Not off the level."

"Once you do, you'll turn up your nose at the road."

"Shape forbids. And time forbids further discussion. Wish you joy of the plovers' eggs."

"I don't know where you want to go, but I bet I could get you there quicker than you can get yourself."

"What? Could you go from London to Torquay in seven hours? That's what I'm trying to do."

"Shouldn't have to try. Shall I take you?"

"Car and all?"

"Come, I'm serious. Put your red crab up at the village, which I can see not far off, though in your worm-like position on earth you can't get a glimpse of it. Shouldn't wonder if there's a garage of sorts."

There was a microbe in Christopher Race's blood which went mad when it came in contact with the microbe of a suggested adventure. His errand from London to Torquay was an errand of business, as he had hinted; and though he had "personally conducted" two short tours and made a little money since he had set up as a gentleman chauffeur, he could not afford to miss any promising chance. An advertisement of his had been answered yesterday by a Mr. Finnington Brown, of Finnington Hall, near Torquay, inviting him to bring his car on a visit of inspection and be engaged for a month's trip if satisfactory. Because he was proud of Scarlet Runner, and liked to show her paces, he had wired that he would (tyres permitting) reach the Hall in a seven hours' run from London; but now he had met Apollyon on the way, and Apollyon tempted him.

It would surprise Mr. Finnington Brown if the advertising chauffeur dropped in on him in a balloon,

the  
us-  
t I  
ur-  
ay  
  
the  
our  
ose  
  
od  
he  
om  
he  
d"  
ad  
to  
his  
on  
im  
ed  
as  
es,  
ch  
ow  
on  
  
he  
n,



"CHRISTOPHER FLUNG THE WORDS SKYWARD AS HE FLASHED TOWARDS THE VILLAGE."



say an hour earlier than expected in a motor-car, and explained that—that—but bother explanations!—say that, owing to unforeseen circumstances, Scarlet Runner would appear later.

Such an escapade would be bad for business, but—it would be the best of jokes, especially if Finnington Brown were some old-fashioned duffer. And if the balloon never got to Finnington Hall, or anywhere else on earth, why, it was all in the day's work, and everything, even life, must end some time.

"I accept with pleasure your kind invitation for tea and a canter," Christopher said aloud. "Will you call for me or do I call for you?"

"We'll make a rendezvous," replied the other, "a little lower down—or what you're still accustomed to considering 'down.' When you've put up your crawler, you might just bring along an able-bodied yokel or two to help unhitch me from the stars, eh? I don't want to let myself down, as I can't spare gas."

"Thank goodness *we* don't have to call for aid in putting on brakes or turning the starting-handle." Christopher flung the words skyward as he flashed towards the village.

It was no more than half a mile away, but owing to a sharp shower the population had been kept within bounds and had missed seeing their sky visitor. Otherwise the gentleman in the balloon would not have eaten his plovers' eggs in peace. Christopher put up his car at the inn stable, which thought itself a garage, and in the company of three young men, whom he easily collected, returned to the field of the balloon by a short cut across meadows.

But the party did not return unaccompanied. The news of the "free show" provided for the neighbourhood spread mysteriously, and by the time Christopher and his attendants were out of the village half the

able-bodied inhabitants were at their heels. A growing crowd watched the slow hauling down of the balloon, and listened, open-mouthed, to the instructions delivered by the aeronaut.

As for him, despite the surging audience, he was as calm as the weather, which, in the lull after storm, enabled his directions to be obeyed without hitch. His basket-car touched earth, light as a swallow dropping from flight. Each of Christopher's assistants got half a crown for the work he would have been enchanted to do for nothing, and while all three village youths clung grinning to the basket's edge the invited guest climbed over it into a luxurious nest stored with rugs, books, maps, food, a tea-basket, and a few bottles of wine.

"When I say 'Let go!' do it all together," ordered the balloon's owner, as he pulled in his anchor and deftly festooned the rope round the car. "Anyone who hangs on may get translated to another sphere. Farewell for ever. Now—let go!"

And they did let go, with scared precision. But Christopher Race, who stood in the middle of the car, wondered because, though the six brown hands vanished, the balloon still seemed to be standing still.

"Not enough gas, I suppose," he murmured, with gentle scorn. "It's the same sort of feeling you have in a motor, when she gasps out her last sigh of petrol through her carburetter."

"Is it?" echoed his new friend, who was, Christopher now began to realise, an exceedingly good-looking young man of the best American type. "Well, just step here and look over."

Christopher stepped and looked, and started back amazed. While he had sneered at the balloon's plight, she had been quietly, industriously rising to a

height of a thousand feet above the staring faces he had expected to see gazing up into his.

"Not enough gas!" laughed the American. "Why, thanks to my economy, we're as full of gas as one of your ha'penny dailies. Let's be happy as birds, telling each other our names and impressions of things in general. I'm Paul Western——"

"I might have guessed that," cut in Christopher. "You're *the* Western, of course—winner of the big balloon race last week. Delighted to meet you. As for me, the only race I have to my credit is my name—Christopher Race—'Ace' they used to call me at my college. Would it had been the Ace of Diamonds!"

"I suppose Ace of Hearts would have suited the case better?"

"Never was in love in my life," said Christopher. "Though one has fancies, of course."

"Same with me," said Western. "I felt somehow, when I looked down on the top of your head and refrained from throwing breadcrumbs on it, that we were kindred spirits. If ever we do care about a girl, probably it'll go hard with us."

"I want it to," said Christopher.

"Do you? I'm not so sure. We'd perhaps be better off if we stayed among the stars. Don't worry, though. I won't insist on your trying the experiment, or you'll begin to think I'm not Western, but a lunatic at large."

"Very much at large," murmured Christopher, glancing at a mountain-range of cloud. "We seem to be in the middle of everywhere, but to be getting nowhere."

"We're bobbing about," said Western, "but I'll run her up higher, and see if we can't catch that breeze."

He began emptying sand out of a bag; but, so far as Christopher could tell, nothing happened except that the mountain-range sank out of sight and others, even wilder, came into view. Also, the air seemed fresher, though not intensely cold.

"God—gracious, we have got our wind with a vengeance!" exclaimed Western.

"I don't feel any," said Christopher.

"Because you're going with it at exactly the same rate. But we're making a good thirty miles an hour."

"At that rate you'll soon land me in Torquay," Christopher replied cheerfully.

"I—er—am not quite sure. You see, the wind happens to be the wrong way." Western peered at a compass through gathering dimness, for the February evening was closing in, and then hastily pulled the valve-cord.

"That's rather a bore—for Mr. Finnington Brown," said Christopher. "As for me, I never enjoyed myself more, and can't regret anything—though Scarlet Runner's reputation will suffer an undeserved wrong. It's getting dark, isn't it? And what are all those white things coming up at us?"

"Rain's turned to a snow flurry."

"Is it usual to snow up—in these parts?"

"We're dropping down now—faster than it snows."

"Dropping into night," Christopher reflected aloud.

It was true. The sun had set behind leaden clouds. Already, as one says across the Channel, it made night; and far below they saw clustering lights, shining like jewels on purple velvet cushions. Though they could feel no wind, as they bent over the edge of the basket the lights in the world beneath appeared to float rapidly past, as if borne by an onrushing

tide. Sometimes they were hidden by black rags of cloud; but at last these rags were fringed with gleaming silver. The moon was coming up, clear and full, and, as if in obedience to her command, the wind was still; the lights in the purple depths no longer moved on a dark tide, but a river of silver swallowed up the yellow sparks and flooded the purple valleys.

"Good!" said Western. "Now we can descend. We shall have an illumination for our landing, and though we're coming down into a mist—a sea mist, I should judge by the salt tang of it—it's so thin that we shall know whether we're dropping on earth or water."

"Have you any idea where we are?" asked Christopher, who had long ago abandoned hope of Torquay or its neighbourhood—if he had ever really had any—but, like a true sportsman, was revelling in the adventure.

"Might be Hampshire," suggested Western vaguely. "Or—well, might be anywhere—near the coast. It's hard to say to thirty miles or so, the way we have been racing."

He had pulled the valve-cord and they steadily descended. Now they swam in a sea of creamy mist, laced with the moon's silver. They knew that they must be near earth, but the gleaming sea-fog shrouded all details. Suddenly, however, they became conscious of a luminous gilding of the mist close to the falling balloon; and at the same instant the car bumped and swaycd, bounding like some wild creature caught by the foot in a trap. There was a swishing of foliage or pine-needles and a crackling of small branches. They were entangled in a tree.

"Halloa, this is a surprise party!" exclaimed Western, quick to snatch an axe. Bending far over

the edge he felt for the branches which held the basket, and began to hack at them. "Push off your side if you can," he said to Christopher.

Obediently Christopher leaned out and down, his hands coming into contact with bristling pine-needles. Thus engaged, his face was lit up with the yellow light which filtered through the thin silver lace of the mist.

"Why, we're close to a house," he said to Western, whose back was turned towards him as he worked. "There must be a lighted window just round the corner. I believe I could push off from the wall. Yes. By leaning well out I can touch it. It's brick, and there's a lot of ivy. It's a wonder someone doesn't hear us through that window so near, and take us for burglars."

By this time Western had stopped chopping branches to glance over his shoulder.

"By Jove, we are close!" he exclaimed. "Narrow shave we must have had from crashing down on the roof in this mist—it's so deceiving. But, as it is, we're all right. Only keep her off the house, your side. It is a wonder we don't see the shadows of heads, by this time, in the light from that window. We're almost in it."

"I can touch the stone ledge, just round the corner of the house wall," said Christopher. "It's wet—there's a pool of——"

"Water" was the word on his tongue; but, as he pulled back his hand and looked at it in the yellow haze of lamplight which mingled with the moon's rays, he drew in his breath quickly.

"What's the matter?" asked Western.

"Look!" Christopher answered, in an odd voice, holding out his hand. Fingers and palm were dyed red, a wet red that glistened.

"Fresh paint, perhaps," suggested Western. But his voice was also strange.

"Paint doesn't run like water; paint doesn't fall in drops," Christopher said gravely.

"Then—you think——"

"I think there's something very queer about this house."

Their lively tones were hushed now. Involuntarily they whispered.

"Pooh! I know what you mean, but it can't be. A window-sill. Why should—such things don't happen."

"All the same, I'm going to hang out from the car and try to twist round the corner far enough to see——"

"Wait till I hang on to you, or you'll get a tumble."

Christopher leaned out, with one knee on the edge of the trapped car, one hand plunged into and grasping the thick-stemmed ivy. Hanging thus, he could see the window whence came the light; and as he looked, peering through the mist, a slight breeze sprang up and blew a fold of the white veil away. He could see round the corner and into the lighted window, but only a faint impression of what he saw there remained with him,—a vague picture of an old-fashioned, oak-panelled room, with a great many books, and a long mirror opposite the window,—for it was something in the window itself which caught and held his gaze. He saw it, and saw it repeated in the mirror, or, rather, saw there what he could see in no other way.

A man's body hung over the window-sill, inert and lifeless. He had fallen backward and lay half out, his head and shoulders protruding over the stone ledge which Christopher had touched, the face upturned and white in the mingling light of lamp and moon.

Christopher saw it upside down, the eyes rolled back and staring open, as if they strove to find and look into his. There was a red stain on the forehead, and the hair, which was dark and long, clung wet and matted over the brows. The lips were twisted into a terrible, three-corned smile, and Christopher started back from it with a cry.

"What did you see?" asked Western.

Christopher told him. "Do you want to look and make sure I'm not mad?" he asked.

For an instant Western hesitated, then said that he would look.

Christopher held him, as he had held Christopher; but the look was a brief one.

"For Heaven's sake, let's get out of this," Western stammered. "I hope I'm no coward, but it's too ghastly—happening on such a thing—whatever it is, whatever it means. It makes me sick to be near it. Where's that axe? Here. We'll be free, and off into pure air in a minute."

With a crash, a branch broke short off under the axe. Western threw out sand, and the Little Stranger floated up, bumping against a curious, battlemented roof, which rose and stretched dark in the moonlight.

"We're caught again! Another branch somewhere!" cried Western desperately, just as they had thought to sail out of danger of perilous bumps. He groped once more for the axe, which he had thrown carelessly down in his haste to get rid of sand.

As he exclaimed, something moved near by, and a figure which had been hiding among the battlements sprang up and ran towards the swaying balloon.

Highly wrought as they were, at first the two young men were struck with horror, as if beholding a spirit; but as the clear moonlight fell full upon the form,

common sense came back, and they knew that this was no ghostly vision.

A girl in a white dress was hurrying along the flat roof, her arms outstretched in a detaining gesture. "Save me!" she faltered, her voice broken by fear or pain.

Whether or no it was partly the effect of the moonlight, the girl seemed to Christopher and Western the most beautiful creature they had ever seen.

She had hair which the moon burnished to copper, and it fell in two long, thick ropes or braids over slim shoulders and young bosom. The white radiance which had pierced the blowing mist shone into her eyes, making them large and dark, and wonderful as wells that mirror stars in black depths.

"Oh, save me—take me with you—whoever you are—wherever you go—anywhere away from this awful house!" she begged of the strangers, as she came flying across the dark, flat expanse behind the battlements. And eagerly Christopher Race and Paul Western put out their arms to reach and draw her into the car.

But Fate came between them and the girl. A new puff of wind caught the balloon again, bumping the basket against the battlements, so that both men staggered and fell upon their knees. So great and so sudden was the strain that the branch which for a moment had arrested them broke with a sharp snap, and the balloon, already lightened of ballast, was whirled away like a soap-bubble before they had time to speak.

In a second the white girl and the dark battlements had been swept out of sight. Western got to his feet and seized the valve-cord, but Christopher, still on his knees, cried out a warning "Stop!"

"Listen," he said; "what's that sound?"

Western paused with his hand on the cord, his ears alert.

The balloon was in a boiling surf of snowy cloud, lit by the moon. They could see nothing save this glittering froth, but there was a sound louder and more ominous than the harp-like singing of the cordage. From below came at short, regular intervals a deep, reverberating boom.

In his excitement Western had not heard, until Christopher compelled his attention.

"The sea!" he exclaimed. "We're over the sea."

"Another moment and we should have been in it," added Christopher.

"Then that house must stand close to the shore," Western said. "Sixty seconds ago we were there; now——"

"We're being blown out to sea, aren't we?" finished Christopher.

"I'm afraid we are," the other admitted. "Great Scot! I wouldn't have had this happen for anything."

"Is it so dangerous?"

"Hang danger! I wasn't thinking of myself—or you either. I was thinking of the girl—that beautiful, that divine girl. We've lost her—deserted her, left her abandoned—do you understand? We can't get back to her. We don't know where she is. We can never find her again."

"We must," said Christopher. "She begged us to save her. From what, I wonder? What had happened? What was she afraid would still happen? What can be the secret of that terrible house?"

Western tilted out another bag of sand.

The clouds fell from under them as they shot up into more rarefied air. "The best thing we can hope for now, I suppose," he went on, "is to get to France, and then back again, to find *her* and the house, or to

spend all we have and are in trying to do it. If we're to make this passage without shipwreck, we must travel high."

"The girl—if she was a girl, and not a dream—seems to have made a tremendous impression on you in a short time," said Christopher, beginning to be himself again.

"Girl! Call her an angel, and you'd be nearer the mark," exclaimed Western. "I never knew there could be such a beautiful creature. And to think that she was in awful fear or trouble, that she called on me to save her, and that I failed, because of a mere puff of wind. If it hadn't been for that, and the cracking branch, she'd have been with us now."

They were racing over a sea of steel which they could see sometimes through a great hole in a torn carpet of cloud. Western did not say anything to discourage his guest; but, though Christopher was a novice, he had heard ballooning men talk since the sport came into fashion, and he knew that the English Channel was wide, that they might never see the other side, because the balloon might not have buoyancy enough to carry her passengers across.

Time might drag, though the balloon flew as the rising wind flew. The two young men had said all they had to say, and fell silent as the hours sped by. But it was not because they were afraid; fear would have been a mean emotion for these star-embroidered heights. Yet they were grave. The sky at night over a wild sea, when the breeze has increased to a wind and the wind has grown to a gale, is not a place for joking.

Both men thought of the battlemented house, and the white girl who had appealed in vain for help. They thought, too, of the lost spirits in Dante's Inferno, impelled ever forward by the pitiless, driving wind.

So the night went on, and as the balloon held her own the adventure would have begun to seem commonplace, had it not been for the dark picture of the tragic house by the sea. There was nothing to do but to eat when they were hungry, to throw out ballast when the Little Stranger showed signs of faltering, to light their lamps and consult the compass or the anemometer.

After midnight the gale grew weary. They still hung over the sea, but far away shone a lamp like a fallen star. It was a lighthouse, Western said; and, though they lost the welcome gleam, it was not long after when they heard once more the thunderous booming of surf. Then they looked down on a vast stretch of opaque darkness, with no more glitter of moon on steely waves.

"Land!" shouted Western. "She's brought us safely across, after all. Below lies France—Normandy, perhaps. Now's our chance, and we must take it or fare worse."

He pulled the valve-cord and they fell, thrilled with the wild joy of danger and uncertainty as they peered over the edge of their frail car into the gulf of moonlight and shadow. Suddenly Western made a quick movement and let down a drag-rope. "It touches," he said. "Hark! Isn't that a cow lowing?"

The earth flew up at them, and not far off were a group of farm buildings, with a large pond beyond. Delay of a moment might mean disaster, for here was the place to alight—not on those pointed gables or in the shining sheet of water. Western opened wide the valve, the car came quietly to earth, and before she could bump or drag he tugged the red ripping-cord and tore the Little Stranger from foot to crown. The gas gushed out, and folds of silk enveloped the two young men as the balloon lost shape and collapsed.

"Let her lie as she is," said Western coolly, as he scrambled out and extricated his companion. "Our business is to get back to that girl."

Christopher agreed with him, and together they started off through a ploughed field of sodden mud towards the buildings with the pointed roofs. There was a locked gate to climb, a farmyard to cross, and then a chained dog began to bay from his kennel. A square of light flashed yellow in a dark wall, and a voice hailed them in French.

Both young men could speak the language, Race better than Western, and between them they explained that they were not burglars but balloonists; that they had crossed the Manche, and had found a resting-place on the land of monsieur, of whom they begged assistance. Could he give them a cart to the nearest railway-station? If he could, they would give him money, much money, in return.

"It is lucky, monsieur, that you are not burglars, for you have come to the house of the mayor of this commune," said the farmer, "and I have five tall sons. But since you are balloonists, and especially English ones, we will do what we can for you, even though it is the middle of the night. Vive l'Entente Cordiale!"

In five minutes more the mayor and the mayor's sons were all out of the house, and some went to gaze curiously at the deflated balloon, while others helped their father get ready the white-covered cart.

Succour and protection for the Little Stranger were promised, and the Englishmen were informed that they had alighted within twelve kilomètres of Havre. The farmer thought it was too late to catch the Southampton boat, and *les messieurs* had much better rest; his sons thought it was not too late, and did their best to speed the parting guests. A hundred francs which had been Western's became the mayor's; thanks and compliments

fell thick as hail; and twenty minutes after the collapse of the Little Stranger its late navigators were speeding through the night as fast as a powerful Normandy horse could take them, towards Havre. They dashed on to the quay as the last whistle blew for the departure of the night boat, and flung themselves across the gangway just as it was being hauled ashore.

The journey back to England across a turbulent and noisy sea was a vulgar experience compared to their flight with the wind among the stars. But as neither felt in the mood for rest, it gave them time to discuss details of their premeditated quest.

Of course, said Christopher, there might be something in the morning paper which could give them the clue they wanted; in which case they would know what to do next. But, if the mystery of the battlemented house and its lighted window were not revealed to them after their landing at Southampton, he proposed that they should as soon as possible retrieve Scarlet Runner, and tour the coast in her. Unless there were news of the house and what had happened there, the only way in which they could hope to find it was by recognising the battlements. Beyond that one salient feature, and their knowledge that the house (which must have at least one pine tree near it) stood close to the sea, they had no other clue to guide them to the girl they had lost.

It was eight in the morning when they touched English soil, and their first thought was to buy a newspaper, of which they scarcely let a paragraph go unregarded. But they learned nothing. So far, the battlemented house kept its secret; nevertheless, if fortune did not favour them in one way, it did in another, for they discovered a train leaving Southampton almost immediately after their arrival, which would take them across country to Scarlet Runner.

She lay at a small village not far from Yeovil; and it was after eleven when Christopher had the congenial task of feeding her with petrol and refreshing her with cool water. To do this was the affair of only a few minutes, and then, having wired to Mr. Finnington Brown, he was ready to return Western's hospitality of yesterday.

All night the expert balloonist had puzzled over the problem of distances and speed, trying to determine from the map of England how far and in what direction the Little Stranger had drifted after taking Race on board, before the sudden gale had subsided and dropped him, in a rising sea-fog, at the lost house. Now, in obedience to Western's calculations, Scarlet Runner's bonnet was pointed upon a south-easterly course, slanting always towards the sea.

When, well on in the afternoon, they came to Weymouth, they told each other that their systematic search was only beginning. It was not unlikely that they might find the house of the battlements in this neighbourhood; and, describing it as well as they could at a motor-garage which they visited, they watched for a look of recognition. But nobody at the garage and nobody at the old-fashioned hotel where they next applied had ever heard of or seen such a mansion by the sea.

Eastward Christopher drove Scarlet Runner after Weymouth, taking the coast road when there was one, and, when the way wandered irrelevantly elsewhere, exploring each side-track which might lead to a house by the shore. So darkness fell, and all the searchings and all the questionings had been vain. It was useless to go on after nightfall, and in the sequestered hollow of Lulworth Cove they stopped till dawn beckoned them on.

The newspapers which found their way late to

Lulworth had nothing in them of interest to Christopher Race or Paul Western, though they were crammed with world-shaking events; and they did not wait for the coming of the papers next day. By six o'clock they were off upon their chivalrous errand, neither behind the other in eagerness, for Christopher did not see why he had not as much right as Western to fall in love with the beautiful mystery. He had already imagined himself half in love several times, though when he reflected upon the affairs in cold blood he knew that there had been nothing in them. He did not even grudge his cousin, Ivy de Lisle, to his friend Max Lind, but he wondered if he would not grudge this girl to Paul Western.

It seemed to him that it would be a delicious romance to find and save her from the horror she had feared, to win her love and eventually marry her about the time that his rich relative should decide to leave him everything, thus making himself forever safe against a wife of his uncle's choosing. Therefore, when Western began to make some such remark, apropos to his own state of mind, Christopher frankly proclaimed his own intentions.

"But I tell you the girl is mine," argued the other, surprised and disgusted; for he had taken Christopher's helpfulness for disinterested sympathy.

"Why is she yours more than mine?" argued Race.

"Because—I saw her first," said Western.

"That would be difficult to prove," said Christopher.

"Anyhow, it was my balloon."

"I was your honoured guest. Besides, if you hadn't thrown out sand, we could have stopped and taken her away."

"I laid first claim. You can't deny that. You should have spoken when I first told you how much I admired her. Oh, by every rule, she's mine."

"First catch your hare," said Christopher.

"What a simile! If only for that, you don't deserve her."

"So far as that's concerned, I don't suppose there's much to choose between us."

"I wish I thought you were chaffing," said the American.

"I'm not."

"Then how's this thing to be decided?"

"By the girl—when we find her."

"Yes. But one of us—the one who gets ahead—is bound to have the best chance. Look here, I'm obliged to stick to your company, for I can't get on without your car; it would mean too much delay now to wire somewhere and try to hire an equally good one."

"There isn't such a thing," said Christopher.

"Well, one half as good, then. I'm at your mercy. You wouldn't have seen the girl if it hadn't been for me. You might stand aside and let me propose. We Americans think nothing of asking a girl to marry us the first time we see her, if we really want her and some other fellow's likely to snatch her out of our possession. But an Englishmen could never do the thing offhand like that. He——"

"Nonsense," cut in Christopher. "Englishmen are the same as Americans. We're brothers; and just because we are, I'll come to an agreement with you. If we find the girl——"

"*When* we find her. Don't say '*it*'"

"When we find her, the one who does most towards saving her shall have the right to speak first. Do you agree?"

"Yes," said Western, after a moment's hesitation. He was sitting beside Christopher, and as they discussed the probable result of their quest it

progressed fruitlessly. Exploration was difficult, for great cliffs walled the coast, and only here and there were they cut into hollows where small side-roads ran to the sea. A place as important as the battlemented house must be approached by a road, and though they passed through village after village, learning nothing, they would not give way to discouragement.

Sooner or later, they said to each other, they would find the house. But there was a thing which they did not say aloud. Suppose it were too late? Already thirty-six hours and more had gone by since they had lost the girl—lost her at the moment when she cried to them for help. Someone else might have given that help. Or else—it might be that she had passed beyond the need—for ever. But these things did not bear speaking of.

Scarlet Runner had sped under the shadow of a ruined castle, and was nearing Ardwanage, when a train which had not yet gathered full speed after leaving the station ran towards them along the line, that here lay parallel with the road. Race had slowed down for a frightened horse, and he was in the act of putting on speed again when Western sprang up in the seat beside him. "Turn—as quick as you can," he stammered. "Catch that train. *She's in it!*"

"She?" echoed Christopher, bewildered, but obeying.

"*She*—the girl—my lost girl. I saw her."

"Our lost girl," Christopher amended, and slipped in his fourth speed. "If Scarlet Runner can catch that train, and she's really in it, the first chance is mine—eh?"

"Yes—yes, anything, if you'll only bring me to her," gasped Western. "She *was* there—you may take my word. There's no one like her. Her face was at the open window, with the same expression on

it as when she begged us to save her. Whatever the mystery is—whatever has happened since that night—she's horribly unhappy and *frightened*. It may be it isn't too late to save her yet."

"Was she alone?" asked Christopher, as Scarlet Runner, sensitively responsive to his touch, leaped ahead like a panther. Lucky there were no more frightened horses in the way!

"How can I tell? I saw only her," said Western. "And yet, now I come to think, I'm not sure there wasn't a man by her side, and a man in the window facing her, too. I don't know what they were like, but—somehow I've an impression of common faces, in strong contrast to hers."

Christopher did not answer, but a thought was in his mind which made him neglect to put on the brakes at the top of a steep descent. Scarlet Runner coasted down, and kept the train well in sight. Though she leaped, panther-like, she held on her terrific way with a rhythm and speed which no animal could equal.

The smoke of the locomotive trailed its dark flag along the sky, and Scarlet Runner hurled herself in pursuit.

The heavy engine drawing its huge load could do forty miles an hour on an even track; the light car, clean and springy as a trained athlete, could sprint at least twenty miles faster on the road, but that road must be clear, and there came in the skill of the driver.

Christopher Race was a driver born, not made. His eye saw and understood with the quickness of light. His hand and foot moved with automatic precision; his nerve was unshaken. Western admired him, and for the moment compared the sport of ballooning unfavourably with that of motoring.

On the long, straight stretch of road the wind shouted in their ears like a hurricane, and Scarlet

Runner gained easily on the dark trail of smoke. But she plunged into a village, with children toddling out of cottages to their playground, the public road. In an instant the speed had dropped to a crawl, and the car, with its musical siren sounding a tuneful warning, picked its path among tiny maids and men, skimmed silently past an unattended cart-horse just ready to bolt, and sprang out with a bound into open country again.

"We shall do it!" cried Western; and then, round a turn, showed a railway-crossing. A moment earlier, and the car would have shot through like an arrow; but Race had to jam the brake on with sudden force, or Scarlet Runner's bonnet would have crashed into the gates as they swung shut.

The car was ahead of the train at the crossing, and Western shouted an offer of ten pounds to the gatekeeper if he would open for a second and let them rush by; but the man shook his head, and they had to wait, not only to see the train go past, but to sit chafing while the huge caterpillar length of a luggage train followed, crawling along the other line.

Later it was shunted on to a siding, and blocked the way for five of the longest minutes either young man had ever known. The race was over, and they had lost.

It was easy enough to learn from the gatekeeper that the train they had chased was bound for London, but, as it would stop at four stations before reaching its destination, it was impossible to guess at which the girl was most likely to get out.

All they could do was to pause at each town in turn, and inquire at the station for a young lady answering their description. Such a girl, it seemed to them, could not pass unnoticed by the most married stationmaster or unobservant porter; therefore, when they asked at

Marne for a beautiful blonde with red-gold hair, and were told that no such person had left the London or any other train, they would instantly have dashed on towards Beemouth, if it had not been for *Scarlet Runner*. She needed water and petrol; and while Christopher was supplying her wants, Western bought a newspaper of that morning.

"Ready to go on," said Christopher.

"We won't go on. We stop here," answered the American excitedly. "Read this."

He pointed to a half column of startling headlines: "Murder or Suicide of a Baronet. Master of Abbey Court, Dorsetshire. Beautiful Young Girl Accused, and Arrested by Police while Trying to Escape."

Christopher read on, eagerly absorbing the sensational version of the mystery which to him and his companion had seemed impenetrable.

Sir Digby Plantagenet was an eccentric, middle-aged baronet, claiming descent from kings. He was a childless widower, living alone save for two old servants, in a desolate but beautiful house, dating from the days of Henry VII. Though rich enough to keep a generous household, he lived almost as a miser, and saw no one until a year ago, when he sent for a daughter of his dead brother, a young girl, Margaret Plantagenet, whom he had been educating in a French convent school. The girl had come to live with her uncle, and eight or nine months after her arrival both servants—husband and wife—had left. The gossip of the countryside was that Sir Digby's growing eccentricity had been too much for them; but others said that, having hoped that their master's fortune might become theirs by his will, jealousy of the beautiful niece had finally compelled them to give notice.

For several months the young girl had acted as her

uncle's housekeeper, without assistance. No servants were engaged, no visitors received; no one ever came to the house except two or three privileged tradesmen from Marne, the county town, ten miles distant. The day before the publication of the report a Marne grocer had called at Abbey Court with his cart, as he was in the habit of doing twice a week, to bring milk and other stores which Miss Plantagenet used in her house-keeping. His knocking remained unanswered, and at last he discovered that a side-door was unlocked. Fearing some tragedy in the strange household, he entered, cried Miss Plantagenet's name, but had no answer. He then ventured on an exploration, and finally made a dreadful discovery: the body of Sir Digby hung half out of a window invisible from the back of the house where the grocer entered. The unfortunate baronet had been shot in the breast and in the head, though no weapon was to be seen; and Miss Plantagenet, the only other occupant of the house, had disappeared. The grocer at once notified the police at Marne, and search was made for the missing girl. Late in the evening she was found at Weymouth, in a state of collapse, at a small hotel near the railway station, where she had arrived that morning. She was arrested on suspicion of murdering her eccentric uncle, whose heiress she was believed to be; but her weakness and hysterical condition had prevented her from making any statement. A doctor had, however, been called in, and announced that Miss Plantagenet would probably be well enough next day to be taken back by train as far as Marne, where she would have to appear at the coroner's inquest.

"She's here now," said Western. "By this time the inquest has probably begun. Those men I saw must have been policemen in charge of the poor child—the brutes! We must go to the inquest ourselves,

as quick as we can get there. Only think; if I hadn't bought that paper we'd have been off to the next place. This time *I* am the Ace of Trumps."

"You wouldn't have got to Marne if it hadn't been for me," replied Christopher; and Western had to admit that this was true. "So far it's a tie," he said, "and the grand test is still to come."

How so beautiful a girl had passed through the railway-station without being noticed would have been puzzling if Christopher had not suggested that she had doubtless veiled her face. Probably the town was agog over the mystery of Abbey Court, and the police escort, who must have been in plain clothes, would have taken pains to keep secret the time of their arrival.

The people of the garage where Christopher had bought his petrol knew all about the "murder" (as they prematurely termed it), and were enchanted to point out the way to the inn where the coroner's inquest was at that moment being held. Everybody was saying, they added gratuitously, that Margaret Plantagenet was the murderess. Sir Digby's two servants, who had taken a cottage close to Marne, had been called as witnesses, also the grocer's assistant who had notified the police of the tragedy. Besides the doctor who had been called to Abbey Court to certify to the time and manner of death, two or three tradesmen accustomed to serving the house, and Sir Digby's solicitor—one of the leading lights of Marne—there would be no other witnesses, so far as the people of the garage knew; and they seemed to know everything.

According to public opinion, Miss Plantagenet had had motive enough to kill her uncle. He was a man of vindictive temper, an expert in the art of irritating and torturing those dependent upon him. Some said that he was mad, and for the last year or two he had

been feared by everyone forced to come in contact with him. Ever since a fall from a horse in hunting six or seven years ago he had been peculiar, and had grown more so every year.

Little was known in Marne about Miss Plantagenet; but she had been seen, and was considered beautiful. Some ladies said it was not natural to be so handsome as that, and the girl must be an adventuress. She had been named as Sir Digby's heiress, and expected to come into a fortune of a hundred thousand pounds on his death. There was the motive; and the man had, perhaps, maddened the girl by some act of tyranny or brutality. She had no other relatives—no one to protect her. Gossip said that Sir Digby's solicitor, Mr. Walter Ressler, had wanted to marry Miss Plantagenet and had been refused; but neither Mr. Ressler nor anyone, except a few tradesmen, had called at Abbey Court for months. As for the servants, Mr. and Mrs. Honey, they had never had a good word to say for the young girl since they left Abbey Court to live at Marne. They described her as an ambitious, designing creature, whose one idea had been to get Sir Digby into her power; but, then, they were prejudiced, as she had accused them of pilfering, and it was through her that they had lost their soft berth, or so everyone supposed. Their evidence would certainly go against Miss Plantagenet at the inquest. Mrs. Honey had told a friend last night, after the news came, that an old-fashioned pistol kept by Sir Digby had disappeared from its place soon after his niece came to Abbey Court, and probably the young lady knew where it was. Besides, if she were not guilty, why had she run away to Weymouth, instead of letting the police know what had happened?

Christopher Race and Paul Western listened to these scraps of information, for they wished to know some-

thing about the case before going to the coroner's inquest. The more they knew, the more clearly would they understand how to go to work, they said to each other. But five minutes of such gossip sufficed, and then they were off in *Scarlet Runner* for the Bell Buoy Inn.

A crowd stood before the door; the bar was thronged, and men packed shoulder to shoulder, talking in low, eager tones, blocked the dim hall; but Christopher and Western contrived to squeeze through as far as a door kept by a big policeman. They knew that behind that closed door the coroner's inquest was in full swing.

"We must be allowed to pass," Western said imperatively.

This would not have been Race's way; but Western had taken the initiative.

"Impossible, sir," replied the representative of the law. "Room's crammed. There isn't space for one more, let alone two."

"But we're important witnesses," urged Christopher.

The big man grinned. "If I'd let in every man Jack—and every woman Jill, for the matter o' that—who said they were important witnesses, I should have let in half the town," he returned calmly. "They've got witnesses enough in there, and too many, maybe, for that poor girl."

"If you mean Miss Plantagenet," said Western quickly, "I intend to marry her."

As he spoke he looked defiantly at Christopher, who, though audacious himself, was astonished at this audacity.

The manner of the policeman changed. "Oh, very well, sir, if you are Miss Plantagenet's intended husband, that alters the case. You had better write that on a card, and I'll send it in. Then you and your friend will probably be admitted."

Thus Western had in an instant become, of the pair, the person of paramount importance. Triumphant, he drew out a visiting-card and scribbled something upon it. The policeman opened the door wide enough to pass this to a comrade, and a few minutes later the coroner's officer was ushering the two young men into the crowded coffee-room. They were led to a position near the long table headed by the coroner, and their pulses quickened as they saw the girl, found again, and more beautiful than on the night when they had lost her.

She had asked to make a statement, and, though advised by the coroner to keep silence, had persisted, pleading that she had nothing to conceal. She was speaking as Christopher and Western took their places; and, seeing them, so bright a colour sprang to her white face that the young men knew they had been recognised.

The girl did not falter for an instant, however, but went on nervously, excitedly, denying that she knew anything of the old-fashioned pistol kept in her uncle's study—beyond hearing from Honey that it had disappeared from its place. She did not take it; she had been very unhappy in her uncle's house; they had not had a quarrel on the night of his death, but there had been a distressing scene.

"He called me into his study," she went on, "and said cruel things; that I was careless of his interests, that I was altogether a failure, and that I didn't deserve a penny of his money. I told him if he thought I was staying for that I would go; if I hadn't hated to leave him alone in his gloomy house I would have gone long ago. Then he flew into one of his rages—terrible rages they were, mad rages, which always frightened me dreadfully, and made me believe that he really was a lunatic, as Honey and his wife

used to say. This was the worst I had seen. Often he had struck—now he threatened to kill me. He said rather than I should leave his house and carry evil reports, he would shoot me. I rushed out of the room, screaming, for I believed he meant to keep his word, and I believe it still. I didn't know where to hide from him, for the lock on my door, as on most of the doors, was broken. Then I thought of the roof—a flat roof, with battlements; and I ran through many passages till I came to the ladder-like stairway that leads to it. I climbed up, trembling, for I could hear my uncle calling my name and slamming doors. At the top I pushed back the rusty bolt and slipped out. I expected him to find me; and I had not been hiding long when I heard two shots. I supposed he had fired them to terrify me. After that all was silent. I decided to wait, if I were not discovered, till dawn, when I would slip down, hoping my uncle might be asleep. I planned to go to Weymouth because it was a big town, and I knew a girl there who used to be at school with me in France. I didn't realise how weak my experience had made me. I meant to look for her. I never expected to feel so ill that I should have to go to an hotel or faint in the street. Oh, that awful railway journey to Weymouth——”

“This is irrelevant,” broke in the coroner. “You walked to a more distant railway station than Marne, and caught the first train to Weymouth, before Sir Digby's fate was known. But do you mean the jury to understand that you remained on the roof all night without being aware that your uncle was dead?”

“I do,” answered the girl. “I dared not go down. Once, though, I hoped to be taken away.”

At this arose a whisper. What could the girl mean? Was she, too, mad? And had she expected

miraculous aid? She blushed and hesitated for the first time, wondering, perhaps, if she had done wrong in disregarding the coroner's cold caution. She knew that Ressler, the solicitor, had given evidence which told against her, and that since the two Honeys had spoken the faces of the jurymen had hardened.

"While I was on the roof," she went on faintly, in her uneasiness giving an air of artificiality to her statement, "soon after dark it must have been, a balloon came close to the house. Two young men were in it—gentlemen—and I begged them to save me. Their balloon was caught somehow in a tree, and they were so near for a minute that I hoped they could take me with them. They must have seen how frightened I was, and I think they meant to help, but a wind came and freed the balloon, whirling it out of sight, so they had no time."

A titter of incredulous laughter among the onlookers interrupted her, and was quickly checked. But it had not died before Western, ignoring the formalities of a coroner's inquest, stepped forward. "They are here as witnesses!" he exclaimed. "We are the two balloonists, my friend and I, and we can corroborate every word Miss Plantagenet has said. We can prove her innocence; for if she had murdered her uncle she would have known that his dead body was lying half out of his window, that we had probably seen it there, and she would have hidden herself instead of rushing towards us and begging that we would take her away."

Twice the coroner strove to stop Western, but the tide of his indignant eloquence was not to be stemmed. Margaret Plantagenet, flushed and grateful, moved aside, and the American was sworn as a witness.

"You and your friend never saw Miss Plantagenet until the night in question?" the coroner asked.

"No."

"Then"—very slowly and distinctly—"how comes it that you should have declared, on your visiting-card which you sent in to me, that you were *engaged to marry that young lady?*"

At this question there was a stir in the room, and the jury gazed at Western with narrow eyes of distrust; but he answered, unabashed—

"I didn't say I was *engaged* to marry her. If you look again, you'll see that I said I *intended* to marry her. I wrote that, so that I might have a chance to come in and give my evidence. But it is true. I do hope to marry Miss Plantagenet—hope it beyond everything. I shall propose to her on the first opportunity, and tell her that I fell in love at first sight with the sweetest, purest, most innocent girl I ever met. That girl a murderess? My friend and I would have been fools even to think of such a thing—when we'd seen her face and heard her voice. I can prove every word I am going to say about my balloon, which took us over to Normandy before we could descend. The first thing we did was to catch a train back and scour the country in my friend's automobile, looking for the lost girl and the lost house; we couldn't locate them exactly. We learned what we wanted to know only by the paper to-day. We were never nearer the house at Abbey Court than being caught in a tree; we didn't descend; the dead body in the window was a mystery to us. But I would wager my dearest possession—which is my balloon—that that pistol you were talking about dropped out of the dead man's hand when he had shot himself in his frenzy, and fell into the bushes under the window where he lay. I advise you to send and look for it."

So frank, so enthusiastic, and so handsome was Paul Western, the famous balloonist, whose name nearly everybody knew, that he carried all before him.

Perhaps it was largely due to his evidence, and the fact that his belief in the girl's innocence was unassailable, that the coroner's jury brought in their verdict at last: "Suicide whilst temporarily insane."

Christopher admired Paul Western more than ever, freely admitted that his was the "first right," fairly won, and after all was glad to think that he had helped him win it.

And Western did win the girl; it would be strange if he had not. It would also have been strange if Christopher had not been asked to be best man at the wedding, which took place soon after his return from a fortnight's tour with Mr. Finnington Brown.

## CHAPTER III: MARCH

### THE MASKED BALL

CHRISTOPHER drew up Scarlet Runner before the door of the new Athenæum Restaurant, and beckoned a tall porter, in dark green and gold lace, to take a note which he held up. But as the liveried giant would have obeyed, with a dignified regard for his own importance, another motor drew up in front of Christopher's. It contained two ladies, and as one was getting out the porter's services were due. Christopher resigned himself to wait until good-byes were said, a kiss given and taken, a forgotten word spoken at the instant of descent, and as he waited he was conscious that two men, who were talking in the doorway, discussed him—or his car.

One of the men he knew slightly as a crony of his rich uncle's. The other, who was young, exceedingly well dressed, and so good-looking as to be almost picturesque, had pale olive features which seemed vaguely familiar to Christopher. Probably the elderly major was explaining Scarlet Runner and Scarlet Runner's owner—from the uncle's point of view. At least, this was the idea which jumped into Christopher's mind, and kindled a flash of amusement mingled with a little sulphurous smoke of annoyance. But just then the lady who was leaving the motor in front of his contrived to disengage herself from her importunate hostess, and Christopher saw her face. It was so

striking that for a few seconds he forgot that he was being discussed, forgot that he was stiffly and mechanically holding up a letter. Christopher Race had always an eye for a beautiful woman.

This one was beautiful; but it was not only her beauty which Christopher found arresting, nor was it in the very least the fact that she was perfectly dressed, though he knew the difference between a woman who was well dressed and one who was not.

"That girl can't be more than twenty-four, if she's that; yet the whole history of the world seems looking out of her eyes—anyhow, all the art, and music, and drama of the world," was the curious thought that tumbled awkwardly into his head.

It was curious, yet there was something of truth in it. Christopher, who could be imaginative and impressionable—especially when he was hungry or a little tired—had a feeling that here was the type which had inspired artists and musicians and lovers—if lovers, then also soldiers—since civilisation seethed out of chaos. She was the kind of woman who ought always to have a soft *leitmotiv* playing as she moved upon the scene—like a heroine of melodrama. Yes, she was distinctly the heroine. Wherever she appeared, things would begin to happen.

"Yes, sir; you called me, I think, sir?"

It was the voice of the green and gold porter. He had handed the lady out of the motor-car; the motor-car was gliding away; the lady was bowing to her friend; the major was shaking hands with the picturesque young man. In another moment there would be "How do you do's" to say, and "Is it long since you heard from your uncle?"

"Oh—er—yes," Christopher answered the giant briskly. He thought that he would not be sorry to escape a broadside from the retired officer. "I want

to leave this letter for Lord Arrowdale. He's to lunch here, I believe, and will be inquiring for a letter."

"Very good, sir," said the porter, and took the envelope. But he was not quick enough to save Christopher from the major, who came forward and said all the things that Christopher had known he would say—given the chance. The young man answered civilly, and even explained without petulance his mention of Lord Arrowdale's name, which the elderly gossip had caught. "No, I don't know him; never met him in my life. A friend wanted him to try my car. Promised to leave a note here making an appointment."

As he talked on, from the tail of his eye he watched the progress of the lady. She had been met in the doorway by the picturesque young man, and they were speaking together now with a kind of suppressed eagerness. If it had not seemed too ridiculously conceited to fancy such a thing, Christopher would have had the idea that he was the subject of their conversation.

"Well, ta, ta. Next time I write old Jamey I'll tell him his nephew's looking prosperous," said the major, and sidled off without a backward glance. As he did so, before Christopher could guide Scarlet Runner away, the picturesque young man had left the girl standing in the door and hurried forward.

"I beg your pardon, but may I speak to you?" he exclaimed.

Christopher paused, a foot on the clutch-pedal. Another car lurked ready for Scarlet Runner's place, or must slip in ahead.

"What I want is to ask if you will lunch with us," the stranger rushed on, by way of holding the motorist's attention.

"Lunch with you?" echoed Christopher, astonished. "You mistake me for someone else——"



**MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART**

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



1.50

1.56

1.63

1.71

1.80

1.88

1.96

2.00

2.05



**APPLIED IMAGE Inc**

1853 East Main Street 14609 USA  
Rochester, New York  
(716) 482 - 0300 - Phone  
(716) 286 - 5989 - Fax

"No, no," said the other. "Major Norburn has told me everything. You like adventures? You are invited to arrange one."

That caught Christopher, as it was meant to. "Very well, I'm with you," said he. And perhaps he thought of the lady, hoping to be with her as well. "I'll get out of the way here, drive my car to the garage close by, and come back."

"Without fail?"

"Without fail."

Five minutes later Christopher returned, walking so rapidly round the corner that he took his host and hostess unawares. They were still standing in the wide doorway of the fashionable new restaurant, and had not expected him back so soon, for they were deep in conversation. The young man appeared to be urging something upon the girl with great earnestness, while she shook her head, refusing to be convinced. As Christopher drew nearer, hesitating to intrude upon the pair, so intent upon each other, she shrugged her shoulders and threw out her hands slightly, as if yielding the point at last. "Oh, very well, I promise," Christopher heard her say; "if it must be, it must."

Her voice was American, soft and sweet, with the oddly childish intonations of the Southern girl. Yet Christopher had thought that she looked French, or Spanish perhaps, and the delicate chiselling of her features had reminded him of early portraits of the Empress Eugénie in her days of girlish beauty.

It was only as Christopher came close upon them that she looked up and saw him, with a start of surprise, evidently not wholly agreeable, though she half-smiled civilly. The start warned her companion, and he turned to welcome his guest with an impulsive air which was rather engaging. Yes, certainly, he was

extremely good-looking. Christopher would barely have guessed it possible for an Englishman to be so picturesque in ordinary frock-coat and silk hat; yet this man was English. "You'll think I'm mad," he said, smiling. "But even that's better than to be commonplace, isn't it?"

"Assuredly," said Christopher.

"I thought you'd be of that opinion, Mr. Race."

"You know my name?"

"From Major Norburn. Even the name of your splendid car. It's the same as an introduction. And now I will introduce you to Miss Dauvray. Then I'll introduce myself. My name is Ponsonby Fitzgerald; and if someone else were introducing me, he'd probably tell you that I don't do anything in the same way as other people."

Ponsonby Fitzgerald! The young man's handsome face and figure appeared upon its own background now. He had written a queer novel, which made a sensation on the strength of its queerness; and out of the novel he had woven a play which owed its success to the same quality. People knew him and talked of him still, though he had not since written another novel or another play. There were things about him in the papers sometimes. He went to country houses, and was said to be entertaining. Christopher knew now that he had seen the pale olive face bowing and smiling in response to a call for "Author!" on the first night of the queer play, three or four years ago—in the palmy days when Christopher always went to first nights, generally took stage-boxes, and gave suppers afterwards.

"We're in a dilemma, Miss Dauvray and I," Fitzgerald went on, "and we want you to help us out of it."

The girl raised her long, beautifully-pencilled eyebrows. They seemed to say, "Oh, please count me

out of this. It is your affair, I am passive." And yet Miss Dauvray did not look like one who took life passively. There were curious depths in her eyes, capable of tragedy, which interested Christopher. And his interest made him enter the more readily into the spirit of the adventure—comedy or drama, or whatever it might turn out to be.

"Help you?" he repeated, smiling. "To the half of my kingdom!"

"Or the whole of your motor-car?"

"That *is* my kingdom," retorted Christopher. But he was faintly disappointed as he realised that, after all, he had merely captured a client.

They went in to luncheon. Mr. Fitzgerald had engaged a table which was laid with two covers, but in an instant it was rearranged for three. "And now for business," exclaimed Fitzgerald, in his lively, enthusiastic way, which made him seem very boyish, though his years might have been twenty-nine or thirty. "Miss Dauvray and I have an important job on for the last day of March,—or rather, it will be the first of April by the time it's found out; wherein will lie the joke. And we're going to propose that you shall be the 'Co.' in our partnership."

The Southern girl neither assented nor protested, though Fitzgerald challenged her with his great, daring black eyes. She trifled with a bunch of violets beside her plate, her lovely face unsmiling. It occurred to Christopher that she had scarcely spoken at all, yet to him, at least, she dominated the scene. It was like being in a play, he thought, where everybody spoke except the heroine, and thus emphasised her muteness. He guessed she was displeased that Fitzgerald's impulsive indiscretion had dragged a stranger into their friendly confidences, for no matter what reason, and he felt uncomfortable and guilty.

"I'm to be a sleeping partner?" asked Christopher, wishing himself elsewhere, though his interest was entangled.

"On the contrary, you're to be very wide awake. But I'll tell you all about it. Of course you've heard of the Van Bouten ball next week?"

Of course Christopher had, and said so. For the past fortnight the papers had rained paragraphs about the Van Bouten ball. It was to be a masked ball, and was planned to rival in magnificence the historic affair at Devonshire House in Diamond Jubilee year. Miss van Bouten, a patent yeast heiress, was as renowned for her beauty as for her millions. She and a carefully selected aunt had taken and restored a fine old abbey of Henry VII's day, conveniently near London. A year ago the young heiress had been presented and captured society; also she had captured, or was on the point of capturing, the Marquess of Arrowdale. Now she and the aunt were giving this ball, at which, it was said, after the unmasking, her engagement to Lord Arrowdale would perhaps be announced.

Nowadays Christopher had not taken so keen a personal interest in social matters as he had when his position as his uncle's heir was thought to be assured, and he had nothing better to do than to amuse himself. Now he was very busy trying to win back his uncle's respect and—incidentally—his own self-respect. Still, he knew all about the ball, and had read the paragraphs with a certain interest, because it was on the cards that he might be engaged by Lord Arrowdale to motor a party of people from town to St. Ronan's Mount.

"We have a scheme for the night of the ball which will be the sensation of the century, if we can only carry it out," Fitzgerald went on. "It falls on the last of March, as I said; so that at midnight we shall have the 1st of April or All Fools' Day, you know. But

that gives you no hint of our brilliant idea—though it *did* give us our inspiration. We had reason to believe, up to last night, that the plan was in the best working order; but—the schemes of mice and men! One of our best mice suddenly failed us—influenza or something obvious. The wheels wouldn't go round without him—literally; because he's a motorist. I was upset; but I reflected, 'When in doubt, always consult an American girl,' so I called Miss Dauvray into consultation. 'No chaperon,' I said; and, having the courage of her convictions, she consented to a lunch at the ultra-respectable Ath. Club. While I waited for her I saw you—and your car. 'What a beauty!' I said to myself. (Don't blush; I mean the car.) 'Now, if only *we* had a motor like that to do our trick!'

"Just then came along Major Norburn. In six words he told me your car's history. Your audacity and originality captivated my imagination on the instant. I felt you were the man for us, if we could secure you. And I lost no time in trying to secure you, did I?"

Christopher laughed responsively. The man's gaiety was contagious, and he had that illusive quality, magnetism, which draws followers.

"*Have* I secured you?" he dashed on, encouraged.

"I must hear the scheme before pledging myself," smiled Christopher.

"Unfortunately, that's just what you can't do. You see, it's to be a great joke. We trust you, of course; one knows one's man instantly in some cases. But still—well, we're pledged not to let out the secret to anyone unless he is first enlisted as one of us. This much I can say, though. We want you to take us—Miss Dauvray, myself, and several friends—to St. Ronan's Mount for the ball in your ripping motor-car.

We don't mean to stay late ; in fact, we can promise that you'll be back in town before most of the guests have stopped dancing. Now, what do you say, when, in addition to 'short hours,' you'll be in for a splendid adventure—just the sort of thing to appeal to you ?”

“It's rather odd,” said Christopher, “but my errand here this morning was to leave a note for Lord Arrowdale, making an appointment for a talk about motoring a party of *his* friends to St. Ronan's for the ball.”

Miss Dauvray looked up suddenly, and was nobly beautiful with the ivory curve of her cheeks stained a deep rose-colour. Still she did not speak. She was supposed to be eating plovers' eggs, but she had not shown much appreciation of them, considering the amount they would probably add to Mr. Fitzgerald's bill. Christopher had always understood that American girls were sparkingly fluent in conversation. This lovely, dramatic-looking creature appeared to be an exception to the rule, however ; or was it only by way of marking her disapproval of the stranger ?

Christopher was glad when she looked up. It gave him his first real chance to see what her eyes were like. No ; it was not necessary for a woman with such eyes to say much with her lips. Still, what *did* the eyes say ? Something, very expressively, very ardently—but what ? Was she pleased to hear that there was a chance of his being engaged to take another party to the ball ? Why did she flush when he mentioned an appointment with Lord Arrowdale ?

“Is Lord Arrowdale lunching here ?” inquired Fitzgerald, glancing about.

“At half-past two, I believe—so said the friend who asked me, by Lord Arrowdale's request, to leave a note for him here. It's not yet half-past one. But even if he were here I shouldn't know it, for I've never

seen him. My friend recommended me and my car, as Lord Arrowdale's biggest one has had a bad accident, and he'd promised it to friends whom he didn't want to disappoint. So it's not for him exactly. I fancy he's to be a member of the house-party at St. Ronan's."

"Yes; he is. I know him slightly. So also does Miss Dauvray. He's never seen you?"

"Never."

"Well, then, as you're strangers to each other, and you and I have known each other, man and boy, for at least half an hour, I do think you might give me the preference over Arrowdale. You aren't pledged to him in any way yet?"

"No," Christopher admitted.

"When you keep that appointment couldn't you tell him you are engaged, but could recommend him some ordinary chaffeur with a fine car, which would suit his purpose just as well?"

"What if I recommended such a chaffeur and such a car to you?"

"Ah, but an *ordinary* chaffeur wouldn't suit our purpose at all. We must have a gentleman. Mr. Race, we want *you*—don't we, Miss Dauvray?"

He appealed to her with an insistent eagerness. His eyes seemed almost to flash light to hers across the little flower-decorated table.

"Yes," she said softly. Christopher noticed now that she was looking tired. Her eyes were gentle and sad, and oddly wistful, as she turned them to his in support of her one word. It was as if she appealed to him. But—did she want him to consent or refuse? He felt suddenly a passionate desire to understand her. The way to do so was to see more of her. He *would* see more of her. "In that case," he said, "I am at your orders."

"It's settled—you're one of us!" exclaimed Fitzgerald.

"Yes," said Christopher.

"Then you *shall* hear the whole thing. This is, of course, in strictest confidence."

"Of course."

"It would spoil all the fun if it got out."

"Need I assure you it won't get out through me?"

"No, you needn't. Well, as you've heard all about the ball, you know that Milly van Bouten—or her aunt, who poses as hostess—has offered the Scrope blue diamond as a prize for the greatest sensation of the evening."

"Meaning the handsomest costume?"

"Not exactly that, for it can even be won by a party. Indeed, I think it will be won by *my* party. What she means is to give the diamond to the person or group of persons whose appearance and manner of entrance creates the greatest sensation. That's the sort of offer to excite original invention and make talk and excitement, and talk and excitement will boom the ball—save it from dulness—help it to go down into history as *the* masked ball of the twentieth century. That's why she's having it masked; it can be so much more sensational, rouse so much more fun and speculation, than even the best fancy dress dance."

"I should have thought it rather risky to let masked guests into such a house, and among such jewels as are sure to be worn," said Christopher.

"Of course, that danger was discussed," returned Fitzgerald, "and Mrs. Appleton, the aunt, opposed the idea of masks at first, but Milly overruled her, as she always does, and it was arranged for the general safety that a 'society detective' sort of person should see the face of at least one member of each party as that

party entered. Also, everyone must show his card of invitation. You see, that gives protection enough, and, besides, there are sure to be lots of detectives hovering about in disguise, watching every door. You're not afraid of losing your pearls, are you, Miss Dauvray?"

"Not at all," said the girl absent-mindedly, as if she were thinking of something else.

"Naturally, everybody wants to get that diamond, which Milly van Bouten bought at Christie's on purpose to offer in this way. Myself, I rather think she hopes Arrowdale may get it, as it would please him, and then there'd be a chance of its coming back to her in the end—though I know for a fact that he hasn't proposed yet, in spite of all the talk. For my part, I want to get it. I discovered that Miss Dauvray had also set her heart on annexing it. This suggested our putting our heads together. Milly got the diamond a bargain, and the day after she was offered three times what she paid by the American millionaire, Jim Scrope-Saunders, who fancies himself to be an offshoot of the real Scopes. She wouldn't sell it; what was twelve thousand pounds to Milly? But it's something to us; and if we get the prize, as we shall, our idea is to sell to Scrope-Saunders and divide among our assistants—the biggest portion for ourselves, as is only fair, since we're the originators of the idea. There'll be five in it, including yourself now, and two men who are friends of mine. Whatever happens, you're sure of adventure, and whatever you like to charge for your car and your services. *If* we get the diamond, your share will be five hundred pounds. How does that strike you?"

"As most generous—too generous for me to accept," said Christopher.

"We'll force you to accept. But never mind that part now. I told you that a friend with a motor had failed us. A motor is necessary because, when we've

made our sensation, we must be able to dash away, as up-to-date highwaymen should. But, oh, perhaps I forgot to mention that we're to be highwaymen?" And he laughed out boyishly.

"You did forget that part." Christopher laughed too. "And Miss Dauvray"—he could not resist bringing her in—"is she to be a highway woman?"

"She's to be an abbess," Fitzgerald answered for the girl, without giving her time to speak. "We're all to be monks at first, we four men. At the right moment we're to throw off our cowls, but she's to remain an abbess. She's to be out of it then, except that she's coming away with us, lest they should tease the secret from her, and eventually she's to restore all the stolen jewels to their owners."

"The stolen jewels!" echoed Christopher, bewildered.

"I don't wonder you're growing woolly. I never could explain anything lucidly, except on paper. I can do it all right there. In fact, I'm a nailer at it. But therein lies the sensation—our hope of winning the prize. Everybody will have racked his and her brains for eccentric and magnificent costumes; people will be walking about crusted with jewels. We can't rival the millionaires on their own ground, but we can make our own effect, which we warrant will beat theirs—and get off the best of jokes on them at the same time. We shall walk in as Miss Dauvray's party; she will be responsible for the four of us: she will lift her veil and show her face to the man at the door who's taking stock of features. She's pretty well known, and, besides, she's an old school friend of Milly van Bouten's, and could have been included in the house-party if she hadn't chosen to help us instead. As I said, she'll be an abbess, dressed in the dark blue and white of the Sister House which used to exist

within a stone's-throw of St. Ronan's Monastery, in the good old days before Henry VIII was king. We'll be in the St. Ronan garb, of course, which will at once excite interest, as there's a terrible ghost story still extant at St. Ronan's, which concerns four monks who were found walled up in the oldest part of the house, when a room was added, and who haunt the place to this day—usually accompanied, for some reason, by the figure of an abbess from the Sister House, who weeps and sobs and wrings her hands."

Miss Dauvray shivered faintly, and said the words over again in her low, vibrant voice, as if they had impressed her fancy grimly: "*Weeps and sobs and wrings her hands.*" But Fitzgerald hurried on, and did not seem to hear the murmured repetition.

"Then, when we've made our effect," said he gaily, "we suddenly throw off our monkish robes and appear as masked, top-booted, belted highwaymen from the Wild West of America. We shall be bristling with bowie knives and big revolvers (not really loaded, of course), and while two of us—you, perhaps, and one other—guard the exits, the other two will hold up the crowd and make 'em hand over their valuables in the most realistic manner just about midnight."

"Won't it rather frighten timid women?" Christopher ventured to protest.

"There are no timid women in these days—anyhow, not in our set. All that 'went out' as long ago as the seventies, I should say. Besides, nobody will be frightened that night at anything that anybody else does. Eccentricity will be the order of the evening. People will give us their things like birds; they'll expect us to shuffle them up like numbers in a hat, and offer them round again, or something of the sort. But this is where the real surprise comes in. We won't do anything so tame."

"What will you do?"

"We'll make off with the whole boodle as fast as we can in your motor-car."

"By Jove!" said Christopher, looking blank.

"Ha, ha! If *you* don't understand, prepared as you are, how much less will they? It will be the great April fool trick of the world."

"For you. But won't it spoil Miss van Bouten's ball?"

"Make a guess as to what we mean to do next."

"I swear I'm in the dark."

"All this will happen just before supper. There's to be a grand sit-down supper, and unmasking. People will be in the most awful quandary. By that time they won't know whether they've been the victims of a grand joke or whether they've been robbed of their little all; but—they'll go on to supper, except the poor detectives, who'll be scurrying round like mice for news of the mysterious motor. Then after midnight will appear a great dish—a pie, with a wonderful cover. It will be set down by a servant (he'll be in *our* pay; not Miss van Bouten's, by the bye) on the principal table, with a request for Miss van Bouten herself to cut it. She will do so; and in that pie will be all the stolen jewels, with our visiting-cards on top, and a sort of round robin dated All Fools' Day and claiming the prize for ourselves. Your name needn't be there unless you like, as you don't know Miss van Bouten and aren't one of her invited guests; but you'll get your share all the same. Everyone will vote us the prize—or be voted without a sense of humour. Now, there's an adventure for you, *n'est-ce pas?*"

"It's a regular boy-and-girl adventure—nothing grown-up about it," said Christopher, surprised and amused at the childishness of the "great game."

"That's the charm," retorted Fitzgerald; and Christopher admitted that perhaps he was right.

In any event, he was committed to the affair now, and he was so eager to find out whether the beautiful Miss Dauvray were bored with it all, or vexed with him for being in it, that he would not have backed out even if he could. When they had finished luncheon—and it was only a quarter-past two—he volunteered to scribble another note to await Lord Arrowdale's coming. In it he said that, since writing the first, he had been obliged to change his plans—that it would not be worth while to make the proposed appointment, as he could not conduct Lord Arrowdale's friends to St. Ronan's Mount; but he would recommend a good chauffeur, with a good car. And thereupon he added name and address.

This little matter was finished in five minutes, and then the ever-impulsive and restless Fitzgerald hurried him off to the garage for a "good look" at Scarlet Runner, Miss Dauvray having bidden them both farewell from the window of a hansom cab. Thus all three were away before Lord Arrowdale appeared upon the scene.

Fitzgerald was very flattering to Scarlet Runner, but regretfully refused a run in her. He had an engagement, he said, with an actor-manager at a theatre in the neighbourhood, to talk in the man's dressing-room between acts of a *matinée* performance. But it was arranged before he and Christopher parted that Race should call upon him at his rooms next evening and get his costume and all necessary instructions.

"Is it worth while for me to have a costume?" asked Christopher at the last. "It's different with me from the rest of you, who'll know everybody at the ball. I'm not even invited, and should feel rather out of the joke, saying, 'Your money or your life!' to fat old ladies I didn't know from Eve."

"Choose young one's, then, whom you'd like to know," laughed Fitzgerald. "Oh, you must go in with us. You see, we couldn't do with less than four desperadoes. We shall have to be a formidable band and guard the doors and all that sort of realistic business, or there'll be no fun. You aren't going to back out, are you?"

Christopher assured him that if his services as a highwayman as well as a chauffeur were actually needed he would give them—he might be counted upon. And then he and Ponsonby Fitzgerald went their separate ways.

When Christopher had driven Scarlet Runner home to her own garage (after a short spin for the purpose of composing his mind) he went round to his club, where he seldom had time to show himself now.

It was a club frequented by men of Upper Bohemia rather than of Mayfair; but it had a few young members who combined literature or some artistic pursuit with the life of society, and one of these Christopher asked casually if he had ever met a Miss Dauvray.

"What, Miss Eloise Dauvray, of New Orleans?" was the quick question in return. "Beautiful, slender creature, chestnut hair and corking grey eyes?"

When Christopher had accepted this description, information concerning Miss Dauvray came volubly out. It really was odd that he had never met her before. In her way she was a kind of celebrity—had been a celebrity in New York before becoming one in London a couple of years ago. What sort of celebrity? Why, a beauty, of course, and something of a wit when she chose. She was a cousin of the Duchess of Maidenhead, and was tremendously smart, though a bit—well, emancipated; went about alone sometimes, and did odd, original things that might make other

girls talked about. But nobody said anything particularly horrid of her, except that she was almost awfully unlucky at bridge, and played rather too high for a girl. Who chaperoned her? Oh, a deaf old thing with gorgeous white hair—grandmother or something; came of old family; proud of it; liked England better than America; too rheumatic to run about with the granddaughter, visiting at country houses. Girl generally went with friends; everyone admired her, and she hadn't lost her popularity when she lost her expectations of a pot of money she ought to have got. Some relative or other promised it, then went and died without a will—so inconsiderate! But the girl must have something; she was always beautifully dressed and never seemed disgustingly hard up. That pretty Milly van Bouten was no end of nuts on her, though everybody thought that Miss Dauvray had been trying for Arrowdale before Milly came over from the other side and swept him off the board.

Later, Christopher questioned his well-informed acquaintance about Ponsonby Fitzgerald, and heard just what he expected to hear—that the young man was very popular, though no one quite knew why, except that he was better-looking than most others.

“I suppose there's a glamour about him still from that book and play of his,” the young man went on, “though he's never brought anything big off since. Has written things, but they fell flat. He, too, used to be a great friend of Miss van Bouten's.”

“Isn't he now?” asked Christopher.

“Oh, perhaps; I can't say. A chap I know told me that he went for her for all he was worth when she was making her first success in society; but apparently he didn't bring that off, any more than the second play, or the books.”

Christopher smiled at his own thoughts. Miss

Dauvray was said to have "wanted" Lord Arrowdale, Ponsonby Fitzgerald to have "tried for" Miss van Bouten—and both in vain, since Miss van Bouten and Lord Arrowdale were probably going to be married. It was rather comic—or tragic; he wasn't quite sure yet which. But no wonder the two disappointed ones came together in their wish to obtain something from that firm—if it were only a blue diamond.

There were four days and nights still before the last of March, the occasion of the Van Bouten ball; but lest any alterations should be necessary in the costume to which he had fallen heir, Christopher was asked to call on Fitzgerald the evening after the making of their queer partnership. Fitzgerald had pleasant rooms in Half Moon Street, delightfully though simply decorated, and crowded with photographs of charming women of society and of the stage. There were good books, too; and a piano at which Fitzgerald was playing and singing deliciously when Christopher was announced. Altogether Christopher was as favourably impressed with the man's surroundings as with the man himself.

The monk's robe and the highwayman's costume were both produced, and the latter tried on. Christopher rather fancied himself in it. He was to wear it, bowie knives and pistols and all, under his chauffeur's coat, throw off the coat in the car (which must not be put up in the garage, but left at a certain place that Fitzgerald knew), and don the monk's robe and cowl over mask and soft felt hat. The whole party was to assemble at the house where Miss Dauvray lived in Regent's Park, and Christopher was to pick them up there with Scarlet Runner at nine o'clock on the great night. It was he who named the hour, calculating that, even allowing for a burst tyre,

he would thus have plenty of time to reach St. Ronan's Mount long before midnight.

It was curious how often Christopher thought of Miss Dauvray between the day of their first meeting and the night of the ball. He was not falling in love with her. Indeed, he could not decently have done so, as it was scarcely a month since he had vowed himself in love with another girl not less beautiful. But as, without speaking, Miss Dauvray had dominated the scene at the Athenæum, she dominated Christopher's mind, though out of his sight. He found himself continually wondering about her, and he even dreamed of her at night once or twice. It was as if she were calling him from a distance, and he could not hear what she said.

When the great night came Christopher could have laughed at himself for the boyish excitement which ran through his veins. He was thoroughly in the spirit of the adventure at last—as thoroughly as Fitzgerald. As he was putting on his belt, and sticking it full of weapons effective in appearance but theatrical in nature, he remembered that not all the details of the grand joke had been made clear to him. It had not yet been mentioned where he must stop the car, after the *coup* had been accomplished, to allow of the collected jewels being carried back. He did not know who was to be the welcome bearer of the wondrous pie, nor had he been told anything about the other two male partners in the undertaking. But these things were details. In only one of them had he an active concern, and he would doubtless learn all about that in plenty of time.

He arrived early at the rendezvous, but not early enough to be the first on the scene. There was a garden, with rather a high wall, and as Scarlet Runner teuf-teufed round the corner of the quiet street the

gate opened, and Fitzgerald looked out from under a dim, hanging light. Stopping the car, Christopher saw that there were two other men with him, both already wearing motor goggles, which disguised them enough even for an appearance at the masked ball.

"We've all been dining here," said Fitzgerald, "and are so impatient to be off we've been ready for the last ten minutes. Mrs. Dauvray, our friend's grandmother, can't bear the smell of smoke, so we've had a cigarette apiece in the garden, expecting you. I'll call Miss Dauvray. Oh, here she comes now. She must have heard the car."

The opening door threw out a stream of light, and the cloaked figure of a tall girl appeared, attended by a maid. Miss Dauvray had covered her face with a thick chiffon veil as a protection against wind (there was no dust), but under the hanging lamp at the gate he caught a gleam of eyes that searched for his.

Fitzgerald would have helped her into the tonneau of the car, but somehow she slipped past him, and Christopher had an odd yet strong conviction that she wished him to put her in. Without an instant's hesitation he held out his arm as a support for her hand, and she laid her fingers lightly upon it. At the same time, with her other hand, hidden under a loose cloak, she thrust something as far as she could up the young man's sleeve.

It was a thing that felt large and singularly cold, but, surprised as he was at the girl's act, Christopher kept his countenance perfectly. By a movement of his wrist he held the thing—whatever it was—well concealed, and prevented it from slipping down. Fitzgerald, suspecting nothing, introduced "Mr. Rawdon; Mr. McClellan," and suggested to his two friends the honour of sharing the tonneau with Miss Dauvray. "I'll sit with you in front" he said: and

Christopher agreed, making a feint of trying to start the car in vain.

This was an injustice to Scarlet Runner, but he must find some excuse for a look at the thing which lay cold against his arm. "I'll just take a peep under her bonnet and make sure that everything's as it ought to be before we get off," he said; and then, with Fitzgerald safely in his seat, and the bonnet as a screen, he contrived to slide out of his sleeve a Smith and Wesson revolver. A folded bit of white paper was kept in place on the barrel by means of an innocent little red rubber band. As he slipped the revolver from his hand into a deep pocket of his motor-coat Christopher pulled off and unfolded the paper. On one side a few words were written, which he absorbed in a second in the eye of Scarlet Runner's blazing lamp.

"To use instead of your unloaded one, *in case anything should go wrong,*" were the instructions flashed into his mind before he crumpled up the paper into a ball and dropped it into his pocket after the revolver.

"In case anything should go wrong." What could she mean? What could possibly go wrong which would excuse his substituting a loaded revolver for the harmless toy he had in his belt? There was little time to think, as Ponsonby Fitzgerald at his side kept up a running fire of chaff, and there would be no chance to ask questions. If Miss Dauvray had hoped for any later opportunity to communicate her secret ideas to him she would have said so in her note. He might take it that this was her final word, and he must trust to luck and his own wit to find the clue.

Had she been an ordinary, laughing, chattering girl he might have taken her mysterious gift for a part of the joke or a new "April fool" game, but he knew, whatever it meant, it did not mean that. And as he drove on through the night he was spurred more and

more by a mingling of vanity and chivalry to try and understand—to do, when the time came, the thing that Eloise Dauvray believed him the man to do.

St. Ronan's Mount—a "mount" only in name—lies near the Thames and not far from Cliveden, and Christopher had allowed himself nearly twice the time he would actually need to drive there. This was because Fitzgerald's trick would be spoiled if any accident should delay them until the unmasking, and, besides, once inside the St. Ronan grounds the party would need a little leisure to get themselves in order for the *coup*.

Fitzgerald had sketched for Christopher a plan of the ballroom and the hall through which the guests must pass to reach it. He had studied this at Fitzgerald's rooms, and knew exactly what was expected of him; but now, as Scarlet Runner brought them swiftly near the place, Fitzgerald repeated each detail of the programme.

Having passed through the entrance gates, the car was to bear to the right, instead of to the left, in the direction of the front door. It was to be driven along an avenue which circled round beneath the ballroom windows, and stopped under a big glass door at the end of the room. This door would be curtained and, no doubt, fastened, but the key would be in the lock; and after the trick had been played, the four "highwaymen," accompanied by the fair abbess, were to escape through this door, run down a short flight of stone steps, and find themselves close to their waiting motor-car. Then they were to be off before the astonished guests could follow or give an alarm; and, Ponsonby added, they would "scorch on" for a bit before being signalled by the "pastrycook," who would take back any stolen valuables they had secured.

"Not a real pastrycook?" ventured Christopher,

laughing, but secretly curious as to this part of the programme.

"Ha, ha!" responded Fitzgerald boyishly. "A real pastrycook? As much a real pastrycook as we're real highwaymen. All the same, that pie of his will be a 'dish to set before a king,' if our 'haul' is only half as good as I expect it will be."

Christopher asked no more questions. After all, he was but a hired understudy, and had no right to go beyond his part, sticking a finger of curiosity into that pie which would be Fitzgerald's crowning triumph.

The three in the tonneau were as silent as if they were on their way to a funeral instead of to a ball. Christopher did not hear them once speak to each other; but, if they were nervous or apprehensive of missing the prize, Fitzgerald was merry enough for all five. He was in the best of spirits, and made Christopher laugh often, never giving him time to think.

The young moon had gone to sleep long ago when Scarlet Runner wheeled through the open gates at St. Ronan's Mount, past the smiling lodge-keeper; and a thin, milky haze veiled the stars. With so much time to spare, they had not travelled fast, and a distant church clock told them, as they spun round the drive, that they had arrived at a quarter after eleven. The music of the White Hungarians in the ballroom drowned the thrumming of the motor, and it was as if Scarlet Runner made no sound as she ran under the ballroom windows and turned a corner.

"We're here at exactly the right time," said Fitzgerald. "Every soul but ourselves has come and is in the ballroom. We shall make our sensation! Now, Mr. Race, can you turn your car round, ready to get away on the instant? That's it. There's our door, you see, through which we have to make our dash when we come out, laden with spoils. The light

look pretty, coming through those gold-coloured curtains. Now to get out of our motor-coats and into our monks' robes."

Ten minutes later a procession of five dark figures was flitting on foot round a short cut to the front door. They were admitted by footmen, and in the oak-lined vestibule a civil gentleman in evening dress asked to see their invitation cards.

"I have one for myself and party of four friends," said Miss Dauvray, lifting for an instant, as required, her abbess's veil, and also showing an illuminated square of pasteboard.

So Fitzgerald had had no separate invitation. It was the thought which slipped into Christopher's mind as they were allowed to pass on without question. Well, what of that? . . . But what of Miss Dauvray's gift, which he wore in his belt now? He had had no inspiration yet. He was no nearer guessing than at first what she had meant him to do with it.

The last guests were ushered into a fine hall, where the two hostesses had stood to receive their friends earlier in the evening. Now they had gone into the ballroom, and the hall was empty.

"There's the door," said Fitzgerald. "There's only that one, and the glass door at the far end, through which we go when all's ready. M'Clellan, you must keep this door. I want Race at the other, as he's chaffeur, and should be first out to start the car for us. The minute we get in see if there's a key in the lock of your door, M'Clellan, and, if there is, turn it and pull it out if you can, so that we shall have everybody penned before the fun begins. You all three remember the signal for throwing off our robes?—when I say *Pax vobiscum* to Miss van Bouten, who'll be Undine, in pale green, with showers of diamonds and pearls—as we know for certain, thanks to Miss Dauvray."

At the sound of her name the girl stopped on her way to the door as if to answer. But she did not answer. She simply touched Christopher's arm with her arm, as if by accident, and went on.

A moment after they were inside the ballroom in a blaze of light, Christopher's eyes dazzled by a scene of enchantment. All the fairies of fairyland and the kings and queens of earth since the world began wove themselves into jewelled patterns as they danced. It was the end of a waltz, and the music died as if in reverence for the monkish band who entered, the last guests, with the last note.

One monk lingered by the door. The other three and the abbess wound through the brilliant crowd towards the gold curtains at the far end of the room. Christopher went on, answering jests that were tossed to him as he passed; and he reached the glass door and turned just in time to see Fitzgerald accost Undine. She, a charming, girlish figure, shook her head and pointed to a Louis XIV, gorgeous as a sun-god.

"*Pax vobiscum!*" cried the discarded monk, raising aloft his rosary. And with that there were suddenly four highwaymen—masked, belted, and slouch-hatted—where four reverend friars had stood.

Now was Fitzgerald's great chance, and with all that was in him of dramatic talent he made the most of it. He had but one assistant in the blithe game of holding up the company, for M'Clellan kept one door and Race the other; but Jack Sheppard himself could not have cut a braver dash than gay Fitzgerald.

The giggling, excited cries of women and the laughter or attempted protests of men drowned the music of a new waltz, which stopped almost as soon as it had begun. Ordered by two tall, masked highwaymen to give up their jewels, some people yielded lightly to the humour of the jest, while others, disliking it,

would have slipped from the room had not another masked robber held the door. Here and there ran forward a conscientious man whom Christopher took for a detective, but Undine herself checked their zeal. "We must yield to the bold highway ɔ!" she cried, unlooping from her white neck a triple rope of pearls. Then, recognising their hostess's voice (she had worn a domino when receiving them), her guests laughed more loudly and followed her example, free from all lurking fear. Fitzgerald and his masked follower were reaping a rich harvest, dropping necklaces, dog-collars, bracelets, and tiaras into the big leather pouches that hung from their belts.

There was no longer any thought of resistance or escape, and from afar off Christopher saw M'Clellan leave his post at the door, from which he had doubtless taken the precaution to remove the key. In a few minutes now the play would be over and the actors would be running off the scene. Nothing had gone wrong, Christopher was saying to himself, when suddenly the blood mounted to his head in a wave that, for a second, turned him giddy. *Had* nothing gone wrong?

What if this were not a joke, but deadly earnest? What if these laughing women should never see their jewels again? By this time the contents of those leather pouches might be worth two hundred thousand pounds. If, under his charming airs of *bonhomie*, Fitzgerald were a rogue—well, the game would be well worth the candle for a man in financial troubles of any sort. And that poor, happy child, the hostess—what a humiliation for her if at her house, led on by her example, all these people lost their dearest treasures! She would never be forgiven—could never live down such a calamity. She might even lose her lover through it.

*"In case anything should go wrong!"* If Miss Dauvray had meant this—meant him to guess, meant to give him something by which, if his wits were quick and his courage high, he could stop the game!

Suddenly his head was clear as a bell. If he did the thing which had sprung into his brain he would not spoil Fitzgerald's chance of the prize, in case the play were a genuine frolic after all. But if it were earnest he might save the situation for Miss van Borden, save the jewels, and—unless Fitzgerald were a fool—no one need ever know the truth.

He decided to act, and the moment had come.

Fitzgerald had finished. He and his assistant were beginning their dash towards the glass door. But instead of unlocking it, as Christopher had been told to do, he tried it quickly, found it fastened, and slipped the key into his pocket. Then, with his back to the gold curtains, he fired one barrel of Eloise Dauvray's revolver at the ceiling.

This was to let Fitzgerald know that he was formidable—that he carried no harmless toy at his belt; and the effect was overpowering. All the women screamed (he hated frightening them, but it was for their own good), and even Fitzgerald and his follower were taken aback for an instant.

It was but for an instant though. Then they sprang forward; but Christopher stopped them with his levelled revolver, before they could touch the triggers of theirs.

"Hands up, or I fire!" he shouted.

Their weapons had death in them, too,—he was sure of that,—but his could speak first, and if it spoke there would be an end of one man. The danger was that he could not be sure of covering two at a time, and the third was not far off now; but that was the risk he had been ready to run, and on the instant he was



"WITH HIS BACK TO THE GOLD CURTAINS, HE FIRED ONE BARREL OF ELOISE DAUVRAY'S REVOLVER"



called upon to face it. From behind Fitzgerald the other man would have taken the chance and fired, but someone knocked up his arm (no one but Christopher saw that it was a veiled abbess), and Lord Arrowdale, as Louis XIV, alert and grave enough now, took advantage of the fellow's brief confusion to seize the revolver from behind.

With that Fitzgerald burst into a loud laugh and tucked his weapon in his belt. (Was it because he knew the game was up, and the only hope lay in saving appearances, or was he merely ready to end his harmless play for the prize?) "Don't be frightened, anybody, and spoil sport," he cried, his voice breaking with laughter. Then, snatching off his mask and looking handsome and gallant in his slouch hat, he ran and knelt at Undine's feet, calling his comrade to follow.

"Our leather pouches, and all that in them is," he exclaimed, "in exchange for the prize, fair lady."

And Miss van Bouten took off her mask also, smiling and beautiful, though a little pale.

"Shall he have the prize, my friends?" she cried aloud.

And the company, unmasking, answered with many voices that the prize must belong to the highwayman.

"It's to be put to the vote, you know, at supper," she said.

Fitzgerald and his friend, having given up their bags of spoil to their hostess, rose from their knees.

Then Fitzgerald came to where Race still stood by the door. Everyone was listening, but all he had to say was to thank Christopher for his "dramatic conception of his part."

"Your one slight mistake," he finished, "has proved a blessing in disguise, for it enables me also to change my mind at the last minute. I and my friends will

stay to supper and hear our fate—in the matter of the blue diamond. You are free to do as you choose.”

“I must be getting back to town.”

“With your car? Very well; we will meet later.”

Fitzgerald was the hero of the occasion; and one of the young men of Miss Dauvray's party presently slipped away unnoticed. Perhaps two others did the same — Christopher did not know. But when he reached Scarlet Runner, to his intense surprise there sat Miss Dauvray in the seat next the driver's.

“Will you take me home?” she asked.

“With pleasure,” he said.

“And quickly?”

“If you wish.”

They started, and for a few moments neither spoke. Then Christopher asked, “Did I do the thing you wanted?”

“Yes,” she said. “I thought you would do it.”

“You hypnotised me, perhaps. But—*was* it a game, or——”

“Oh, a game, if you like. But a terrible game. I would have given my life to stop it, or—yours. You've saved both. I can live now, I think. If he wins the prize he'll let me alone for awhile. But if he'd succeeded to-night I—couldn't have borne it. What would there have been for me? Only to disappear, as he meant to do, or—disappear in another way, a *quieter* way. I should have chosen that. I'm so very tired, you see.”

“Tired of what?” Christopher questioned her almost fiercely.

“Of playing cat's-paw to him. I'm a coward. I'm horribly afraid of him. He could ruin me. I've helped him several times—in country houses where I've been staying. It's nearly killed me, but I had

to do it. This would have been worst of all, though. I love little Milly van Bouten. I bear her no grudge for taking Arrowdale from me, because I *didn't* love him. It was only his money and title I wanted—*needed*, if you like. Fitz thought I'd be glad of revenge, but I'm not vindictive. I helped only because I was forced to.'

"Why?"

"Oh, it all began with the most awful losses at bridge, and a hundred outside debts to drive me half mad. Once—I *was* mad then, I think—I cheated. Fitz saw, and said me, for—*this* kind of thing. He's in awful straits too. But the blue diamond will save him, if he gets it. For your sake I hope he will, as well as for mine. He doesn't forgive easily."

"How did he mean to rid himself of me to-night?" asked Christopher quietly.

"You can guess, I think. Of course, the story of the pastrycook and the pie, and giving back the jewels, was a fiction for your benefit. But you would have been asked to stop your car at a certain place, I believe, as if to meet the 'pastrycook,' and then—then—they wouldn't have killed you, for Fitz was going to disappear and you couldn't have identified the other man. But you would have had a knock on the head, and Fitz would have driven your car where he liked. He can drive one or two makes of car, and he's been taking lessons with *your* kind for the last three days. But now don't ask me any more questions, will you? I'm so tired. If you are kind, let me rest."

Christopher obeyed and sat silent, driving fast. Neither spoke again until he had brought her to her own door in Regent's Park.

Then, as he stopped Scarlet Runner, he broke out: "All this time I've been thinking of what you've said. I——"

She burst into merry, if nervous laughter. "What I've said? *Surely* you didn't take all that wild nonsense seriously! *Of course* I was joking. It was a fairy-story from beginning to end, believe me."

"I can't," said Christopher.

"Then you are the April fool after all, aren't you? But thank you, nevertheless, a thousand times, for bringing me home. And take care—Fitz won't be too pleased with you for changing the end of his game."

Stunned, Christopher let her slip away from him. *Had* it been a joke, then, the whole thing? He would never quite know, it might be. But he had a very strong theory; and that theory did not prevent him from wishing to see Eloise Dauvray again.

## CHAPTER IV: APRIL

### THE HIDDEN PRINCE

CHRISTOPHER RACE stared at the invitation, and stared again. If it had come to him in his palmy days, he might not have been thus blankly amazed; but at best who was Christopher Race that he should be bidden to a reception at the Foreign Office, to meet Royalty?

Of course, Christopher said to himself, he would not go. Before the day of the reception he would be away in the country with Scarlet Runner, trailing a fat and vulgar Australian millionaire, with his fat and vulgar millionairess, about rural England. He had not accepted the millionaire's offer yet; but it meant ten pounds a day for a fortnight—perhaps longer, and Scarlet Runner had been eating her bonnet off in an expensive garage for nearly three weeks.

There were several humbler envelopes under the one which had naturally found a place on the top; but they were blue or grey, and, taking it for granted that they were bills, Christopher was in no hurry to open them. Had he not chanced to knock down the little pile with his elbow, in reaching for the coffee-pot, he would have accepted the millionaire's terms and declined with thanks the Foreign Office invitation. But he did knock the pile down, and the bottom envelope had no resemblance to the rest.

It also was blue, but a delicate and attractive

azure. It was addressed to him in a writing unfamiliar, yet perhaps the more provocative for that; and, unless it were deliberately calculated to mislead, it suggested the individuality of a woman at once original and charming. Christopher broke the violet seal with anticipation, which for once fell short of realisation, for the letter, which covered no more than a page, was signed "Eloise Dauvray."

That name had rung in his ears, mysterious and sweet as the music of bells floating over the sea from a city of mirage, since the masked ball, where he had been lucky enough to serve the fair Southerner's purpose. But he had not heard from her in the three weeks that followed, nor had he expected to hear.

Now his heart gave a leap as he read the summons which called him back into her life.

Her letter had no conventional beginning. "Since I have been a grown woman," she said, "I have known only two Real Men, and you are one of those two. I want you to meet the other. Something great may come of the meeting, and this time you would be with me in an adventure of which neither of us need be ashamed. As for me, I am in it deeply, heart and soul. If you will throw in your fortune with mine, come to-morrow night to the Foreign Office reception, for which I will see that you have an invitation. Yours—gratefully for the past, hopefully for the future—ELOISE DAUVRAY."

No question now as to whether he would go or not go! He wanted to see Eloise Dauvray; he wanted to know why and how she needed him; he wanted to be in that adventure, whatever it might prove, because she would be in it; and though it was a drawback that he was not the only Real Man on her horizon, he wanted to find out what the other one was like.

He wrote to the millionaire, regretting that he was

previously engaged. And on the night of the reception he dressed himself as one of the two Real Men in the world ought to be dressed for an occasion of importance.

Lest she should be needed he drove *Scarlet Runner* to Whitehall, and left her in charge of a hired chauffeur whom he could trust.

Christopher stepped out of his car into a blaze of light and colour; and indoors the luscious perfume of flowers, mingled with the thought that he was about to see Eloise Dauvray, went to his head like some rich Spanish wine. He dreaded, yet longed, to join the tide of men and women passing up the wide staircase between the double line of Guards, glorious in scarlet tunics and silver helmets. Beyond that staircase—somewhere—Miss Dauvray and he would meet.

He was greeted by the Foreign Secretary and his wife, and instantly forgotten as the murmur went round that Royalty was arriving. Christopher knew by sight many of the celebrities, but found no friends. In his social days he had been in a very good set, but it was not this set; and now he paused forlornly, looking for Eloise Dauvray, his eyes half dazzled by the blaze of women's diamonds and men's jewelled decorations.

"Mr. Race," murmured a voice that no man who had heard it once could forget; and, turning, he was face to face with Eloise Dauvray—an astonishingly changed Eloise Dauvray.

She had been beautiful before, but she was doubly beautiful now, with the radiant, morning beauty of a girl of eighteen. The eyes, once clouded with mystery or tragedy, had been turned into stars by some new happiness; and for a giddy second Christopher asked himself if it could be his presence that—

But the thought broke before it finished; for he

saw the Other Man, and, seeing him, knew the secret of the change in Eloise Dauvray. The glory of love irradiated her, and it seemed to Christopher that she was not ashamed to let him see it.

Of some men Christopher might have been jealous; for, though he was not in love with the beautiful American, she called out all the romance and chivalry in his nature, and she had a special niche of her own in his heart, a niche of gold and purple. But this man was no common man, and suddenly it was as if Christopher saw his tall figure framed in such another niche, glowing with strange jewels, unique and splendid. If there had been jealousy in Christopher's soul it must have been burnt up like chaff in the brave fire of the Other Man's eyes, as they welcomed him.

"Mr. Race," said Eloise Dauvray again, "I wanted you to come and meet Prince Mirko of Dalvania. I have told him about you."

Christopher was not surprised to learn that this noble young giant, in the wonderful Eastern uniform scintillating with orders and decorations, was called Prince. It would have been more surprising to hear that he was other than a prince. He must have been at least six feet three in height, slender, yet broad-shouldered, and singularly graceful in bearing for so tall a man. His face, no darker than that of an Italian, had features that were purely Greek; and the great eyes, soft yet brilliant, had the starry darkness of Southern skies.

"I am here with my grandmother," said Miss Dauvray. "You have not met her, but she is an old friend of the Foreign Secretary's wife. Prince Mirko and you and I must talk together."

They found a quiet corner, out of the way of the crowd. "Now I am going to tell you a secret," the girl went on. "You see how I trust you—how we

both trust you? For it's a secret that, if known, might spoil a plan whose success means everything to the Prince—everything, therefore, to me."

"I hope to be worthy of your trust and the Prince's trust," answered Christopher simply.

"He has asked me to marry him. That is part of the secret," said Eloise. "For his sake I ought to have refused. But I love him. My love has made me selfish."

"You would have spoiled my life and killed my ambition if you had refused," Prince Mirko of Dalvania broke in hotly. "From the moment we met the world held nothing for me that compared with you."

He spoke in perfect English, though with an accent something like that of an Italian when venturing out upon the sea of a foreign language. They looked at each other, and forgot Christopher for an instant, but only for an instant.

"Congratulate me, Mr. Race," said the Prince. "Good fortune had a quarrel with me until two weeks ago; then I met Miss Dauvray."

"Congratulate *me!*" exclaimed Eloise. "You saw what I was before. You see what I am now."

This was a delicate topic; and perhaps Christopher's face showed that he found it difficult, for the girl spoke before he could choose his answer. "The Prince *knows*," she said. "I told him everything. It was hard, and I was tempted to keep my own counsel. Perhaps conscience alone would not have decided me, but—it was better he should hear all there was to hear—the very worst—from me than from—*someone else.*"

"Don't speak like that," the Prince implored her tenderly. "What was there to hear, after all? Only that a man whom I shall kill one day when I have the time terrorised you cruelly."

So quietly and with such sangfroid did he announce

his intention that, despite the emotion they were both feeling, Eloise Dauvray and Christopher Race smiled.

"But I will," repeated the Prince, like a boy. "Just now, you know very well, Eloise, I have not the time, because I am given to other things first; then, when I am my own again, I shall do what I say."

"You will not be your own; you will be mine, and your country's," answered Eloise. "And that brings us to what we have to tell and ask Mr. Race."

"Whatever you ask I will do," said Christopher rashly. He was in the mood to be rash; not only for Miss Dauvray's sake, but now for the sake of the Prince as well. There was something of that extraordinary magnetism about the young man which the House of Stuart had, and made use of in enlisting followers.

"You had better wait and hear first," Mirko warned him. But at this moment arrived an anxious-looking gentleman, whose face cleared at sight of the group of three. Bowing courteously to Miss Dauvray, at whom he glanced quickly with veiled curiosity, he announced in indifferent French that he had been searching everywhere for His Royal Highness, in the hope of introducing him—by special request—to a very great personage.

Such a request was a command, and Eloise smiled permission to go.

"That is the Dalvanian Ambassador," she murmured, as the tall, youthful figure and the short, middle-aged one moved away together.

"He looks clever," said Christopher.

"He is clever," replied Eloise, "and—we believe—he is on our side. Not for *me*—I don't mean that. I hope and pray he knows nothing, and may guess nothing until too late to interfere. I mean something of more importance to Dalvania than a love affair. Perhaps, after all, it's just as well that I can tell you what

I have to tell you alone. First, I thank you for coming, and—isn't he glorious?"

"Yes," said Christopher. "If I were a soldier I should like to fight for him."

"How strange you should say that!" half whispered the girl. "It is exactly what I want you to do. *Will* you be a 'soldier of fortune' and fight for us both? But, no; it isn't fair to ask you that until you know the whole story."

So she told him the story, briefly as she could, keeping down her own excitement, which would grow with the tale. Christopher knew little or nothing of Dalvanian affairs, except that the people of that turbulent country had risen some years ago against their king and killed him; that the queen and her children had been saved only by flight; that a distant relative of the dead man—a person favoured by Turkey—had been raised to the throne; and that the Dalvanians, who ought to have been elated at their success, had been more or less dissatisfied ever since.

Now Eloise Dauvray told him that the story of the flight and the massacre was twelve years old. The queen had lived in great seclusion, incognito, sometimes in France and England, sometimes in Austria and Hungary. Now she was dead—had been dead for two years. Her last words to her two sons—Mirko, twenty-six, and Peter, twenty-one—had been: "Win back Dalvania. Mirko must be king. Do not try to avenge your father's murder on the people. Most of them were innocent. It was a plot of Turkey's. But take the throne away from the alien."

This chimed with Mirko's heart's desire. But there was no money; and Dalvania—even if willing to accept him—was weak, while Turkey was near and powerful. Still, he was the rightful heir; and Dalvania was very tired of King Alexander, spendthrift and profligate.

Mirko as a boy had made one or two highly-placed friends in England; and though, while Alexander remained king, Great Britain could not officially countenance Mirko's claims, were he successful in regaining his father's throne England would be ready to congratulate him.

Now, Prince Mirko's errand in the most important island of the world was to enlist sympathy for his cause among those who would lend him their money or their help in organising a secret raid; and the adventure, so Eloise Dauvray eagerly explained to Christopher Race, was not so hopeless as it might seem.

The Dalvanian Ambassador, who had just called the Prince away, had been put in his place by Turkey, like all other Dalvanian diplomats of King Alexander's day; nevertheless, he had private reasons for being at heart Mirko's friend. Damiello Rudovics knew what was Mirko's mission in England; knew that he was trying to get together a hundred thousand pounds to buy arms and feed a small army; knew that he was inviting adventurous or rich young Englishmen to join him secretly at the Montenegrin frontier of Dalvania, for a certain purpose; yet Rudovics was giving no hint to Turkey, his real employer, of the business afoot. "And that is not because of any personal love for the Prince," finished the woman who loved the Prince above all, "but because he wants Mirko to marry his wife's daughter. If Mirko would take her, Turkey would let him gain his throne with no more than a mere theatrical struggle."

"That sounds as if thereby hung a tale," said Christopher, deeply interested now in the Other Man's fortunes.

"Thereby hangs a strange tale," echoed Miss Dauvray—"a tale of love. Once upon a time a Sultan loved a fair lady who was not his Sultana, yet she was of high rank and had important relatives who

must not be offended. So the Sultan heaped upon her all the honours he could, and married her off to a colonel in his army, who died rather suddenly soon after the wedding day. Perhaps by that time the great man had tired of her beauty; at all events, when she had been long enough a widow, with a pretty little girl, he smiled upon a match between the lady and the new Dalvanian Ambassador to the Court of St. James. Now the girl is grown up—that is, she's sixteen or seventeen; and you can see that, if Mirko of Dalvania would please to fall in love with and marry her, there would be persons who would be pleased to see her a queen."

"I see," said Christopher. "The plot thickens."

"It grows very thick indeed," answered Eloise, "for Mirko won't think of the Lady Valda—will think of no one but me. Yet he must keep Rudovics' friendship for the present. That's why our engagement has to be secret; and our marriage must be secret too. Only my grandmother knows—and you. At least, that's what I hope. I daren't dwell upon the things that might happen to Mirko if anyone who wished either of us evil should find out."

"Yes," said Christopher. "I understand, and I'd give anything—even Scarlet Runner—to help."

"We want you both—you and Scarlet Runner. Will you be one of those young men who will happen to be taking a trip that may end by bringing you to Dalvania? It's a very interesting country—everyone who has seen it says so—and, though wild, some good roads have been made lately—a bid for popularity by the usurper Alexander. No motor-cars have been seen there yet. If one should go, especially if it were a handsome, large, red one, it would cause great excitement among the simple-minded peasantry. It would be considered almost supernatural."

"What if it carried a prince—the rightful ruler of his country?" smiled Christopher.

"Some such thought was in my mind," said Eloise. "It would create a profound sensation. People would think him a god in the car."

"There ought also to be a goddess in the car," remarked Christopher thoughtfully.

"She need not be lacking—if she had an invitation," answered Miss Dauvray.

"She has the invitation now."

"Thank you! And *you* have—an invitation to her wedding."

"When is it to be?" he asked, with outward calmness.

"That is the greatest secret of all. It is to be next week. I will let you know the day, and should like you to be there. So would Mirko. He knows what you did for me. Already you are to him more than other men, for my sake. And if you would help him—if you would take us into Dalvania——"

"Not only will I do that; but I think, if the Prince still needs it, I can get him money."

"He needs it desperately. But you—are not rich?"

"My Uncle James is."

"I heard something of your story from—but you can guess. I hate even to speak his name, in these good and happy days. Your uncle has disinherited you."

"That's still on the knees of the gods. It's partly a question of conduct, partly the question of a girl. I'm not sure he hasn't a sneaking fondness for me. But there's one thing he worships: a title. Once he gave fifty thousand turkeys and Heaven knows how many loaves of bread to the poor, for which he expected a knighthood, and got—thanks."

Eloise Dauvray's colour brightened.

"Prince Mirko would give him a dukedom and the Order of the Red Swan of Dalvania. Though it's a

small country, the Swan is famous—as old as Constantine the First, and has been bestowed on few who were not kings or princes. You may have noticed that Mirko is wearing it to-night.”

“I did notice, and thought—of my uncle. He would give ten years of his life for the Swan, and a hundred thousand pounds for a dukedom, even though Dalvanian—or I don’t know him. You and Prince Mirko could induce him to do it, if you would let me take you both in Scarlet Runner to Hyde Hampton, his place in Middlesex, to pay an afternoon visit.”

“We will go; I can promise for Mirko,” said Eloise. “I must have my grandmother with me, for even Mirko wouldn’t approve of his *fiancée* going unchaperoned. When he comes back to find me here, I’ll tell him what you say, and he’ll be very glad to know, too, that he can count upon your aid in our great adventure. Three hundred other young men have pledged themselves already; but there’s no one like you, and there’s only one Scarlet Runner. As for our marriage, the day will be fixed to-morrow, for one of the two men who is to marry us—a Dalvanian priest of the Greek Church, who was Mirko’s first tutor—is coming on purpose, and everything will be arranged.”

If Christopher had the idea that his acquaintance with a Royal prince would enhance his value in the eyes of his uncle, the thought had not influenced his suggestion. He spoke only in the interest of Mirko and Eloise, and indeed unselfishly; for a hundred thousand pounds would be a slice out of his inheritance in case his uncle relented towards him at the year’s end.

He had not seen his relative for months, nor had he communicated with him since he had taken to earning his own living with Scarlet Runner. Nevertheless, his long and elaborate wire the next day was promptly

answered by old James Revelstone Race with a cordial invitation for any day that suited His Royal Highness.

The expedition was to be a secret, of course, like everything else which brought Prince Mirko of Dalvania and Eloise Dauvray of New Orleans together. Mirko was staying at a house which had been lent him by a young English earl, and Christopher called for him there with Scarlet Runner. But the Prince was well disguised with the least romantic of motor goggles and a cap with long flaps; and instead of picking up Mme. Dauvray and her granddaughter in Regent's Park, the car was driven by appointment to the house of a trusted friend in Richmond. There the two ladies got in, and Mirko, who was too ardent a lover to regard conventionalities when they might be disregarded, deserted the front seat to be with the adored one in the tonneau.

"But you would not let me see you yesterday," Christopher heard him complain, in answer, perhaps, to some laughing objection. "*Why* would you not let me? I had a thousand things to say to you. It's a day wasted in my life. Nothing can make up for it. And you had promised me. It was a great disappointment."

"And to me," said Eloise. "But—I couldn't help it. You must *know* I couldn't help it, or nothing would have made me write and put you off."

Whether or no Prince Mirko knew the inflections of Eloise Dauvray's voice as the amateur chauffeur fancied he knew them Christopher could not tell, but there was a hint of the old weariness in her tone which made him say to himself instantly: "Something has happened. She has had a blow or a shock."

During the run of an hour and a half to Hyde Hampton (the old place which Christopher still hoped might at some distant day be his) the girl was very silent. Mirko remarked it at last, asking anxiously

if she were not well, but she answered with an effort at calling back her spirits that it was nothing; she hadn't slept very well last night, and had one of her bad headaches. Grandmamma knew how horrid they were, but soon the fresh air and quick motior would drive the pain away.

In spite of the headache she was very beautiful when she removed her thick motoring-veil at Hyde Hampton and replied to old Mr. Race's greetings. Yet it was a subdued beauty, pale as moonlight, though her lips were feverishly red and her eyes large and burning. Perhaps this was the effect of the headache; but Christopher Race did not think so; and his eyes returned again and again to her face, questioningly, during the visit, which—save for her suffering—was proving splendidly successful. Once or twice it seemed to him that she avoided his eyes; and he said to himself that, whatever might be the cause of the change in her, Miss Dauvray did not seem to confide in him.

Old James Race was enchanted with the Prince, almost collapsing with joy at Royalty's gracious praise of his picturesque Jacobean house and wonderful Dutch gardens. Such an honour had never come his way before; but, snob as the old man was at heart, he genuinely admired Mirko, and was fired by the romance of the young Prince's situation. The confidence that Mirko reposed in him he regarded as an overwhelming compliment, and hinted a suggestion of help even before the quickly following offer of the dukedom. That could not be bestowed until Prince Mirko should become King Mirko; but the Red Swan of Dalvania, on fire with the blaze of rubies and small brilliants, was transferred from Mirko's breast to that of the dazzled old man.

On the way back to London, after this triumphant visit, Eloise told Christopher that the wedding would

take place on the following Saturday. Her grandmother being a Roman Catholic, they had a small private chapel in their house in Regent's Park. In this they would be married by a Catholic priest and the Greek priest, the first to satisfy Mrs. Dauvray; and afterwards, before Mirko should ascend the throne of his fathers, Eloise had the intention of becoming a convert to the Greek Church. The banns of Theodore (one of Mirko's many names) Constantinus and Eloise Dauvray had been read three times in a quiet little church of South Kensington—a church where nobody would recognise either name; and all was now ready. Nor need there be further delay in starting for Dalvania, since old Mr. Race's thousands—added to those already subscribed—would put the Prince in funds.

Save the two priests and the registrar, Mme. Dauvray, Christopher Race, Lord Wendon (who was lending the Prince his house), and Mirko's young brother (expected back presently from a visit to Paris) would be the only witnesses of the marriage. The bride and groom would travel quietly the same evening to the Isle of Wight, where Lord Wendon offered his country house for the honeymoon. But it would be a short honeymoon; for as soon as arrangements could be rushed through Mirko and Eloise were eager to start for Dalvania.

Unless Christopher heard to the contrary, he was to call at the house in Regent's Park at twelve o'clock on Saturday. His car was not to accompany him, but he volunteered her services and his to spin the bride and groom as far as Southsea.

There was no reason why Christopher should have expected to hear from Eloise or the Prince before Saturday, for their plans were carefully made and seemed likely to be carried out successfully, whatever might happen afterwards. Yet, somehow, he did

expect to hear; and though, as luck would have it, he received a rather tempting offer for his car for the four days preceding the wedding, he could not bring himself to accept it. "If anything should happen and I should be gone!" he thought, with a nervous apprehension foreign to his nature.

Really it seemed as if the love affairs of Prince Mirko of Dalvania had got upon his nerves, for he grudged leaving his dingy lodgings for more than half an hour at a time, lest a special messenger or a telegram should come from Eloise Dauvray and he should not be there to receive it. But nothing did come; and on Wednesday afternoon, feeling the need of air and exercise, he went out for a stroll in the Park. The day was so fine and he saw so many charming persons that he forgot his secret and, perhaps, foolish anxieties. It was after five o'clock when he somewhat reluctantly returned to Chapel Street; and he had been away for close upon two hours.

As he let himself in with his latch-key, which never would work properly, he remembered old days, and his handsome chambers. Still, he had no regrets. Poverty and independence had given him some very good adventures, he thought; and nearly stumbled against the lodging-house maid-of-all-work, carrying somebody's tea.

"Oh, sir, what a good thing you've got back!" she exclaimed. "The lady's been waiting for you a good half-hour. Missus said I was to take her up this to amuse her, as she was in such a state at your not being at 'ome."

"A lady?" echoed Christopher. He kept up an acquaintanceship with very few ladies nowadays, and knew none who were likely to call upon him.

"Yes, sir, a beautiful lady—least ways she's beautifully dressed, and 'er figure's like a girl's, though

'er face is covered up. First there was a note by messenger, when you hadn't been gone five minutes, and it seems the lady sent it, for when she arrived she asked if it 'adn't come all right, and if you'd 'ad it; but there it was in its envelope on your dining-room table, where she's 'ad it under 'er eyes ever since she was put to sit there."

Christopher put no more questions, but ran up the two flights of stairs to the second floor, two steps at a time, the little maid following more sedately with the brown teapot and thick bread and butter on a tray twice two big for her.

As he opened the sitting-room door Eloise Dauvray sprang up. "At last!" she cried. "I've been praying for you to come. You're my one hope."

Then she paused for the maid, who appeared with the tray; but when they were alone neither thought of the tea.

"What has happened?" Christopher asked abruptly.

"Mirko has disappeared," Eloise answered.

For an instant Christopher was silent. Then, "Since when?" he asked.

"That I don't know. But he was to have lunched with my grandmother and me at a little riverside hotel, so quiet and secluded that we would have been quite safe—we've lunched there before. He didn't come; we waited lunch for an hour, then—for neither of us could eat—we drove home. No word had been sent me. I wired to Lord Wendon's, but got no answer—that showed me Mirko couldn't be there; and I dared not go to ask news from the servants, for the house may be watched. Then I thought of you, and hurried off a messenger with that note on the table. He returned to me saying that you were not in. After a whole hour of waiting I could stand it no longer, but drove here in a hansom. Mr. Race,

what do you think has become of him? Has Turkey got wind of the plot for the raid, and has he been murdered, like his father?"

"Don't think of such a thing," said Christopher. "They wouldn't go so far as that at worst. A dozen things may have happened—none of them tragic. He may have been motoring with Wendon or some other friend, and have got *en panne* miles from a telegraph office."

"I thought of that; but he had no plan for motoring to-day or he would have told me. And I *feel* that something is wrong—desperately wrong."

"Shall I go to his house and find out what I can from his servants?" asked Christopher.

"Oh, if you would!" she sighed. "It was one thing I wanted you to do."

"I'll start at once," he said. "I can be back in half an hour."

He was back in less; but he had very little that was satisfactory to tell. He had asked for Prince Mirko, alleging an engagement with him, only to hear from the stately hall-porter that His Royal Highness had walked out alone about nine o'clock in the morning, saying nothing of his intentions, and had not come in since. Even his valet had no idea where he had gone, nor when he intended to return.

On hearing this, Christopher, knowing that the valet was more or less in his Royal master's confidence, asked to speak with him. The man was brought, and Christopher saw him alone, behind closed doors, in a small anteroom off the hall. All the valet could tell him, however, was that the Prince had appeared somewhat disturbed when reading some letters which came by the first post. One of these he had placed under a paper-weight, and had put it in an inner pocket of his coat immediately after dressing, which

he did more quickly and earlier than usual. This letter the valet believed to be one which he had noticed because it was addressed in Prince Peter's hand, and postmarked Paris. Another letter His Royal Highness had read carefully, two or three times over; and then, ordering the fire already laid in the grate to be lighted, had burned it, watching till the paper and envelope were both entirely consumed.

These details were vouchsafed to Christopher because Mirko had lately mentioned his name to the confidential servant as that of a valued friend; and the man appeared to be slightly anxious, though not greatly upset, on account of his master's absence. His Royal Highness, he said, had somewhat erratic ways, and this was not by any means the first time that in England and other countries he had gone out, staying away all day, or even more than a day, without having announced any such intention. True, he had been very regular in his habits for the last fortnight or so (this tallied with the time of his engagement to Miss Dauvray), but it was not so very surprising that now and then he should go back to his old ways again.

"Does this comfort you?" Christopher questioned, somewhat doubtfully, of Eloise; but she shook her head.

"No," she answered. "He wouldn't have broken his appointment with me for anything on earth, if— he hadn't been forced to. Now, *what forced him to break it?*"

"Have you no suspicions?" asked Christopher, searching the girl's face with his eyes; for she had snatched off the veil she had worn in driving to Chapel Street.

"I thought that—Turkey might have found out, and considered it worth while to remove him," she faltered.

"Is that your only idea?"

"The only developed one. All the rest are vague

—and I mad. But—there's one thing I had better tell you, though it may have no connection with this—I pray to Heaven it hasn't. The day before you took us in your car to see your uncle, Ponsonby Fitzgerald came."

"To your house?"

"Yes. He wrote a note to announce that he was coming, saying that I must throw over everything else to receive him, as it was important for my interests as well as his. So I—I positively dared not refuse. You are the only person in the world except Mirko to whom I could tell this, because you know Ponsonby Fitzgerald, and that we used to be—rather pals, in my dark days. But I didn't mean to speak of his visit, even to Mirko. I knew it would make him furious that the man had forced himself on me, and he wouldn't understand my motive for receiving him."

"Nor do I quite understand," Christopher ventured.

"Men can't understand women. They think we ought always to be brave and strong. But it was like this. Ponsonby let me alone after Milly van Bouten's ball. As he won the Blue Diamond prize he was in funds, and all the more as I refused my share, which he was ready to pay. Two weeks ago I had a letter from him saying we must meet and talk over a new idea of his; but I pretended to have a lot of engagements, and on one excuse or another I kept putting him off, hoping that, before he grew too impatient, Mirko and I might be married and safely beyond his reach for ever. He'd hardly follow to Dalvania, to take revenge, or claim my help again! But I was afraid, from the tone of the last letter, that the thing I dreaded had happened. I thought he might have come to suspect that Mirko and I cared for each other. I felt it would be best to see him and find out, though it made me sick at heart even to think of the meeting."

"And did he suspect?" asked Christopher.

"If he did, he was too clever to give me reason to suppose so. He came to get my help in a—in a kind of speculation he's going into, and when I told him I couldn't possibly do anything, he insisted obstinately, even threatening disagreeable consequences if I persisted in refusing. I told him that I should be away—out of England—at the very time he wanted me; and he caught at that instantly. Where was I going? he asked; and then I would have given a great deal if I hadn't spoken. But I saved myself by saying I should be in Paris. (That's true, you know,—we must pass through Paris,—and he knows I have friends there whom I've visited once or twice.) I hope he fancied I was going to them. In any case, he shrugged his shoulders as if in resignation, saying, 'I wish you joy of Paris.' Then he went away, leaving me horribly depressed and almost ill. I trusted that, after all, the worst result of the visit was my headache; but now I'm not so sure. It may have been his object to deceive me, and keep me from divining how much he knew—or guessed."

"It was on Sunday that he came," Christopher reflected, aloud. "It's now Wednesday."

"Yes. He's had plenty of time to play the spy since. Of course, we—Mirko and I—couldn't help showing that we were rather absorbed in each other at the few dances and receptions where we have met. People may have gossiped; Ponsonby may have heard the gossip, and had his suspicions aroused."

"Hasn't he enough generosity in his nature to be glad that you should be happy?" asked Christopher.

"He has a heart of ice, and is as selfish as he is clever and unscrupulous. I've been valuable to him, and there are things he can't do, because he can't get into, without me. He would hate me to escape, and

would prevent it if he could. Could he have gone to the Turkish Ambassador and betrayed Mirko?"

"What could he betray, except his idea that you might be in love with each other?"

"Perhaps nothing. I don't think Ponsonby Fitzgerald could have found out about the raid. That secret's been too well kept. It isn't as if a few glances could betray it, as they can a love affair. But Mirko has disappeared. Something dreadful has happened. I have to think of every chance, though maybe Ponsonby has nothing to do with his disappearance. Oh, Mr. Race, I feel as if I were blind and drowning! My love for Mirko clouds my judgment. That's why I came to you. Help me—help me!"

"I'm going to try," said Christopher simply. "But I want a little time to think things over."

The girl rose. "I'll go," she said hastily. "It's just possible there may be news at home. If there is, I'll let you know. And you won't keep me in suspense a moment when there's anything to tell?"

Christopher gave her his promise, as he put her into a cab. When he was alone once more he sat down in the dull sitting-room, still faintly fragrant from her presence, and resting his elbows on the table he sat with his head in his hands.

This had always been his way when there was something abstruse to think over and thrash out. He had sat thus for half an hour after hearing of his uncle's determination to disinherit him. Then he had sprung up with an inspiration, and his enterprise with Scarlet Runner had been the result.

A theory of Christopher's was that, if you wanted to know exactly what a man was most likely to do, you must put yourself in his place, see life with his eyes, desire the things that he desired. Now he strove to imagine himself Ponsonby Fitzgerald—

Ponsonby Fitzgerald going out of the Dauvray house furious because he had lost his valued partner.

Perhaps Fitzgerald had loved Eloise Dauvray a little in his selfish way, admiring her as he might a coveted picture. At all events, whether or no it had entered his mind to want her for himself, Fitzgerald would not wish any other man—especially one more highly placed than himself—to take her from him. He would not like to think of her as a queen, while he remained a somewhat *passé* young man about town in London.

"He wouldn't have given it away to her if he guessed about the love affair," Christopher said to himself. "What would he do, then? I think he'd try to make sure whether his suspicions were correct, and if they were he'd try still harder to separate Miss Dauvray and the Prince—partly to keep her under his thumb, partly to revenge himself upon her for loving another man and planning to escape. He'd watch her, and he'd watch Mirko."

Having gone so far in his deductions, Christopher remembered that Fitzgerald had seen Eloise on Sunday. On Monday morning she and Mme. Dauvray had gone to Richmond. Perhaps Fitzgerald had followed them to the train, and had then returned to watch Mirko. If he had done this he must have seen Scarlet Runner stop at the door of Lord Wendon's house and take the Prince away.

Here Christopher hesitated, wondering how Fitzgerald could have contrived to track the car, unless he had been already in a motor of his own, which seemed unlikely. But suddenly he recalled the fact that Prince Mirko had kept him waiting fifteen or twenty minutes until the Dalvanian Ambassador, who was calling, had made his elaborate adieux. That would have given Fitzgerald time to engage a motor-

cab from a stand near by; and, as the traffic of London reaches to Richmond, Scarlet Runner had never a chance during the run to show her paces. A motor-cab could have kept her in sight; and though Eloise Dauvray had been thickly veiled, Fitzgerald knew her too well not to recognise her figure as she left her friend's house.

Afterwards Christopher had been able to put on speed, and would probably soon have outdistanced such a follower; but Fitzgerald could have kept the trail by making inquiries, as Scarlet Runner was a conspicuous car, which everyone noticed; and in any case he would have learned that Eloise and Mirko knew each other intimately enough to take a long run together in a motor. The fact that Christopher Race was the driver would have roused a suspicion in Fitzgerald's mind that he and Eloise had been in collusion at Miss van Bouten's ball; and thus he would become more bitter against his old ally, more anxious than ever to do her an ill turn. How to do that ill turn would have been the question in his mind.

If he had seen Rudovics, the Dalvanian Ambassador, leave the Prince's door, Fitzgerald might have turned his attention to that gentleman, whom he probably knew by sight. If he had no inkling of Mirko's political situation he would make inquiries in diplomatic circles. There someone would be aware of the fact that Rudovics desired handsome Prince Mirko of Dalvania to marry his stepdaughter.

Such a piece of news would be precisely what Fitzgerald wanted, and he would seek some pretext to pay a call at the Dalvanian Embassy.

What would be Rudovics' action when he learned that the Prince he had secretly aided intended to disappoint his ambitious hopes? Would he revenge

himself by betraying Mirko to Turkey, or would he seek other means of gaining his ends?

Christopher decided that if he were to help Eloise Dauvray, he could begin in no better way than by learning what manner of man was the Dalvanian Ambassador to the Court of St. James.

He had no friends in the diplomatic service living in England, for Max Lind was far away, but old Major Norburn, an ancient crony of James Race, had a nephew who was a clerk in the Foreign Office. Christopher went at once to the club where his uncle's friend spent his afternoons; and by a stroke of luck the budding diplomatist had called to keep an appointment with his relative. The two were on the eve of starting out, but had a few moments to spare; and young Norburn was boyish enough to be flattered by Christopher's questions, which implied inside knowledge on his part. He perhaps did not know all he affected to know; but he described Rudovics as inordinately vain, endlessly ambitious, subtle and proud of his subtlety, not bad at heart though sufficiently unscrupulous. "His part is a bit above his capacity," said the young man from the Foreign Office, "and he'd have had no chance of it except through his wife. His marriage was brought about to serve the convenience of the powers that be in Turkey; but the woman—who's half Irish—has been a beauty in her day, and all poor old Rudovics' honours have been given him for her sake. Those who are 'in the know' say he despises King Alexander, and if he weren't afraid of his Turkish master would be in the thick of all the plottings. Of course, if that romantic-looking chap, Mirko, would take a fancy to the stepdaughter, who is naturally a favoured *protégée* of Turkey, things might get uncomfortable for Alexander in Dalvania."

"What sort of girl is she?" asked Christopher.

"They say beautiful, and quite a woman, though only seventeen. The mother's Catholic, and follows European customs when in Europe; the girl, Valda, has been brought up in a Paris convent. Lately they've had her in London, no doubt for Mirko's inspection; but nobody seems to know whether the affair marches or not."

Christopher would gladly have learned more, but the source of information was pumped dry, and he apologised for having kept the two Norburns so long from their engagement.

"Rudovics is surely in this," Christopher said to himself; and suddenly an idea of what he would do in Rudovics' place sprang into the young man's mind. If Rudovics *had* done that—well, it would make things difficult. But perhaps, after all, by this time Mirko had come home, with a simple explanation of the mystery. Before seeing Eloise again he decided to call for the second time at Lord Wendon's house to make inquiries.

"Has His Royal Highness Prince Mirko come back?" he asked of the hall-porter.

"No, sir; but His Royal Highness Prince Peter has arrived from Paris," was the answer.

Christopher thought for a moment, and then scribbled a few lines on a card for Prince Peter, whom he had never seen. Presently he was invited to enter the library, where he had once been received by Mirko, and there stood the younger brother, a surprising likeness of the elder.

Such a face as Peter's could be trusted for loyalty, if not for prudence, and Eloise had said that the boy knew of the engagement. Now Christopher, claiming friendship with Mirko and Miss Dauvray, spoke with partial frankness of his suspicions.

"I believe," he said, "that somehow the Dalvanian Ambassador has got wind of the Prince's engagement, and has tricked him, by means of a letter which your brother received this morning, into calling at the Embassy. There he'll keep him, if my idea is right, until after the appointed wedding-day, perhaps indefinitely, to separate him from Miss Dauvray, and if possible to bring about a marriage with his step-daughter."

"Great heavens, sir! The day that my brother marries Valda will be the day of my death," exclaimed Peter. "I love her—she loves me. But Mirko doesn't know. He might take her without dreaming that he wronged me; and Valda is so young that she would not dare thwart her stepfather. I have been with Mirko often at the Embassy, and the first moment I saw Valda I loved her—as it was with my brother and Miss Dauvray. I knew I had nothing to fear from his rivalry, so I kept my secret, though I knew his; for there seemed no hope of marriage for me until my brother's rise in fortune should give me something to offer—and I feared he would disapprove, as we are both so young. Mirko sent me to Paris some days ago with a letter to a friend of his who is enlisting recruits and raising money. But yesterday came a telegram from Valda, forwarded to me from this house—(I don't know who could have helped her, unless her maid)—begging me to come back, as she foresaw trouble. I wrote my brother I must return, wound up his affairs as well as I could, and here I am, only to find that trouble has come indeed. What shall I do? Shall I demand Mirko at the Embassy?"

"Certainly not," said Christopher. "But I'll tell you what you might do—elope with Mlle. Valda. That would be a valuable move. If her maid helps her

to send off secret telegrams, she will help smuggle you into the house. Do you know her name?

"Anastasia," replied Peter.

"Disguise yourself as a man of her own class, and ask for her at the servants' door. If you can get Mlle. Valda out of the Embassy before the day fixed for Prince Mirko's wedding with Miss Dauvray, your brother's happiness as well as your own will be assured. Take the young lady to Scotland with her maid for chaperon, and marry her quickly; afterwards you can do things again in proper form. If her stepfather or her mother knows nothing of your love, neither of you will be watched or suspected; you ought not to have great difficulties; and I'll lend you my motor-car for the elopement."

"What! The Scarlet Runner, of which my brother wrote? But that will bring me luck."

"I hope so, for everyone concerned," said Christopher. "I can't take you myself, for I shall have business in London; but I'll get you a good chauffeur."

"Your business will be to release my brother?" Prince Peter guessed.

"That's easier said than done," Christopher answered gravely. "If he's in the Embassy, it's his own Embassy, you see; there's no other power to appeal to. Turkey would defend Rudovics' action, if he declared that it was the only way to save a Royal prince from a marriage with an untitled, designing woman. Rudovics has nothing to fear in any case. And if we can learn that Prince Mirko is his prisoner, even if we can release him, still, good-bye to his happiness."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Peter, horrified.

"Something would certainly happen to Miss Dauvray. Their engagement known, those two would never be allowed to come together again. In

evening ; Valda would pretend some slight indisposition, keep her room all day, and leave the house, well veiled, in Anastasia's hat and cloak. Afterwards the woman would do her best to follow unobserved, and a rendezvous would be made somewhere in the neighbourhood after dark, with Scarlet Runner in waiting. Then it was not likely that Valda's absence would be discovered till morning, and by that time she and her lover would be far on their way to Scotland.

As for Mirko's presence in the house Anastasia had been able to say nothing definitely, but she did know that since morning one of the rooms had been closed, on the plea that part of the ceiling had fallen, and no one was to go in until workmen should have come to repair the damage. On hearing this Peter had been thoughtful enough to inquire the position of the locked room, and had learned that it was at the back of the house on the second floor, and on the right of the corridor which ran down the middle of the three upper storeys.

"Good!" exclaimed Christopher. "I thought they'd put him there, for knocking on the wall would do no good if he tried it. There's an empty house on the right, you know. The one on the left's occupied. I can imagine old Rudovics inviting the Prince into the room, as if for a secret meeting with some emissary from Dalvania, then quietly turning the key. Rather smart idea that about the fallen ceiling. And as the room's at the back, and the old-fashioned wooden shutters (which all the houses in Queen Anne's Gardens have) are probably nailed fast, your poor brother's as much a prisoner as if he were at Portland."

Next morning at ten o'clock Christopher Race was at the door of Messrs. Leonard and Steele, estate and house agents, at the moment when it opened for

business. He informed the manager that he had been empowered by Mr. James Race, of Hyde Hampton, to take No. 36 Queen Anne's Gardens, for three years (the shortest term permissible), if immediate possession could be given.

The agent thought there would be little difficulty about this, and became certain of it when there was no attempt at cutting down the high rent asked for the old house, unlet for several years. A telephone message was sent to the owner, papers were signed, a cheque in advance for a quarter's rent was paid; and presently Christopher found himself in possession of the keys of 36 Queen Anne's Gardens, the house adjoining the Dalvanian Embassy on the right-hand side.

About ten o'clock that night, having given all necessary instructions concerning Scarlet Runner to the chauffeur he trusted, Christopher unlocked the front door of his uncle's newly-acquired town house and walked in. He had with him, in a golfer's bag, a pickaxe, one or two other handy tools, and an electric lantern. To begin work, he chose the back room on the second floor, which, according to his calculations, was separated from Prince Mirko's prison only by the house wall. With a small hammer he tapped lightly once, twice, without receiving an answer. Then he was rejoiced by a responsive rapping on the other side. At first the knocks seemed to him desultory and irregular, but in a moment he realised that words were being formed by taps and spaces, long and short, according to the Morse code of telegraphy.

Long ago Christopher had learned it at Eton, when he and another boy had sought means of secret communication. Evidently the occupant of the room beyond the wall had learned it too.

In ten minutes the two men, thus divided by

bricks and mortar, were able to come to an understanding. Christopher was assured that he was talking with the Prince, Mirko was informed that he was talking with Christopher Race. Also, Christopher was able roughly to communicate his plan to the prisoner, and learned to his delight that there was a good prospect of success. Mirko indicated the position of a large wardrobe which stood in his room against the dividing wall, and suggested that Christopher's boring operations should be conducted behind it. When the bricks should be loosened Mirko would pull out the wardrobe, and be ready to push it back into place in case of danger.

All night long Christopher worked, refreshed with bread and wine from his bag; and by early dawn he had dug a hole through which he could speak to the Prince. Until this moment he had outlined his plan but vaguely; and what Mirko heard now amazed him.

While London slept, and the old houses in Queen Anne's Gardens kept their wooden eyelids closed, four persons, who had stepped out of a closed carriage round the corner, walked quietly to the door of No. 36. There were three men and one woman; and, having pushed the long-unused electric bell, they were almost immediately admitted into the dark, unfurnished house.

"Is all well—so far?" asked Eloise Dauvray whispering, in the dim corridor.

"All is well—so far," answered Christopher Race.

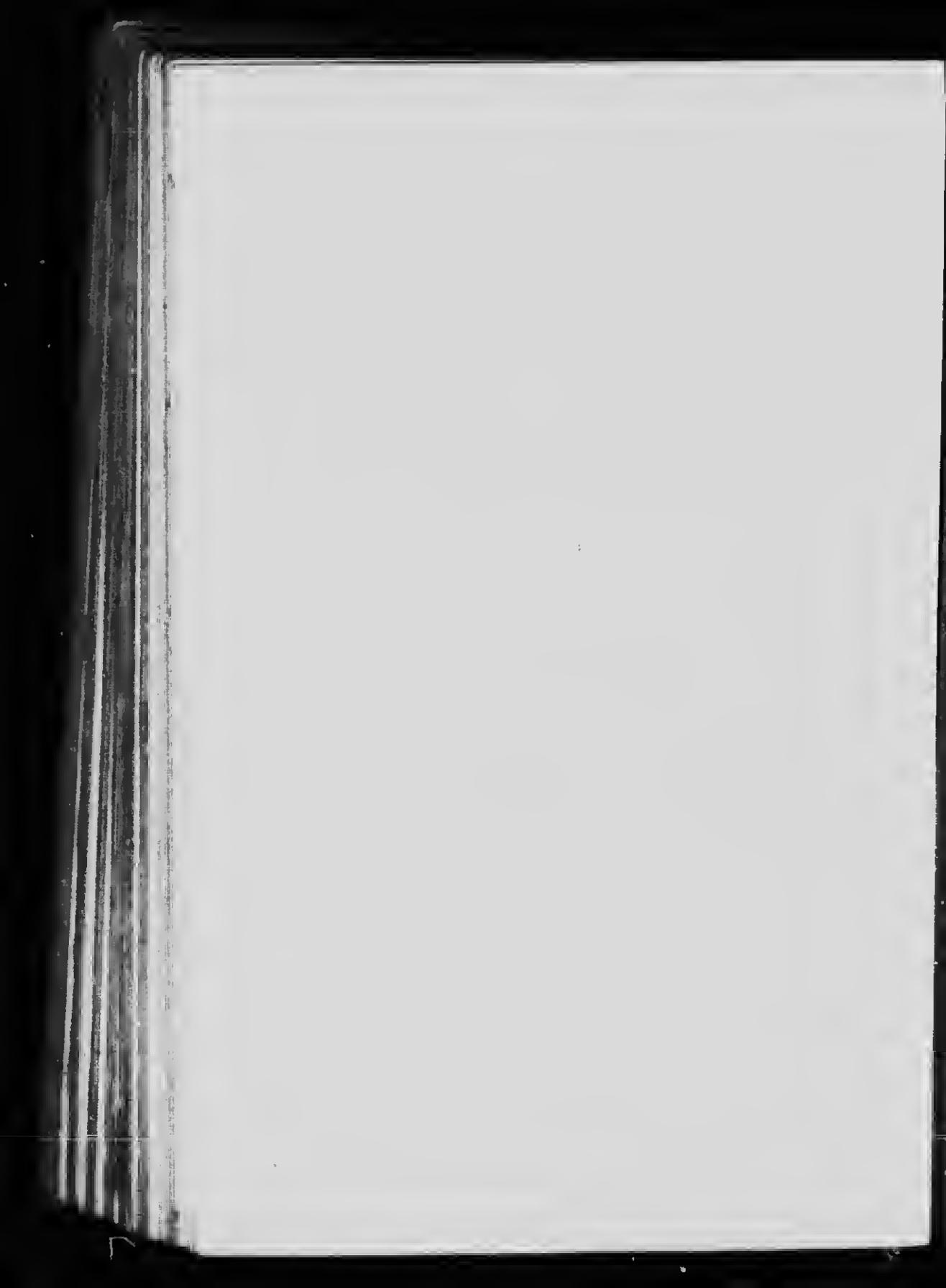
It was not until after ten o'clock in the morning that the absence of little Lady Valda and her maid was discovered by Mme. Rudovics, for she was a late riser by habit, and the girl had posed as an invalid the day before. Under Valda's pillow a note had

der-  
was  
that  
Also,  
his  
that  
Tirko  
which  
and  
ould  
d be  
d be  
with  
dawn  
speak  
lined  
now  
Queen  
losed,  
losed  
door  
oman ;  
bell,  
the  
uvray  
ace.

orning  
maid  
a late  
invalid  
e had



"CONGRATULATE ME, HE CONTINUED, AS RUDOVICS FELL BACK UPON THE THRESHOLD"



been slipped. "I have gone away to marry Prince Peter of Dalvania. We love each other." And that news had sent the Ambassador in haste to the door of the closed room, where no work had yet been begun upon the "fallen ceiling."

He unlocked the door, and knocked by way of courtesy, two men—tall Dalvansians both, in his own private service—standing on guard as usual lest the prisoner should attempt an escape. Each time since Mirko's capture Rudovics had himself brought the Prince's meals in this fashion, twice within twelve hours, bearing also a hundred apologies for his "necessary but regrettable harshness." Not once before had the indignant Mirko answered the knock, but now his voice responded with a cheerful "Come in."

"Congratulate me," he continued, as Rudovics fell back upon the threshold, aghast at what he saw. "And let me introduce you to my dear wife, the Princess Eloise. We thought a wedding at the Embassy an excellent plan, and have been married for an hour."

A thousand thoughts raced each other through the Ambassador's head as he stood staring, first at the pale, smiling girl, the two priests, the registrar, and the hole in the wall by which they and Christopher had entered. He thought of his daughter, and was forced to hope—in the circumstances—that she was the younger brother's wife by this time. He thought of his own chances of advancement in Dalvania under a new king. He thought of Turkey's probable attitude towards a struggle in which Valda's husband would be engaged as well as his brother; and he thought of nine hundred and ninety-seven other things, all in the space of one long moment.

Then he bowed and said slowly: "Graciously allow your host to be the first who offers your Royal Highness and his bride all possible good wishes."

## CHAPTER V: MAY

### THE NUREMBERG WATCH

CHRISTOPHER had had a hard run with his motor the day before, and while lazily drinking his early tea in bed he read the morning paper.

His own advertisement was there; but it was not that which interested him, nor was it any of the latest earthquakes or national complications. He had glanced over the events of yesterday, and at last settled eagerly to reading the Mendell Poisoning Case, as half London was doing at this very hour. The paper in his hands was an illustrated one, and this morning there were portraits of young Lady Mendell, accused of poisoning her elderly husband; the celebrated K.C. who was her counsel; Miss Mendell, the sister-in-law, a philanthropist, and witness for the prosecution; and Miss Mendell's secretary.

Lady Mendell looked pretty and interesting even in the rough illustration; but it was not the face of the young woman (once popular, now notorious) which engaged Christopher's attention: it was the strong profile of Sir Gordon Race, his distant cousin, engaged for the defence.

So far away was the relationship that it was merely by courtesy it could be said to exist; and Christopher was aware that his famous 'forty-second' cousin would scarcely know him if they passed each other in the street. Nevertheless, the amateur chauffeur was

privately proud of the tie of kinship between him and the brilliant K.C. who had received a baronetcy as a tribute of Royal and national admiration.

The trial was a more than usually interesting murder trial; for only a few months ago the accused had been prominent in society, a young woman married to a rich old man, a City knight, who had been received among her girlhood's friends for his wife's sake. Lady Mendell's dead father, a man of science, had been a friend and protector of Gordon Race while Gordon Race had been young and obscure. It seemed a debt of gratitude that the K.C. should defend his old friend's daughter; and the fact that he had taken up her cause added to the piquancy of the case.

"If any one can get her off, it will be he," Christopher was saying to himself, when there came a knock at his bedroom door. "Please, sir," announced the one overworked servant of the house, "there's a lady to see you in a hurry, and she won't take 'no' for a hanswer, because her business is *that* important."

"Any name?" Christopher called out.

"M'iss Poinsett; and I was to say it was about your motor-car and Sir Gordon Rice."

Astonished, Christopher set down his tea-cup. He had counted on another half-hour in bed; but this combination could not be resisted. A lady—at a quarter before eight in the morning, and an errand which apparently brought together Scarlet Runner and the very man who had been in his thoughts at the moment of her arrival.

Without asking further questions Christopher jumped up and into his bath. To the lady, who had been asked to wait in his sitting-room, appeared at the end of twenty minutes a clean-shaven and well-groomed young man. But, if that young man had hoped to be rewarded for meritorious speed by a vision of beauty,

he was disappointed. A plainly dressed woman of medium height and size half rose from a chair at his entrance; and she was so closely veiled in thick, ugly tissue that to search vainly for her features was like being struck suddenly with blindness.

Her neat black dress was (or appeared to the eye of a man) precisely like the dress which every other middle-class woman hurrying to Oxford Street or Bond Street would be wearing this morning; and Christopher knew that, unless she chose to raise her veil, he would be unable to swear to the identity of his unknown client, should he meet her in the street ten minutes later she left his sitting-room.

"Forgive my disturbing you," the veiled lady began, in a cultivated, if somewhat affected, voice, "but it was necessary that I should see you early. A great deal depends upon it. I saw your advertisement last night for the first time. It gave your address, and though you invite your clients to write, not to call, I ventured to disobey. Of course, you are the Mr. Christopher Race whose great exploit in Dalvania we all read about—the Mr. Race who helped to seat the new King and Queen on their throne."

"I did what I could; it wasn't much, for it was a foregone conclusion that they should win," said Christopher.

"And your car is the one that Prince Peter of Dalvania and his bride eloped in?"

"Oh yes. Scarlet Runner was in that little romance."

"I was sure of it. Mr. Race, I believe you are a lucky person. You not only have luck yourself, but you bring luck to others. If not, you would never have got your car back to England in a little more than a month intact after ten days of such adventures as you went through in Dalvania. That is one reason

I have come to you. The other is, because you must be a relation of Sir Gordon Race. It's not a common name."

Christopher smiled and began to be a little bored, for he hated gush; and as he was something of a hero since the Dalvanian affair, he could afford to choose his clients.

"Naturally I claim Sir Gordon as my cousin," he said, "but Sir Gordon would not claim me, because I doubt if he'd remember me from any other member of the race of Adam. I met him several years ago at a dinner given by an uncle of mine who's delighted if he can find a drop of his own blood in the veins of a celebrity."

"At least," the veiled visitor broke in, "Sir Gordon wouldn't refuse to see you if you sent in your name at his house?"

"Perhaps not, if he weren't too deeply engaged."

"That brings me," the lady went on, "to my object. I don't ask how much you charge for your motor, by the hour, because the price doesn't matter. I am anxious for you to go at once, and as quickly as possible, to Sir Gordon Race's house in Curzon Street—that means going in your car—and doing an errand for me. It seems small, but it is really of importance, and I will pay whatever you ask, in advance."

"Thanks," said Christopher. "But perhaps you have forgotten that this is the 31st of May, the great day in the Mendell case. Any other would be better for finding Sir Gordon free. This is his day to address the jury in defence of Lady Mendell."

"Oh no, I haven't forgotten," answered the veiled woman. "That is the reason I chose this morning. It's early, as you know, to your sorrow." She laughed perfunctorily. "Sir Gordon won't be at the court yet—it's the Old Bailey, isn't it?—for a couple of hours.

Even the greatest advocate in England must breakfast when engaged in the most important case, and I think he will be eating his when you arrive, if you'll kindly start at once."

"I haven't had mine yet," smiled Christopher.

"Did you have it regularly—in Dalvania?"

"No," he admitted. "That was part of the fun. And I don't mind delaying this morning if you give me a good reason, madam."

"My name is Miss Poinsett," his visitor announced. "I am an old acquaintance, with cause for gratitude to Sir Gordon Race. I beg you to take him a parcel which, in my belief, will bring him the best of good luck for this great day. He's to make his speech in defence of Lady Mendell. Her fate depends on him, for if she has a single chance for her life it lies in the effect his words may produce on the jury."

"That is true," said Christopher. "Sir Gordon could draw tears from the eyes of a potato. He plays on the feelings of a jury as if they were the strings of a violin. Lady Mendell was more than lucky to get him."

"And I want to add to her *bonne chance* by sending her advocate a *fetish*," urged the lady who called herself Miss Poinsett. "You see, I am interested for them both. I have my own reasons—you can fancy them, perhaps—for not going to Sir Gordon's house myself, and it would probably be useless sending an ordinary messenger. Such a person would never get into Sir Gordon's presence, but you will. The packet which I send, with best and kindest wishes, must be put into his *own* hands. I thought of you, the bearer of his own name, when I saw your advertisement and remembered what I'd read of your presence of mind as well as pluck, as the one man for my mission. Here, in an envelope, is pay-

ment in advance. Break the seal, if you choose, now; but in any case I think you will be satisfied."

"Really, the small thing you ask isn't worth payment," said Christopher, guessing at some old love affair. "My car is at a garage close by, and will be ready to start at a moment's notice. It will take me only a few minutes to run up to Curzon Street, if you're really bent on having me carry your message."

"I couldn't consent to your doing it without being paid for time and trouble," said the lady, laying a sealed envelope on the table.

Christopher made no further objections, as it was not worth while to argue, and his client took from a leather bag which hung from her arm a small, daintily tied up parcel, not more than four inches square, and wrapped in white paper such as jewellers use.

"There is something rather fragile as well as valuable in the little box," said she. "But I may trust you not to let it drop. And you will insist on seeing Sir Gordon yourself. If you send in your name he will be certain to see you, if you mention that it is important."

A few minutes later he was spinning towards Curzon Street, in Scarlet Runner, and reached Sir Gordon Race's house just as another large motor-car had drawn up before it. Evidently the occupants of this car were expected, for the door was opened by a footman before two ladies had had time to alight.

They passed into the hall at once, but Christopher saw that they were young and pretty, one a charming girl with brilliant colouring and naturally wavy hair of a wonderful golden brown.

The chauffeur of the big blue car moved on a few yards to give the red car place, and the servant kept the door open for the newcomer. Another footman

had shown the ladies in; and the expression of the man at the door was not encouraging. His stolid features seemed to say "Not at home," even while he civilly awaited the stranger's question. But instead of asking if Sir Gordon would see him, Christopher took out a card and wrote on it a request for a moment's interview, adding that he had "come from Miss Poinsett, bringing a present from her which must be delivered personally."

"Please give this to Sir Gordon Race," he said, with confidence; and the servant, seeing that the name on the card was the same as that of his master, invited the visitor in without hesitation. Christopher was shown into a room which seemed to be a combination of drawing-room and library; and he was allowed to sit there for so many minutes that he would have been anxious for the safety of Scarlet Runner, if he had not taken the precaution to bring a chauffeur from the garage.

When he had begun to grow impatient there came through a closed door the sound of laughter from the adjoining room, and an instant later the door opened for Sir Gordon Race himself.

The famous K.C. was young for the position he had won in the world,—scarcely over forty,—and his clean-shaven face was as fine in outline as a profile on some old Roman coin. He was not what women would call a handsome man, but the extraordinary magnetism which was said almost to hypnotise a jury shone in his eyes and gave a singular attraction to his smile. He had Christopher's card in his hand, accepted the young man as a cousin, said that he remembered their meeting, and invited him to stop for breakfast. Then, when Christopher refused, trying to take his leave after delivering Miss Poinsett's parcel, Sir Gordon would not let him go.

"The invitation for breakfast is not only from me, but from two ladies, my guests," he said. And as he spoke he glanced towards the door, which he had left wide open. Beyond, Christopher could not help seeing a handsome breakfast-room, and the late occupants of the blue motor-car seated at a table gleaming with old silver and decorated with June roses.

"We're cousins, and, it seems, not strangers," he went on, leading Christopher towards the open door. "Really, you must come. There's a little mystery to be cleared up, and only you can clear it—this mystery of Miss Poinsett." By this time he had brought the young man into the breakfast-room. "I have Mrs. and Miss Collingwood's permission to introduce you. They've kindly come to wish me luck for to-day, since they're not able to see me through it, as I hoped they might. In half an hour they're off house-hunting with their motor, instead of going into court to learn the fate of that poor little woman."

"And before we go Sir Gordon has promised that we shall see what Miss Poinsett has sent him," laughed the girl with brown-gold hair, accepting Christopher as a relative of her host.

"Also that we shall hear what Miss Poinsett is like," merrily added Mrs. Collingwood, who was too young to be other than the girl's stepmother.

Christopher glanced from one to the other, and guessed at the situation.

The message written on his card had apparently caused a discussion, and he had been called in to settle it. He deduced that Miss Collingwood (evidently an American girl, accustomed to have every whim humoured) was either the great man's *fiancée* or on the point of becoming so. Sir Gordon doubtless

wished to prove that Miss Poinsett was nothing to him, and Christopher had been summoned as an independent witness for the defence.

"If I ever heard of Miss Poinsett, I've forgotten her name," said Sir Gordon. "Did she give you any reason why she should send me a present?"

"It was to bring you good luck for to-day," said Christopher.

"Very kind, I'm sure," remarked Sir Gordon. "Is she a friend of yours?"

Christopher frankly related the story of the veiled lady's visit, and added that he did not know whether she were really Miss Poinsett or a deputy of Miss Poinsett.

"To show you that neither do I know Miss Poinsett, I beg you'll open the parcel," said Sir Gordon to Miss Collingwood.

"Supposing there's a letter inside?" The girl was smiling, yet Christopher fancied that this was not quite a joke for her.

"Then you're to read it out to me," Sir Gordon answered. And now the young man was sure that he was right in one particular: this famous K.C. of forty was deeply in love with the girl of twenty.

There was a delicious breakfast, but the host and his three guests were neglecting it. No one could think of anything save the little white parcel, whose dainty ribbons Miss Collingwood had begun half-hesitatingly to untie. The paper concealed a paste-board box, and within the box, on a bed of jeweller's cotton, lay a quaint and beautiful antique watch of nearly the size and somewhat the shape of an egg. The rich yellow gold was chased in an elaborate pattern of tiny figures, representing birds and animals, and the face of the watch was of blue enamel, set round with small jewels.

"What a lovely present!" exclaimed Mrs. Collingwood. "Just the kind of thing that my husband adores."

"There's a note with it," announced the girl, her cheeks growing pink.

"I said you were to read it," insisted Sir Gordon.

Miss Collingwood opened a folded bit of paper. "Aloud?"

"Yes, aloud."

"On this, your great day, in a great case," the young voice read, "I send you this in memory of *another* great day in a great case; and may it bring you the good luck I wish you. Would that this old Nuremberg watch were filled with diamonds as brilliant as your own arguments; but since I have not those to give, I give my best. Of its kind this watch is perfect, as you will see by the date, and an examination of the works, which are unique.—Yours,  
ELIZABETH POINSETT."

"Elizabeth Poinsett!" echoed Sir Gordon. "By Jove! That case I had forgotten."

"Ah! I thought you'd find the name had associations!" exclaimed Miss Collingwood, flushing.

"To show you how much I value them and their souvenir, I beg you to accept the watch," said Sir Gordon. "Let it bring *you* luck instead of me."

"I couldn't think of taking it," cried the girl.

"For your father, if not for yourself," pleaded Sir Gordon. "As Mrs. Collingwood says, it's just the thing to please a collector, and it's wasted on me."

"Send it back to Miss Poinsett."

"She went away from my place without leaving an address," Christopher ventured to put in.

"Such a present from Sir Gordon would certainly put your father into a splendid humour, Nora, dear," suggested the pretty stepmother, with a meaning arch of the eyebrows, from which Christopher deduced

parental disapproval of the K.C.'s suit. Probably Miss Collingwood was a great heiress, for whom her father expected a duke—or an earl, at the least.

"Nora, dear," weakened, then yielded. She thanked Sir Gordon charmingly, and, letting the box lie on the table, slipped the fat gold globe into an inside pocket of her smart tailor-made jacket.

"We ought to be going," said Mrs. Collingwood, who was as English in type as her stepdaughter was American. "Henry allowed us half an hour to tell you that, after all your kindness in getting us seats, we couldn't be in court to-day. Oh, it really is too bad. I'm so disappointed not to hear your speech, and so is Nora. Fancy having to spend *such* a day in looking for a country house! We might as well have started on our search to-morrow; but—you don't know what American men are, Sir Gordon. They're charming,—my husband especially,—but if they want to do a thing they must do it *to-day*! I hope we shan't have to stop at some outlandish place to-night where we can't get an evening paper to read your speech, and perhaps the verdict."

Thus speaking, she gathered up from the table several clippings with photographs of country houses, which she had been showing Sir Gordon. But the long apology caused Christopher to suspect a hidden reason for Mr. Collingwood's ultimatum. A girl half won would be wholly won if she were allowed to hear her lover's eloquence to-day!

His errand accomplished, his breakfast supposed to be finished, Christopher took his leave, not wishing to linger until the departure of the ladies. Instead of returning to the garage, he ran out to South Kensington to call on a possible client who had asked to see the car, and an hour passed before he brought Scarlet Runner to the door of his lodgings.

He intended to stop for a few moments, pick up the correspondence he had missed by his early start, and set out again on another errand. Until this moment he had forgotten the envelope left by the veiled lady, but seeing it on the table he had the curiosity to open it. Within was a smaller envelope, and this contained, in lieu of cheque or bank note, five gold sovereigns. Miss Poinsett's generosity combined itself apparently with a wish to preserve her privacy as carefully as she hid her face.

Several letters had come by post, but one, arriving by district messenger in Christopher's absence, had been laid on top of the others. Opening it, his blood rushed tingling to the roots of his hair as his eyes travelled down the neatly typewritten page:—

"Circumstances have put the writer into possession of a secret which conscience compels him to reveal. If you would save the life of Sir Gordon Race, go back to him instantly. Say that in the antique watch sent him this morning is an explosive strong enough to kill six men. Even if the case be opened, a spring must be touched which will mean destruction."

This was all; but it brought Christopher Race to his feet and set his heart thumping. The anonymous letter might be a practical joke—it might be the work of a madman; but it might also be the truth; and, without stopping to dwell upon probabilities, Christopher bolted downstairs, tucking the sheet of paper and envelope into his pocket.

Without a word to the chauffeur who sat in the car, he sprang to the driver's seat and started Scarlet Runner towards Curzon Street. He felt curiously sick, and there was a tightness in his throat, as once more he rang the bell at Sir Gordon Race's house; but the stolid face of the footman gave him a sudden sense of relief. At least, no tragedy had happened yet.

"Sir Gordon has been gone in his motor about twenty minutes, sir," said the footman, adding, as he saw the look of disappointment on Christopher's face: "It's just possible, if very important, you may catch him at his chambers in King's Bench Walk before he goes to the Old Bailey."

Forgetting to answer, the young man rushed to the car, and swept away from the house at a speed beyond the legal limit. How he yearned for a clear road, out in the open! Never before had his nerves so jerked with impatience in the stream of traffic, stealing an inch here, an inch there, from other motors, from lumbering omnibuses, and darting hansoms, rushing down any narrow lane that temporarily opened, slowing hastily under the hostile eye of a policeman. Risking detention, he seized a chance to tear down Constitution Hill, and took at speed the long stretch of road past the Wellington Barracks to Westminster, on, on along the Embankment; and in probably the shortest time on record for the distance, in hours of traffic, he turned into King's Bench Walk. Nevertheless, he had arrived too late. Sir Gordon had already left his chambers.

Off again sped Scarlet Runner like a red arrow, the silent chauffeur wondering at Race's tense face and reckless driving. Ludgate Hill was crowded, and many precious minutes were wasted before Christopher could leap from the car near the entrance to that grim haunt of lost hopes, the Old Bailey.

The stir and movement round the public entrance to the court, and the line of people waiting *en queue* along the pavement, would have told Christopher that some great trial was proceeding within, even if he had not known of the popular excitement roused by the Mendell case. Each approach was guarded by burly constables; but Christopher wrote hastily on a visiting

card: "I must see you instantly on a matter of life and death. It concerns the ladies who visited you this morning." This he gave, with a sovereign, to the most intelligent-looking of the policemen, and told him that somehow it must be got immediately to Sir Gordon Race.

Christopher's face forbade arguments and challenged interest. The policeman vanished, to return presently followed by a legal-looking person with the precise side-whiskers of a lawyer's clerk. Sir Gordon would see Mr. Race. He was to "come this way—by the counsel's entrance, please."

The spacious new court of the rebuilt Old Bailey was crowded to overflowing, and the heavy atmosphere moved with the inarticulate buzz and murmur of intense interest and controlled excitement. Christopher saw, as in a vision, the twelve serious faces in the jury-box, the black and white lines of wigged and gowned counsel, the craning heads in the galleries, the flower-like cluster of delicately-dressed ladies with seats on the bench, and in the dock one slender figure—one lonely, hunted woman, with a tall, grim warder towering like a dark statue at her side.

This picture was painted on his brain when a hush fell upon the court, save for the rustling as people got to their feet while the judge came in and bowed gravely to the counsel. It was as the judge sat down and the murmur swelled again that Christopher reached a seat exactly in front of Sir Gordon Race. Leaning towards him, the great man fixed the newcomer with a glance that had something of sternness, something of apprehension in it; and silently he pointed to the pencilled words on the card.

For reply, Christopher handed him the anonymous letter, and watched the elder man's face change as he read. Would he disbelieve the warning? Christopher

asked himself. Would he think his young cousin a fool, or worse, for disturbing him? But Sir Gordon's tightening lips, and the pallor that followed a dark flush, answered these questions.

Lady Mendell's defender had turned so white that hundreds of curious eyes fastened on his face and tried to read its secret. Women whispered, asking each other who could be this handsome young man, dressed like a motorist, who had suddenly appeared with news evidently so startling to the famous K.C. Was it possible that there was about to be a dramatic and unexpected turn in the trial? Whatever it was, it could scarcely be favourable to Sir Gordon's client, if an opinion might be formed from his look and bearing.

The eager eyes turned from the man to the woman whose life perhaps hung upon some magic turn of his eloquence to-day. She, too, feared and wondered, as all her friends and enemies in court could see in her wide eyes. Still, Sir Gordon whispered to the young motorist, calling his clerk into consultation and giving hurried directions, though the judge coughed dryly, and ushers, jury, prisoner, and public waited in surprise and growing bewilderment.

Not for an instant had Sir Gordon accepted the supposition that the writer of the anonymous letter was mad or jesting grimly. "What a fool I was not to suspect!" he said. "There's one person on this earth—in this court now—who has everything to gain by putting me out of the fight to-day. Great Heaven! If I had any heart left in me, what I could make out of this for Lady Mendell! How I could break her enemies if—but this has broken me. Nothing matters here. I must get out of this—I must follow Nora—Miss Collingwood—and save her——"

"Send me instead, I beg of you," broke in Christopher. "You can't go. You'll realise that when

you're yourself again. If you desert Lady Mendell now you'll condemn her to death, and I promise you I'll do all to save Miss Collingwood and her people that you could. Trust me and tell me where to go with my motor."

"You're right," said Sir Gordon, the blood slowly flowing back to his white face. "I can't play traitor. More than ever now I must stand by Lady Mendell. I see a way out of the tangle for her—don't ask me questions. You'll know what there is to know by to-morrow. To-day you'll do for me as much as one man could for another if you save the woman I'd give a dozen lives to save. Now, listen; they were going to Somerset to look at country places. Collingwood fancies that county, and likes old houses. He wants to buy one. Mrs. Collingwood showed me the orders to view she'd got from the agents; I remember the names of four houses. I think there were no more, though one or two may have slipped my memory. I'll have my clerk telegraph a warning to Collingwood at each place; but that's a forlorn hope without you and your motor." He called the clerk with side-whiskers, and scribbling four addresses on a leaf of his notebook, tore it out and gave it to the man, with instructions. Then he repeated the same process with Christopher, and had barely jotted down the last name when the judge coughed for the second time.

The cousins exchanged a look, and Christopher turned away. By the time he had reached the door and stopped for one backward glance Sir Gordon was on his feet, ready to speak. He was still pale, but all the old fire burned in his eyes. Christopher expected to hear the stereotyped words, "Gentlemen of the jury," but to his surprise and the amazement of the Court Sir Gordon began with a request to the judge. Evidence of vital importance had come to hand. He

begged the privilege of recalling two of the witnesses for the prosecution.

Christopher dared not linger; but, hurrying off on his quest of life and death, the question would spring into his mind: What evidence of vital importance in this case had he, all unwittingly, brought to Sir Gordon with the anonymous letter?

Through the City traffic forged Scarlet Runner, her bonnet pointing for the Marble Arch and the Bath road. All four houses whose names were written on the torn leaf from the notebook were within a radius of thirty miles from Bath, as Christopher knew from reference to the elaborate road maps always ready in the car. His plan of action was arranged; so much was clear; yet his heart was heavy as he drove on. It had been well enough to encourage Sir Gordon; but the young man choked with a sickly foreboding. He had started on his mission too late. What hope was there, really, that the girl or her father—a man professedly a collector of antiques—would not by this time have opened the case of the Nuremberg watch? If only he had gone straight back to his lodgings from Sir Gordon's house, what a difference it would have made! Horrid pictures rose between his eyes and the fair summer landscape. He saw the beautiful girl, charming in her pretty tailor-made jacket, with the Nuremberg watch lying in the pocket where she had so carelessly thrust it. A chance blow on the fat, globe-like case—he grew cold at the thought, and put it from him, only to see another picture rise: the girl handing the watch to her father, he opening it, while the faces of the young wife and daughter bent down in smiling curiosity. Horrible! Christopher dared not think, lest he should lose his nerve and the respect of Scarlet Runner.

esses

ff on  
pring  
ce in  
rdon

unner,  
d the  
ritten  
hin a  
knew  
always  
anged;  
as he  
ge Sir  
sickly  
o late.  
or her  
ques—  
of the  
straight  
e, what  
res rose  
e. He  
y tailor-  
in the  
chance  
at the  
another  
r father,  
wife and  
horrible!  
lose his



“CHRISTOPHER WAS OBLIGED TO ASK QUESTIONS IN THE VILLAGE.”



From the Marble Arch he steered straight for Bath and the West. Soon a clear course lay before him, and he took advantage of it to the utmost, travelling at a speed not greatly inferior to some of the best trains which would run westward to-day.

The first of the four houses on Sir Gordon's list was some miles on the London side of Bath, and Christopher found it after an inquiry or two—a stately Georgian mansion. His heart leaped when he learned that the Collingwoods had been there. Two hours ago, then, they had been alive and well. This raised his hopes, for, if the Nuremberg watch had been neglected thus far, it might lie safely, forgotten and untouched, in Miss Collingwood's pocket until evening; or it might even have been left behind in London. Having been informed by a caretaker that the "American gentleman thought the house was not big or cheerful enough," Christopher went on in better spirits. Mr. Collingwood's directions to his chauffeur had been overheard by the caretaker; there was no difficulty in taking up the chase as far as the next house visited by the blue motor. This was on the outskirts of a village; and while Christopher finished his inquiries there he sent his chauffeur flying off in Scarlet Runner to the post-office with a reassuring telegram for Sir Gordon Race.

At Greystoke Hall the Collingwoods had duly arrived, but had not even entered the doors, as the two ladies had pronounced the place "uninteresting," and "the gentleman had got into a temper." It was not known which direction they had taken afterwards, and Christopher was obliged to ask questions in the village. This delayed him a little; and after all he was put on the wrong scent, having to retrace his steps for several miles, to the cross-road where he had gone after a motor that was not the Collingwoods'. More

time than he liked to think of had been wasted before he had called at the two remaining houses on the list, only to find that the Americans had not been at either.

All Christopher's fears returned. He could get news of no accident on the way, yet it looked ominous that Mr. Collingwood had not carried out his programme. At the first two houses the telegrams from Sir Gordon's clerk had arrived after the departure of the motorists; at the last two they had not been claimed. Christopher was at a loss what to do for the best, for the one clue he had to the Collingwoods' movements was lost; yet there was no time to spend by the way in making inquiries here and there. When he had thought until his head ached, he decided to run into Bath, which now lay near, and call on the most prominent house-agent there—a firm which advertised largely in the illustrated papers. It occurred to him that, not feeling greatly attracted by the photographs of the remaining places (which were not, in fact, as picturesque as the first), Mr. Collingwood might, in a fit of impatience, have determined to seek further information in Bath.

Twilight was drawing on when he drew up before the door of Richardson and Millington, in Bath, and Christopher was thankful to find the office not yet closed. To his joy, his wisdom in coming was proved. The Collingwoods had called, between three and four o'clock, and had spent some time discussing particulars of various houses in the agents' books. In the end they had found one, the description and photograph of which had delighted all three. It was an Elizabethan house of some historic interest, called Atherton Manor, and there was a large estate attached; but Mr. Collingwood had remarked that this would be no objection if he liked the place. It was late to visit it that afternoon, as it lay twenty miles or more out of

Bath; but the American gentleman had seemed very energetic, and had insisted upon going. He had been interested to hear that the owners—the two heiresses of the estate—were still living at the Manor, which must be sold owing to the conditions of the father's will. Mr. Collingwood had heard of some valuable pictures and jewels, which were heirlooms in the Atherton family, for he had inquired if they were kept in the house; and, on being told they were still there, he had been anxious to set off at once with an order to view.

"Did the ladies object?" asked Christopher.

"Yes," replied the agent. "The younger one complained of fatigue, saying she wished to stop in Bath; and the elder lady thought it might be well to remain on account of the hour, and a storm coming up. But the gentleman wouldn't listen. It was the heirlooms had determined him; and though there was some talk about an antique watch which the young lady had forgotten to show her father being as well worth his attention as any of the Atherton things, he hardly listened, but hurried the ladies out of the office."

"Was nothing else said about the watch?" asked Christopher.

"Mr. Collingwood promised to have a look at it later. I think, from the little discussion, it was a question of some present from a person he didn't care for and was not interested in; but, of course, it was no affair of mine, and I paid no great attention."

Race waited for no more, but got out of the office as quickly as he could with decency, and dashed off in the direction he had been told to take. He had had nothing to eat since breakfast, but was too excited for hunger; and his chauffeur, though visibly sunk in gloom for the last few hours, made no complaint.

Christopher dared not stop to send another wire to

Sir Gordon, as he had thought of doing. The lurid pictures came and went again before his eyes. Talk of the Atherton heirlooms might at any moment bring up once more the subject of the Nuremberg watch. There was little doubt left that Nora Collingwood had brought it from London. Race could not understand why it had not already been examined by Mr. Collingwood, since it had been mentioned, and since he had a fad for all that was antique.

The approaching storm, which Mrs. Collingwood had pleaded as an excuse to stop in Bath, was about to burst. Purple clouds boiled up over the horizon, strange clouds, edged and veined with copper; and as Scarlet Runner rushed on, her lamps lit for the unnatural darkness, pale serpents of lightning writhed across the heavens. Soon came the first big drops of rain, heavy as nail-heads; next, a threatening mutter of thunder which broke in an explosion of rage at the end; and a cataract of water streamed down, as if the black sky were a coarse-meshed sieve. Rain splashed on the road and poured on the weather glass which protected the driver's seat of the car; then the fresh mud fountained up, covering the great clear pane with its brown spray, so that it was with difficulty Race could see to drive. He could no longer "scorch," though the road was free of traffic, but had to moderate his pace, the while he tingled with impatience and peered anxiously down cross-roads.

There was no one of whom he could ask the way, but he remembered that he had been told to wheel sharp to the right at a point where three poplars marked a turning; and suddenly he saw them loom black against the lightning, like three giant soldiers guarding a shield of steel.

Half a mile beyond were the stone gate-posts with their carved wolves rampant, for which the agent had

warned him to look. The gate was closed, and there were no lights in the low-built lodge, nor did anyone come at his call; so the car must be stopped and the gate, which was not locked, pushed open by the tired chauffeur.

Christopher took Scarlet Runner in, past the lodge, where there was still no sign of life, and up a slightly ascending avenue that turned and twisted under a tunnel-like arch of branches.

Still the avenue wound on, but half a mile, perhaps, beyond the stone gate-posts and the dark lodge a turn in the drive brought the tunnel of trees to an end. Through rain and darkness he spied at a distance, across wide lawns, a long, low house, whose irregular shape was cut, sharp and black, out of the sombre fabric of the sky. Christopher saw no lights, but intervening shrubberies might hide some windows of the lower floors; and the agent had said with certainty that people were living in the house. Race had slowed down, for the white glare of his lamps on pale mud and wet grass was bewildering; but he was proceeding gently when with a sudden bump Scarlet Runner's front tyres struck some tense yet curiously yielding obstacle. Surprised, Christopher stopped the car so abruptly that inadvertently he stopped the engine as well.

Instantly he jumped down to see what was amiss, and even the famishing chauffeur forgot his anguish in this new excitement.

The obstruction, whatever it might be, was mysteriously invisible, but in a moment Christopher had stumbled over a thick wire tightly stretched across the drive at a height of twelve or fifteen inches above the ground. Had Scarlet Runner been going at an ordinary pace, there would certainly have been an ugly accident.

As Christopher pitched forward, and righted himself hurriedly, the chauffeur cried out, and would have broken into excited questioning; but Race silenced him with a raised finger of warning.

"There's something very queer here," he said in a low voice. "Best make *no* noise for a bit, until we're sure of our ground. They can't have heard the car at the house—the wind and rain are too loud; and, as the drive seems to wind round to the other side, the principal rooms and entrance are probably there. Wait a bit and I'll reconnoitre."

The chauffeur kept his place, and Christopher took the electric torch from under the front seat. Armed with this he stepped over the wire, and discovered in the fresh mud clear traces of a motor-car's pneumatics. They passed beyond the obstacle and disappeared behind a curtain of darkness, making it evident that the wire had been stretched since the Collingwoods had gone by—either driving to the house or leaving it.

Christopher racked his brain for a solution of the mystery, which hovered and eluded him, like some dim figure in a dream, and he was half ashamed of the idea that came into his mind. It would be almost too strange that such a thing should happen precisely at this crisis of affairs; yet—there was an old proverb which affirmed that certain happenings were too strange not to be true; and Christopher had always found the world a queer world.

As he had thought, the drive wound round to the other side of the big, rambling house, but on foot he could take a short cut across the slope of the lawn and skirt to the south, thus reaching the entrance. Also, if there were more stretched wires, he might avoid them by finding his way across the grass. Telling the chauffeur to stand by Scarlet Runner, unless called, Christopher began to climb a slight eminence, the

wind and rain in his face, as his feet squashed through the soaked, spongy grass. Mounting to the top, he came into full sight of the house, above the shrubbery and some low-growing trees. At the extreme western end was a row of three lighted, diamond-paned windows on the ground floor. The room within was hidden by semi-transparent green curtains; but Christopher guessed that it was the dining-room, and that the family were still lingering at the dinner-table. Had the Athertons persuaded the Collingwoods to stay the night on account of the storm, and a little on account of the heirlooms—or had the blue motor-car sped away long ago, carrying the Nuremberg watch and deadly danger with it? In any case, despite the peril of delays, it was Christopher's humane duty to make sure if he were right or wrong in that queer idea concerning the wire; and even as he told himself this he came near to tumbling over another, barring a narrow path across the lawn. Then, recovering his balance, he saw in a window at the east end of the house a light suddenly flash up, disappear, and flash again. All the other windows in that wing were black, as this one had been a moment ago; for the bedrooms of the old-fashioned house doubtless depended upon candles for light, and remained in darkness when their occupants were absent.

This light, which cast its white beam up and down, shining out through thin white curtains, was neither the light of a candle nor a lamp. It was a strange, will-o'-the-wisp of a light, and seemed to confirm those odd ideas which had played shyly in Christopher Race's brain.

Instantly he extinguished his electric torch and, abandoning his quest of the front door, ran towards the window. The east wing was evidently a modern addition, for there were long French windows opening

to the ground. All were closed and curtained, but the curtains were of the thinnest muslin, and as Christopher noiselessly approached the lighted panes he suddenly saw, as in a vision, what was passing on the other side.

A man, with a small, wiry figure, and a half-mask of crape or some black material hiding the upper part of his face, was tiptoeing, catlike, about the room, guiding his movements by means of a dark lantern. He had evidently just satisfied himself that there were things worth having in the room, despite the risk of the thin curtains; and, having locked the door of an adjoining room, he placed on the floor by the dressing-table a partly-filled bag of plunder, already secured, before moving towards the door leading out to the corridor. Here he suffered a disappointment. Flashing his lantern up and down the oak, he found no bolt, no key in the lock. For a second he hesitated; but there was a litter of jewelled gold brushes and bottles and boxes on the dressing-table (such luxurious things as American heiresses can afford to carry about when they travel), and men of his profession must be accustomed to such risks, such disappointments, in old-fashioned, carelessly conducted houses. Having flashed a ray of light over the tempting display on the table, he advanced to the window and softly opened it, that his way of escape might be ready if needed.

"I'll let him gather up the spoil and then, as he comes out, I'll nab him and yell to my chauffeur," thought Christopher.

For a brief moment he had forgotten the Nuremberg watch, and all the conflicting interests entangled round it; but as the long beam of light once more lit up the dressing-table he had the best of reasons for remembering it again. There it lay, plainly visible, as the dark, moving arm advanced to push the crowding gold toilet things aside. The lean hand

grabbed it up, and as it withdrew into shadow the unlocked door suddenly opened. Framed in a square of dim light from the corridor stood Nora Collingwood, a flickering candle in her hand.

With a shriek of fear and surprise she started back, then, recovering herself, bravely rushed forward to save her treasures. Out went the light of the dark lantern, and with one spring the burglar made for the window, swooping swiftly as he went, to pick up the bag at his feet.

A thousand thoughts seemed to flash and light up Christopher's brain, like the bursting of fireworks.

The Nuremberg watch! The thief had it, in pocket or bag. If Christopher grappled with him, in the struggle they would both be killed, perhaps the girl too, for she was close to the window, at the man's heels, and there were voices and quick-running footsteps in the corridor outside the open door.

There was half a second to decide what to do, and then the lean figure had dashed through the window into Christopher's arms. In the shock of surprise the escaping thief recoiled, snatching out a revolver; and Christopher, seizing him with a bull-dog grip by coat-collar and leather belt, caught him off his feet and cast him away like a parcel. The revolver exploded in the air as the man fell; and as he touched earth there followed a terrific detonation. Instinct impelled Christopher to throw himself flat on his face, but he had no time to carry out his intention. The force of the explosion, even at a distance of twelve or fourteen feet, whirled him like a leaf against the house, throwing him backward into the open French window.

Broken glass rained about him; there were cries and waving lights, and faces bent above him as he lay dazed and only half conscious. One of the faces was Nora

Collingwood's—or he dreamed it—and dimly he heard himself murmuring, "It's all right—you're safe—Nuremberg watch—explosive—I followed—to warn—send word—Sir Gordon."

Christopher suffered no serious injuries, but the effects of the explosion and the heavy fall on the back of his head took a form resembling concussion of the brain. For twenty-four hours he was unable to speak coherently, and the family at Atherton Manor might have suspected him to be an accomplice of the dead burglar, had it not been for the somewhat confused evidence of his chauffeur, and the knowledge of the Collingwoods that he was a cousin of Sir Gordon Race.

They kept him that night and next day at the Manor. Meanwhile, no one in London (save the one man whom it most concerned) guessed that a provincial burglary sensation described in a newspaper paragraph had any bearing upon the Mendell trial. Neither did anyone guess that it had any interest for the great K.C. whose name, at the time when the paragraph appeared, was in everybody's mouth.

At an old country house, twenty miles or so from Bath, an enterprising burglar had contrived to enter while the family and their guests were at dinner. He had opened a concealed safe in the library, whose whereabouts was known to few, and secured several valuable heirlooms in the shape of jewels; he had gone into the picture gallery and cut from their frames two priceless portraits; and had then proceeded to ransack the bedrooms, meaning to escape through a window on the ground floor. If he had accomplices (as was suspected, since an old lodge-keeper was found bound and in an almost dying condition) they had got safely away; but a curious accident had cost the principal actor his life.

At this point in the newspaper narrative the explosion which had killed the burglar was described; but, as Christopher had not been able to clear up the mystery, the explanation was necessarily vague. "It was believed that an antique watch among the stolen articles had contained an extraordinary infernal machine, but nothing was yet known definitely; and all friends of the ladies at Atherton Manor would be glad to hear that a bag, containing their heirlooms, had been dropped by the thief at some distance from the spot where the explosion occurred."

Christopher's part in the drama was scarcely understood, and therefore the newspaper correspondent who wrote up the sensation in time for the morning papers thought best to refer to him but sketchily. The name of Christopher Race became, by a misprint, "Christopher Dace"; but even had he retained the "R," which made the difference between importance and insignificance, it would have mattered little to London that day. There was only one Race whose name was worth making, and it rang through England.

Yesterday the Mendell murder case had come to an end, but in a sensational and utterly unlooked-for way. Opinion as to its result had been divided. Some had considered the evidence against the beautiful Lady Mendell so overwhelming that she must be found guilty and sentenced to death. Others had argued that, as the evidence was purely circumstantial, Sir Gordon Race's speech to the jury would, at least, save her from the severest penalty.

But the end had been reached in a way which no one could have foreseen, not even those best acquainted with all the details of the affair. The Mendell case had simply ceased to exist in the form it had assumed before the world.

Sir Gordon had obtained permission to recall two



# MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



4.5

5.0

5.6

6.3

7.1

8.0

9.0

10



APPLIED IMAGE Inc

1653 East Main Street  
Rochester, New York 14609 USA  
(716) 482 - 0300 - Phone  
(716) 288 - 5989 - Fax

witnesses—Miss Mendell and her secretary. Miss Mendell, the half-sister of the murdered man, had been the principal witness against Lady Mendell. A middle-aged woman, who posed and occasionally lectured as a philanthropist, no suspicion had clung to her, despite some terrible cross-questioning early in the trial. She had lived in her half-brother's house before his marriage, and continued to do so afterwards; and though the whole of his fortune would come to her in case of Lady Mendell's decease, people had said that she was already rich enough not to need it. As for Miss Mendell's secretary, he was an interesting enough figure—a young man who had started life brilliantly as a clever chemist. Failing health had reduced him to extreme poverty. Miss Mendell had befriended him; had taken him as her chief assistant in philanthropic and other work. He owed everything to her, and it was not surprising that such evidence as he had given had been in praise of his benefactress, in dispraise of young Lady Mendell.

Nobody had expected a surprise from that quarter; but a few questions from Sir Gordon Race, put to Miss Mendell and her secretary, had altered the whole aspect of the case. All had seemed bewildering at first. What did it matter if young Hartley Norman, the secretary, had looked up for his employer some old cases where Sir Gordon had been counsel for the defence? What if there had been a Miss Poinsett concerned in one of those cases? What if Norman, in his days as a chemist, had been known for his experiments in the invention of explosives? What had that to do with the Mendell poisoning affair; and what if, among other valuable antiques, the murdered man had had in his collection an ancient Nuremberg watch? What if he had given it to his sister, or what if she had chosen to take it as a souvenir?

Soon, however, such questionings had ceased among the audience. Order had come out of chaos, and, though denying everything, Miss Mendell and Norman had been thrown into such pale and trembling confusion by the weapon of unexpected cross-questionings that it was as if they became their own and each other's accusers.

Miss Mendell had sought to destroy her sister-in-law's defender, lest the woman she hated should be saved, and the fortune she desired lost. The secretary had helped her, not knowing her true design, but, finding it out, had weakened. The one mistake in her calculations had been in trusting him too fully. Terrible admissions were wrung from the stricken man and woman—admissions bearing upon the past as well as the present. On the incident of the Nuremberg watch Sir Gordon Race, with almost diabolic ingenuity, made the poisoning case turn, and turn against Miss Mendell. After the cross-questioning of the pair by Lady Mendell's counsel, no jury on earth would have convicted the younger woman, unless the elder had first been made to stand her trial for her brother's murder, and been proved innocent.

Only one man in England could have accomplished this change, the world was saying, and perhaps a certain American millionaire decided that such a son-in-law might be almost as acceptable as a duke. At all events, the engagement of Sir Gordon Race to Miss Nora Collingwood, of New York, was announced before the trial of Miss Mendell for the crime which had so nearly engulfed the innocent. But Christopher Race was the first man allowed to offer his congratulations; and his idea for a wedding present caused him to search the curiosity shops for a Nuremberg watch of the early sixteenth century.

## CHAPTER VI: JUNE

### THE GLOVE AND THE RING

“ I ASK nothing of life—except death,” said the Marchese Baria.

“ The one thing life can't give,” answered Christopher Race.

They were sitting together at Florian's, in Venice, at one of the out-of-doors tables. They had met for the first time that evening at nine, when the place had been crowded, and they had been forced to sit down at a table together, if they would sit at all. Now it was two in the morning (for Florian's never closes), and they had talked ever since.

The Marchese Baria had talked more than Christopher, because every inch of Christopher Race was English, while the Marchese Baria was half Italian, and had lived in Italy for more than half his twenty-six years. He knew that his new friend was a gentleman chauffeur who had conducted a party of American ladies from London to Venice, where they had embarked in a friend's yacht, and left their guide to go home alone in his car—Scarlet Runner. But of him Christopher had been told far more. He had been sympathetic and genuinely interested—for Baria was an attractive young fellow, whose dark face might have served Giovanni Bellini as a model—and depths had been opened.

Christopher knew that Baria had loved a lady, the

most beautiful on earth—according to her lover; that they had been engaged; and that then he had lost some thousands of pounds, and had received an adverse opinion concerning his health from an eminent doctor. The lady admired strong men, and threw Baria over to take one whose lungs and whose bank account were both more satisfactory than his. She was now the wife of this person, who happened to be a Prince, and the Marchese Baria wished to forget her as soon as possible. The only way in which he felt himself able to do this was by death; and at present he was engaged in shortening the short lease of life given him by his doctor, by taking too much alcohol. He found this recipe disagreeable, as he disliked wine and spirits. But, unfortunately, he had promised his English mother on her deathbed that never, in any circumstances, would he follow the example set by one or two of his father's hot-blooded ancestors, and commit suicide. Noxious microbes had refused to infect him. He could not take typhoid fever, or any other disease warranted to carry off a delicate patient. But he had hopes of pneumonia. That was why he had chosen to sit out of doors on an unseasonably chill, cold, rainy night, clad in the lightest of garments.

"It is really very damp, and the mist gets into one's bones, doesn't it?" he asked cheerfully.

Christopher assented, so far as the Marchese's bones were concerned. He refrained from adding that, according to the newest theories, cold hurt nobody, and chilled nothing but intrusive microbes. Neither did he think it wise to remark that the atmosphere behind those closed and lighted windows would be ten times more deleterious to inhale than the salt-smelling dampness.

"All my people are dead, you see, except a few particularly healthy ones whom I dislike extremely," went on Baria. "So you see I've no one to live for;

I can do more for society by making a will than by existing. I suppose you couldn't by any chance be induced—er—to be charitable, and put an end to me?"

"Glad as I should be to give you pleasure," said Christopher, "I'm afraid I must draw the line at murder."

"Is it murder to annihilate a person whose one wish is to die?"

"I'm inclined to think the law would regard it so. But"—and Christopher spoke slowly, as if on mature deliberation—"I'll tell you what I can do. You say you're trying a course of freezing treatment to hurry up matters. Well, this is June, but it's more like October weather, and I can give you a long, strong dose of cold air in my motor. What about coming on with me until you pick up pneumonia, or, if not that, a violent attack of inflammation of the lungs or even pleurisy, as you may do if it doesn't soon stop raining?"

"You *are* a good fellow!" exclaimed Baria. "The moment we exchanged our first words, I felt you would be a friend."

"And I you," replied Christopher. "The pity is, our friendship's likely to be so short."

"Still, we shall be together till the end," said the Marchese. "I've never been in an automobile. My doctor—a dear old chap of the *ancien régime*—pronounced decidedly against it, in the days when I still wished to fight my weakness. Open air only when combined with warmth and sunshine, is his prescription; no draughts indoors; an even temperature, and that sort of thing. I've always followed his orders, as my one hope of regaining health and strength, until a few weeks ago—which seem years—when I began to turn all my energies to losing that to which, poor fool! I used to cling, I do think," he went on, in an eager

tone, "that an automobile trip ought to finish a miserable weakling like me."

"It's worth trying," assented Christopher. "Scarlet Runner and I are at your service for the experiment. I've got rid of my passengers; I've seen Venice. I must take the car home in time for another engagement, and I shall be delighted to have a companion."

"For as long as I last?" said Baria.

"For as long as you last," echoed Race.

They started next morning, the Marchese having wound up his more pressing affairs in case of a sudden end, and giving all necessary instructions to the servants who looked after his palace on the Grand Canal.

Their way led through southern country, where the days should have been summer days; but the weather was abnormal. There were cold winds and bursts of rain, which delighted the Marchese Baria. He would wear no overcoat, and insisted upon sitting in front beside Christopher. Each night he expected to be ill; but he had instead an enormous appetite, and slept as he had not slept since the marriage of his faithless lady. This annoyed and puzzled him, but he was somewhat comforted by Christopher's suggestion that the seeming improvement might be a mere flash of life before the end.

They drove through Padua and Verona to Milan, and on to Alessandria; so across the plain of Lombardy to Cuneo, all by easy stages; and when the sun shone on them again Baria no longer coughed, except when it occurred to him as the duty of a jilted lover.

Now Scarlet Runner was set to climb the mighty barrier of the Alps which shuts off Piedmont from the Mediterranean, and darkness had fallen for the third time since her start, when she had passed through the long tunnel of the Col di Tenda, and had begun to descend, past San Dalmazzo, into the valley of the Roya.

Solemn and mysterious even at midday, the rock-walled road was a hundred times more mysterious at night, and this was a night starless and moonless, save when a black cloud was torn by the wind to show a high, cold point or two of light.

Christopher would have stopped at Tenda while it was still dusk, for, great as was his faith in the healing power of fresh air, he knew it would be cold in that narrow pass among the mountains, perhaps dangerously cold for the patient he was secretly doctoring. But the Marchese wished to go on. He liked the thought of the rush by night through the wild valley, past curious hill villages and hamlets clinging to the rock. Far from being discouraged by the danger of side-slip on steep and twisting roads inch-deep in greasy mud, he was pleased with the idea of experiencing it. "If you were alone would you go on?" he asked. And when Race was forced to admit that he would, that settled the question. Baria threatened to have a high temperature if his friend stopped at Tenda.

Christopher had entered Italy with his late passengers by way of Mont Cenis, and the valley of the Roya was strange to him. He knew it only through study of maps and guide-books, but he had no fear of losing the way, and hoped to reach Mentone by midnight. There, though it was out of season, one or two hotels would be open.

Scarlet Runner's lamps and searchlight threw a blinding glare ahead as the car picked its way, round sharp curve after sharp curve of rock, down the slippery road. On one side rose always a wall of mountain; on the other was a precipice, in the trough of which roared the river Roya.

They had met no vehicle since passing the gloomy barracks far away up the Col, and no pedestrian since San Dalmazzo; nevertheless Christopher was prudent,

as all good motorists should be, and caused his siren to send out a melancholy wail of warning at each turn of the narrow road. There was no reason that anyone ahead should be surprised at sight of Scarlet Runner, yet suddenly, taking a quick curve, the car all but dashed into the leader of three horses drawing a market-cart.

Instantly Christopher put on the brake and stopped the motor, just in time to save disaster, but not in time to avoid frightening the horses. The leader, whose pale grey colour gleamed ghostlike in the fierce light of the acetylene lamps, reared back upon his fellows, swerved, and would have plunged over the precipice, dragging the other two horses and the great covered cart with him, had not Baria sprung out of the car and seized him by the rein.

It was admirably done, not the act of a world-weary invalid, but of alert youth, quick to think and do, because full of interest in life. There was just time for admiration and something of surprise to flash through Christopher's mind as he also jumped down and ran to help his friend with the horses.

Between the two they had the animals under control after a few wild seconds of struggling confusion; and as soon as the clamour of pawing and snorting ceased, Christopher began scolding in French the invisible driver of the cart.

"You deserve to be in the river," he shouted, "or in jail, for not lighting up! And on a road like this! What's the matter with you? Are you drunk or only asleep? Fellows like you would sleep while the last trump sounded."

Still no answer. Nothing moved in the darkness under the big white hood which arched over the cart.

"Drunk, of course," said Baria. "He's been across the frontier and taken his eggs to market; now he's on

his way home to Cuneo, trusting to his horses to find their way over the Col and through that awful tunnel. How like a peasant! They all do it in my country, forgetting that this is the day of automobiles."

"I'll stir the idiot up," said Christopher.

"Why bother?" sighed Baria, losing interest again, now that the excitement of danger was over. "Nothing ever hurts drunken men and fools."

Nevertheless Christopher persisted. He and Baria had carefully led the horses past the great silent, lighted shape of Scarlet Runner, so that the market-cart had the width of the road to itself, standing back to back with the motor-car. Now, as Baria held the head of the grey leader, who seemed anxious to get on, Christopher peered under the cover of the cart. For a moment he was silent; then he gave an exclamation.

"What's wrong?" asked the Marchese.

"I can't make out yet, but it's very queer," answered Christopher. "There's nobody to be seen in the cart. Yet something holds the reins. It's so dark I can't see what."

"The grey horse is restive, trembling all over, and lathered with sweat," said Baria. "If I weren't hanging on to his head, he'd be off."

"Hold on, and I'll fetch a lamp," said Christopher.

He hurried back to Scarlet Runner and got out the electric lantern with which he had discovered the stretched wire at Atherton Manor. Flashing its white ray into the dark tunnel under the canvas roof, it was as if he had swept a black curtain away from a strange and ominously-suggestive picture.

There was in it no human figure, yet it did not lack dramatic elements. Empty egg-boxes were piled and tumbled in confusion. On the broken heap lay a woman's cloak of blue cloth, torn from collar to hem;

and half-hidden under the folds of this garment—which had not been made to cover the shoulders of a carter's wife—a handsome though small travelling-bag of alligator skin gaped wide and empty as if it had been wrenched open in mad haste or fury. Among the boxes and scattered bunches of straw were tossed various articles of a woman's wardrobe: a silk blouse, handkerchiefs, a long fichu of rich lace. And on the back of the driver's seat a little grey, gauntleted glove held the reins, and was itself kept in place by a knife which pinned fast both the delicate kid and heavy leather.

The glove seemed so clearly to retain the shape of the fingers it had once protected that at first glance it was as if a woman's hand, cut from the arm, were nailed to the wood by that dagger-like knife, and a dark, smeared stain on the back of the glove added an ugly realism to the illusion.

"Is the carter dead?" called Baria.

"There is no carter," Race answered, and cried out to his friend at the horse's head the things which the lantern-light showed.

"It sounds like murder—the murder of a woman," answered the Marchese, "and no common peasant wench."

Christopher had climbed on the step of the cart, and was peering within. "It is blood on the glove," he said; "a light smear of it, dry or almost dry. Whatever has happened here must have happened an hour or more ago. And there's something in one of the fingers—something small and hard."

He was supporting himself with one hand, and had freed the other by setting the lantern on the straw-strewn seat. Now, with an effort, he wrenched out the knife which stabbed glove and reins and wood. The dainty bit of gauntleted grey suede was released.

"It's a ring!" he exclaimed. "A queer ring with a shield of red enamel and a raised black and gold crest on it." As he spoke he gathered the reins into his own control, and clambered on to the seat.

At once the horses knew that they were under guidance. The leader ceased to start and tremble, but stood still, as if relieved to find life resuming its normal routine. Baria let go the animal's head, and, as keenly alert with curiosity as if he had never lost interest in the things of this world, he ran to see what he had heard described.

"She was a gentlewoman—young and beautiful, perhaps," he said, staring at ring and glove. "What can the mystery be? Why was she in this cart—alone?"

"I doubt she was alone," said Christopher. "There's a knitted scarf of worsted under the seat, such as peasant men wear."

"The driver!" exclaimed Baria. "You think he killed her and stole what valuables she had—knowing they were worth his having?"

"It seems the most probable theory," said Christopher. "She—whoever she was—had engaged him to drive her. There must have been a strong motive for trusting him, if he were a stranger."

"But if he were not a stranger—and deceived her?"

"Ah, then—— Yet why the glove nailed to the seat?"

"Unless it were for a signal. Santa Maria! We must get to the bottom of this. Shall we go on in your car, as we were going, and trace the mystery, step by step, along the road by which this cart has come?"

"What! and let the cart go on alone?"

"No; that would not do. One of us might stop with it until the other could return with the motor,

having found out the truth—or, at worst, having given an alarm at the nearest gendarmerie."

"I think we'd better not separate," said Christopher. "We may be wrong in our theories. And we can't tell which way we should take. There are twenty or thirty tracks in the mud, made by just such market-carts as this, going towards France or returning into Italy. If there's any difference between this and others, it's too dark for us to tell. How can we be sure which one of many small branch roads between here and Ventimiglia is the road we ought to follow?"

"Have you no plan, then?" asked the Marchese impatiently. "We *must* do something."

"I've a thought—not a plan. Did you notice anything peculiar about the grey leader?"

"Only that he's an unusually good horse to draw a market-cart. He's got blood in him."

"That's what I meant. He's almost as mysterious as everything else about the cart, more like a riding-horse than a cart horse—somebody's favourite. Well, he'll lead the others—and the cart—back to where he came from—back to where that somebody is waiting for him. If we want to take the quickest and most likely way of getting to the root of this queer business, my idea is—let us go on with the cart, and see what happens."

"Good!" said the Marchese, thrilling at the thought of the danger, the mystery, ahead. His eyes sparkled in the lantern-light. He did not want to fade away now. Indeed, he had forgotten that he had ever wanted to fade away. "Good! But the car——"

"We'll tow her, lights out, behind the cart, so that she may make no noise. You shall sit in her to steer and put on the brake if necessary. I'll lie low in the cart, ready for anything with my revolver. I'd give that part to you, for I know you'd like it, but you're

not quite strong enough yet for a job where both our lives may depend on strength as well as quickness."

Baria saw that it was Race's intention to keep him screened and protected, in case of sudden assault, but he could not object. He could only regret, for a poignant instant, that he had so busily wasted instead of husbanding his strength. As for Christopher, he saw Baria's silent disappointment and was sorry.

"Keep these," he said, handing his friend the glove and the ring.

The Marchese brightened. He felt that, at the worst, he was in the heart of the mystery, and, slipping the ring on the least finger of his left hand, the glove in an inner pocket, he was as vividly conscious of their presence as if they had been warm from the touch of a beautiful wearer.

Christopher started the automobile once more, turned her, silenced the motor again, and with a piece of stout rope, which he always kept in case of need (the need of others, rather than his own, since Scarlet Runner was not used to accidents), he fastened the car behind the cart.

"We may be going into a den of thieves and assassins," said Baria, cheering up as he prepared to change places with Race.

"If so," said Christopher, trailing the ray of his lantern along the canvas cover of the cart, "it may not be long before we get there. Look! here's the name of the owner—or alleged owner—Ravelli; Valegio. Valegio's that village, you remember, whose lights we saw twinkling far above us about half an hour ago as we came down the pass. Some road branching off near here must lead to it. If it does, the grey horse will take it, and—perhaps Signor Ravelli will have a surprise."

Out went the light of the lantern. The lamps of

the car were already dark. Christopher, lying among the egg-boxes, the reins held loosely in his hand, his revolver ready, let the grey leader go at his own pace and in his own way. The car trailed behind noiselessly, invisible to anyone in front. Thus the horses, steady enough now, plodded up the pass down which Scarlet Runner had swept but a half-hour ago.

Soon, as Christopher had prophesied, the grey horse turned without hesitation at a rough branch road, leading steeply uphill. Far above hung the lights of high Valegio, like a thin crescent made of yellow stars. But the cart was still a long distance below the level of the mountain village when the grey horse abruptly took another turn. Confidently he walked through an open gateway, yawning black in a rough stone wall. And in the darkness Race was aware that a man had leaped up and out of some hiding-hole, to lead the horse, as the grey shape glimmered towards him.

There was not a word, scarce the rustle of a foot-fall, nor was there a light anywhere. But in the thick blue dusk Christopher had heard for an instant a man's breathing.

Every nerve and muscle in Race's body was tense now, though he lay still among the egg-boxes, his head on the blue cloak.

There was something curiously exciting to him in watching the dark shadow ahead, the figure of that silent man who, without asking a question or striking a light, took charge of the horse for whose coming he had waited.

Did he expect to find the cart empty? Would he fall back in amazement when no familiar face greeted him by and by? Certainly he must be astounded by the vision he would see, and to discover that there was an automobile in tow.

Suddenly there broke into the stillness of the night

one deep, baying note from the throat of a dog—a bloodhound, Race judged by the rich bell-tone, different from the bark of other dogs. Next moment there were scuffings, as if someone were holding the animal in check; and Christopher's heart began to pound against his side.

Soon the bulk of a house loomed a blacker mass against the blackness of the sky. The man who guided the grey horse swung him round a corner; a half-open door let a flood of yellow light flow out into a stone-paved courtyard; and huddled in the doorway Race could see several figures looking out—peering, listening. Then the horse stopped. Still Christopher lay without moving. He wanted to know, if possible, what these people expected to find.

The man who had guided the leader came towards the cart, asking a question as he approached, but he spoke neither in Italian nor French, nor any language which Christopher Race had ever heard before. When no answer followed he repeated the same words anxiously, then sprang forward to look into the cart.

What he saw was Christopher, sitting up—his revolver cocked and aimed—for now there seemed little hope of explanations, and it was necessary to be ready on the instant for reprisals.

The thing which any normal man would do on suddenly seeing a revolver aimed at his head at such close quarters is to start back mechanically; but this man was different. With a roar of rage he risked death and leaped at the stranger as a tiger leaps, and—Christopher did not fire.

Perhaps he would not have had time; yet it seemed to him in the half-second he had to think that there had been time if he had chosen to kill the other at sight in self-defence. But the man's desperate courage thrilled him. He could not have fired if he had been

certain that to shoot then and there was the one way of saving his life.

In an instant the courtyard was echoing with cries and footfalls. The door was flung wide open and three or four young men and a woman had thrown themselves, like living shadows, among the shadows of the stone-paved square. Baria, fearless and excited, had dashed out of the car and run forward at the sound of the first cry, waving a revolver. But he could not fire, for three tall men had torn Christopher Race out of the cart and wrenched his weapon away. The group struggled together, and Baria dared not fire lest he should kill the one he would save. Then, suddenly, someone seized his arms from behind and snatched his revolver, as he discharged it inadvertently in the air; and at the same moment a woman's voice shrieked in Italian: "An automobile—an automobile!"

Other voices, all voices of men, parleyed passionately together in that strange language of which Baria could understand no more than Christopher. It might, perhaps, be German, thought Baria, who knew only English and Italian, with enough French to read and travel, and the poorest smattering of German, remembered vaguely from his school days. Therefore he called up some words of that tongue, and strove to protest furiously, as he and Christopher were dragged towards the house, unarmed now and well-nigh helpless, in the grasp of four or five strong men.

No one understood or would seem to understand, and they were at the open door, surrounded and powerless, when some inner door opened, and for an instant a tall and magnificent old man, with long white hair falling on the collar of a curiously-fashioned brown coat, appeared on the threshold.

"Whatever happens, don't let *him* be seen!" cried one of the men quickly in Italian. At this the woman

ran ahead into the house, pushing the tall old man with her hands on his breast, then shutting the door he had opened, and bolting it.

Even in this moment of extreme peril, Christopher Race and the Marchese Baria, in the hands of their captors, were stabbed with curiosity because of the old man. He was beautiful, wonderful, with the face of a prophet. Who was he, that the young men of this strange house had cried with one accord, as if in fear, "Don't let *him* be seen?"

They were now all inside the lighted room, a big farm kitchen with whitewashed walls, and only one other door besides the door of exit. That door the woman had bolted, and at a word from one of the men she flew to lock the other.

Christopher and Baria saw themselves at the mercy of five young men, all tall and broad-shouldered beyond the common, and not one beyond the age of thirty. They were fair-haired, having the look of brothers, and their features were the hard, set features of the far North, their eyes grey and full of fire, but not the easily kindled fire of the South. Only the woman was of the South, if she might be judged by the soft brown oval of her young, frightened face and the dark velvet of the startled eyes, which seemed already to see the vision of a double murder. She stood before the door she had just locked, pale and trembling.

"Are you going to kill them?" she asked.

"We are going to execute them," answered the oldest of the five men, whose age could not have been much beyond thirty. "What else? They are spies, and worse." Then, having quieted the girl—his young wife, perhaps—in her native tongue, he had begun to speak again in his own language to his brothers, when Baria interrupted, in Italian.

"You had better make sure first that we are spies. My friend can speak only French and English. He is an Englishman, from London; I, half English, half Italian. His name is Christopher Race; I am Lorenzo Arnese, Marchese Baria, of Venice. We came here as avengers, not as spies. If you miss any friends of yours from the cart you had better question us. Then, if we see reason to think you as innocent as we are, we will answer. And meanwhile, if you doubt our identity, we have papers as well as an automobile to prove it."

His impudence was impressive. The men consulted together, asked a few questions, and got dramatic answers, with a description of the meeting of cart and car on the road, and what had been found under the canvas cover. As he finished Baria showed the glove and ring, and at sight of them the tide of angry suspicion turned against him and his friend again, until Christopher whipped out the knife which had held the reins fast.

"Tell them where we found it, and why we came here," he said to Baria, for, though he could understand, he could speak no more than enough Italian for servants, an inn, or a garage.

The men, still guarding their prisoners, but no longer wholly antagonistic, looked at the knife, touching it and examining the blade and handle with care.

"It is Russian," commented the eldest in a low voice to his comrades. Then he turned to Baria. "You may both show the papers you spoke of, to prove your identity," he said.

That one word "Russian," spoken in Italian, was a clue instantly seized by both Race and Baria. The language which they had not been able to comprehend was Russian. These men's features were Russian—

their high cheek-bones, their narrow grey eyes, and short noses.

"Why did you come to us?" the last speaker asked, in Italian; and Baria, prompted now and then by Christopher, explained with perfect frankness. "We wanted to know who had plotted the murder,—if murder has been done,—and we thought the quickest way to find out was to travel with the cart. But it seems that you suspect us, as we suspected you."

"If there has been murder, there is not one of us who would not die to avenge it," said the eldest of the young men.

"We should like to be with you in that," said Baria.

"But why, if it has nothing to do with you?"

"It has this to do with us—that we found the glove and the ring, and our blood grows hot against those who have injured a woman."

"If they have injured her, they shall pay for it," exclaimed another of the young men, in Italian. "They shall pay, sooner or later."

"Say to them that, with our motor, we might help them to pay sooner," cut in Christopher.

Baria said it. And the men's faces, fiercely set a few moments ago, softened to a friendliness that was almost guileless.

"You are brave men. We are sorry that we threatened you," he said to Baria. "Your friend understands Italian, though he does not talk it. We speak the language, for we are Italians by birth, every one of us except me, the eldest; but when we have private things to say, we use the tongue of our parents—Russian."

"Who is called Ravelli here, if you are of Russian parentage?" Baria inquired.

"We are known as the brothers Ravelli. Our

father married an Italian woman of that name when our mother died, soon after we came to Italy; and this place—now a farm, though it was once a château—was her property. My father took her name and became a farmer. We have followed in his footsteps; and I have married an Italian wife.”

“Ask them if they know French,” suggested Christopher.

They did, one and all, and began speaking it rapidly. Now Christopher could enter intelligently into the conversation, and presently they were conversing like friends. There was a secret, evidently, and that secret none of those who were in it intended to reveal to those who were not; but they admitted that one of themselves—the second brother of six—had gone to Ventimiglia ostensibly with a load of eggs to dispose of, but really upon a different errand. He had got rid of his eggs—that was proved by the emptiness of the boxes. Then he had picked up a passenger—a lady. She was the daughter of an old friend, to whom the family had been deeply indebted in years gone by—indebted, in fact, for their escape from Russia in a time of terrible danger. Nothing that the Ravellis could have done for that friend and for his daughter would have been too much; yet—she was gone, her belongings ransacked, her bloodstained glove pinned to the reins. The sole comfort was that, if she were dead, Loris Revelli must have died in trying to save her. He would not have failed to do his utmost, and—he too had disappeared.

As for the glove, nailed conspicuously to the seat, holding the reins in a kind of horrible mockery, it had been put there for a purpose, the young men said gloomily to each other. There were those who wished them to know that a certain plan had failed, and through whom it had failed.

"Let us go, then, and find them, and punish them before it is too late," said Christopher.

"And save the lady, if she be not dead," added Baria, who would a few weeks ago have had little thought for any woman, except the one woman in his small world. But now, suddenly, there was room for another. The torn cloak, the little lace handkerchief, and above all the grey glove with the ring in its finger, had waked all the sleeping romance and chivalry of the young man's nature.

It seemed that hours must have passed since Scarlet Runner and the driverless cart had so nearly come into collision; but it was not an hour yet, when the door of the kitchen was unbarred and three out of the five Ravellis accompanied their guests—late prisoners—to Christopher Race's motor-car. Two stayed behind, making no explanation; but they had looked at each other, glancing with meaning towards the other locked door, and they had exchanged a few hurried words with the young woman.

Though nothing had been said, Christopher and Baria both knew that those who remained were on guard, watching over a life that was more to them than their own. "Don't let *him* be seen!" they had exclaimed. That no harm might reach him, enough men to protect him were staying at the farm.

There had been a few moments when Christopher had hardly expected to smell the night air again, or to see the car that he loved. It was good now to sit on the driver's seat of Scarlet Runner, to hear the comforting thrum-thrum of her engine, to feel her steering-wheel under his hand, and to see her lights drinking up the darkness. It was life, after a cold dream of death.

The Ravellis had an idea where to go. "They" would be anxious to get away with "her," were she

living or dead, and the papers they must have found in the opened bag.

Perhaps, the young men thought, those concerned would be glad that she should be dead; and yet there were strong reasons why they might rather have her living; there were ways by which she could be made to answer questions. As they listened, Christopher and Baria (but more especially Baria) were consumed with curiosity, with longing to know the true inwardness of this adventure, which still kept all its mystery, if not its peril.

"She" was called Alexa — so much they soon learned, for the name was spoken over and over again by the brothers. Whoever she was—whatever her errand—her coming had had to be kept so secret that she was to have been hidden in a kind of cave under the empty egg-boxes, and her conductor had trusted to the familiarity of the *douaniers* with his cart and his frequent errands to let the waggon pass back across the frontier without a thorough examination.

"They" were to have been eluded. It was hoped that, owing to great precautions, Alexa would not have been traced to Ventimiglia. She had worn, at different stages of the journey, two or three disguises. Nevertheless she must have been tracked, and those who tracked her had been as secret as she. They had waited till she was hidden in the cart, with certain valuable papers she carried, and then, at a dark and lonely part of the road— But conjecture broke down at this point. More than once the brothers said: "At least Loris will have died for her." All their anxieties, their sick terrors, were for the woman; they had none for their lost brother. They knew, and seemed contented, that he was for ever gone from them.

"He would have been shot," Michael, the eldest,

said; "shot from behind some ambush as he drove, before he had time to suspect. Otherwise they could have done nothing with him. He was the strongest and biggest of us all; that is why we sent him. It might have roused suspicion if there had been two men in the cart, for always it is one who goes with the eggs. It was too much, even, that there was the best horse—Loris' own horse. We feared he might attract notice, but he was Loris' own horse—he has been trained. We knew he would come home, whatever happened, and I waited for him. I had been waiting for an hour."

So the brothers talked, speaking of Loris as if he were dead, and of Alexa as if, perhaps, it would be better to know that she were dead too. But there was no doubt in their minds that the way to take was to go straight and quickly to Ventimiglia.

"They would have been there, and they would have made arrangements to leave again with her; for somehow they would take her, even dead, to show to those who sent them, for proof," Michael said. "I think they would have attacked the cart as soon after Ventimiglia as the darkness and loneliness of the road would make it safe for them, that there need be no delay in getting back. And if they are to be found, it will be at Ventimiglia, or near. But if they are gone, then—then our revenge will have to fall later. Yet fall it will, if it costs every lira we have saved and every one of our lives."

"If your brother has been killed or wounded, it may be that he lies hidden somewhere by the roadside," said Christopher; "and if we search, going slowly——"

"It is of another we must think, not of our own," answered Michael. "And to find her it is necessary that we go fast, searching for nothing else, thinking of nothing else. As for my brother, his body will be found by some of us to-morrow in the Roya."

Who could the woman be who inspired such selfless devotion? The curiosity of the two who were not in the secret grew, and fed upon their own silence.

There was much discussion as to how the men they sought might be travelling, how they would account for the presence of an unwilling companion, provided she were alive and in a condition to protest. All the talk was in French now, and Christopher found a boyish satisfaction in taking part in it, in making shrewd suggestions.

The car rushed on towards Ventimiglia, obedient to the brothers' idea that Ventimiglia was the centre for the quest to begin.

It might be, it was agreed, that the kidnapers had been in a motor; or they, too, might have chosen a market-cart; or they might have driven in a closed carriage. Having succeeded in capturing the girl and the papers she was carrying, they could choose between concealing her for a time in some house which they might have hired, taking her secretly afterwards to a distance to dispose of her as seemed good, or travelling all simply by train, alleging that she was an invalid or a mad woman, according as her actions indicated.

"We don't wish to know your secrets, but tell us one thing," said Christopher. "Is this lady a person politically important, or merely of importance to private interests?"

"She is of great importance politically—not here, but in another country," answered Michael Ravelli.

"It would be worth a good deal of trouble, then, and a large expenditure of money to people in high position to get her back to—that country?" "Russia" was the word which came to Christopher's lips, but he pressed it back.

"Yes," Michael admitted. "Much money must have been spent already in tracking her with the most

skilled detectives at the disposal of her enemies, otherwise they would never have succeeded as they have in spite of all our precautions."

"You think, then, that they would have preferred to let her live?"

"I think they wished us for the time to believe her dead, a time long enough for them to go far away with her. But they would hope to gain much by questioning her, when they had her safely back again in that land where anything may be done in the name of the law."

"Then I don't believe they will risk travelling by train," said Christopher. "By motor for a short distance, perhaps, but not far. You see, they would be anxious to get her out of Italy and France before you could do anything to stop them. Knowing nothing of us and our car, they might calculate on a few hours before you could possibly follow. Doesn't it occur to you that a yacht would suit their purpose better than anything else?"

Michael half sprang up in his seat beside Christopher, who was driving. "A yacht!" he echoed. "You are right. They would have a yacht. It would be the one plan of all others. And there are men who would gladly lend their yachts for this scheme."

"The yacht would lie in Mentone harbour," said Christopher thoughtfully.

"It is as if you spoke on inspiration!" cried Michael.

"At least, it would do no harm and waste little time to run on there, except for the bother with the Customs; but I have a *passe-avant* and all necessary papers. And if we stop in Ventimiglia what shall we accomplish, after all? We don't know what to inquire for. Let's try the yacht theory first. If the kidnapers were in a motor we may have our work cut out in catching them."

"Heaven grant they were kept parleying long at the frontier," muttered Michael.

"And that we may not be," added Christopher, with whom the rescue was becoming a matter of deepest personal interest, as it was with Baria.

They paid small heed to the greasiness of the road now, or the sharp and dangerous turns, risking a smash, and thinking only of the end they had to gain.

"Has another motor passed lately?" asked Christopher, with a careless air, of the sleepy *douanier* at the French frontier, between Ventimiglia and Mentone.

"One got away not half an hour ago," was the answer.

The three young men in rough farmers' clothes and the two young men in smart motoring dress glanced quietly yet significantly at one another.

"Foreigners, weren't they?"

"They spoke French excellently—too well for Englishmen."

"Not too well for—Russians, perhaps?" (This time the word had been uttered; but the faces of the brothers did not change.)

"No, not too well, maybe, for Russians."

"How many talked with you—one man and a chauffeur?"

"Two men and a chauffeur."

"Was there no one else in the motor?"

"There was a lady asleep inside."

Christopher's eyes and Baria's met.

"Ah, yes, certainly—asleep. And the car. It was a large covered one, was it not?"

"Fairly large, with a roof, a glassed-in front, and glass windows."

"The gentlemen said nothing about their destination?"

"Nothing."

"You had seen them before when they passed over into Italy?"

"Yes. Two days ago."

"But they had not the lady with them then?"

"You are right, now I think of it, sir. The two gentlemen and their chauffeur were travelling alone when they crossed the frontier day before yesterday. They are friends of yours?"

"The lady is a friend. Good-night."

The courtesy was returned, and Scarlet Runner sped on towards Mentone, the heart of each man beating with excitement. They were sure now that they were on the right scent, and the quarry not far ahead.

"All three must be in the game," said Christopher; "the chauffeur with the rest. They wouldn't have dared hire a man and trust him to look on at the work they must have done. Probably they have bought the car, for future as well as present convenience, and if the yacht theory's right and the motor can be accommodated on board, the chances are they'll take it with them. That's what we have to hope for, since getting it on the yacht will cause delay. Not enough delay to have meant danger of being followed, except by an automobile, but enough to serve our turn."

Scarlet Runner flew into Mentone and made straight for the harbour. Out of season as it was, there were two yachts in port—one small one, and a fine, large craft which had got up steam and was ready to go out. At sight of her lights in the distance Christopher slowed down Scarlet Runner and stopped the engine. He was not anxious to advertise the presence of his car.

"What yacht is that?" he asked the harbour-master, whom he sought when he had left his automobile in

charge of the youngest of the Ravelli brothers. He and Baria had sauntered up alone, two of the Ravellis strolling not far behind. The four had the air of being out for a late walk after a hot day; and where would a breeze be found astir if not down by the port?

Christopher put his question as if in the curiosity of idleness, and the harbour-master, who was sleepy and would rather have been in bed than where he was, answered carelessly: "*Nadège*, belongs to a Russian Prince. Been here for a week."

Christopher did not inquire the name of her owner. It was enough for him that she was Russian, and that she was about to leave.

"What's she waiting for?" he seemed to reflect aloud.

"Been waiting for an automobile which she's to take on board," said the harbour-master. "It's come now, and they're going to ship it from a pontoon."

Christopher and Baria, politely touching their caps to the official, moved on to watch the progress of the work. Once the Ravellis happened to pass them as they lingered for a moment, and a dozen words were murmured. A few paces farther on the Ravellis turned and went back slowly towards the harbour-master, while the two motorists walked on, as if for a look at the yacht at close quarters.

She was berthed a little way from the quay, lying side by side with her smaller companion. The yachts were moored to the quay, but there was no communication with the shore save by boats. Into a broad-bowed fishing-smack some sailors were now preparing to lower the Russians' automobile and row her out to *Nadège*, where she must be slung up by means of the derrick on the floating pontoon.

The motor-car was drawn up near a crane close to the edge of the quay, and late though it was, a knot of three or four idle onlookers had collected to watch

the sailors. Christopher and Baria joined the group. A chauffeur stood by the bonnet, absorbed in the preparations to sling the automobile.

As the Russians did not dream that pursuers from the Roya Valley could possibly arrive before their departure, they were off guard for the moment, and there was nothing to prevent Christopher and Baria from going close to the car. They peered into the dark depths, while the two Ravellis engaged the weary harbour-master in conversation, lest he should chance to follow with his eyes the movements of his late questioners.

In the covered tonneau of the automobile, half sitting, half lying, they could make out the slender figure of a woman, who appeared to be sleeping. This, after the statement of the *douanier*, was what they had expected to see; and they had laid their plans accordingly, hoping against hope for just such a chance—just such a clear moment—as Fate offered them now.

Softly Baria opened the door of the car, and out came a strong whiff of chloroform, which was a relief to their fears—since it is not necessary to drug the dead. Reaching in, Christopher took the limp form in his strong arms, and in his joy would have forgotten the last whispered words of Michael Ravelli: "Remember to look for a bag or a bundle of papers," if the unconscious girl's feet had not dragged against a leather despatch-case on the floor. Baria snatched it out on the instant, and shut the door as noiselessly as he had opened it. Then each of the young men supported the girl, taking her between them; and the darkness of the night, intensified by the blaze of the car's lamps ahead, as well as the preoccupation of every other person concerned—or not concerned—favoured their quickly carried out manœuvre.

At any instant the chauffeur who had been left on guard might discover his loss, and raise an alarm among his fellow-conspirators. Their footsteps and the hammering of their hearts loud in their own ears, Christopher Race and the Marchese Baria walked as fast as they dared, supporting and hiding as well as they could the unconscious form which hung in their arms. As they neared the spot where the harbour-master had stood, the Ravellis joined them and helped conceal the presence of the girl. The door of Christopher's car stood open. They flung the despatch-box in, and Baria, with Michael Ravelli, got the limp form on to one of the seats while Christopher started the engine.

Scarcely had Scarlet Runner waked to life again and begun to throb impatiently, when the white glare of a searchlight tore away from her the decent cloak of night. There she stood revealed in all her richness of colour, no detail hidden, but the men were all on board, and Christopher's hand on the wheel. Scarlet Runner was off like a red arrow, and the searchlight did not immediately pursue her. It was sent out by the Russian automobile, flashing from one end of the quay to the other, for just as all preparations to sling were completed the chauffeur had seen that his car was empty.

Fortunately the Russians could not yet be sure that the vanishing motor held that which they desired. The girl might not have been as completely under the influence of the drug as they had supposed. She might latterly have feigned unconsciousness to throw them off their guard, and thus have contrived to escape unaided.

They would look for her on the quay, and would not be sure that the sudden disappearance of a strange automobile was not a coincidence. Inquiries would

give them certainty, and, though their car would doubtless be sent in hot pursuit of Scarlet Runner, some moments must first be wasted—moments priceless to the pursued as well as the pursuers.

Baria sat in the car with the girl's head upon his shoulder, while with his arm round her body he kept her steady as Scarlet Runner flew on. Michael Ravelli was outside with Christopher, but the two others were in the covered tonneau, anxiously engaged in breaking open the despatch-box. For the papers the brothers so eagerly sought Baria cared nothing, but for a man who hated life and women because one woman was false, he showed a singular interest in the delicate profile outlined like a pale cameo against the dark grey of his coat.

She was young and very beautiful—he could see as much as that. He could imagine a great deal more, and he knew that she had been brave—witness her strange journey, her cloak torn in a struggle, the ring in the glove wrenched from a resisting hand.

Scarlet Runner had swept like a tornado along the deserted road and reached the Italian frontier. The delay was short, since Christopher's papers were in order, yet it seemed an eternity to Baria, turning his head always to see if the Russian car with its wicked searchlight had rounded the last corner. He scarcely heard the exclamations of joy drawn from the Ravellis by the discovery that all they hoped to find was in the despatch-box. He thought only of the girl, and of a plan that perhaps would not have sprung, full-fledged, into his head had hers upon his shoulder been less beautiful, a curl which had escaped less golden.

As Scarlet Runner shot away past the Custom-house, and still no searchlight had flashed upon her from behind, Baria spoke to the Ravellis.

“They—whoever they are—will know where to

look for this lady, no doubt," he said softly, as if fearing to disturb her.

"Yes. They will know. When they don't find her near the quay, hiding, or anywhere in Mentone, they will be sure then that we took her—somehow," answered Sergius Ravelli.

"And they will come to your place to look for her?"

"It will go hard with us before they find her."

"But if they are distinguished and powerful persons they could get the help of their Consul, and say you'd kidnapped a young countrywoman of theirs. You could be forced to give her up. I've been thinking that she oughtn't to stay at your farm—not even for an hour. She—and if there's anyone she loves, that one also—ought to go on somewhere else."

"There is one she loves. You have done so much for us all to-night—you and your friend—that I'll tell you we are hiding her father. But where else could they go?"

"A plan which has been growing in my mind is this. My friend and I could take them both, father and daughter, back to my palazzo in Venice. I am well known there, and my people have always had influence, at Milan and Padua, too, in case we were caught before reaching Venice. She might, if she would, and if her father would permit in such a cause, pass as my *fiancée*. What Russian could touch either of the two, if the lady were known as the future bride of the Marchese Baria?"

"The plan is good, and you are good," said Sergius Ravelli. "But it is right you should know who you are offering to protect. They are Prince Alexander Murgieneff and his daughter Alexa."

"That noble man is the 'm. itant Tolstoi'!" cried Baria. "But I thought he was in Siberia."

"All the world thinks so. And Russia does not contradict the world. But he escaped, after incredible difficulties and hardships. It was arranged by his friends that he should come to us, if he could. We are his relatives, though distant, and have always corresponded with him. The book which he was writing when he was arrested would have been confiscated, but his daughter contrived to hide it, and papers, in cipher, which would compromise many persons in high places, yet which must, for the good cause of liberty, be preserved. The daughter, being so young, and still at school when her father was sent to Siberia, was not suspected until after his escape, when she disappeared. Twice she was all but taken, yet we hoped the last plan would succeed, it had been made so well and so secretly. But we were mistaken. She was tracked. If they could have kept her, they would have had her father between their fingers. He might have died of the shock at seeing her glove bloodstained and pinned with a knife to the reins of the cart. They would have been glad of that, for dead he would cease to trouble the enemies of freedom. If he had not died they would by and by, when it suited them, have let him know that Alexa was in their hands; that they would torture her, if he did not go back to Russia; and he would have gone back, old and weak as he is. Now, knowing who they are, do you still wish to befriend them?"

"More than ever," Baria answered. "Prince Alexander Murgieneff is no anarchist, but a prophet—a friend of peace as he is of liberty, and some day his country will learn to value him."

"It values him now—as a prisoner," said Ravelli. "There is no one more important, for he has connections of the highest. We can do nothing to show you our gratitude, for, as we told you, our father fled

in time of trouble from persecution, and we are poor farmers in our adopted country. Yet you will have our blessings for ever, if you can save this lady and her father."

"I would do it even without the blessings" replied the Marchese.

They reached the farm without accident or sign of pursuit, and this time Christopher and Baria entered the house as trusted friends. By the ministrations of Michael Ravelli's young wife the girl was revived, and she and her father were told of the plan that had been hastily made for them.

The old man did not hesitate, but decided for himself and his daughter, while she was still unable to decide for herself. They would go to Venice with the Marchese Baria in the car of his English friend. And, if necessary, Alexa should pass as the *fiancée* of the Marchese. But it seemed improbable that the car could be traced by the enemy farther than Milan, where there were many motors going in different directions. And the Russian pursuers could not possibly know the name of the Marchese Baria in connection with the rescue at the Ravelli farm.

Instead of sleeping quietly at Mentone or Monte Carlo, as they had expected to do, the two young men spent the night on the driver's seat of Scarlet Runner, while the father and daughter sat together inside.

Never stopping, they drove back over the Col di Tenda, and on through the dark hours and into the morning. At a farmhouse they stopped for food, and water for the car; then on to Milan, where they rested in comparative safety. But the rest was only for a few hours, and, by hard going, the next night they reached Venice.

By that time both young men would gladly have

given their lives for the old Russian and his brave, beautiful daughter. Christopher risked being late for Scarlet Runner's English engagement by waiting to see the refugees installed in the Palazzo Baria, while Baria himself found quarters with a neighbour-cousin. There was no news yet of pursuit; therefore, when all was settled peacefully, Christopher had no longer an excuse for lingering. He left after three days, but they were epoch-making days, and he was not surprised to receive a long telegram when he had arrived at Southampton and unshipped his faithful car:—

"Best of friends, I cannot wait to tell you that I am really engaged to her. She is adorable. There is no other woman. There never was, except in my sick imagination. You saved my life, you gave me health and love, and love gives me love of life. We shall be married as soon as possible. She loves me. I am perfectly happy, and hope not to die until I am a hundred and she ninety-one.—Yours until then,  
BARIA."

Christopher sent as a wedding present a little model of Scarlet Runner, done in red enamel and gold.

## CHAPTER VII: JULY

### THE MYSTERIOUS MOTOR-CAR

THE tide was coming in, and the five-mile stretch of beach was hard and glistening. Christopher could hardly have chosen a better place for a speed trial, to test the success of a new invention, nor a better time than the earliest hint of dawn. There had been a storm yesterday, and the green rollers boomed upon the sand as they curled over and flung their white foam towards the wheels of Scarlet Runner; but with the birth of day the wind had died. The car purred rhythmically, and Christopher hummed happily as he drove.

He was excited, for an experiment which had absorbed two weeks of his time, and many coins of his hard-earned money, was proving a success. So excited and self-absorbed was he that, when Scarlet Runner had devoured four sandy miles out of the delicious five-mile course, only annoyance, unmixed with curiosity, was aroused in his breast at sight of a knot of men standing at a distance, knee-deep in the sea. If they were fishermen, their present occupation had apparently nothing to do with their calling. Dimly defined as were the closely grouped figures in the tremulous light of dawn, it was plain that, if he were excited, these men were still more excited. In other circumstances it would also have occurred to him that something unusual must have

assembled them at such a spot at such an hour. But Christopher Race had put himself to the trouble of coming from London to a remote part of the East Coast, on purpose to have this run by dawn on this particular stretch of sand. He had felt certain that not only need he not fear police traps if he exceeded the legal limit in driving (and had he not made the journey expressly to exceed the legal limit?), but that there would be not a single soul to see and report Scarlet Runner's law-breaking feats. Yet here, at half-past four in the morning, on this desolate beach, he was on the point of coming plump upon half a dozen men, who might almost have been waiting to catch him.

For once his imagination failed. For a moment he saw nothing suggestive in the grouping of half a dozen eager men round some object, half engulfed in water, which they were striving to drag out. But, in fact, Christopher had some excuse for his temporary self-absorption.

His latest client (the one he had hurried home from Italy to join) had finished a wedding trip *en automobile*, whereupon Race had returned to London and been thrown into the society of a fellow-enthusiast for motors—a young engineer who had designed a new invention. It was a very clever invention, for at a stroke it revolutionised all existing systems of transmission, and did away with gear-box, pinions, and clutch. The engine worked a pump, whose business was to compress oil and force it under high pressure to two turbines on the back axle. These turbines turned the wheels, "and there you are," as the inventor explained, exulting over his model. The system was capable of infinite gradations of speed, by guiding this stream of oil towards the centre or towards the periphery of the turbines. Owing to

the beneficent nature of the transmitting force, the mechanism was smooth and silent as the motor of a dream; and a great proportion of the engine power was able to act directly on the wheels.

The idea had instantly caught Race's fancy. He loved his car as most men love their sweethearts, and could not bear to let Scarlet Runner lack anything which might bring her to perfection. Her transmission gear was already of the newest pattern, with direct drive on the top speed; still, Christopher had to admit to the inventor that much engine power was lost in getting to the wheels; and in the hour he decided upon adopting the proposed plan. Scarlet Runner, thus regenerated, had come out of a London workshop only two days ago, her owner proud that she should be the first car in England to inaugurate a new era in automobilism. Such tests as could be had in London streets had been triumphant; and now here was Christopher with his scarlet darling, heart and engine both beating in the hope of a long, satisfactory trial, with the sea and the rising sun as sole witnesses.

Within thirty yards of the group in the water Race slackened speed, and would have turned, sacrificing the last mile of the five, had not one of the men seen him and begun to shout and beckon. At the same moment several others broke away from the group to hurry across the sand towards the approaching motor; and Christopher saw, to his extreme surprise, that the thing they had surrounded was a half-submerged automobile.

In a second all desire to depart was burnt up by a fire of curiosity. Instead of retreating he drove nearer; so near that, faint as was still the light, he could see the make and colour of the drowning car.

She was, to the eye of an expert in such matters

unmistakably a Hansard, of a pattern now superseded. Of fifteen to twenty horse-power, perhaps, she had an old-fashioned back-entrance tonneau; but she had doubtless been a fine car in her day, her motor might be as good as ever, and apparently she was still valued by someone, since her dark blue paint was fresh, and the leather cushions, of a colour to match, quite new—facts emphasised rather than concealed by her soaked condition.

Here was a mystery which made a special appeal to the heart of a motorist.

"Halloa! What's happened here?" exclaimed Christopher to the man who met Scarlet Runner. "This looks a queer business."

"That it does, sir," answered a brown old fisherman. "And as to what's happened, we don't know no more than you, or a babe unborn for the matter of that. But something's happened, and, as you say, something queer."

"Perhaps the gentleman himself can give us information," remarked a young fellow, also a fisherman. "He's a motorist. And why is he on this beach at a time o' day when mostly there's no one except of our trade about, unless he expected to find——"

"He expected to find a clear course with nobody on it," broke in Christopher. "Better send for the police before trying any amateur detective work."

"We have sent for the police from Tilton-on-Sea, sir," said the elder man. "My boy and I were the first to catch sight of this 'ere, and we got together some mates to help drag her out of the water before the tide gets up. But she's stood where she is so long, her wheels have sunk into the sand, and we can't move her."

"I'll help with that work, if some of you will hitch a rope round her front axle," Christopher volunteered.

"My car can tow her. But here comes a policeman now."

A blue-clad man, hastily dressed at a summons, was approaching, guided by a boy. He stared gravely at the automobile, murmured that it looked like murder or suicide, and began scribbling notes in a book produced from his pocket, while the derelict was being rescued. A young fisherman volunteered to get a rope round the car, and soon succeeded, though it was a battle with the waves. The rope was fixed to Scarlet Runner, the fishermen hauled on it, and, Race driving his motor up the beach, the drowned automobile crawled dripping out of the sea.

Day had now fully dawned, and the little group of men, wet to their waists, gathered again round the blue Hansard, staring and surmising. The constable took down the names of all those present, heard what they had to say, and warned them that they would be called upon as witnesses, in case the sea should cast up a dead body and make an inquest necessary.

Evidently the man read other than local papers, for he glanced up with interest when Christopher Race gave his name and address, no doubt associating him with the Dalvanian affair, which had made the young motorist something of a celebrity; and afterwards he consulted Mr. Race, with respect for his opinions.

At his request Christopher made a careful examination of the derelict, and announced with certainty that it was a Hansard, of a date about four years old, but elaborately altered and modernised. He peered into the gear-box, saw that the pinions were clean and new, and said that the motor had apparently not run many miles since being repaired. Another point to which he drew the attention of the constable was that the number of the motor had been carefully chiselled off, and that the number-plate of the car itself was

missing. This showed that its abandonment had been an act of deliberation, and the plate must have been lately removed, as an automobile lacking such a mark could hardly have passed through the streets of the smallest village without attracting attention.

The idea of the fishermen was that the person—murderer or suicide—who brought the Hansard to this lonely part of the beach must have driven it here after dark, and just as the water was beginning to rise for the last tide. He might then have hoped that it would soon be engulfed, and that, even if the waves were not strong enough to bear the car out to sea, causing it to vanish for ever, they would at least carry off a body or any other incriminating contents, to say nothing of washing away tell-tale stains.

Christopher had made a night run, as Scarlet Runner was now fitted with a fine searchlight which could turn darkness into day, therefore he had no abiding-place in the neighbourhood. Nevertheless he had the curiosity to remain for an hour or two at Tilton-on-Sea, after towing the Hansard there, in the hope of some elucidation of the mystery. But no unknown motorist had stayed at the hotel there, or at any other near by to which inquiries were sent. No such car as the rescued Hansard had been noticed by anyone; and at last, little wiser than when he had first seen the squat shape rising from a welter of surf, Race drove off to London.

Leaving Scarlet Runner in her garage, he went to his club and picked up the last edition of his favourite paper.

His eyes ran down column after column of the pages on which such news might be displayed, and finally caught at a paragraph headed "Mystery of a Motor-Car."

"Here we are!" Christopher muttered, beginning to

read with interest. But, to his disappointment, the paragraph had nothing to do with the affair at Tilton-on-Sea.

"Yesterday morning," he read, "an empty motor-car was discovered on the Oxford Road. A party of labourers going to work saw a new-looking, blue-painted car of moderate size standing by the roadside, with no one in it. They lingered for some time, expecting the owner to arrive, but when no one came they ransacked the woods in the neighbourhood, suspecting foul play. The search proving vain, however, the labourers gave information to the police of Needleham, the nearest town, and a horse was sent out to tow the automobile to the police-station. There it was recognised during the morning as the property of a gentleman who had arrived at an hotel the evening before, unaccompanied by a chauffeur. This gentleman had already left town, but as he had gone by rail he was traced to Oxford, about ten miles distant. Interviewed there on the subject of the lost car he changed colour, and appeared at first somewhat agitated at learning where it had been found. But he expressed himself delighted to hear of its recovery, offered a reward to the men who had given the information, and returned by the next train to Needleham, where he once more took charge of his property. The gentleman's name as it appeared in the visitors' book of the Bell and Bush Hotel of Needleham was John Smith, London. He refused to lodge a complaint against any person for the theft of his motor, though he did not deny in so many words that he knew who had taken it. He was not, he said, altogether surprised that it should have disappeared, but further than this he declined to be interviewed. Mr. Smith and his car left Needleham immediately; but its stranding in the woods remains a mystery which has aroused considerable local interest."

"A new-looking, blue-painted car of moderate size," Christopher repeated to himself. This was a queer coincidence, to say the least. Evidently there had been no expert on hand, or the motor would have been described in detail; but a "new-looking, blue-painted car of moderate size" might easily be the description, given hastily by an amateur, of the automobile found in the waves at Tilton-on-Sea. As far as time was concerned, there was no reason why a motor should not have been rapidly driven from Needleham to Tilton-on-Sea between noon and night. Yet, if the blue cars were one and the same it made the mystery all the more impenetrable. Christopher Race was inclined to dwell on the idea of a murder, connected in some sinister way with the blue motor-car; and he was not the only one to deduce this theory from the facts at Tilton-on-Sea and the coincidence of the less serious affair at Needleham.

In the London papers next day were paragraphs concerning the finding of an automobile on the East Coast in curiously suspicious circumstances, and several journals cited the occurrence at Needleham as a queer coincidence. The *Daily Recorder*, a half-penny paper of great prominence and popularity, seized with eagerness a choice morsel which might be worked into a sensation for the approaching "silly season." It called upon Mr. John Smith to stand forth from among other John Smiths and explain his half of the mystery; for, unfortunately, the occurrence at Needleham had at the time been deemed of comparative unimportance, and Mr. John Smith, of London, had been allowed to depart in peace and his recovered motor-car.

It was while Christopher was reading the column, under a somewhat sensational heading, which the *Daily Recorder* gave to the mystery of Tilton-on-Sea,

that the maid who brought his breakfast brought with it a visiting-card. The name was an unfamiliar one, but the magic words, "*Daily Recorder*," were printed beneath, as a kind of "Open Sesame" to closed doors.

Christopher had no desire to close his to the caller. It was easy to understand how the newspaper people had found him out, since he had left his address at Tilton-on-Sea, and his name appeared in the paragraphs concerning the affair. But he could not understand why it was worth while for a representative of the *Daily Recorder* to call upon him, since he had already told all he knew of the circumstances.

"Tell the gentleman to come up," said he to the little servant who had brought him so many queer messages and visitors of late.

In another moment a spruce-looking young man appeared—not an ordinary reporter, it seemed, but a representative deputed to ask Mr. Race's help in solving the mystery of the blue motor-car. The matter was to be "taken up" by the journal, and a reward was to be offered for information. Mr. Race's name had been popular with the public since he was instrumental in placing the young King and Queen of Dalvania on their disputed throne. Besides, he was known in the motor world, and altogether, if he would lend himself to the scheme, it would be considered an advantage to the paper.

Christopher reflected, and soon reached a practical conclusion. He had no engagement for *Scarlet Runner*, having been obliged to sacrifice one or two on the altar of the new improvements. The *Daily Recorder* offered remuneration at the rate of ten pounds a day for his services; and the enormous advertisement which that journal could give would be of use to him and *Scarlet Runner*. Some months remained of his probation with his uncle, and it was

impossible to predict what the old man would decide to do with his money. Meanwhile, it behoved Christopher to take every chance of advancement that he could take honourably, for the sake of the future, which still loomed vague.

He agreed to the proposal, and promised to begin investigations at once, the *Daily Recorder* giving him *carte blanche* as to his proceedings, and asking only for a telegraphic report of progress each evening, in time to go to press with his news—or lack of news.

The first thing that Christopher did was to proceed in Scarlet Runner to Needleham, a pretty little town which had just outgrown villagehood. At the best hotel he obtained a description of Mr. John Smith, of London, and was favoured by a glimpse of a signature in the visitors' book. Mr. Smith was apparently a gentleman, well dressed, so far as the landlord and the servants of the inn had noticed. He was tall, rather fair, but sunburned, and wore a beard, cut like that of a naval officer; indeed, now one came to recall him, he had somewhat the air of a sailor. He might have been anywhere between the ages of thirty and thirty-five. No further information concerning Mr. Smith could be obtained.

Christopher had run down from London to Needleham in Scarlet Runner, whose picture, with him on the driver's seat, was to appear next day and each day till the public tired of it at the head of his particular column in the *Daily Recorder*. From Needleham he went to Oxford (whither Mr. Smith had journeyed by train), and sought the hotel where the missing man had been found. There he had given no name, but had been traced by the police of Needleham, through a cabman. Mr. Smith had been interrupted while lunching; and as he had not asked for a room, it was supposed he had not intended to spend a night. At

Oxford he was described as a fine-looking man of thirty-two or three, with the air of a yachtsman or naval captain; but it was admitted that this impression might have been increased by the cap he wore. It would have been as suitable on a motoring tour, however, as on a yacht.

So far, Christopher had not accomplished much, and his pride was at stake. He determined to travel from Needleham to Tilton-on-Sea by short stages, making researches here and there. Starting at the time he calculated Mr. Smith must have started, he paused to put questions at towns where a motorist might have stopped for repairs and to buy oil and petrol. He could learn nothing of the blue motor or its driver, however, until at about six o'clock in the evening he reached Helmsford.

There were two garages in the place, but neither had lately sheltered a motor-car of the description given. On visiting one of the old-fashioned inns, however, Race discovered that a gentleman had arrived in a motor-car about nine o'clock two nights before, and had demanded dinner. Each detail of the car, so far as it could be remembered, agreed with those furnished by Christopher. It had stood in the street unattended while the owner had hurriedly dined, and a number of people had noticed it. But—one link in the chain was missing. The motorist, a tall man of a fine presence, was clean shaven, white-faced, and had greyish hair. So pale was he, indeed, that the waitress who attended him had remarked on it to a fellow-servant, and she had thought his eyes looked dark and wild, in contrast to almost colourless brows and lashes. Instead of the heavy motor-coat Mr. Smith had been described as wearing, the man with the white eyelashes was lightly clad. As for his head covering, it was a checked travelling cap, such as cheap

tourists and bicyclists affect. He had been in a hurry, and when his dinner was not ready as soon as promised he had shown signs of restlessness. Champagne was the drink he had ordered with his dinner, and he had drunk and eaten fast. Then, rather than wait for change, he had gone hurriedly off, saying that those who had served him might "keep the rest for a tip."

All this was interesting news for Christopher, since the description of the car given by a stable-boy was so accurate that he could not doubt the identity of the automobile with the one of his quest. Either John Smith had between Needleham and Helmsford made a hasty attempt at disguising himself, or else the man who arrived at Helmsford in the blue car was not the bearded, "sailor-like" fellow who had left Needleham as its driver.

The *Daily Recorder*, which next day printed Christopher's telegram, with sensational elaborations, inclined more and more to the theory of murder. John Smith, who had arrived in Needleham originally with the blue car, had an enemy whom he feared, and to whom, for some reason, he had found himself compelled to give up his motor. This would explain his agitation, mingled with pleasure, on hearing that it had come back to him, his generosity in bestowing a reward, and his haste to get out of the neighbourhood with his property. There seemed to be no question that he had started on the road which led towards Helmsford; but that village was a far cry from Needleham, in Oxfordshire, and many things might have befallen the driver on the way. Therefore, the question was, what *had* befallen him? And as there was yet no proof of a crime, it was the *Daily Recorder*, not Scotland Yard, which set itself to answer.

Between Helmsford and Tilton-on-Sea, Christopher could learn nothing. The journey had been made by

the blue car after dark, and nobody could be found who had seen it, even though Christopher refrained from continuing his own journey till daylight, for fear of missing the trail.

At last he arrived once more at Tilton-on-Sea, three days after leaving it. The Hansard was still in charge of the police at the little seaside town, which was now stirred to its depths by the sensational surmises of the London Press. Christopher went to pay the car a visit, and in looking it over carefully, lest some detail might have escaped his attention, an idea suddenly occurred to him.

As he had stated at first, carelessly, the automobile had been newly painted. Now he asked himself if the change of paint were not in itself an attempt at a disguise calculated to entangle the meshes of mystery in a way still more complicated.

He scraped off a bit of the brightly-varnished paint on the back of the seat and brought to light a patch of colour red as blood.

No other tint could have been more conspicuous than this crimson which had been lately covered with blue. It was of a shade even more noticeable than that of Scarlet Runner; and this discovery gave Christopher food for thought. A man might have his car repainted for reasons other than because it had become shabby.

Daily, hourly, the inhabitants of Tilton-on-Sea had been expecting, if not hoping, that the waves might give up a dreadful secret. The fishermen of the neighbourhood dropped their nets on the chance of a catch more gruesome than any they had ever made; for the two hundred pound prize offered by the great London halfpenny daily was alluring.

Christopher remained all day at Tilton-on-Sea, having gathered no exciting new material for his

evening telegram to the paper; but as the soft opal twilight of September fell, he went out once more on the sands for a spin with Scarlet Runner. He had little hope of making any discovery, but his work during the day had been nervous work, and at worst a run over the old ground to the scene of the mystery could do no harm.

This way must the blue motor-car have come, since a great arch of rock closed in the beach at the end of the splendid five-mile stretch. Other rocks there were, too, strangely formed, grotesque, striding out across the sand here and there, though leaving room for a roadway on the safe side of the highest tides; and this evening, as Christopher drove Scarlet Runner smoothly, thoughtfully, along the level sands, the sun's last rays reddened a great block of stone called the Turk's Head.

The rock had, indeed, a vague resemblance to the head of a giant wrapped in a turban, neck and shoulders rising above the beach. The enormous face appeared to be ever staring out to sea, the half-shaped eyes wide open; the great slit which was the mouth parted in a grin as fierce as it was grotesque, when seen by a person of imaginative mind.

Christopher had always been fascinated by these rocks, the Turk's Head especially, but to his mind it bore a likeness to the Sphinx.

"Oh, Sphinx, would that you'd tell me the secret of this beach!" he said, as he slowed down his car within sight of the gigantic bust. Then, looking up, it seemed to him that the shape of the mouth had changed. It looked less wide than usual.

"There's something inside it," he exclaimed, half aloud, and stopped Scarlet Runner.

The Turk's mouth was as large as a good-sized fireplace though of a different shape; therefore it was

big enough to be used as a place of concealment; and legend said that it had been thus used in ancient days of smuggling.

The dark hole could be reached by a scramble, and not a difficult scramble for a man who had ever done any mountain climbing. Christopher had had a summer or two in the High Alps, and for several winters he had gone to Cumberland. To reach the Turk's mouth and look in would be child's play to him; and, he reminded himself, would also be child's play to a man of the sea.

He silenced the motor, jumped out of the car, and—glad that for the moment he had this part of the beach to himself, though he could see figures afar off—began to climb up the Turk's shoulder. There was handhold on the rough, protruding chin, then kneehold; then handhold above, on the huge flat cheek; which reached, gave good foothold on the chin. Hanging on by a spike of rock which might have been a mole on the giant Turk's face, Christopher peered into the mouth.

He had not been mistaken. Within was a dark bundle, pushed far back, and while Christopher supported himself by one hand, with the other he reached into the aperture and dragged out the parcel. Then he could have exclaimed in triumph, for his treasure-trove was a motoring-coat of the most approved fashion, wrapped round a cap—a combination between the cap of a motorist and a yachtsman's.

So forcibly had the coat been jammed into its place that in pulling it out the cloth caught a projection of rock and tore. The cap rolled to the front, bounded out of the hole, and fell on the sand twenty feet below.

It was at this moment that the figures which had been distant drew near enough to declare themselves as three young fishermen from Tilton-on-Sea. They were extremely interested in Christopher's discovery,

and, though they envied him his luck, they were consoled by thinking that they might eventually be called upon as witnesses.

Also they had the pleasure of a run to the village in the fine red automobile, when Christopher drove back to surrender his trophies to the police.

The name of the tailor had been cut out of the coat, and the lining of the cap had been torn away. If there were any faith to be placed in circumstantial evidence, this coat and this cap were closely connected with the mystery of the blue motor-car and the sea. But, unfortunately, owing to the fact that Christopher had torn the coat in dragging it out of its hiding-place, it was impossible to be sure whether or no the wearer had been roughly handled while he still wore the garment.

Nevertheless, it was not probable that a person intending suicide would trouble himself to climb steep rocks and hide his own cap and coat. "Murder" was the thought in everybody's mind; and the police began to take an active interest in the strange business. Christopher's account of his discovery in the Turk's mouth, on the sands near Tilton-on-Sea, was made the most of in the *Daily Recorder's* columns, and he was complimented by the editor. Nevertheless, days passed without his being able to follow his first sensational *coup* with another. The man who had hidden the coat and cap, and driven the blue Hansard into the sea, might himself have vanished under the waves, so far as any trace of him could be found either by the police or their amateur rival. The mystery threatened to share the fate of other nine-day wonders, notwithstanding the reward offered by the London paper and the money it lavished on its "Motor Detective."

Public interest was languishing, and Christopher was

growing restless, when, one evening nearly a fortnight after the finding of the derelect, he was dining at a country inn on the London side of Rochester. It was late for dinner, but he had not lunched, save for a sandwich, and was hungry. A private detective, whom he had lately employed to help on the investigations, had misled him with a false scent. He had wasted his day in running after the wrong man, and had in addition, it seemed to him, made himself ridiculous. Therefore, he was half-resolved to "throw up the whole sickening job," when a man walked into the dining-room.

Christopher sat at a small table opposite the door, and looked up as it opened; but he would not have remarked the newcomer with particularity if the newcomer had not appeared disconcerted at sight of him.

He was a tall, good-looking man of thirty-two or thereabouts, clean-shaven, brown-faced, and evidently fresh from ablutions, for his short-cut, light-brown hair was wet and crinkly. Christopher had never to his knowledge seen this person before; but as the eyes of the two men met across the room the newcomer stopped with his hand on the door, his face freezing into an expression of blank dismay. For a second he stood still; then, instead of advancing into the room, he turned abruptly round and went out, closing the door behind him.

Instantly Christopher sprang up. "It's the man himself!" were the words that flashed into his head.

He thought of the photographs of himself taken with Scarlet Runner, which had so often appeared in the *Daily Recorder*. A man trained by habit, or necessity, to quick observation might readily recognise him from those reproductions; and what man, save one, thus recognising him need wish to get out of his way unseen?

Christopher darted to the door, and, flinging it open, dashed into the corridor. The front door of the inn was closed, but Christopher could hear the sound of a motor being started, and at the same instant he saw through the glass door the figure of the man who had made so hasty an exit from the dining-room. His back was turned to Christopher, but, having started the motor, he was looking up the street as if expecting the arrival of someone. Christopher would have flung the door open, but an obsequious waiter stepped forward to perform that service, and between the two the business was bungled. "Mr. John Smith!" Christopher yelled through the glass, his hand and the waiter's both on the old-fashioned latch.

He hoped to make the stranger turn, and if he did so, at the sound of that name, it would be practically certain that his sudden departure was no coincidence. But, instead of turning, the man sprang into the driver's seat of the fine, large car, which he had already started, and flashed away from the hotel.

Out bolted Christopher, having got the door open at last, and was just in time to see a covered automobile swerving round the corner close by. Though the month was July it was already deep twilight, and so fast did the car go that Christopher had not time to make out the number or to satisfy himself as to the make of the motor. He saw only that the colour was a dark yellow faced with brown.

Dinner was but half over and Christopher was still hungry, yet there was only one thought in his mind—to follow the yellow motor-car. He turned to hand money to a staring waiter, and say, "Don't mind change," as Mr. John Smith had done before on a previous emergency, when a leather-clad chauffeur came running up, a dazed look on his face.

"Well, I never!" this youth exclaimed inelegantly,

as the automobile disappeared round the corner. "Is he out of his wits?"

"Is that your car?" asked Christopher.

"Yes," answered the chauffeur; "it's gone off without me. But I suppose it will be coming back. I was told to get my supper, and, as I'm paying my own bills this trip, I went down the street to a cheap place. The car was left in front of the door, as we were to go on as soon as we had eaten, and I thought I heard her being started, so I looked out to see. There was he, standing by her, beckoning to me with all his might; and though I came running, what should he do but jump in and make off as fast as he could! Wonder if he's mad?"

"Perhaps I'm going his way," said Christopher.

"If so, you can go on with me, if you like, in my car. I'm starting at once. What's your employer's name?"

"Fortescue," replied the chauffeur. "I don't know much about him. I only got the job yesterday. He's shipping his car—a forty-horse-power Ressler—from Dover to Calais by cargo-boat to-night. Car's new—only delivered a day or two ago, I believe, after delay. Much obliged for your offer, sir. Are you going that way?"

"I am," said Christopher.

Five minutes later Scarlet Runner was off, and flying faster than the law allows; but accidents can happen with the best regulated motor-cars. Things so seldom happened to Scarlet Runner that Race had got out of the habit of expecting them; but if anything unpleasant did occur, it was usually when least convenient. Of all nights, Christopher Race would have prayed for a good run to-night; yet it was now that Scarlet Runner, with the perverseness of the best automobiles, chose to puncture a tyre. Even with the strange chauffeur's help there was nearly half an

hour's delay; and hardly was the car on the road again when the tyre on the other driving-wheel went down. Another half hour was wasted; nevertheless, when Scarlet Runner rushed through Dover towards the quay, she passed a yellow car standing in the open doorway of a garage.

"That's she! I'd swear it!" cried the chauffeur; and Christopher stopped in triumph. "We've done the trick!" he said to himself.

But, though they had tracked the car, they had lost the man. The Ressler, it appeared, had also had an accident. She had broken her change-speed lever not far from the garage where Christopher found her standing, and her owner had paid some men to help him push her into her present position. He wished to catch the night boat, he explained, for Calais, and would leave money for the car's keep and repairs. Later he would wire an address and instructions.

On hearing this news from the employés of the garage the chauffeur's face fell. His master had, indeed, intended to take the night boat, and he was to have followed with the car on the cargo boat; but Mr. Fortescue had seemed to value the new automobile highly, and it was extraordinary that he should rush off like this, leaving his property in the hands of strangers.

"What time does the boat start?" asked Christopher.

"She's started, sir," replied the caretaker of the garage.

"Then I must send a wire before she reaches Calais," exclaimed Race.

"She'll be at Calais before a wire could reach there," returned the man of Dover. "She'll be landing her passengers ten minutes from now."

Without another word Christopher started the throbbing Scarlet Runner off towards the station,

where, after hurried explanations to the station-master, he got into telephonic communication with the *Daily Recorder*, and received instructions to follow the escaping criminal across the Channel at the newspaper's expense, instantly, and at any cost.

There was a small tug which could be hired, and Christopher chartered her with little trouble or delay. He was an hour and a half on the water, reached Calais before daylight, and went straight to the railway station to learn, if he could, whether the man he sought had been among the passengers in the boat-train for Paris. But there had been a crowd of Englishmen and Americans, several of whom answered well enough to the description given, so far as French porters and ticket-takers could remember.

Christopher had brought the chauffeur across with him, thinking he might be useful, and now he decided to leave the man in Calais to look about for his absconding master, and wire to him (Christopher) at the Hôtel Continental, Paris, if Fortescue were seen. The chauffeur, vexed at the treatment he had received, agreed to accept the payment offered for this service; and Christopher, bereft of Scarlet Runner and unwilling to wait some hours for the next train, routed out the sleeping proprietor of a garage, hired a powerful sixty-horse-power motor-car, and dashed off in the early dawn for Paris.

At each town where the express train from Calais had stopped, however, he paused to make inquiries at the railway station; but apparently, if the quarry had been in the train at all, he had boldly gone on, to lose himself in the vastness of the metropolis.

The first thing that Christopher did on reaching his destination was to drive to the Gare du Nord and try to learn whether a tall, slim, clean-shaven, brown-faced, and brown-haired Englishman of thirty-

two, dressed in light clothes, had arrived by the night train from Calais. Here he met shrugs of the shoulders and the answer he expected. Numerous messieurs of that type had poured themselves into Paris, and had disappeared in different directions. It was unfortunate, *n'est-ce pas*, that all Englishmen looked so much alike?

The next move in the game was to seek the aid of a private detective, since the French police would only interest themselves in such a quest when applied to by their brothers on the other side. That application would come; but meanwhile Christopher intended to leave no stone unturned; and it was not until he had done all that could be done by way of interviews and telegrams that he went to bed at the Continental, where he had taken a small suite of rooms.

He had left directions that he was to be waked if a caller or even a telegram should come; but the clock on his mantelpiece pointed to noon and he still slept on. Not many minutes later, however, his telephone bell rang violently. A clerk in the bureau of the hotel wished to advise monsieur of the fact that there was an inquiry for him, from the Ritz. A lady stopping there was telephoning to know if Monsieur Christopher Race were in, and, if so, whether he would receive her if she called on urgent business. Madame did not care to announce her name; but she had a communication to make concerning the affair which had brought Monsieur Race to Paris.

This message surprised Christopher exceedingly, but he reflected that the nameless lady was probably an agent of the detective he had employed to work for him. Accordingly he replied that he would be ready to see madame in his private sitting-room, if she would do him the honour of calling in a quarter of an hour.

Seldom did a man bathe and dress in a shorter

space of time; but when his visitor was announced, Christopher was ready to receive her.

He expected a Frenchwoman, but the lady who was ushered into his little *salon* had the air of an Englishwoman or an American. She could not be more than twenty-eight at most, and might be younger. Her hair, under its neat toque, was the colour of a ripe and burnished chestnut; her features were piquant and dainty, her complexion of the wild-rose order. But her eyes were her most remarkable feature. They were large and soft, deeply violet, and their first half-frightened, half-appealing look at Christopher disconcerted and disarmed him. This lovely creature could be no female detective. Yet, if not, what could she be? How had she found him out, and what could she want of him?

"Mr. Race?" she faltered.

"An American," thought Christopher. "No, a Canadian," as aloud he claimed ownership of the name she mentioned.

"You'll hardly believe it," she went on, "but I've travelled all the way from Montreal to talk to you, Mr. Race. I arrived at Cherbourg yesterday afternoon, came on to Paris, where I slept, as I was very tired after a rough voyage, and meant to leave for London to-day; but I saw in the foreign edition of the *Daily Recorder* that you'd arrived in Paris, and would be at this hotel, so I waited, and now I've come to see you here."

It was true Christopher had telephoned to his newspaper from Dover before it went to press; but in letting the editor know that he would go on to Paris and take rooms at the Continental, he had not expected the news to appear in print.

"It was the articles in the *Daily Recorder* which brought me across the ocean," his beautiful visitor went on, before he had time to speak, "and I made

up my mind from what I read there that you would be the man for me to appeal to. But of course you can't understand what I'm talking about. I wouldn't send my name by telephone; but I am Mrs. Fortescue. When I was seventeen and my husband was twenty-three, I married an Englishman who came to Canada, in the diplomatic service. We fell in love at first sight, and married, against my people's wish, when we'd known each other only a month. He had to promise that we'd live in my mother's house, otherwise she wouldn't have consented at all, and—things didn't go well with us. I was a child. He was scarcely more than a boy. We both had plenty of money. I had been spoiled, and he had a strong will. I suppose, too, we had hot tempers, and I see now, ten years after, that as my people never liked him, because they wanted me to marry a Canadian, they weren't exactly tactful. We quarrelled; I was encouraged to thwart him. When he wanted me to leave home and go with him to England I refused. Then we quarrelled a good deal more, and—and, to make a long story short, we separated. I said I never wanted to see him again, as he was so cruel; and he said I never *should* see him, unless I asked him to come. I thought I was glad when he was gone, but oh, I wasn't! Still, I was too proud to call him back. I believed that he'd tired of me.

"A year ago, when I was left alone in the world, I came abroad for the first time. I didn't even know where my husband was, though once I'd heard of his being in India, and I remembered that he was free to travel, as he had given up his profession. Well, at a dinner-party in London, my English hostess said, 'Mrs. Fortescue, I'm going to give a namesake of yours, Mr. Fortescue, the pleasure of taking you in. You may discover that you have relatives in common.'

"Can you imagine how I felt? It was my husband. Somehow, we managed to carry it off as if we were strangers. He was handsomer than ever, and—he told me that I had improved. He told me, too, at that very dinner, that he'd never ceased to think of me, had never cared for any other woman. He begged to call. I said he might. Two days later he was imploring me to let everything between us be as if we'd never parted. I was tempted to yield; but I feared to make another mistake, and refused. Then he said that, if he lost me again, he should lose all interest in life; that he would be utterly miserable, because he cared far more for me than he ever cared in old days. I was so terrified of being over-persuaded that I at once went back home, though I'd meant to travel for some time in Europe.

"After that I spent all my time in trying to think I'd been wise, until I saw the articles in the *Daily Recorder* (which I'd begun to take in, for London news) about the mystery of the motor-car. Mr. Race, that Hansard car was my husband's car, I'm sure. That's why I've flown over to this side again. I'm afraid—oh, horribly afraid—something dreadful has happened to him. He'd just bought a *red* Hansard car, exactly answering the description of the blue one you found in the sea, at the time he was begging me to be his wife again. He came in it to see me and wanted me to go out with him, as he was very keen on motoring. A friend had sold the car to him—a man I met at the same dinner I told you of. I didn't like the creature. I—I think he rather admired me and would have been glad to *flirt*, although my husband had told him our story. I believe that my husband may have—as he threatened to do—lost all interest in life and committed suicide. Or else some other awful thing has happened. I can't help feeling

as if, in either case, I may be to blame, so I *had* to come. I couldn't rest. Oh, if only he could be found, how I would try to make up to him for the past! I hoped you might have solved the mystery by this time, or, if not, that I could help you. So now you understand why I'm here, and why, in a way, I have a right to beg that you'll tell me everything you've been doing, everything you know. Do you believe my husband has killed himself, or been murdered?"

Christopher hesitated. He did believe that the man had been murdered; but how could he strike this lovely, impulsive woman a terrible blow and tell her what was in his mind while still he might be mistaken?

She saw his hesitation and guessed its meaning, however. With a cry she covered her face with her hands and burst into tears. "Oh, I have gone through so much!" she sobbed. "How can I bear this—how can I bear it?"

"Don't, I beg of you. He may be safe; he——" Christopher had begun to stammer, when there came an imperative knock at the door.

Mrs. Fortescue, trembling, checked her sobs. "I mustn't be seen like this," she faltered. "Who can it be?"

"Probably a detective I have employed," said Christopher.

"Oh, then," she implored, "let me stop till he is gone. Let me wait behind that tall screen in front of the fireplace."

Without waiting for permission, she ran across the room and hid herself. At the same moment the knock was repeated, and, rather than seem to delay, with the lady in the room, Christopher called, "Come in."

Again he was surprised. Instead of the little French detective, he saw the man he had pursued to Paris.

This man, rather pale but composed, walked quickly into the room and closed the door.

"I saw in the *Daily Recorder* that you would be here, so, instead of waiting for you to run me down, I thought it would be better to beard you in your den, Mr. Christopher Race," said the newcomer.

For an instant Christopher did not answer. The chauffeur had given his master's name as Fortescue. But was this man really Fortescue or the murderer of Fortescue, who had stolen his victim's identity for some purpose of his own? The doubt was gruesome, since Fortescue's wife was in the room. Christopher glanced involuntarily towards the screen, and thought that it quivered.

"Well?" he questioned.

"This chase has lasted long enough," went on the other. "I've been a double-dyed idiot not to end it in this way long ago; but I hoped, until to-day, that I should be able to slip out of the silly mess without notoriety. Now, rather than have the French police on my back I've sought you out, to be frank with you, as one gentleman can be frank with another."

"You mean you've come to—er—explain the mystery?" said Christopher diplomatically.

"There *is* no mystery; there never was any mystery, except what the *Daily Recorder* made. I was an ass—that's all."

"I'm glad to hear that's all," retorted Christopher.

"I suppose you take me for a murderer? Certainly I've given you a good deal of trouble, though I've made myself more. It was amusing at first; indeed I'm not sure it wasn't more amusing than otherwise till I met you face to face last night, and—er—put myself to some inconvenience to get out of your way, and prevent the world in general and one woman in particular from knowing me as an ass.

I'm quite aware that, unless you're moved to compassion by my story and hit upon some means of getting me out of the scrape, I shall probably be called for the rest of my days 'The Blue Motor-Car Idiot,' or something of the sort. If I have a remnant of hope left with a woman I love desperately, that would kill it, for already she's put thousands of miles between us for fear of making herself ridiculous."

Again the screen shook.

"A woman you love desperately," echoed Christopher.

"She happens to be my wife—or she was once. I want her to be again; but if you don't get me out of this she never will be."

"I am at a loss——" began Christopher, but his visitor cut him short.

"Just wait till I tell you the story, and you won't be at a loss. It isn't exciting; it's only silly; too silly not to be true. I bought a Hansard car, second-hand, of an alleged friend, and I was too much of an amateur to dream that he was palming off a regular 'back number' on me. Once I got to know something of motors, as I soon did, I wasn't satisfied to go about the world with a thing like that. I'd just sold my last toy—a yacht—with which I'd worked hard at amusing myself for several years, and I wanted a car that was worth having. So I ordered a forty-horse-power Ressler and tried to sell the Hansard, but it was so old-fashioned I couldn't get buyers at any price, though I had her painted up, new gearing put in, and gave her new tyres. I got tired of paying garage for a car I never used and never meant to use, so the next thing I tried was to give the car away. Not a soul would have her! Who wants to be saddled with an antediluvian? I

grew desperate, and determined to abandon the beastly nuisance somewhere. Needleham was the place I selected. Well, you know what happened. I had to pretend that I was delighted to get the brute back. I began to see that, if I wasn't foxy, she would always be returning on my hands in the same way, so—being an impulsive, impatient sort of chap—I said to myself, 'I'll shave off my beard, destroy the number on the car, with all other means of tracing the owner, and send the Hansard to Davy Jones' Locker.' This seemed to me a good joke, and I quite looked forward to seeing in the papers that a lonely automobile had been found putting out to sea. After I had driven on the beach—you know where—as near the water as I could get at that state of the tide, it occurred to me that it would be awkward walking a long distance and then travelling by train in a motor-coat and cap. I hid mine where I thought they wouldn't be discovered and make any bother, and went off as fast as I could in the night, wearing another sort of cap which I found in the overcoat pocket.

"Naturally I never thought there'd be such a fuss. My idea was that a few people in the neighbourhood would wonder a little, and there might be a paragraph in a local paper. But I forgot the *Daily Recorder*. When the row did begin I determined to let it burn itself out, for I didn't want to be conspicuous, and if only my Ressler had been ready when it was promised I should have been safely out of England, taking a tour I'd planned in France. As it was, I wrote to some chaps I'd tried to sell and give away the old car to, and asked them to keep mum. They were good fellows, so they did, and had their laugh at me all to themselves. I had a laugh, too, just once, when I saw myself described as a grey-

haired, white-eyelashed man. I hadn't washed off the dust that night on purpose.

"I thought everything was coming out all right till last night, when I stumbled across you at that inn, recognised you by your pictures as the bloodhound on my track, and thought you recognised me. When you yelled 'Smith,' I wouldn't even wait for my chauffeur. I made up my mind he'd go on to Dover anyhow, and meant to wire him at the garage, where he was pretty sure to see my car. But this morning, when I learned in the paper that in spite of all I hadn't shaken you off, I saw the game was up; and if I didn't want to be arrested like a criminal, I'd better come to you and confess myself an ass. Now, as a fellow-motorist, haven't you some sympathy for me, and won't you help me to disappear?"

"I might call my dogs off for a bit, and give you time to sail—for Canada," said Christopher.

Fortescue started. "Why do you suggest Canada?"

"Because——" But the screen did not give Christopher time to finish. It fell with a crash, and a beautiful young woman ran out from behind it.

"Oh, you darling boy!" she exclaimed. "If you are going to Canada, take me with you!"

That is the reason why the mystery of the blue motor-car has been a mystery until now; why the editor and readers of the *Daily Recorder* do not now think as highly of the detective ability of Christopher Race as they did at first; and why a large and magnificent yellow Ressler was sold at Dover a marvellous bargain.

## CHAPTER VIII: AUGUST

### THE RED-WHISKERED MAN

"**W**HAT a queer place for a rich man's relatives to live!" thought Christopher, looking up in a puzzled way at the tall, dilapidated house in the Jewish quarter of Amsterdam, in front of which he stopped *Scarlet Runner*.

Christopher, who by special arrangement and extra payment had brought the motor across from England on the night boat to the Hook of Holland, had spun along good clinker roads, bowling his car and his one passenger into Amsterdam in time for a late breakfast. That meal he had taken at an hotel, while his employer (unknown to him a few days before) had driven off in a cab to the house of a relative, who was expected to join the party for a week's run through Holland. Instructions were that, after breakfast and a couple of hours' rest, Christopher was to call at a certain address.

Here he was, then, in front of the house, an ancient, secretive-looking building that nodded forward as if its time to tumble into ruin might come at any moment; and a vague suspicion of mystery in his errand suddenly stole into Christopher's mind.

The young man who had engaged him and *Scarlet Runner*—the young man with the features, bearing, and manner of an Englishman, the accent of Oxford, and the name of a Dutchman, Van Cortlandt—had

seemed frankness itself. He had insisted (as he was a stranger to Christopher and the car was to be taken out of England) upon paying fifty pounds in advance. He had been an agreeable companion during the run, showing himself a cosmopolitan in knowledge of the world, of literature, and of drama. Christopher was inclined to like and admire his passenger, and fancied that the Dutch cousin to be visited in Amsterdam would turn out a merchant prince. Yet this was the cousin's house; the hour appointed had passed, and young Mr. van Cortlandt seemed in no hurry to appear with his relative.

It was a house, Christopher told himself, where things might happen; and wasn't it, now he came to think of it, a little odd that Van Cortlandt had asked him to wait without sending in word or announcing his presence in any way?

When he had sat in front of the house for a quarter of an hour Christopher stopped the motor; and it was just after he had done this that the door opened and a girl came out. She wore a blue tissue veil draped over her hat, and the long ends fluttered gracefully behind her in the slight breeze. Christopher had only a dim impression of the features behind the waving azure cloud, but he was conscious that a pair of large dark eyes regarded him, and the slim alertness of the figure that tripped down the steps to the street assured him that they were the eyes of a young woman. She was dressed in a neat, inconspicuous tailor suit of dark grey, and carried in her hand a roll of music in a leather case. Perhaps it was vanity on Christopher's part, but he fancied that the large eyes glimmering alluringly through the veil rested upon Scarlet Runner with interest and even curiosity. He watched the girl as she walked to the corner, and at the end of the street saw her hail a cab. Immedi-

ately afterwards a man who had been staring aimlessly at the bottles in a cheap hairdresser's shop on the other side of the way became abruptly aware that he had been wasting time. He hurried off briskly in the direction the girl had taken and also found a cab, so promptly as to suggest the idea that it had been waiting his orders.

"Doesn't look like the sort of fellow who could afford to drive," Christopher said to himself, faintly interested, and so far forgetting his own affairs for the instant that it was a surprise suddenly to see Mr. Ean van Cortlandt standing in the street.

How he had got there Christopher was not sure, but one thing was certain: he had not come out of the building in front of which Scarlet Runner had been waiting for nearly half an hour. There was a vague impression in the mind of Scarlet Runner's owner that his employer had run down the steps of a house two doors farther on, but his thoughts had been so occupied with the doings of others at the instant that he could not have sworn to this had it been to save his life or Van Cortlandt's.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting," said the other. "It was unavoidable." He paused for a moment, evidently having something more he wanted to say and not knowing how best to say it.

Christopher looked at his employer with a new criticism now that that faint suspicion of mystery was growing in his head; but there was nothing secretive in the clean-cut, intelligent face, with its large, thoughtful grey eyes, set rather wide apart, and its broad forehead, round which the short-cut but curly brown hair grew in a singularly attractive way. The well-shaped head was finely set on the shoulders, and the tall figure, though so slim as to seem boyish, was erect and soldierly. Christopher could not imagine

this young man, of about his own age, to be one who would engage in underhand dealings.

"And I'm sorry, too," Mr. van Cortlandt went on, "that all my plans are changed. My cousin, who was to have gone with me on this motor trip, can't go—family affliction, something quite sudden; and that being the case, I feel it would be hard-hearted, as well as gloomy, to make the tour without him. However, you shan't suffer in any way by the change, Mr. Race, for matters between us shall stand exactly as if I'd been using your car for the next week, as arranged; but I've made up my mind to turn round and go back to England to-day, after all."

Christopher was surprised, but he showed no astonishment. He merely regretted, civilly, that there was trouble in Mr. van Cortlandt's family and disappointment for Mr. van Cortlandt himself.

Nothing could have been pleasanter or more friendly than the manner of the two young men in discussing the situation; nevertheless, Christopher had a strong, if inexplicable, conviction that, in some way and for some reason thus far incomprehensible, he had been a tool in the hands of the other; that no sudden affliction had befallen the Amsterdam relatives of Mr. van Cortlandt; and that Mr. van Cortlandt had never really intended to take the trip he professed to abandon with so much reluctance.

If a car had been wanted only between London and Amsterdam and back again it appeared ridiculous that Scarlet Runner should have been shipped across the North Sea on a passenger boat, with a good deal of trouble and still more expense. It would have been so obviously easy and comparatively inexpensive to hire one car in England and another in Holland if a pleasant spin were the object. But the very fact that this expedient was obvious, yet had not been

adopted, caused Christopher to look under the surface for motives. He began to suspect a game in which he was being made to play the part of dummy; and he awaited his next instructions with hidden eagerness, for under them might lie the key to the secret, if secret there were; and the chauffeur resolved to keep his eyes open for that key. If he had been employed simply to be used as a cat's-paw, he did not wish to let himself get badly burnt.

"We will go back now to your hotel, please, and pick up the suit-case which I asked you to leave there until my plans were settled," said Van Cortlandt. "There ought to be time for lunch, too; but as we have to arrange for the shipping of the car to-night I don't want any contretemps, and I think we'd better order plenty of food and drink to take on board the car, and eat by the way whenever we feel inclined."

Christopher turned the proposal over in his head, but could make nothing mysterious of it; nor had he got hold of any further clue by the time Scarlet Runner had landed them at the door of the old-fashioned Bible Hotel.

When they had arrived there, he expected his passenger to go in and see to the fetching of the suit-case, which, from the first, Christopher had ventured to think rather scanty provision for a week's tour. But Van Cortlandt had a different idea. He suggested that, as Race had arranged for the disposal of the luggage, he had better be the one to ask for it now; otherwise there might be a misunderstanding. Also he was to order something to eat and drink on the journey. Christopher agreed, wondering, half humorously, half anxiously, if the plot consisted in making off with Scarlet Runner during his absence.

Of course, he said to himself, nothing of the sort

would happen; but, to make assurance doubly sure, he called the concierge to the door, and did not remove his eyes from the car for more than a minute at a time. Also, he had taken the precaution to stop the motor, which could not be started again by the most expert hand without noise enough to give warning even at a little distance.

During one of the moments when Christopher's attention was diverted from his best-loved possession, Mr. van Corlandt left his seat and began examining the car with frank interest. His back was turned to the door of the hotel, where Christopher stood guard, but when the owner of the car came hurriedly out, accompanied by a porter with the suit-case and a waiter with a neat parcel, the passenger was peering into the petrol tank. "You're sure there isn't rather a queer smell?" he inquired. "I thought as we came there was bad carburation, or something."

Christopher, quick in defence of his darling, denied the bad carburation, and explained to the amateur that, even if it had existed, the petrol in the tank could have nothing to do with it. While the suit-case was being put away in the tonneau, however, Van Cortlandt asked various other questions about the car's mechanism, and Christopher wondered if his object were to make a delay in starting. Was he expecting someone to come, someone who had failed him, someone to whom it was important for him to speak before leaving Amsterdam?

But no acquaintance appeared, and when presently Christopher started the motor, Van Corlandt made no objection to getting off.

They had an uneventful drive to the Hook. Christopher, who intended as a matter of course to guard the car on board the boat, expected that his passenger would take a cabin and rest during the passage, which

promised to be disagreeable owing to the steamy, unseasonable heat of the weather. But Van Cortlandt would not hear of leaving his chauffeur to get through the night alone. That would not be "sporting," said he; and the two spent the seven hours of the voyage together, never for a second out of sight of Scarlet Runner.

Christopher was as much puzzled as ever concerning his agreeable employer, for now there was nothing left of the trip save the run from Harwich to London, and it seemed impossible that a mystery should develop out of this affair after all.

It was the grey, misty dawn of a mid-August day when the boat slowed into harbour. The passengers looked shadowy and anxious as ghosts who had just been ferried across the Styx. Christopher and his companion had not seen any of their fellow-sufferers during the night, as they had got on board earlier than the others, on account of the car. As they were somewhat out of the way of the passing crowd, and could not leave the ship until everyone else had gone, they would in all probability have got off as they had got on, without meeting a soul, had not a young woman, with a modest air of wishing to escape observation, flitted out of the way of the passengers pressing up from the cabins.

She wore a neat, dark grey tailor suit; her hat was draped with a blue tissue veil which fell over and covered her face; and she carried in her hand a leather-cased roll of music.

"By Jove!" muttered Van Cortlandt under his breath; and instantly it was clear to Christopher that he was not alone in recognising the pretty, girlish figure.

Race kept silence; but the other started forward and, without joining the girl, approached near enough

to call her in a low voice without being heard by any of the more distant passengers. Watching intently, Christopher saw her start, peer anxiously through the blue cloud of her veil (which she did not lift), and then flit quickly up to Van Cortlandt. Evidently it was as great a surprise for her to see him as it was for him to find her on board. But they talked together in whispers, speaking with intense earnestness, the girl's back turned to the groups of passengers who stood or moved about on deck.

Among, these, however, was an elderly, spectacled man, with old-fashioned side-whiskers, turning grey from sandy red, while shaggy brows and lank hair matched in colour the grizzled, reddish bunches on his thin cheeks. He wore a soft felt hat, which looked as if he had slept in it, and an overcoat so much too heavy for the heat of the weather that he must have suffered from its weight. Separating himself from the line of passengers forming to leave the ship, he strolled towards the retired spot where Van Cortlandt and the girl in the blue veil were talking together. Then suddenly his eyes behind his spectacles lighted upon Van Cortlandt's face and lingered for an instant, his expression changing.

It was at this moment that Christopher became aware of the man's existence. He saw him glance at Van Cortlandt and turn away with some slight suggestion of haste; but evidently Van Cortlandt had recognised in him another acquaintance. The face of his employer was turned from Christopher, but the quick start forward he made told its own tale.

"Jacobs, is it possible?" Christopher heard Van Cortlandt ask.

The other man hesitated as if unwilling to answer, and Van Cortlandt spoke again sharply. "Surely you recognise me? Surely you know who I am?"

"I—suppose so," the stranger admitted at last.

"Then in Heaven's name, tell me—in the name of all the demons—why you, too, are on board this boat, when you ought——"

But Race caught no more. The sandy-whiskered man moved closer to Van Cortlandt, and the two fell into earnest conversation, to which the girl listened without joining in. Nothing was clear to Christopher except that his employer had unexpectedly encountered a man and a woman on board the Harwich boat, one of whom, at all events, should have been somewhere else. "His journey to Amsterdam had something to do with the man, anyhow," Race said thoughtfully to himself. "As for the girl—I'm not so sure." But he remembered how she had come out of the house in front of which he had been directed to wait, and how, a very few moments after, Van Cortlandt had appeared, half an hour late for his appointment. "I shouldn't wonder if the girl had something to do with the famous tour, also," Christopher ended by thinking. And he was curious to see the face under the blue veil.

By this time the boat was moored and the people beginning to go off. Presently no one was left save Scarlet Runner's owner, her late passenger, and that passenger's two new-formed acquaintances. As the last group crowded the gangway Van Cortlandt came to Race, leaving the girl and the elderly man standing together.

"I suppose you won't mind carrying three of us instead of one?" he said. "A young lady I know has unexpectedly turned up, and a man with whom I've had some business dealings. I had no idea they were on board with us until I saw them this morning. In fact, it's only by a series of accidents that they are not somewhere else. But being here, and both bound for London, if you don't object I would like to take

them on the car. They have nothing with them except hand luggage."

Christopher answered that Scarlet Runner would not feel the difference between two passengers and four; and as soon as the car was on dry land and ready to start the newly arranged party boarded her. Formerly Van Cortlandt had sat beside the driver, and such luggage as the two young men carried was in the tonneau. But now the old man was placed in front with Christopher, and Van Cortlandt was the girl's companion in the tonneau, the big kit-bag and suit-case being put on the roof.

Neither of the new occupants of the car was properly prepared for motoring. The man's hat was of an inconvenient shape for the wind of motion, and it and his heavy overcoat were black, though there had been no rain for days, and white, powdery dust lay inch-deep on the road. As for the girl, her hat was low and broad, and before starting she took off her veil and made a scarf of it, which she tied over her head and under her chin. Thus Christopher's wish was gratified, and he saw that she was very pretty, even prettier than he had dared to picture her, after that tantalising glimpse of big, dark eyes.

She was distinctly of the gipsy type, with a dusky colour coming and going under the brown of her peach-smooth cheeks. Deep dimples sprang into life as she laughed; her great black eyes were exceedingly brilliant and full of expression, while every little gesture had an individual grace and eloquence which spoke of a singularly vivid personality. There was no doubt that she was a lady; and the first words that Christopher heard her speak told him that she was an American. In spite of the tiresome journey and the heat of the day, the girl was sparkling with the joy of youth and life, and was

childishly delighted with the prospect of several hours' spin in a fine automobile. Possibly, too, Van Cortlandt's presence had something to do with her pleasure; in any case it was plain that she was an object of deep interest to the young man, who could scarcely take his eyes from her face. They talked and laughed together after starting, and, though Christopher caught only a few scattered words, he gained an impression that some undertaking in which each had been engaged bade fair to be successful.

The man on the front seat was apparently far from being as well satisfied with his situation as the others. He pulled his hat as far down as possible to keep the dust out of his eyes, turned up the collar of his overcoat, then nervously unbuttoned the greatcoat and threw it back, sighing with relief.

At this early hour of the morning the country lay still and calm, and few were stirring save labourers plodding heavily to work. The villages through which the car sped had drawn blinds sheltering tired workers, and not many houses were open save here and there an inn. Christopher looked forward to an easy run, the one thing that he disliked being the long chain of interminable suburbs, with skiddy tram-lines, which he must meet before he reached the heart of London. On starting two days before he had picked up his passenger at a busy hotel in Bloomsbury, and, as he had so far received no further instructions, he supposed that Mr. van Cortlandt wished to be deposited there.

"What kind of a person was it who followed you, Jacobs?" the young man in the tonneau leaned forward to ask, after a long conversation with the girl who sat beside him.

Jacobs swallowed heavily, and Christopher saw his hand tighten on the back of the seat as he turned to

answer: "Don't you think, sir, that I—that we—that it might be wiser not to——"

Van Cortlandt laughed. "Oh, I see, you think I'm incautious in talking business before outsiders? That's like your prudence, which my uncle described to me when he showed me your photograph the other day, and told me what sort of man I must expect to find. But, as a matter of fact, we can speak as among friends here—now that our errand has been done and we're close to home again. This young lady, Miss Warren, has been on the same mission that you and I have been on."

The man on the front seat gave a jump. "She, sir! And you, too, *the same errand as mine!*"

"Yes," said Van Cortlandt. "You probably guessed when you were introduced to me, over there, that you weren't the only one sent?"

"I—no reason was given me to think that there were others," stammered Jacobs. "I supposed that mine was—was the only message."

"'Message' is rather a good word for a cautious man like you," laughed Van Cortlandt. "You're quite right, there's only one real 'message,' as you call it; but there are three of sorts, and each of us is carrying one. Even I don't know which is which. It is a strange thing that all three should have been brought together in this car, when only one should have come this way, another by Flushing, another by Rotterdam, as an additional precaution in case of 'followers.'"

"It is strange indeed," said Jacobs, glancing stealthily at Christopher.

"Oh, Mr. Race isn't in this, except that he's taking us all to London as fast as he can get us there—three passengers instead of the one he'd engaged to transport. But he's absolutely to be

trusted. You must have heard of Mr. Christopher Race, who helped to put the young King of Dalvania on his throne? Well, this is the very man who's driving us now. An honour, isn't it? I haven't discussed my business with him, because there was no reason I should, and I don't flatter myself he has much curiosity about his passengers' affairs; he has too many interesting ones on hand of his own. Besides, I didn't want to worry him with too deep a sense of responsibility. But we can speak before him now. As for Miss Warren, she's rather a celebrity, too. If you were an American instead of—what *do* you call yourself, Jacobs?—you would probably know something about Miss Constance Warren, who writes for the papers. When this day's work is over, she will be privileged to make of it what she would call a 'story.' I got my uncle to employ her, so that she might get a little kudos out of the thing after it was well over, and the secret could be allowed to come out. But you haven't told me yet what sort of person followed you, and caused you to think it would be wiser to come this way instead of going by Flushing as arranged."

"It was a fat, Jewish-looking man, sir," replied Jacobs, becoming glib at last. "I could hardly describe him beyond that he had a hooked nose, a large black beard, and was well dressed. He kept pressing against me in the railway station, and looked at me with such particular interest that, when I got a chance to escape in a sudden press of the crowd—a lot of emigrants pouring into the station—I got away, and hastily decided to come by the Hook. I hope you think I did right?"

"Oh, quite, if you felt sure that your imagination wasn't playing games with you. Miss Warren's experience was even more trying than yours. Because of a person who apparently chased her in a cab from

the first, and who climbed into her railway carriage at the last minute, she jumped out after the train began to move, risking trouble with Dutch officials, to say nothing of broken bones. She is a brave girl. But I knew that beforehand." And Ean van Cortlandt gave Miss Warren a look which, if he had wished to hide his feelings for her, would have been, to say the least, imprudent.

"I was quite sure imagination had nothing to do with it," Jacobs insisted, anxious to exonerate himself. "Of course, the man may have been only an ordinary pickpocket. But do I look like a man whose pocket would be worth picking? This is the watch I carry about with me." And, somewhat ostentatiously, he pulled out a plain old gun-metal watch.

Christopher heard this talk with interest, and confessed to himself that, though it wasn't "his affair," he would like to know the nature of the message to which the man beside him had so cautiously referred. In his silent interest he observed all that went on, and it struck him that Jacobs looked at the gun-metal watch with concealed eagerness. He had produced it apparently in the sole desire to prove his poverty, his unattractiveness to thieves; yet his eyes fixed themselves sharply on the staring white face, and he did not put the watch away again until he had had time to know the hour and minute.

Christopher looked too, and saw that the hands pointed to the quarter before eight. They had been some time in getting Scarlet Runner off the boat and away from the wharf, otherwise they ought to have been much earlier, for Van Cortlandt had brought his chauffeur a roll and a cup of coffee on board, had broken his own fast also, and the other two had presumably done the same when the chance offered; therefore they had had no need to stop.

Before them now rose the spires and the clustered roofs of a village, and as they entered it Jacobs, who had been silent after putting away his watch, turned again to speak to Van Cortlandt.

"It would be a great favour," he said, "if you would be willing to make a short stop here, sir, only long enough for me to send a telegram. I don't know if your uncle mentioned to you that my wife is ill and worrying about this trip of mine?"

"I didn't even know that you had a wife," replied Van Cortlandt.

"I have, sir, and a good one. She will be expecting me earlier than I can arrive, and I should like to let her have a few words to reassure her; nothing, of course, except about myself, my health, and when I shall be with her again. I'd wire in cipher, too, in case of any busybodies. She and I have one which we worked out together when we were young, and always use when I'm away, as often happens."

Van Cortlandt consented to the slight delay, and Christopher stopped the car in front of the village post-office. Jacobs scrambled lightly down, like a younger man than he appeared to be; and Christopher happened to notice that his hands looked strong and muscular. As he hurried into the post-office Van Cortlandt strolled after him, buying a few stamps and standing near enough to take a glance at the address on the telegram. This was not because he distrusted Jacobs, but because he had much at stake in this venture, and could not afford to take chances. The cipher message was unreadable, but the name of Jacobs stood out plainly at the top, and Van Cortlandt was satisfied, as he had expected to be.

The telegram was handed in quickly, yet its sender begged to remain long enough to see that it was really despatched without delay. Then he remembered that

he wanted change for a bank-note, and was carefully slow about counting his money over when he got it, fancying a mistake, and apologising at length when he discovered that there had been none after all. If there could have been any reason why Jacobs should wish to linger deliberately, after getting off the message to his sick wife, Van Cortlandt might have been vexed and suspicious; but he remembered that this elderly, red-whiskered man was famous among those who knew him, or knew of him, for his trustworthiness.

At last they were off again, but they had not gone far when Jacobs cried out that his handkerchief had just blown away. It was one he valued; his wife had embroidered his initials on it. Really, he thought he saw it caught in a bush a little way behind. By Van Cortlandt's consent, Christopher reversed the car and went back for half a mile; but the handkerchief was not found, though Jacobs got out and thoroughly ransacked a group of bushes to look for it, being gone some time. Returning, he rejoined the road ahead of Scarlet Runner, which stood throbbing impatient to be off; and Christopher thought, as he advanced towards the car, shaking his head and bemoaning his loss, that he scattered something by the way. Starting on again, with the nervous old man hardly settled in his place, there came a sharp explosion, and Scarlet Runner had burst a tyre.

The sudden sound gave Jacobs a shock, which caused him to grip the seat nervously and cry out. He had never been in a motor before, he exclaimed, and thought that someone must have shot at the car.

"What was it you threw on the road before you got in just now?" asked Christopher, already out, and preparing to jack up.

"Nothing," answered the man innocently.

"I saw you put your hand in your overcoat pocket and then scatter something," said Race.

"Ah, I was merely feeling to see if I had an extra handkerchief in my pocket," exclaimed Jacobs, "and dipping my fingers into a mess of biscuit crumbs, I got rid of them, if that's what you mean. Here are more, left behind." And, as if to prove his words, he displayed in the palm of his hand a few broken bits of biscuit.

To doubt his explanation seemed ridiculous, even monstrous; yet Christopher had just discovered a bit of broken bottle-glass deeply embedded in the deflated tyre. No doubt it was a coincidence. Van Cortlandt evidently believed fully in Jacobs, and yet—some curious conjectures passed through the mind of Race as he did his work of repairing, with his three passengers sitting, or walking up and down, by the roadside. What he thought he kept to himself, as it would have been the height of impropriety to accuse, on the vaguest suspicion, the trusted employé of his own employer. Nevertheless, when the tyre was changed and Scarlet Runner on the way once more, he threw an occasional keen glance at the whiskered face under the shadow of the dusty hat-brim. The day grew more and more sultry, and the air was so heavy that even in driving there was no freshness. The thick dust also was very disagreeable, especially for the two new members of the party, who were unprepared for motoring; and Christopher was not surprised when, after about two-thirds of the run to London, Jacobs complained of headache and vertigo. It was, he supposed, in an apologetic murmur, his inexperience in motoring, as well as having been somewhat upset at sea, which caused him to suffer now; but Christopher suggested that it was far more likely to be the weight of his big overcoat, and advised him to take it off.

This, oddly enough, Jacobs seemed unwilling to do. He had chosen the coat to travel in, he said, as the weather was very different when he started. Now, if he parted with it, the change would be too sudden; and he appealed to Van Cortlandt in rather a marked way for confirmation of this opinion.

But the young man only laughed good-naturedly, wondering that Jacobs had been able to cling to the heavy garment so long. "Take the thing off and sit on it," said he, "if you've got any love-letters in the pockets which you're afraid of losing."

"Whatever I may have in a pocket of that coat is safe in any position, I assure you, sir," protested the other, consenting at last to follow the advice of the majority. And indeed, looked at closely, the garment did appear to be of rather unusual make. There were no pockets on the outside, but there might well be several capacious hidden ones. And though Jacobs seemed so certain that the contents of such pockets must be safe, when he had taken off the overcoat he not only sat upon but leaned both shoulders against it, as it draped the back of the seat.

Still, he felt no better, and on coming in sight of an old-fashioned roadside inn not far outside the dark fringe of London suburbs, he begged that the car might pause at the door long enough for him to get a glass of brandy.

"Hadn't you better wait a bit till we get farther on?" asked Van Cortlandt, not unsympathetically. "The stuff's sure to be bad here."

"Oh, sir, if you knew how faint and queer I feel——" faltered Jacobs; and Christopher hastily slowed down in front of the inn, where a small, uncovered automobile was already standing, covered with fresh dust.

The whiskered face was grey with dust, therefore it

to do.  
as the  
low, if  
dden;  
arked

uredly,  
to the  
and sit  
in the

coat is  
ted the  
of the  
arment  
re were  
well be  
Jacobs  
pockets  
coat he  
gainst it,

ht of an  
he dark  
ear might  
t a glass

t farther  
hetically.

queer I  
r hastily  
a small,  
, covered

herefore it



“DON'T RESIST—SAFER NOT TO RESIST, SIR!” HE CRIED.



was impossible to see the natural state of the sufferer's complexion; but he sat with eyes half closed and head bowed forward, as if on the verge of unconsciousness, and Van Cortlandt jumped quickly out to order the brandy. Miss Warren sprang down from the car also, coming round to the front for an anxious look at the sick man's face, and to ask if she could do anything. She had her leather-cased music-roll in her hand, and Christopher saw the dulled eyes of Jacobs glance at it, from under drooping lids.

Then, just as Van Cortlandt would have entered the inn, out burst three policemen. "We arrest you all on a warrant, charged with theft," called out one, "and it will be better for you not to resist."

But Van Cortlandt did resist, and violently. Not for himself alone, but for the girl. He hurled off the man who grasped him by the shoulder, and, springing to the aid of Miss Warren, dashed aside the big fellow in blue who would have seized her by the arm.

Instantly Jacobs had waked from his dazed state into vivid alertness. The third policeman, who attempted to catch Van Cortlandt round the waist, was sent reeling by a backhanded blow from a strong fist in deadly earnest; and, seeing this violence, seeing also the little crowd which quickly gathered at Van Cortlandt's cry of "Help!" Jacobs slipped out of the car, lithe as a snake.

"Don't resist—safer not to resist, sir!" he cried; and, while apparently wishing to aid his patron, so stumbled against him as to fling him into the arms of the tallest policeman.

Seeing himself trapped, Van Cortlandt cried to Race, "Ninety-nine Park Lane!" and at the same instant something was tossed into the tonneau. Quick as light, Christopher took his cue and dashed off at speed, Jacobs and one of the policemen tearing after him.

"Stop thief! Stop thief!" warning voices yelled; but he would have been a bold man, or a foolhardy one, who tried to check Scarlet Runner's rush with anything save a bomb. Luckily, there was no bomb handy, and knowing nothing of the fate of his late passengers, knowing only that the man he served had bidden him go, Christopher made Scarlet Runner fly along the London road like a red cannon-ball.

"Ninety - nine Park Lane! Ninety - nine Park Lane!"

He seemed to hear Van Cortlandt's voice still calling the direction in his ears.

At first the number had no special meaning for him, but as his first hot excitement cooled he realised that 99 Park Lane had some association of importance in his mind.

"By Jove, it's Maritz's house!" he exclaimed. And the mystery of his tour and the experiences attending it appeared suddenly to flash with rainbow colours, clear and bright. For Maritz was (and is) a South African millionaire, president of the Blue Sinbad Diamond Mines Limited. A rumour had been flitting about that he had bought from the company that great diamond lately found in their own fields, named the New Koh-i-Noor, and that, with the view of currying favour in high circles and perhaps securing a title, he intended to present it to the Crown.

What if Van Cortlandt had journeyed to Amsterdam on business concerning the New Koh-i-Noor? The cutting of the diamond must have been done there, and if the young man were a nephew of Peter Maritz (Jacobs had talked about "your uncle"), what more natural that he should be trusted to bring it back safe, despite all attempts likely to be made upon it *en route* if the secret of the errand had leaked out?

In such a case no wonder there had been precautions,

and a trumped-up story of a tour and a relative in Amsterdam. No wonder a rendezvous had been given in a queer street; no wonder, if the great stone were to be fetched from a house in that street, a marked man, like the nephew of Peter Maritz, had appointed a meeting at another. Still, there was the girl to be accounted for. *She* had come from the house named; but she must be unknown in the business to those who watched such affairs for their own profit, and most likely there was a connection inside between the two buildings.

With these thoughts running through his head, Christopher slowed down just enough to make it safe to turn his head and give a quick glance behind, to see what thing had been thrown into the tonneau at the moment of his flight.

It was Miss Warren's music-roll, and she must have contrived to toss it there on learning from Van Cortlandt's order that the car was to make a break for freedom. In his haste to aid his employer, or to mingle in the tussle in some way, Jacobs had jumped out, leaving his precious overcoat; therefore it was not strange that he had run screaming after Scarlet Runner.

"From the first I thought he was disguised and anxious to screen his face from the light," Christopher thought. "That cipher telegram he sent! He'd just learned from Van Cortlandt that there were *three* messengers instead of one, and all, by a queer chance, in this car. Could he have wired to bring those fellows out? What if they're not policemen?"

As the last word formed itself in his mind it was as though it had been a magic summons to call up other men in blue coats; for before Scarlet Runner had got her speed again three uniformed figures leaped from behind a clump of trees to line up across the road.

Christopher's first thought was to blame himself for slowing down to glance behind, and to atone by making a dash, scattering the men, who might be conspirators in the same plot. But, even at a distance, his clear-sighted eyes recognised a face he had seen before. One of these policemen was a well-known "motor trapper," with whom Christopher had come into friendly contact more than once. Whatever the men at the inn a mile back might be, these were genuine servants of the law; and a brilliant idea danced into Race's mind. With the view of making it useful, he slowed down instantly.

"You've done the measured distance at a speed of fifty and a half miles an hour," said the inspector of police whom Christopher remembered, his stopwatch in his hand. "Where's your licence?"

"Here it is, and here's my card," answered Race. "Don't you know me, inspector—in spite of the dust? And don't you know Scarlet Runner?"

"Why, yes, Mr. Race, I recognise you now," said the policeman. "I'm sorry to say, however, as you were going at such a speed——"

"First offence, isn't it?" laughed Christopher. "And when you've heard a word or two, I think even *you* will say I was justified in exceeding the legal limit. Summon me if you think right; but go back now to the next public-house and rescue my passengers, one of whom is, I believe, a nephew of the millionaire, Peter Maritz. He and the lady with him are the victims of a plot, and have just been arrested by three thieves disguised as policemen. They appealed to the landlord and several other men, but the power of the law is so much respected that naturally the pretended policemen were believed against them. I was sent off to Mr. Maritz, whom I want to see as quickly as I can, and if you and

your comrades can get to the scene before the thieves have hustled their victims away——”

The inspector waited to hear no more. All his professional pride was on fire. “Go on, Mr. Race,” he broke in; “we’ll overlook your furious driving this time. And have no fear for your friends. It’s a strange story you tell, but I know you, and I believe it. We’ve got bicycles, and as the house is only a mile away we’ll be there before you can say ‘Jack Robinson.’”

“Take care you don’t go beyond the legal limit,” laughed Christopher excitedly, and sped off at a speed to risk being “held up” by another police trap.

“First time in my life I was glad to get caught in one of those,” he said to himself, “and I’d be willing to bet it will be the last.”

At least, it was the last for that day; for he was not again stopped on his way into town, though had he been, he must have confessed that he deserved it. Never had he driven so fast through traffic, except on the day when he followed the automobile with the Nuremberg watch; and at the last moment, as he drove through bronze gates into the millionaire’s famous courtyard, he just escaped being crashed into by a passing motor omnibus.

Never had Christopher been inside these magnificent gates before, but so often had he seen the courtyard pictured in illustrated papers, when the house was new and the wonder of London, that marble walls and pillars, Venetian windows and great bronze statues, appeared familiar to him.

The gates had been opened, perhaps, for an electric brougham which stood before the door to pass out, and the servants in livery glared daggers at the reckless chauffeur who dashed in, risking a collision. But Christopher stopped Scarlet Runner at a safe

distance, and called out that he wished to see Mr. Maritz on urgent business.

At the sound of that name a gentleman looked from the window of the brougham, and his face had been made familiar by the same methods which immortalised his mansion.

"I come from Mr. van Cortlandt," added Christopher, this time addressing himself directly to the millionaire. He expected to see a look of enlightenment dawn on the clear, somewhat hard, features. But, to his surprise, for an instant Peter Maritz appeared puzzled. "Mr. van Cortlandt?" he repeated questioningly. Then, with a slight exclamation and a change of expression, he opened the door of the brougham before his alert servants had time to touch it.

"You have a message for me from Mr. van Cortlandt?" he asked.

"Not exactly a message," answered Christopher. "But I have news of importance."

"Come indoors with me and tell it, then," said Peter Maritz, who had the manners of a gentleman as well as the wealth of a millionaire.

Christopher looked doubtful. "I'm not sure about leaving the car," he replied in a lower voice. "I may be carrying something of—er—considerable value."

Maritz asked no further questions and made no new suggestions, but mounted to the seat beside Christopher which Jacobs had last occupied, giving at the same time a glance at his servants which sent them to a distance.

Race did not begin his story at the beginning, but very near the end, slurring over what had happened until he reached the episode at the inn. When Maritz heard that Van Cortlandt and Miss Warren had been seized by men in the dress of policemen, his dark face suddenly paled.

"But my nephew told you to drive on, to come here?" he demanded tersely.

"Yes. And I came as fast as I could, after sending back three genuine policemen to the rescue."

"Then where is that which my nephew trusted you to bring to me?"

"He trusted me with nothing—except the sense to understand his meaning. But Miss Warren tossed her music-roll into the car as I shot away from the inn."

"That was clever of her, and shows that she is the right kind of girl. But, though she thought she was carrying something of importance, as a matter of fact she wasn't. She was a kind of decoy duck."

"The man Jacobs, who I venture to believe is a fraud, disguised to look like someone else, left his overcoat behind, very much against his will."

"No doubt it was against his will, if he had put a little parcel he ought to have had into one of its pockets. But there's nothing in that overcoat which can interest me. And for the moment I'm not interested in this spurious Jacobs, who was probably furious at being seen by Ean on the boat. What I want is the thing which my nephew, whom you know as Mr. van Cortlandt, *must* have given you to bring me, or he would certainly not have sent you away from him with your car."

"I tell you he gave me nothing," persisted Christopher, beginning to resent the piercing glance of the millionaire. "If there is anything of his on board it must be in his luggage."

"Very well; we'll have the luggage down," said Maritz, "and I will look through it here and now, sitting by your side. Johnson!"—and he raised his tone imperatively—"shut the gates."

The bronze gates closed, and the courtyard became as private as if it had been a vast room.

The next order was for Van Cortlandt's suit-case to come down from the roof of the car, where it had been placed when the new members joined the party. A strange-looking, thin little key on the millionaire's watch-chain opened the case as though it had been made for the lock; and the absent man's clothing, neatly folded as if by a valet, lay exposed to view. Peter Maritz lifted everything out, shook each garment, and ransacked each corner of the handsomely fitted piece of luggage, but the thing he searched for was not there. He was looking very stern and anxious now.

"I am as sure as I am of my own life that my nephew would not have voluntarily remained in the hands of thieves, sending you and your motor on, if he had had on his person the thing I trusted him to bring back to me," said Maritz, with grim confidence. "He himself did not know whether he, Miss Warren, or my old servant Jacobs was carrying back the real thing or an imitation; nevertheless, as he knew the chances were one in three that he had the right one, he would have died rather than risk breaking faith with me."

"I can give you no explanation of the mystery," said Christopher. "Mr. van Cortlandt—who, I suppose, did not even trust me with his real name—confided not at all in me, therefore I had no responsibility except to obey instructions. If I happen to guess that you employed three messengers, each one of whom was to bring back (as he thought) a diamond cut in Amsterdam, and all of whom met by accident in the same boat, I have absolutely nothing to go upon except my own suspicions."

"Now that you are here, in my courtyard, there is no reason why I shouldn't confirm your suspicions," replied Maritz, in a more conciliatory tone. "You

ought to have with you the New Koh-i-Noor, of which you must have heard. You see I have cause for anxiety, and have had cause enough ever since the truth about my purchase of the finest diamond found in a hundred years unfortunately leaked out. I was certain that a well-known gang of diamond thieves would be on the lookout for the stone on its way back from Amsterdam, and I did my best to guard it. It was my nephew's idea to employ you and your car; and knowing your name and the reputation you made in Dalvania, I approved the notion. As for giving you a false name, he did nothing of the sort. His middle name is Van Cortlandt—his last is the same as mine; though he has lived much abroad, and, luckily for my project, is scarcely known here as yet. You can see why he did not wish to give his own name, Maritz, on account of the association. It was better for you to know nothing, and you need have no resentment if he was not entirely frank. The mission was not his own, but mine, though if he succeeded he was to be made my private secretary, with such a salary as to keep himself and a wife, if he chose to take one—Miss Warren, for instance—in luxury. Now you understand what hung upon success, for him, and you must see that he would not easily fail me. If you are hiding anything, because you think you haven't been treated fairly——”

Christopher broke in with a protest; but the position was now becoming worse than uncomfortable. He was at his wits' end, and in his desperation would have told the millionaire to send for the police and have him searched, if he chose, when a loud clang at the gate-bell cut him short.

“Keep everybody out!” cried Maritz.

“What if it is your nephew himself?” exclaimed Christopher.



MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



1.0

4.5

2.8

2.5

5.0

3.2

2.2

5.6

6.3

3.6

7.1

4.0

2.0

8.0

9.0

10.0

11.2

12.5



1.1



1.8



1.25



1.4



1.6



APPLIED IMAGE Inc

1853 East Main Street  
Rochester, New York 14609 USA  
(716) 482 - 0300 - Phone  
(716) 288 - 5989 - Fax

"Then let him in," amended the master of the house; and an instant later the small gate at the side of the great ones was opened to admit Van Cortlandt-Maritz, with Miss Warren.

"Hurrah, uncle!" cried the young man. "We hired a motor and came on like lightning after the rescue. Poor old Jacobs was drugged on his way to get the diamond, it seems; and who but the notorious Tom Astley did the trick and disguised himself so well I think even you wouldn't have detected the fraud—so well, he was exactly like Jacobs' photograph which you showed me—and got the parcel. But he's caught, and his three confederates; and the diamond's in his overcoat. This girl is the trump I told you she would be, and her packet she threw into the car, as Mr. Race must have told you."

"But yours—yours, Ean; that's what I want," almost panted the millionaire.

"I stuffed it into the petrol tank—just room to squeeze it in," said the young man calmly. Then, turning to the girl, he caught her hand. *Won't* you have a 'story' to write?" he cried. "And it will have to end with our wedding."

"Forgive me for everything, Mr. Race," said Peter Maritz. "You must come to that wedding."

## CHAPTER IX: SEPTEMBER

### THE MISSING CHAPTER

WHEN Christopher Race came back from Amsterdam after his adventure with the diamond carriers, an engagement which he had expected to take up fell through owing to unforeseen business which detained his would-be client; therefore, he was not too pleased to find himself free for more than a fortnight.

Something might turn up, of course. Something generally did turn up with Christopher. Indeed, he had begun to think that he must be the sort of man who attracted adventures as a magnet attracts iron. But when, after he had been idle for a day or two, the card of a Mr. James Harkness was brought to him, he could not regard it as the preface to an adventure.

Neither the card nor the name suggested anything exciting, or even interesting. For one thing, James was a name which had always seemed particularly prosaic to Christopher. Nothing could possibly happen to a man named James, unless he turned into Jim, which he could only do legitimately if he were of a certain type; and this visiting-card was not of the sort that the Jim type would own.

The name was engraved in an attempt at Old English script, according to the conception of some country shopkeeper, on thin, shiny pasteboard, and there was not even the conventional prefix of "Mr."

It was just "James Harkness," as if the owner of the visiting-card did not think himself of enough social importance to have a handle.

It did not occur to Christopher that James Harkness might be a client; rather he fancied that his caller would prove to be a commercial traveller, unobtrusively pushing some new invention of a motor-car firm. He was within an ace of sending down word that he was engaged on important business and regretted that he could not possibly see the gentleman; but as the important business happened to consist in reading a dull novel which bored him inexpressibly, and as he had besides just run out of tobacco and it would be idiotic to go and buy more in a thunderstorm, he told the servant to show Mr. Harkness up to his sitting-room.

The maid who, during the last few months, had brought to Christopher Race's door so many strange people, now produced one whom no wildest stretch of imagination could fit with that adjective.

He was small in stature, with a neat, slender figure clad in a grey tweed suit that boasted the "American shoulder." He had a fine head, and would, from the shape of his forehead and cut of his features, have somewhat resembled a provincial Napoleon, if instead of Napoleon's eagle gaze he had not possessed the soft, wistful brown eyes of a misunderstood dog—a dog who has never deserved a kick in his life but has had many, and has ceased to hope or even wish for a caress—indeed, would be startled and embarrassed if he got one.

This neat, rather dapper little man walked into the ugly lodging-house sitting-room with an air that was briskly business-like, yet oddly apologetic.

"Oh, certainly he wants to introduce a new patent tyre or an improved carburetter," thought Christopher.

But the first few words of his visitor showed that one must not jump at conclusions.

"How do you do, sir? I'm very pleased to have the honour of meeting the celebrated Mr. Race; and I hope that, if you're not engaged, I can get you to take me a trip in your automobile," said Mr. Harkness, with an accent that proclaimed him from the Middle West of America.

Christopher replied that he and Scarlet Runner were disengaged for the present, and invited his caller to sit down and talk business. There was something in the combination of American briskness and—perhaps—un-American slyness which pleased him; and James Harkness—not on shiny pasteboard, but in flesh and blood—had a winning smile; winning because it was like a schoolboy's, and had no self-consciousness in it. He might have been old-looking for thirty, or young-looking for thirty-five, and there was grave, business experience in the firm set of his jaw. But the eyes were a boy's eyes; and Christopher liked him in spite of the fact that James—plain, unromantic, undiluted James—did not appear an ill-chosen name to express his personality.

"Sorry I can't offer you a cigar or cigarette," said Race. "To my disgust, I've just found that I'm out of everything." (He did not add that this was one reason why Mr. Harkness now had the honour of his acquaintance.)

"Oh, I never smoke, thank you," returned the American. "I used to, but I saw it was going to get on my nerves, so I quit. My business—I guess over here you'd call it stockbroking—makes some fellows kind of jumpy, anyhow; and I think a man ought to keep control of himself."

Christopher said that he was quite right, and invited him to have a whisky and soda. Mr. Harkness again

thanked his host, but declined. He did not touch alcohol. In his opinion there was nothing better than ice-water, unless it was lemonade, for a hard worker.

"That's just it," he went on. "It's hard work that's brought me over to this side. I'm taking a vacation; it's the first one I've ever had since I left school, and that was when I was fourteen years old. I've had my nose to the grindstone ever since—but I like it well enough. Mrs. Harkness goes to the seaside every summer, which is the right thing for a lady to do; and she's had a run out to California and down to Florida once or twice, winters. Now she's travelling in Europe with some lady friends of hers,—has been for the last eighteen months,—and it was her idea I should take this vacation and meet her. I just landed yesterday, and took train right to London. So, you see, I haven't lost much time in giving myself the pleasure of calling on you, sir."

"How did you hear of Scarlet Runner?" Christopher inquired.

The little dark man with the head of a Napoleon and the eyes of a misunderstood dog smiled his engaging, boyish smile. "I guess you must be pretty modest," said he. "Why, in America you've been a kind of a hero with the ladies since you helped to set the young King and Queen of Dalvania on their throne; and the public haven't lost sight of you. I feel proud to have the chance of a ride in your automobile."

"I shall be delighted to take Mrs. Harkness and you for a tour, if you don't want to be gone longer than a fortnight," replied Christopher, pleased in spite of himself by the genuine admiration in the brown eyes.

"Two weeks is just what I was thinking of," said Mr. Harkness. "But my wife won't be in the party.

The reason I can go is because I had a Marconi on board ship saying she'd been invited to stay awhile in a French château, and she thought she'd like to have the experience. She hasn't been acquainted with the Baron and Baroness long—they're friends of *her* friends—so she couldn't ask them to invite me too; and her idea was for me to just fool around, seeing sights in England, till she was through visiting. The people who've promised to go automobiling with me I met on the steamer. I suppose three passengers and their baggage wouldn't be too much of a burden to you, sir?"

Christopher set Mr. Harkness' mind at rest on this point, and then, finding that the American was an amateur in motoring, he gave him advice about luggage. Also, they discussed routes, and it appeared that Mr. Harkness, who had never found time to leave his own country before, had no preference. All he wanted was to see some of the prettiest places; and it was finally decided that Scarlet Runner should conduct the party through Devonshire and Cornwall, going by way of the New Forest. The question of money lay in abeyance till the last, and then it was Christopher who introduced it. "I guess I can leave the price to you, sir," said the little man from the West. "I don't know anything about the charge for automobiles myself; but you're a gentleman, and whatever you say will be right."

The start was to be made next day, as there was no time to waste, and Christopher was asked to bring Scarlet Runner to an old-fashioned hotel in Suffolk Street, not at all the sort of hotel an American would be likely to choose unless he had heard of it from English friends. However, that was not Race's affair, and he and his car arrived promptly before the door at ten o'clock in the morning, according to arrangement.

Though he had a liking for Mr. James Harkness, Christopher was not looking forward to the trip with any keenness of interest. He had pictured to himself the sort of friends the kindly, provincial American would have been likely to pick up on the ship. There were two, he knew, and that was all he did know; but he imagined that they would be tired business men like Harkness himself, though probably without Harkness' simple charm. Seldom had he been more surprised, therefore, than when his client ushered out from the hotel two ladies. Nor was their sex the most amazing part of their unexpectedness. That which was particularly astonishing about them was—themselves.

One was elderly, the other young. She who was elderly was English; and the thought that flashed into Christopher Race's head was that if she had a twin brother he would be a fine, brown, hawk-eyed soldier: one of those brave, unobtrusive men who go off as a matter of course to far-away, unhealthful lands, there to do their country's work well and faithfully, without making any fuss about it, until their Sovereign fills their place with a younger man, or until they die in harness.

This woman, though womanly, had the eyes of a soldier—steadfast, enduring; and though she was not yet really old, her hair was white, in fine contrast with the calm dark brows.

She, for a ship acquaintance of Mr. Harkness, was remarkable enough; but her companion—a young girl who could hardly be twenty—was bewildering.

Christopher had never seen a girl like her. She was a princess out of a fairy tale; not just a flesh and blood princess who had strayed into a story of fairies because it was convenient to have her there, but a princess born of a fairy spell.

This fancy did actually present itself to the young man's mind, so completely was he swept off his feet by the appearance of Mr. Harkness' young friend; and though he was usually ashamed if he found himself by chance being sentimental, the girl was so exquisitely romantic a figure that he did not stop to check his extravagant similes.

She made him think of a garden of lilies in moonlight; and this though she was dressed in grey cloth by a tailor who understood his business; therefore, she must indeed have been wonderful.

Christopher had seen a good many beautiful girls—in fact, had even gone out of his way in life to see them; but he felt, without being able to understand precisely why, that this young creature was different from any other he had met, or was likely ever to meet again. Nevertheless, it did not occur to him to fall in love with her at first sight—which he certainly had a right to do if he chose. He would as soon have thought of falling in love with a girl-queen of enchanting beauty, of whom he had caught a dazzling glimpse on the eve of her coronation and marriage with a suitable prince-consort. Yet she was a friend of the provincial Napoleon from the Western States, who had found her on shipboard; and she and her stately, sad-faced companion had consented to take a motor trip with an insignificant, rather commonplace little chance acquaintance.

"Miss Dalrymple—Miss Nourma Dalrymple—let me present Mr. Race," rattled off the American, primly and conscientiously. "This is the automobile I've been talking to you about. A beauty, isn't she?"

Then, having discharged what he considered his duty, he fussed over the luggage as it came out from the hotel, and fussed a good deal more about getting the ladies comfortably seated, tucking a light rug of

his own over the girl and round the girl, as if she had been an early crocus to be protected from some blighting flurry of snow. Indeed, though she had not the air or look of illness, she did seem as fragile, as ethereal, as a flower of the South transported to the North—some kind of dream-flower, Christopher told himself foolishly—a night-blooming Ceres, 'perhap', for everyone to wonder at, and then to vanish as a ray of moonlight vanishes when the moon is swallowed by a cloud.

They started, and as Race was not carrying a chauffeur, Harkness proposed to sit beside him on the front seat. But Miss Dalrymple the elder asked for his company in the tonneau, and he accepted the invitation shyly, delightedly, as if it were a favour bestowed by Royalties. Nevertheless, he was soon laughing and talking, as the car ran through London streets out into the suburbs, making for the country. Christopher heard him telling one or two funny, typically American stories, which evidently amused his guests; and if ever a silence fell, it was Harkness or the girl who broke it, never the elder of the two women, whom Nourma Dalrymple called "Aunt Constance."

Christopher's simple conception of James Harkness had now suddenly and completely changed. The naive yet brisk little business man had assumed in his eyes the importance of a mystery. But, after all, was not the mystery rather an obvious one—too obvious? Race asked himself on second thoughts.

Here was a hard-worked American taking his first holiday, and bent on enjoying it. "When the cat's away the mice will play." Mrs. Harkness was away, and she was amusing herself. Naturally it would occur to Mr. Harkness, who was probably very rich, like most travelling Americans, that now was the

"chance of his life" to amuse himself too, and he was doing it. That was all; except that two exceptionally interesting women were ready to help him do it—at his expense.

Yes, that must be all. And yet—Christopher could not make this obvious supposition fit the characters in the little drama which was to be played in his motor-car.

The weather was perfect, and each day that came to take the place of its dead brother was more exquisite than the last. Christopher was cordially invited to have his meals with his passengers—sometimes charming picnic meals, in which the aunt or niece performed dainty miracles with a somewhat battered tea basket, sometimes meals at delightful, old-fashioned hotels or country inns. If there was any sight-seeing to be done on foot, he was expected to do it with the others, although it appeared that Devonshire and Cornwall were familiar to "Aunt Constan" and she could have played cicerone for the party as efficiently as the owner of *Scarlet Runner*. Occasionally Christopher had Nourma Dalrymple to himself for half an hour at a time, on some short excursion; and it seemed to him that her mind, her nature, was as wonderful as her face. She had thoughts high and clear and light-giving as the stars, and she spoke them out with apparent frankness, yet at the end of a week Christopher had drawn no nearer to the solution of the mystery which had assembled this strange party than in the hour of starting.

He did not even know anything about the Dalrymples, aunt and niece, except that the girl had spent most, if not all, of her life in India, and that the elder woman had—more or less lately—gone out there to visit her brother, who was Nourma's father. Who the father was, what he did in India,

or where was his home in that wide land of enchantments, Christopher did not hear; nor did he hear why Miss Dalrymple had taken her niece to America. He knew that they had been, only because James Harkness had met them on the ship coming back; and this was the girl's first sight of England, as it was that of her new friend. Whatever she admired, he admired. If she so much as said of a place, "Oh, I should like to see it!" her host was not happy unless the vague wish could be quickly gratified. He watched over her even more anxiously than did the evidently devoted aunt. He was depressed if she appeared absent-minded, as she did occasionally, or if her lips drooped, or if she had a far-away look in the dark eyes, which were almost startlingly beautiful under the soft frame of moonlight-on-wheatfield-coloured hair.

There were always flowers for both ladies every morning, even at the most out-of-the-way stopping-places, and there were sweets, and any book which Nourma Dalrymple had said to her aunt or Christopher—Harkness knew little about books—that she would care to read.

Nothing could be more patent than that the provincial Napoleon adored his strangely acquired fairy princess; yet, though by design or accident the name of the absent wife was never mentioned in Christopher's hearing, Harkness did not behave like any other man in love. legitimately or otherwise, whom Race had seen. He never tried to turn a conversation upon himself; he never paid the girl compliments; he never schemed to steal her away from the others for a few moments alone, though it was unconcealable that to be near her was the little man's heaven. Altogether, Christopher could not make him out at all; nor could he make out the meaning of the tour, or what was to come of it afterwards, if anything.

So matters went on until they had been gone for a fortnight, all but one day, and were on their way back to London, which they would reach the following evening. They had returned by Stratford-on-Avon; and wandering about the beautiful old town, Christopher had Nourma Dalrymple beside him. She was even more than usually sweet and gentle in her manner that day, though thoughtful, and Christopher ought to have been enjoying each moment in the society of such a unique and radiant girl; yet somehow he felt troubled and restless, as sensitive women do when the air is crackling with electricity before a thunderstorm. He could not think of things worth saying, though he would have liked to be brilliant, and instead of looking at his companion he found himself continually watching the pair who walked ahead—James Harkness and Miss Dalrymple.

They were absorbed in some very grave discussion, that was clear; so completely absorbed that they might as well have been staring at London hoardings as gazing upon the beautiful beamed walls of Shakespeare's birthplace. Once, when Christopher happened to catch a glimpse of the American's face, he was startled. The little man looked as if he had been struck a deathblow. But afterwards his eyes lit up with feverish excitement, or hope, and a spot of colour burned on each of his rather high cheek-bones. Christopher could not, to save his life, help being curious. He would have guessed, if Harkness were not married, that overtures had been made to the aunt for the niece's hand and repulsed by her; but, as it was, no explanation of this sort was feasible.

That night, as Race sat in his room at the hotel, smoking a pipe before going to bed, and wondering what had happened, someone knocked at his door. He rose and opened it, to see Harkness standing

outside, twice as shy, twice as apologetic, as he had been in the first moment of making acquaintance.

"I—there are some things—perhaps you'd let me talk to you about," he began, still on the threshold.

"Come in," said Christopher pleasantly. "Is there anything in Scarlet Runner's performances or mine that you don't like, and want me to change?" he went on, laughing good-naturedly at the other's hesitation. "Because if there is you mustn't mind telling me so."

"No, indeed," replied Harkness. "You've both been just about perfect this trip. And it's been a grand trip, too. I was a blamed idiot, I suppose, to think it could amount to more than it has. But I always was hopeful if I cared about anything." He sat down, relapsing into silence and thoughtfulness. Christopher was silent too, for the good reason that he knew not what to say. He was at a loss to understand his employer's meaning, though, if the American had been a coarser type of man, he might have sprung to some conclusion. But soon Harkness began again. "As a matter of fact, sir, it's your advice I want to ask, if you'll permit me."

Christopher answered that he would be glad to give it, or to be of use; and he spoke sincerely. This was one of Christopher Race's good points. There was no affectation about him. When he said a thing he meant it, and had a way of convincing you that he did, without many words. Harkness looked at him gratefully, with those eyes of a wiseful dog.

"It's a mighty delicate matter," the American went on; "a matter I wouldn't have any call to talk about, if I could see my way clear how to act. But I don't. That's just it. I'm a plain business man. What's that saying about fools rushing in where angels would be afraid to show their noses, or something kind of

like that? Well, I feel that way right now. But you're different. I don't know as I'm putting it so's you can understand, but what I see about you is, that you've *lived*. Now, I never lived—till I got on board the *Baltic*, less than four weeks ago. I knew what business was, and how to get along in the world, and my duty to my wife and my neighbours; but I hadn't *lived*. I didn't realise what it was to be really alive, or to live. But I do now. I've learned in less than four weeks what I hadn't up till then in thirty-three years, and probably shouldn't for thirty-three more years—or till the day of my death. Yes, sir, I should just have dried up like a withered leaf or an old nut if it hadn't been for that blessed girl. That's what I've got to thank her for—life."

Christopher did not speak. What could he say—yet? But there was stealing into his puzzled brain a glimmer of light. No more than a faint glimmer; but it was enough to keep him from misunderstanding the man with a name to which nothing worth happening could ever possibly happen.

"Do you take in my meaning, sir?" asked Harkness. "Because, if you do, it'll be easier for me to go on."

"I—well—I suppose you've unfortunately fallen in love with Miss Nourma Dalrymple," blurted out Christopher, whose thoughts of the situation were more delicate than his words. But, in a way, it was better to be blunt; it flung open doors and windows and let in air.

"*Unfortunately* in love?" repeated Harkness, in a shocked way. "Oh, then I've been fool enough to mix things up so you can't see, after all. Why, it's the most fortunate thing ever happened to me. It's like being shut up in a kind of dark cell for thirty-three years and then having an angel from heaven fly down to let you out. Once you're out, you know,

nothing can put you where you were before, because, when you go back into the cell, it won't be dark or musty any more, but full of all the glory you saw when you were outside. If you've got anything in you at all, you're bound to take that much with you. Maybe you think I'm crazy, talking like this, Mr. Race, but I have to explain. And it isn't as if you were a stranger. We've been acquainted a mighty short while, as time goes; but you're right in this chapter where the angel comes in."

"The missing chapter," Christopher muttered, more to himself than the other; but Harkness heard, and answered—

"I see what you're thinking about," said he. "You think this is going to be the missing chapter in my life. That—that my friends—that my wife—won't ever know anything about it."

"I suppose that is what was in my head," Christopher confessed.

"Well, you're right, sir, in a way. We'll call it the missing chapter. It'll be that for the other people—the ones who wouldn't be able to understand it if they were told, and might get thoughts I'd rather fall dead right here than anyone—either near me or far off—should have about an angel. You, for instance, wouldn't have known there could be such an angel on earth, if you hadn't seen her and been with her, would you, now?"

"No," said Christopher. "She's wonderful. You're certainly to be excused, Mr. Harkness."

"I guess I *wouldn't* have been excusable if I hadn't loved her, because I'd have been a block of wood," the little man retorted, almost indignantly.

"But what about her?" Christopher ventured. "Forgive me—you asked my advice, you know. Is this going to make her unhappy?"

"I don't quite catch your meaning." Harkness was looking honestly bewildered.

"I mean, if she has learned to care——"

"Great *Scot*, sir, care for me? Be in lo—— Oh no, I can't even say the word in a connection like that. She feels kindly towards me, I know, and the *Lord* knows how good to me she's been. As for me, why, you don't think—no, of course you don't think—that I'd have been worm enough, green idiot enough, beast enough, to speak that same word to her about myself?"

"If I could have thought it for an instant, I apologise," said Christopher.

"Thank you, sir. You're a white man. I knew you were. That's why I've turned to you; for that reason, and because, as I said, you've *lived*, you've felt, in your years, though they're not so many as mine. I love that girl—yes. But even if there weren't a Mrs. Harkness I wouldn't have told Miss Nourma, any more than a common man like me could tell a queen he was in love with her and would like to have her for his wife. Her kind isn't for my kind. And, besides, she loves somebody; I guess a mighty different sort of man from me. She didn't say anything about him herself, but her aunt told me."

"Is that what she was talking of this afternoon?" inquired Christopher, recalling the mysterious conversation which had seemed to crush the life out of the American.

"My goodness, no. She told me on shipboard."

"Then what *did* you expect from this trip which you haven't got, since you knew all along that the girl was in love with another man?" The question was out before Christopher quite knew that he was asking it aloud.

Harkness stared blankly. "Expect? Why, I didn't dare *expect* anything, the way things stood; the way

they'd been explained to me. But I *hoped*. I hoped the motoring and the beautiful scenery, and the fresh air and new experiences, might do her good. Though I ought to have known that what a tour from India, 'most round the world, to America couldn't do, two weeks in an auto wouldn't. But, you see, she happened to say, the afternoon before we landed in Southampton, that going in a motor-car ought to be a nice way of travelling in England, and that she'd never taken more than a short ride in one. That's how I thought of it; and, of course, the first thing I did was to hustle round and find Mr. Race. If *any* old automobile was good, said I to myself, a historical kind of a one like his Scarlet Runner ought to be just It. And it has been. But though she's enjoyed everything, she doesn't feel any stronger for the two weeks."

"I think I see," said Christopher. "The father, in India, wouldn't let his daughter marry the man she loved, and Miss Dalrymple has been trotting her niece about the world to help her to forget."

"No, you don't see," Harkness answered. "But how could you, without having any sort of a clue to the real story? The young man is a fine chap any father would be proud to have his daughter marry; a soldier who got a Victoria Cross in that war of yours with the Boers, before he was ordered to India. He's titled, too. I think he's a baron or a baronet, and good-looking, Miss Dalrymple said. She called him a splendid fellow, worthy of her niece, so you can guess what he must be, for her to think that. But Miss Nourma refused him."

"Although she loved him?"

"Because she loved him. But she made him think she didn't care, otherwise he wouldn't have given her up."

"And now she repents?"

"No, she doesn't repent. She'd do the same thing over again, though it nearly killed her to do it, and she isn't as strong even as she was then. She refused him because she was under sentence of death."

"Good heavens! What are you talking about?" exclaimed Christopher.

"We've just struck the part that I came here to talk about," answered Harkness quietly.

"Has the poor child got consumption?" Christopher asked. "She doesn't look ill. It's only that she's different from other girls—seems made of moonlight, or flowers, or something unearthly."

"That's *just* the thought one has about her," said Harkness. "It came to me the minute I saw her. My steamer chair was put next to her aunt's on deck, or I shouldn't have got acquainted. I haven't much cheek anyhow, and I should never have mustered up enough for that. But Miss Dalrymple and I talked, and so it all happened naturally. I suppose it was to be—I mean I was to live my Missing Chapter, the only real one in the whole book. I guess Miss Dalrymple understood me pretty soon, so she told me things. By and by it was the whole history. Miss Nourma's father was an officer, like the young man his daughter loves. He spent a summer in Kashmir, on leave, about twenty-one years ago, and had some letters of introduction to high-up, grand sort of natives, princes and noblemen. Then he somehow—I don't know how, for his sister didn't tell me—got to see a girl he wasn't supposed to see, for women there aren't much on show, are they? The two fell desperately in love, and he stole her away. They married; and as it wasn't exactly the right sort of thing for an officer to have done, when he was a kind of guest, he gave up the Army. Miss Nourma's mother was perfectly beautiful, Miss Dalrymple says; looked as if

she'd been carved out of ivory, with gold for hair and starry sapphires for eyes. Her husband brought her to England, but she was home-sick, and the climate didn't suit her; so he managed to get some civil appointment in a remote part of India, where he's stopped ever since, not having any money of his own. And his father was so displeased with the marriage, he didn't leave him much. But the lovely Kashmiran princess died when her baby was born; that's Miss Nourma, whom they named after her mother. And it seems that the child of a European man and a Kashmiran woman, though almost always extraordinarily handsome, is just the same as born under sentence of death. They loved each other so much, those two, that they didn't think of anything else; but afterwards Captain Dalrymple must have had some awful heartaches, seeing that beautiful angel grow up like a lily, and knowing (for apparently it's a thing well known) that she was in all probability doomed to be cut down before she was twenty-one."

"I have heard that sort of thing from Army people who've come back from India," said Christopher dully. "I believe it's true enough. Heavens! What an awful fate to hang over so lovely a head! Can nothing be done?"

"If Captain Dalrymple had been a rich man something might have been done earlier, perhaps, or so it appears, now that the world's growing scientific. When she was a child, Miss Nourma might have been sent away from India, not to England, but to the High Engadine for the winters and somewhere bracing every summer—mountains, or the seaside; and she might have had great specialists to look after her. But he was poor, and nobody supposed, anyhow, that there was a chance for the little girl to escape the fate others had suffered when their time came, else the father might

have made a tremendous effort. As for Nourma, she was happy enough, for, of course, nobody told her. It was only just before Miss Dalrymple, the aunt, came out to visit her brother and niece (indeed, I guess that was what took her out) that Miss Nourma overheard a conversation which let her know what to expect. Someone was giving a dance in honour of her eighteenth birthday; and while she was sitting on a balcony, waiting for her partner to come back (the young man she'd fallen in love with, it was), a couple inside a window began to talk. At first they didn't mention her name, but said what a pity it was, a beautiful girl like that, certain to fall into a decline and go off before the age of twenty-one—only three more years to live, at most. Then came the name, and she knew. But think of her pluck, sir! She just got quietly up and moved off to another place at a little distance, so that when her partner came the people on the other side of the curtain needn't discover what an awful thing they'd done. But instead of saying 'Yes' when the young officer proposed, as he did that very night, she said 'No,' pretending not to care a bit, and telling him he must find some other girl better suited to him than she was.

"Not a word did she tell her father when she got home, either, but went on living as if nothing had happened, as long as she could. Only her body wasn't as strong as her soul. She broke down, and finally grew delirious, so that her father heard the truth in a broken kind of way, which made him question the girl when she was getting well. My guess is that something he must have written about it, and the tragedy of it, to his sister, brought Miss Dalrymple flying out to India. She'd never seen Nourma before, and now she blames herself for not going sooner; she just adores her niece. She isn't too rich herself, but she

sold stocks or something, and got hold of enough cash to take Nourma a long sea trip, which a doctor there said might possibly give a new tone to the girl's constitution, late as it was to try experiments. But the day I met the ladies, Miss Nourma was no stronger than the day she left home. And to-day she's no better than the day we started motoring. I don't think she cares much, except for her father's sake. You see how serene and—and radiant she is always, as if she'd sailed right up to the zenith to live with the moon and stars. Only this afternoon it was a little different with her, maybe; for the trip will be over to-morrow, and she and her aunt have been having a talk about—her being worse, and going back to India. Miss Dalrymple told me. And she told me something else, which she hadn't mentioned before, because, as she said, there seemed no use speaking of it.

"It's that I want to ask your advice about, Mr. Race. It seems that when they got to London, Miss Dalrymple took Nourma to see a great specialist a doctor in New York had recommended her to consult, as she was always catching at some hope or other. His opinion was that there might be a good chance of saving Miss Nourma, making her strong and well as any girl. Only neither of them saw how the thing he suggested could be done; and she didn't even tell her niece what he'd said."

"What was the thing?" Christopher asked, intensely interested.

"Oh, I guess you've heard of it mostly in story-books, where beautiful girls do it to save their lovers' lives. But the question is, could a chap like me, so much beneath her in every way, and almost a stranger as far as time of acquaintance goes, have any right to propose it? Would it be a monstrous liberty that a

lady would resent like a kind of insult? I don't see how I could bear it if she did."

"You forget you haven't told me yet what the thing is," Christopher reminded him.

"Oh, so I didn't. I was just thinking out loud. Why, that doctor said, if a perfectly healthy person, who never drank alcohol or took any other poison into the system, would give his or her blood to Miss Nourma, it could make her all over again like new. She might marry, and be happy, and live to a good old age. He and Miss Dalrymple didn't see how any such person could be found, for she's too old, and so is the girl's father. But I'm not old yet, and I'm strong."

"You would do that for her?" asked Christopher.

"If I dared to propose it. If you don't think it would be considered too great a liberty."

"A liberty! And you'd do it to save her—for another man?"

"Of course, that would be a great happiness for me to keep in my mind, Mr. Race, when I thought back on what you call my 'missing chapter.' I do wish you would tell me what you think."

"I think you're the best and most unselfish—yes, absolutely selfless—chap I ever met," answered Christopher.

And to his own surprise there was a slight lump in his throat which all but made his eyes water as he swallowed it.

Mr. James Harkness sprang up and shook hands with him very hard, several times over.

"Thank you, sir!" he exclaimed. "It seems funny you should think that, you know, because, if—if it was allowed to happen, it would be the greatest honour and joy that could come to me—greater than anything I ever dreamed of: to feel *I* had done something for her—a girl like her. But what I *am* glad of is that you don't think they'd be insulted."

"Insulted!" cried Christopher. "Why, don't you understand you'd be risking your life, if——"

"Pshaw!" cut in Harkness. "I'm not a giant, but I'm 'most as strong as one, I guess. I can stand anything. Besides, I'd be so happy. Scot! If they would let me do it! Say, Mr. Race, would you just mention it to Miss Dalrymple as coming from me? I shouldn't have the courage to, myself, and I have her permission to tell you this story about Miss Nourma. She considers you a fine young man, and she didn't mind your knowing, as we've all been such friends together the last two weeks."

"What if—your strength should fail, and you shouldn't get through?" Christopher asked. "Mrs. Harkness would have to know, and——"

"No, she wouldn't. There'd be no good in her knowing. I've thought that out already, and how to arrange, although there's no chance, really, of such an ending. She's having a good time in France, getting acquainted with the aristocracy over there, so she's going to stay and make a few more visits. I shall get a clear three weeks, and she's happy about me, knowing I'm seeing the sights. It isn't as if I was the kind of man a woman would be what you'd call *in love* with, you see, sir; and though Mrs. Harkness does her duty by me, she's a woman who's born to be independent. And I should leave her well provided for. You'd be doing me a big favour if you *would* lead up to this with Miss Dalrymple, and find out if she could feel I was worthy."

So it came about that Christopher was induced to grant the "big favour," and Miss Dalrymple not only thought Mr. James Harkness worthy of the high honour he solicited, but agreed with Christopher in thinking some very good things about the little man's character which would have surprised the little man himself.

They motored back to London without broaching the matter to Nourma Dalrymple; but on arrival there was a consultation with the great specialist, who approved of Harkness physically as much as the others did spiritually. Then Nourma had to be told, and after the utmost difficulty persuaded to consent to the experiment which might mean life for her. That was where Scarlet Runner and Scarlet Runner's master slipped out of the story, and into another, so much more dramatic, so much more sensational in its incidents, that the strong impression graven on Christopher's mind by James Harkness' missing chapter might easily have been blurred. But it was not so. He thought constantly of the little man with the wistful eyes of a misunderstood dog and the features of a provincial Napoleon. He thought also of Nourma Dalrymple, and was as joyous as if the result had intimately concerned himself when the first news (which he had asked to have) came telling of the experiment. All was going well, so far as could be known, and it was believed that the opinion of the eminent specialist would be triumphantly justified.

Christopher had had to take up an engagement immediately after returning to London with Harkness and the two Miss Dalrymples. This called him out of town, and he did not return until nearly another fortnight had passed. His first thought after getting back was to go and see the American at a nursing home, the address of which, by request, had been given him. But Harkness was no longer there. He had got a telegram with some unexpected tidings, and, having been pronounced strong enough to move, had left at a few hours' notice. There was, however, a note for Mr. Race, in case he remembered his promise to pay a visit.

"Am just off to get rooms for Mrs. Harkness and self at Savoy Hotel," Christopher read, scribbled hastily in pencil on a shiny, thin card such as had introduced the owner to Scarlet Runner's master. "Mrs. H—— has wired will arrive sooner than she thought. Shall probably remain in London some days, as she wants to shop; and would both be please if you found time to call."

Nothing further. No allusion to the past or to the state of his health; no closing admonition not to speak a word which might open to eyes not meant to see a leaf of the missing chapter. Harkness trusted his new friend. He knew that such a reminder was unnecessary, and Christopher felt the more warmly drawn to the little man because of his silence.

He did call at the Savoy that day, and at such an hour as to be almost sure of finding Mr. and Mrs. James Harkness at home. He was not disappointed. They were in, and he was asked up to their private sitting-room.

If it had been Nourma Dalrymple's room she would have had it full of flowers. Flowers seemed to come of themselves where she was. But Mrs. Harkness had no such attraction for the flower-kingdom. There were flowers on the centre table, supplied by the management for one of the best suites in the house; and Mrs. Harkness had presented herself with parcels. There were boxes and bales of all sizes and shapes, just arrived from various shops; and there was Mrs. Harkness in the midst of them, a tall bustling woman of noticeably fine figure, no particular complexion, restless light eyes, and a firm, full chin. She was the embodiment of practicality—self-satisfied, well-dressed practicality; and as she and her husband came forward to meet their guest, she towered over him a good two inches in height.

Christopher had thought the American small, but now he seemed to have shrunk to half his original size. Was it only that he was thin, with hollows in his pale cheeks, and stooped a little as if from fatigue after a long day's shopping with his wife, or was it partly the contrast with Mrs. Harkness' imposing carriage and superior height? Christopher did not quite know; but he did know that the brown eyes were as kind and wistful as ever, and that they lighted up with pleasure at sight of him.

"Why, yes," said the lady; "Mr. Harkness has told me how lucky he was to have gotten you and your celebrated automobile to take him a trip. I'm very glad to meet you. It's a good thing he's seen all he wants to of the country before I joined him, for I'm not partial to country myself. New York, y, Paris, *and* London are good enough for me. I expect you both had a nice time, from what I've got out of Mr. Harkness, but I can't say his vacation in an auto seems to have done him much good, by the way he looks. He appears to me twice as tired and peaked as he did before I left him at our home, some months ago. But he tells me he's all right."

They asked Christopher to stop to dinner, which they were having early, and to go to the theatre with them afterwards, but Christopher pleaded an engagement.

"Well?" he said, when Harkness went down with him to the door.

"It is well," the other answered. "The big doctor's mighty pleased with her; thinks she's even better than he hoped. I guess no one, not even you, can understand what that means, my knowing the happiness that's surely coming to her now will be just a tiny bit through me. Miss Dalrymple, the aunt, has written all about everything, since it's over,

to the young man. He *is* a baronet. I know his name now. He's Captain Sir Everard Molyneux. She'll be Lady Molyneux. Can't you just see how happy he'll be, finding out she did care always, and why she wouldn't let him know? *She* wouldn't have called him back herself, but Miss Dalrymple could tell him all right."

"So this is to be the end," said Christopher. "Love and happiness with her lover for the girl you saved; and for you——"

"Happiness too—the best kind. All my life is in the Missing Chapter. But it isn't missing for me. The memory of it's enough."

Then he shook hands with Christopher, and went back to his wife.

## CHAPTER X: OCTOBER

### THE JACOBEOAN HOUSE

THE day after Christopher came back to London from his tour with the man of the "Missing Chapter" he found on his table a queer telegram. It said: "Please come at once with your car and try solve mystery at old house now used as hotel patronised by motorists. Same rate paid per day for necessary time as for automobile tour.—SIDNEY CHESTER, Wood House, New Forest. References, London and Scottish Bank." And the message was dated two days back.

Christopher did not see why he should be applied to as a solver of mysteries. However, the telegram sounded interesting. He liked old houses, and his desire to accept the offer was whetted by the fact that it had been made several days ago, and might have been passed on to someone else by this time.

At all events, he thought he would answer the wire, and he did so before washing away the dust of travel which he had accumulated at the rate of thirty miles an hour.

"Just back from journey. Found telegram," he wired. "Am I still wanted? If so, can come."

When an answer arrived he had Scarlet Runner ready for another start.

"Yes, urgently wanted," ran the reply. "Hope you can start this afternoon. But don't come to Wood House. Will meet you at the Sandboy and Owl,

within mile of Ringhurst as you come from London. Please let me know probable hour of arrival.—  
CHESTER.”

Christopher wired again, “Hope to reach you about seven.” And his hope was justified, as it usually was when he had to depend upon Scarlet Runner. He had often passed the Sandboy and Owl, and remembered the roadside inn for its picturesqueness, so that he lost no time in finding the way.

“I have come to see a Mr. Chester, who will be here in ten or fifteen minutes,” Race said to the landlord, who looked as if he might have had a meritorious past as a coachman in some aristocratic household.

The sporting eye of the old man suddenly twinkled. “I think, sir,” he answered, “that the person you expect has arrived, and is waiting in my private parlour, which I have given up for the—for the purpose.”

The landlord’s manner and slight hesitation, as if in search of the right word, struck Christopher as odd; but it was too late to catechise the old man in regard to Mr. Chester, no matter how diplomatically.

The dusk of early autumn draped the oak-beamed hall with shadow, and one lamp only made darkness seem more visible. The landlord opened a door at the end of a dim corridor, and said respectfully to someone out of sight, “The gentleman with the motor has arrived.” Then he backed out of the way, and Christopher stepped over the threshold. He saw a girl rise up from a chair, crumpling a telegram which she had been reading by the light of a shaded lamp.

She wore a riding habit, and a neat hat on sleek hair the colour of ripening wheat. She was charmingly pretty, in a flowerlike way. Her great eyes, which now appeared black, would be blue by daylight, and

ndon.  
al.—

bout  
was  
He  
and  
ness,

ll be  
the  
ad a  
cratic

kled.  
you  
ivate  
the

as if  
odd;  
egard

amed  
kness  
or at  
ly to  
motor  
, and  
saw  
which

p.  
sleek  
ingly  
which  
, and



"I THINK, SIR," HE ANSWERED, "THAT THE PERSON YOU EXPECT HAS ARRIVED."



her figure was perfect in the well-cut habit; but she was either pale and anxious-looking, or else the lamplight gave that effect.

"I beg your pardon," exclaimed Christopher. "I've come from London to see a Mr. Sidney Chester, and was told I should find him here, but——"

"I'm Sidney Chester," said the girl. "It was I who telegraphed for you to come and help us."

Christopher was surprised, but he kept his countenance, and pretended to take this revelation as a matter of course.

"Sidney is a woman's name as well as a man's," she went on, "and there was no use explaining in a telegram. Please sit down, and I'll—no, I can't promise to make you understand, for the thing's beyond understanding; but I'll tell you about it. First, though, I'd better explain why I sent for you. I don't mean to flatter you, but if there's any chance of the mystery being solved, it can only be done by a man of your sort—clever and quick of resource, as well as an accomplished motorist. That's my reason; now for my story. But perhaps you've heard of Wood House and the strange happenings there? We've tried to keep the talk out of the papers, but it was impossible; and there've been paragraphs in most of them for the last fortnight."

"I've been touring for a fortnight," replied Christopher, "and haven't paid much attention to the papers."

"I'm glad," answered the girl, "because you'll listen to what I have to tell you with an unbiassed mind. You don't even know about Wood House itself?"

Christopher had to admit ignorance, though he guessed from the girl's tone that the place must be famous, apart from its mysterious reputation.

"It's a beautiful old house," she went on, the

harassed expression of her face softening into tenderness. "There are pictures and accounts of it in books about the county. We've got the loveliest oak panelling in nearly all the rooms, and wonderful furniture. Of course, we love it dearly,—my mother and I, the only ones of the family who are left,—but we're disgustingly poor; our branch of the Chesters have been growing poorer for generations. We had to see everything going to pieces, and there was no money for repairs. There were other troubles, too—oh, I may as well tell you, since you ought to know everything concerning us if you're to do any good. I was silly enough to fall in love with a man who ought to marry an heiress, for he's poor, too, and has a title, which makes poverty harder and more grinding. He's let his house—a show place—and because he won't give me up and look for a rich girl (he wouldn't have to look far or long) he's trying to get a fortune out of a ranch in Colorado. That made me feel as if I *must* do something, and we couldn't let Wood House, because there's a clause in father's will against our doing so. We're obliged to live there, or forfeit it to the person who would have inherited it if the place had been entailed and had had to go to a male heir.

"But no such thought came to poor father as that mother and I would dream of making the house into an hotel, so it didn't occur to him to provide against such a contingency. It was I who had the idea—because I was desperate for money; and I heard how people like old houses in these days—Americans and others who aren't used to things that are antique. At last I summoned up courage to propose to mother that we should advertise to entertain motorists and other travellers.

"Every penny we could spare, and a lot we couldn't, we spent on advertising, when she'd consented, and

two months ago we opened the house as an hotel. Our old servants were good about helping, and we got in several new ones. We began to make the most astonishing success, and I was delighted. I thought if all went on well I need have nothing to do with managing the place after this year. I might marry if I liked, and there would be the income rolling in; so you see, after these dreams, what it is to find ruin staring us in the face. That sounds melodramatic, but it's the truth."

"The truth often is melodramatic," said Christopher. "I've discovered that lately. Things happen in real life that would be sneered at by the critics as preposterous."

"This thing that is happening to us is preposterous," said Miss Chester. "People come to our house, perhaps for dinner or lunch, or perhaps for several days. But whichever it may be, during one of the meals—always the last if they're having more than one—every piece of jewellery they may be wearing, and all the money in their pockets and purses—except small silver and copper—disappear mysteriously."

"Perhaps not mysteriously," suggested Christopher. "You mentioned having engaged new servants. One of them may be an expert thief."

"Of course, that was our first idea," said the girl. "But it would be impossible for the most expert thief, even a conjurer, to pull ladies' rings from their fingers, unfasten clasps of pearl dog-collars, take off brooches and bracelets or belts with gold buckles, and remove studs from shirt-fronts or sleeve-links from cuffs, without the knowledge of the persons wearing the things."

"Yes, that would be impossible," Christopher admitted.

"Well, that is what happens at Wood House every day, and has been happening for the last fortnight. People sit at the table, and apparently everything goes

on in the most orderly way ; yet at the end of the meal their valuables are gone."

"It sounds like a fairy story," said Christopher.

"Or a ghost story," amended Sidney Chester.

Christopher did not smile, for the girl's childish face looked so distressed that to make light of what was tragedy to her would have been cruel. The ghost theory, however, he was not ready to entertain.

"I think the explanation will turn out to be more prosaic," he said. "It would be difficult for ghosts to make jewellery and money invisible as well as themselves."

"Yes," replied Miss Chester seriously.

"So we must turn our attention elsewhere."

"Ah, but where?"

"I suppose that's what you want me to find out?"

"Exactly. And I wouldn't let you come to Wood House until I'd told you the story. Whatever it is that works the mischief there mustn't know that you are different from any other tourist. You're prepared now. I want you to watch, to set your wits to work to find out the mystery. Of course, you must leave your valuables in care of the landlord here. You'll motor over this evening, won't you, and say you wish to have a room?"

"With pleasure," said Christopher. "And I'll do my best to help."

"Thanks for taking an interest. Then I'll go now. I shall just be able to ride home in time for dinner."

"But there are questions still which I'd better ask you," said Christopher; "as we're not to have any private communication at Wood House. How many indoor servants have you?"

"Three housemaids, one dear old thing who has been with us for years, and two young girls lately got in—one from London, one from our own neighbour-

hood; a butler we've had since I can remember, two new footmen from London, and an old cook-house-keeper, who has had two assistants since we opened as an hotel. That's all, except a stray creature or two about the kitchen. I must tell you, too, that with the new servants we had the best of references. They've been with us for two months now, and the mystery only began, as I said, a fortnight ago. The first thing that happened was when a rich American family, doing a motor tour round England, came to stop for a night, and were so delighted with the place that they made up their minds to stay from Saturday to Monday. On Sunday night at dinner the two girls and their mother lost jewellery worth thousands, and Mr. van Rensalaer, the father, was robbed of five hundred pounds in notes—all he had with him except his letter of credit, which wasn't taken. You can imagine how they felt—and how we felt. Of course, we sent for a detective, but he could discover nothing. He said it was the queerest affair he ever heard of. Not a jewel, not a penny has ever been recovered; and at least twenty people who have come to us since have suffered in the same way."

"Still, they come. You haven't lost your clients?" said Christopher.

"Not yet; for though most of those who arrive have read about the mystery in the papers (if they haven't, we feel obliged to warn them) they don't believe the stories. They think the thing must have been planned to work up a sensation, and they're so certain nothing of the sort can happen to *them*, that they won't take the precaution of leaving their jewellery and money somewhere else before coming into the house. Then they lose everything, and are aghast. But it's too late for regrets. Nothing that has disappeared at Wood House has ever been traced."

"Have you lost no valuables yourselves?" asked Christopher—"you and your mother?"

"No, we have none to lose, in the way of jewellery," answered the girl. "As for the money that comes in, we bank everything immediately, and pay for all we buy with cheques. The servants haven't been robbed, and none of our old silver has been taken. But our cousins, Mr. and Mrs. Morley Chester, who have come to stay with us and manage the house—mother and I are too unbusinesslike to do that ourselves—have lost their jewellery, and a little money. Luckily they hadn't many valuables with them, but there were a few heirlooms. We felt dreadfully about their loss, for they're no richer than we are; but they're dears—young, and gay, and kind-hearted, and they pretend not to mind. I don't know what we should have done without them. The servants, too; not one has left us, though with such a cloud of mystery hanging over the place we couldn't have blamed them if they'd walked out in a body, even those who've been with us for years. Oh, it's been so horrid in the house for this dreadful fortnight! Men coming from newspapers wanting to interview us and take photographs of the rooms where the things disappeared. It's a wonder you've never read about us and our troubles."

Christopher replied that it did seem odd, but that he found little time when touring to do more than glance at the summary of news in the papers. He did not add that he had been too much interested in the affairs of his last clients to think about outside matters; but went on to inquire whether he had understood aright—that the vanishing of jewels and money had invariably taken place in certain rooms.

"Always at meals, and, therefore, it could happen only in three rooms," said Sidney Chester; "the big dining-hall and two small rooms which we've set apart

as private sitting-rooms. Sometimes those who stay with us like to eat there, if they come in parties of three or four; but the dining-hall is the most beautiful room in the house, and people admire it so much that they often prefer it to any other place."

"Extraordinary!" exclaimed Christopher. "You mean to tell me that sometimes you have a number of persons, many of them strangers to each other, lunching or dining at the same time, and that all are robbed without suspecting anything is wrong at the time?"

"Stranger still, there are some who have no valuables and are not touched by the mysterious influence, whatever it may be, yet they don't know what is happening to the others."

"Nobody is robbed in the night?"

"No. Nothing has been missed from the bedrooms."

"Do most of your clients stop for a long time?"

"Most of them only for a day or two, in passing through the New Forest. I don't suppose that any of those who have had things stolen will come back, though they're enchanted with the house at first, before the Thing happens. Just now we're getting crowds who come to try and ferret out the mystery, or because they've made bets that *they* won't lose anything. But soon the sort of people we want will stop away, and we shall get only vulgar curiosity-mongers; then, when we cease to be a nine days' wonder, there'll be nobody, and we shall have to give up. That's what I look forward to, and it will break my heart."

"Something will have to be done," said Christopher—puzzled, but anxious to be encouraging. "Have you no guest who has been with you several weeks?"

"One," the girl returned, half reluctantly, as if she guessed his reason for putting this question. "It's—a man."

"A young man?"

"Yes, a young man."

"How long has he been in the house?"

"Several weeks. He's painting a picture, using the King's room, as we call it, for a background—the room Charles II had when an ancestor of ours was hiding him, and would dart down into a secret place underneath whenever a dangerous visitor arrived."

"Oh, an artist?"

"Not a professional. He——"

"Can't you remember how long he has been with you?"

"Between three weeks and a fortnight." The girl blushed, her white face lovely in its sudden flush of colour. "I see what's in your mind. But there's nothing in that, I assure you. The merest coincidence. You don't look as if you were ready to believe me, but you will when I tell you that it's Sir Walter Raven, the man I'm engaged to marry. When I wrote him about our scheme he didn't like the idea, but soon I let him know what a success it was proving. I even hinted that I might think over the resolution I'd made not to marry him for years, because, after all, I mightn't have to be a burden. He was so excited over the letter that he left his ranch in charge of his partner and came over at once. It was a great surprise to see him, but—it was a very agreeable one. He's been my one comfort—except, of course, our dear cousins—since the evil days began."

"He hasn't been able to throw any light on the problem?"

"No, though he's tried in every way."

"Does he know you've sent for me?"

"I haven't told him, because it would seem as if I couldn't trust him to get to the bottom of the mystery. You see, though he's tremendously clever, he isn't

that sort of man. He's been in the Army, and used to drift along, amusing himself as he could, until he met me, and decided to go to work. He's different from you."

"Not so different as she thinks," Christopher said to himself; only he had been driven from amusement to work by a reason less romantic, and, unlike Sir Walter Raven, had not met the right woman yet, but he expected to find her some day.

"When you've got hold of a clue, as I feel you will," Sidney Chester went on, "then I'll tell Sir Walter, and he'll be delighted. Till then, though, you shall be for him, as for everybody else except myself, a guest in the house, like other guests. Luckily, we can give you a place to keep that famous car of yours. We've had part of the stables made into a garage. Now, have you asked me everything?"

"Not yet," answered Christopher, selfishly less sorry to detain her than he would have been had she been middle-aged and plain. "I want to know what servants are in the rooms where these robberies occur?"

"The butler, Nelson, in the dining-hall, or one of the footmen if the meal is being served in a private sitting-room."

"Only those, except the guests?"

"Since the mystery began I've sometimes been there to watch and superintend, and one of my cousins, either Morley or his wife. And in the dining-hall Sir Walter Raven is kind enough to keep an eye on what goes on, while appearing to be engaged with his luncheon or dinner."

"Yet the robberies take place just the same under your very eyes?"

"Yes. That is the mysterious part. The whole thing is like a dream. But you will see for yourself.

Only, as I said, take care not to have anything about you which They—whoever, whatever They are—can steal.”

“I don’t think I shall trouble to put away my valuables,” said Christopher. “It wouldn’t break me if I lost them, and I can’t feel that such a thing will happen to me.”

“Ah, others have felt that, and regretted their confidence.”

“I shan’t regret mine,” laughed the young man. “And I never carry much money.”

“Remember, I’ve warned you!” cried the girl.

“My blood be on my own head,” he smiled, in return, and at last announced that the catechism was finished. She gave him her hand, and he shook it reassuringly; then, it being understood that, as it was late, he would dine at the inn and arrive at Wood House after nine, she left him. Five minutes later, standing at the window, he saw her ride off on a fine hunter.

As he ate chops and drank a glass of ale, Christopher considered what he had heard of the mystery, and did not know what to think of it.

He could not believe that things happened as Miss Chester described. He thought that a sensitive imagination, rendered more vivid by singular events, must have led her into exaggeration. However, he was keenly interested, and the fact that Sir Walter Raven had been in the house since the strange happenings began added to the piquancy of the situation. He admired the girl so much that he would regret disillusionment for her; yet her *fiancé’s* presence for precisely that length of time was an odd coincidence. He might be anxious to force her to abandon the scheme which he appeared to approve, and—he might have hit upon a peculiar way of doing it. How he could have gone about accomplishing

such an object in such a manner Christopher could not see; yet his attention focused on Sir Walter Raven as a central figure in the mystery.

The road from the Sandboy and Owl, through Ringhurst and on to Wood House, was beautiful. Christopher had passed over it before, and, coming to the gateway and lodge of the place he sought, he remembered having remarked both, though he had not then known the name of the estate.

He steered Scarlet Runner between tall stone gate-posts topped with stone lions supporting shields, acknowledged a salutation from an elderly man at the door of the old black and white lodge, and drove up a winding avenue under beeches and oaks.

Suddenly, rounding a turn, he came in sight of the house, standing in the midst of a lawn cleared of trees, in a forest-like park.

It was a long, low building of irregular shape, the many windows with tiny lozenge-panes brightly lit behind their curtains. In the moonlight the projecting upper storeys with gabled roofs and ivy-draped chimneys, the walls chequered in black and white, with wondrous diapering of trefoils, quatrefoils, and chevrons, were clearly defined against a wooded background. The house could have few peers in picturesqueness if one searched all England. Christopher was not surprised that the plan of turning it into an hotel had attracted many motorists and other tourists.

He was received by a mild, old, white-haired butler, and a footman in neat livery was sent to show him the way to the garage. Scarlet Runner disposed of for the night, he returned to the house and entered a square hall, where a fire of logs in a huge fireplace sent red lights flickering over the carved ceiling, the fine antique cabinets stored with rare china, the gate-legged tables, and high-backed chairs.

His name was announced as if he had been an invited guest arriving at a country house, and from a group near the fireplace came forward to welcome him a young man with a delightful face. Glancing past him for an instant, as he advanced, Christopher saw Sidney Chester in evening dress; a dainty old lady whom he took to be her mother; a rather timid-looking little woman, whose pretty features seemed almost plain in contrast with Miss Chester's; a handsome, darkly sunburnt young man, with a soldierly, somewhat arrogant air; also seven or eight strangers, divided into different parties scattered about the hall.

"How do you do? Is it possible we're to have the pleasure of entertaining the famous Mr. Race?" said the young man who came to greet Christopher. "My name is Morley Chester, and I play host for my cousins, Mrs. Chester and her daughter."

Christopher disclaimed the adjective bestowed upon him, but admitted that he was the person who had had a certain adventure in Dalvania, and one or two others that had somehow got into the papers. Then Mr. Chester introduced him to the two cousins, mother and daughter (he meeting the girl as if for the first time), to the pretty, quiet young woman who was, it appeared, Mrs. Morley Chester, and added an informal word or two which made Sir Walter Raven and Mr. Christopher Race known to each other.

Sidney Chester's *fiancé* was, after all, very pleasant and frank in manner, his haughty air being the effect, perhaps, of a kind of proud reserve. Christopher could not help feeling slightly drawn to the young man, as he usually was to handsome people; but there was no doubt in his mind that Mr. Morley Chester was an agreeable person. He was not fine-looking, but his way of speaking was so individual and engaging that

Christopher did not wonder at Miss Chester for referring to him as her dear cousin.

Assuredly he was the right man for this trying position. His tact and graciousness must put the shyest stranger at ease, and he struck the happy mean between the professional and amateur host, necessary in a country house where paying guests were taken.

He went with Christopher to show two or three rooms which were free, and the new arrival having selected one, and settled about the price, Morley Chester said, half laughingly, half ruefully, "I suppose you've heard about our mystery?"

Christopher confessed that rumours had reached him.

"We think it right to warn everyone who comes," said his host. "Not that our warnings have much effect. People think nothing will happen to *them*—that *they* won't be caught napping; or it amuses them to lose their things, as one gives up one's watch or rings to a conjurer to see what he will do. At worst, though, you're safe for some time."

"The ghostly thief—as we've begun to believe him—lets our visitors alone until just before they're leaving. He always seems to know their intentions. It's a new way of 'speeding the parting guest.' But, if I make light of our troubles, we feel them seriously enough in reality."

Christopher was offered supper, but refused, as he had lately dined; and he did not go downstairs again until after the ladies had gone to bed. Then he joined the men in the smoking-room, and observed with veiled interest not only the guests, but the servants who brought in whisky and soda. There was not a face of which he could say to himself that the expression was sly or repellent.

Before Mr. Chester and Sir Walter Raven no one mentioned the trouble in the house; but next morning,

sitting in the hall, which was the favourite gathering-place, he caught scraps of gossip. No one present had yet been robbed, but everyone had heard something queer from others who had left the place, and as a rich brewer, lately knighted, intended to go away in his motor after luncheon that day, he was being chaffed by his acquaintances.

"I suppose you'll give your watch and money to your chauffeur before you sit down for the last meal?" laughed an American girl who had arrived some days before in her motor-car.

"No, I shan't," replied Sir Henry Smithson valiantly. "I don't believe in this nonsense. I'll show you what I have got on me, and as I am now so shall I be when I go into the dining-hall."

With this he displayed a gorgeous repeater, with his monogram and crest in brilliants; indicated a black pearl scarf-pin, turned a sapphire and diamond ring set in aluminium on a fat finger, and jingled a store of coins in his pocket, which he announced to be gold, amounting to fifty pounds. "I've a few notes, too," said he, "and I expect to have them just the same when I finish my lunch as when I go in."

"Well, we shall all lunch at the same time, and watch," remarked the American girl.

The paying guests at Wood House either breakfasted in their own rooms or in a cheerful morning room, more modern than most parts of the quaint old house; therefore, Christopher Race had not seen the dining-hall of which Miss Chester had spoken. He did not join in the conversation with the brewer; nevertheless, when he saw that gentleman swaggering to luncheon, he followed at a distance, everybody else moving in the same direction at the same time.

It was, indeed, a beautiful room, this dining-hall which Sidney Chester had praised. It was wainscoted

to the ceiling in old oak carved in the exquisite linen fold pattern, and though it was worm-eaten and showed signs of excessive age, Christopher, who called himself a judge of antiquities, thought the panelling would be almost worth its weight in gold.

The tables for guests were arranged somewhat oddly, probably, Christopher supposed, with a view to showing off the room and its furniture to advantage. The tables were small, of a size to accommodate parties of from two to eight persons, and ranged along two sides of the dining-hall, placed against one of the walls. In the middle of the room stood a huge old refectory table, with carved sides and legs, and leaves to draw out, a splendid specimen of the Tudor period; but no plates were laid upon this. It was used as a serving table; and against the wall on the right of the door, as one entered from the great hall, was a magnificent oak sideboard, loaded with handsome pieces of ancient silver.

Christopher had a table to himself at the end of the long room, and Sir Henry Smithson sat at a larger one not far away. He had invited the American girl, her chaperon, and Sir Walter Raven to share with him his farewell meal, and much champagne flowed. There was a good deal of talk and laughter at that and other tables, but the luncheon was served by the butler and two footmen in ceremonious style, Mr. Morley Chester unostentatiously superintending behind a screen which hid the door used by the servants. Not one of the three ladies of the Chester family was in the room.

All went on in the most orderly manner, and the food was good, as well as nicely served, though it struck Christopher that it was rather long between courses. He ate with good appetite until the meal was drawing to an end, when he began to realise that he was tired, and would be glad to get into the garden

and smoke a cigarette. He liked the smell of the old oak which came to him from the panelled wall, yet he thought that the fresh air would be pleasant.

Suddenly, as Christopher was beginning upon biscuits and cheese, Sir Henry Smithson sprang up in his chair, exclaiming, "By Jove!"

Then came a clatter of voices at his table, both ladies there crying out in consternation.

"What has happened?" asked Morley Chester, coming out from behind the screen, while Sir Walter Raven sat looking pale and concerned, and the mild-faced butler saved himself from dropping a bottle of port.

"Everything has gone!" ejaculated Miss Reese, the American. "His watch and chain—his ring—his scarf-pin—and——"

"And my money," finished Sir Henry Smithson.

"I'm dreadfully sorry," stammered Mr. Chester. "I begged you to be careful."

"Oh, I've got myself to blame, I suppose," broke in the brewer. He gave a rough laugh, but it did not sound genuine. "Who on earth would have thought such things could be? Well, seeing's believing. This is the queerest house I was ever in. It's bewitched."

"So we are beginning to think," said Chester, deeply mortified. "I can't begin to express my regret——"

"My own fault," said Sir Henry. "I'll say no more about it—for the present. But I wouldn't be sorry to see that repeater of mine again. If you don't mind I'll send a detective down on this business."

Chester assured him that he would like nothing better, and that he only hoped the detective might be more successful than others they had already had at their own expense. People left their tables and

crowded round Sir Henry, who was, indeed, shorn of the jewellery he had displayed before luncheon. No one seemed to doubt his word that it had disappeared during the meal without his knowledge, but Christopher made a mental note to write up to town for information concerning the brewer's character. He was a responsible man by reputation, but he might have eccentricities. He might wish to draw attention to himself by pretending to be a victim of the mystery.

Presently, after the dining-hall had been searched in vain for trace of the lost treasures, Sir Henry Smithson went off in his motor, a sadder and a wiser man.

After this, whenever any guest was about to leave the house, history repeated itself, except in one or two instances where precaution had been considered the better part of valour, and no jewellery or money brought into the dining-hall for the last meal.

Meanwhile Christopher had had a look into the two private sitting-rooms, which were separated from the dining-hall only by one long, narrow room used of late as a kind of office. He even ordered dinner in one of them, but nothing happened during the meal.

"I believe people do it themselves when nobody is looking," Christopher thought that night, meditating in his own room. "Can it be that there is some supernatural influence in this old house which puts people into an hysterical state, hypnotises them, so to speak, and makes them do abnormal things?"

Certain it was that he had grown nervous and, as he had expressed it, "jumpy." He suffered from headache, an ailment he had scarcely known before; slept fitfully, starting awake, often with the fancy that he heard a sound in his bedroom. When he dreamed, it was always of old oak and the smell of oak. He felt dull and disinclined to think for long on any

subject. In the mornings when he got up there were lines under his eyes, and he had little appetite. Either he imagined it, or the Morley Chesters and their cousin Sidney also looked ill. Perhaps this was not surprising, as the mystery in the house caused them constant anxiety, but Sir Walter Raven was losing his sunburnt tint, and it seemed to Christopher more or less the same with the butler and footman, and all the guests who remained longer than three or four days at Wood House. He was the last man to dwell on ghostly fancies, yet after he remained for a week at the place without being able to earn a penny of the money Miss Chester had offered, he was half ready to credit the idea that the house was haunted.

"If anybody had been doing conjuring tricks I should have had the wit to discover it by this time," he reflected. But if there was anything material to discover, professionals were no more successful than the amateur. There was a new footman in the dining-room, and Morley Chester whispered to Christopher one day that he was a detective in the employ of Sir Henry Smithson.

Race had almost abandoned his suspicions of Sir Walter Raven, whom he liked more and more, when, on his eighth night at Wood House, a sound startled him from a dream of linen fold patterned panelling. Usually, when he waked thus, it was to find all silent, and he would turn over and fall asleep once more, telling himself that the noise had been part of his dream. But this time it continued. There was a queer creaking behind the wainscot.

Of course, it might be rats. Rats could make any sort of sound in the night; and yet he did not think that rats had made this sound. It was too like a foot treading on a loose board, and then stepping on it a second time.

Christopher struck a match and looked at his watch. It was two o'clock. He determined to stop awake the next night and listen for the same thing again. He did so; and it came, at almost exactly the same hour. That day, and the day before, a mysterious disappearance of jewellery had taken place.

In the morning Christopher asked the servant who brought his morning tea who occupied the adjoining room. "Sir Walter Raven," was the answer. Race was angry with himself for not having learned earlier who his neighbour was; but during the day, as he passed, and saw the door of the next room ajar, he glanced in. It seemed to him that there was an inexplicable distance between this door and his. The rooms were supposed to adjoin each other. His own door was near the dividing wall, and so was Sir Walter's, yet there was a wide space between.

Through the open door of Sir Walter Raven's room he could see a low window, with a cushioned seat in the embrasure. In his room there was one of the same size and shape. To prevent mistake he propped a book against the lozenge-panes of his own window, and went out to walk round the rambling house and reconnoitre.

Yes, there was the book; and there was Sir Walter's window farther on towards the left. But there was something between which did not puzzle Christopher as much as it would had he not noticed the distance separating the doors of the two adjoining rooms. Half-way between the two low windows was a tiny one, so overgrown with ivy that it was all but invisible, even to an observant eye.

"Sir Walter Raven must have a cupboard in his wall, lit by that little window," Christopher decided, "or else there's a secret 'hidie hole' between his room and mine."

As Sir Walter's door stood open, Christopher could peer into the room, by pausing as he passed through the corridor, and discover for himself whether there was a cupboard door in the wall. If anyone saw him looking in, it would be simple to explain that he had absent-mindedly mistaken the room for his own, farther on. But he was not seen and had plenty of time, lingering on the threshold, to make certain that no cupboard door was visible in the oak wainscot of the wall. If there were a door it was a secret one.

Christopher was sure now that some place of concealment existed between his room and Sir Walter Raven's, and he was sure, too, that someone entered there at night. What was that someone's errand, and had it any connection with the mystery? This was a question which Christopher considered it his business to find out as soon as possible.

To begin with, he tapped the wainscoting in his own room, and was interested to discover that his knock gave out a hollow sound. He believed that there was but the one thickness of oak between him and the secret, whatever it might be, which lay beyond.

The panelling here was simple, without any elaboration of carving. The wainscot, which reached from floor to ceiling, was divided into large squares framed in a kind of fluting. Having examined each of these squares on the wall nearest Sir Walter Raven's, he gave up the hope that there was any hidden door or sliding panel.

"I could saw out a square, though," he thought, "and look at what's on the other side; or I could squeeze through if it seemed worth while. A panel behind the curtain of my bed would do; and I could stick it in again, so that if anybody suspected there was something up they would hardly be able to see what I'd been doing."

Apparently no one ever entered the hiding-place except in the night, about two o'clock. The noises behind the wainscoting continued for a few minutes only, and after that all was silence.

In the afternoon Christopher motored into Ringhurst to buy a small saw, and a bull's-eye lantern such as policemen use. On the way back he overtook Sir Walter with Sidney, and they accepted his offer to give them a lift back to Wood House. "Queer thing, I'm used to tramping about the whole day, and don't turn a hair after a twenty-five-mile walk; but lately I feel done up after eight," said the young man, who was looking pale and heavy-eyed. "I suppose it must be that the climate's relaxing."

Christopher was pricked with a guilty pang. He was engaged by Miss Chester to act as a detective, and yet he felt ashamed of suspecting and plotting against the man she loved. He liked Raven, too. Altogether, keen as he was to fathom the mystery, he wished that he had never come to Wood House.

They talked about the robberies as Christopher drove the car home, Sidney sitting beside him, Sir Walter leaning forward in the tonneau. "After all, it will end in our going away from the dear old place," sighed Sidney, with tears in her eyes. "The strain is wearing mother out; and, you know, if neither of us continues living in the house it will go, as I told you, to the man who would have been the heir had the entail not been broken."

"You'll both come out with me to Colorado and forget your troubles. Let the chap have the place, and be thankful it's off your hands," said Raven.

He spoke with the sincerity of a lover, not like a schemer who would force a woman to his will by foul means if fair ones proved not strong enough.

"I feel a beast spying on him and working against

him," thought Christopher. "Suppose he knows nothing about the secret place next his room? Suppose the noises are made by rats? And what if, after all, the people who think they have been robbed never have been robbed? I'll give Raven the benefit of the doubt until I've tried one more experiment."

Tea was going on in the hall when Scarlet Runner arrived at Wood House. There were letters for Christopher, and he announced in the hearing of everyone, including the servants, that unless he should get a telegram advising him to the contrary he must leave Wood House, where he had spent such an enjoyable fortnight, immediately after breakfast the next morning.

"You'll not come back to us?" asked Sidney, with veiled meaning in her voice.

Christopher pretended not to notice the meaning. "I'm sorry to say I shan't be able to," he answered. "Already I've been here longer than I expected."

He did not mean to take any money from the girl; but though she could not be aware of this resolution, she seemed really sorry to have him go, failure as he had been—thus far.

Christopher took longer over dressing for dinner that night than usual. He hesitated whether to wear the studs and sleeve-links he liked best, or others which he did not care about. Also he was half minded to lock his watch up in his suit-case. Finally, however, he resolved to make his experiment bravely. "I'm not hysterical," he said to himself, "though I might get to be if I stopped here much longer. I shan't steal my own things and hide them, if that's what other people do."

Throughout his stay at Wood House he had taken his meals at the same small table, except once or twice when he had been asked to join new-made acquaint-

ances for dinner. But to-night he invited Sir Walter Raven to dine with him, "as it was his last evening." The young man accepted, and they talked of Colorado. Sir Walter was inviting him to come out to his ranch some day, when suddenly the expression of the once healthy, sunburnt, now slightly haggard face changed.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Raven, the blood mounting to his forehead.

"What's the matter?" asked Christopher.

"I'm not a particularly observant chap, but I suppose I would have noticed if you'd come in without your shirt studs. You didn't by any chance forget to put them in, did you?"

"No; I had them in, right enough," said Race. Looking down he saw that the white expanse of his evening shirt lacked the finish of the two pearl studs he had worn when he came into the room. His cuffs hung loose, empty of his favourite pair of links. Hastily touching his watch-pocket, he found it limp and flat.

"Well, yes, it *is* 'by Jove,'" he remarked grimly.

"Shall we call Morley Chester and tell him what's happened?" asked Raven.

"No," said Christopher, who sat with his back turned towards the other occupants of the room, his table being at the end by a window, and he having given his usual seat to his guest; "I'd rather not make a fuss. I shall sit till the others have gone, and no one will be the wiser. I'm sick of sensations, and don't want to pose as the hero of one if I can help it."

"Some people seem to like it," said Raven.

"So I've thought," replied Christopher. But his theory was upset. He could not believe in any ghostly influence strong enough to impose illusions upon his mind. A queer thrill went through him. He was

struck with horror by the mystery, which had never impressed itself so vividly upon him before.

It was a relief when the rest of the diners left the room, and he was free to slip away without making statements or answering questions. Luckily for him—if unluckily for the Chesters—there were few guests in the house. Those who were there—with the exception of Sir Walter Raven—were new arrivals, and strangers to Christopher. For this reason he escaped the fire of curiosity which raged round most departing visitors at Wood House. He went to his room, locked the door, and, having listened with his ear at the wainscoting, presently began as noiselessly as possible to saw out a selected square from the oak panelling behind his curtained four-poster bed. The saw was sharp, and he worked as energetically as if he had an injury to avenge. In an hour he had the panel ready to come out of its frame. But he did not venture to take it out and commence his explorations until the house was still for the night.

Not once while he worked had there been the faintest sound on the other side. Removing the square of wainscoting at last as if it had been a pane in a window (odd, the oak here hadn't half that strong, subtle fragrance of rich old wood that it had downstairs in the dining-hall and the two private sitting-rooms!), Christopher turned on the light of his lantern and peered into the obscurity on the other side.

There was a hollow space between this wall and the next—a space rather more than two feet wide. Christopher had moved his bed, and cut into a panel so low down that to peer into the opening he had to kneel. The square aperture he had made was so large that by squeezing he could thrust his shoulders through as well as his head. So far as he could see, there was no door on the opposite side, nor was there furniture of

any sort in the secret place the stream of light lit up. But at the far corner there was something low and long, and blacker than the darkness. It might be a heavy beam, he thought, against a wall, or it might be a box.

Withdrawing his head, he looked at the quaint grandfather clock which stood in a corner of his room. It was never right within half an hour, but he had now no watch to consult. According to the old timepiece it wanted twenty minutes to two. Perhaps it was later, perhaps earlier; but, in any case, Christopher had time to make researches before the nightly footfalls were due.

It was difficult to wriggle through the square hole in the wainscoting, but he did it, after ridding himself of coat and waistcoat. Now he stood in a long, narrow space between the walls of his own room and Sir Walter Raven's. He had slipped off his pumps, and in stockinged feet began cautious explorations, the lantern making a pathway of light. The thing he had seen at the far end was not a beam. It was a box—two boxes—three boxes—of common wood, such as come into every household from the stores. They had lids, but the lids were not nailed down. Christopher lifted one. The box was filled with jewellery, heaped up in neat piles, according to its kind, on some dark garment folded underneath. There were a pile of bracelets, a pile of brooches, a pile of rings, and a collection of watches like glittering gold eggs in a nest. The second box had the same description of contents, though there were more miscellaneous articles—gold or jewelled belt-buckles, hatpins, a diamond dog-collar or two, and several strings of pearls. In the third box, much smaller than the other two, were purses, some of leather, some of gold or silver netting; cigarette

cases with jewelled monograms; and, weighted down by a lump of gold chains, lay a quantity of bank-notes.

The ghost of Wood House did his work in a business-like manner.

Of gold coins there were none. Even the most prudent ghost might venture to put these to use without delay, when a sharp and practised eye had found them not to be marked suspiciously.

"What a haul it has been," Christopher said to himself. His valuables did not appear to have been added to the collection, but he shrewdly suspected that they would be put into place that night. He had only to wait and see who came to put them there; or should he go further in this adventure first?

Behind the row of wooden boxes was a square hole, black as the heart of night. Christopher's lantern showed him that from the top of this opening descended a narrow staircase, winding round upon itself like a corkscrew. He set his foot on the first step, and it squeaked. Then he knew what it was that had waked him every night—a foot treading upon that stair—perhaps other stairs below.

"I'll see what's at the bottom," thought Christopher; and was in the act of stepping over the low barrier of boxes when he heard a distant sound.

It was faint, yet it made Christopher pause. He withdrew his foot from the top step of the stairway, and, covering the light, lay on his side behind the boxes, which would, until a person advancing had risen to a level higher than the wooden lids, form a screen to hide him.

The sound continued, growing gradually more distinct. Someone was tiptoeing towards the stairs. Someone was on the stairs. Someone was coming up. There was a wavering glimmer of light, a little light, like that of a candle.

Christopher lay very still. He hardly even breathed.

The light was moving up the dark wall, and throwing a strange black shadow, which might be the shadow of a head. A stair creaked. Another stair. That clock must have been slow, or else the ghost was before its time. Now there was a long-drawn, tired breath, like a sigh, and in the advancing light gleamed something white and small. For a moment it hung in the midst of shadow, then it descended on the lid of the middle box. It was a woman's hand.

Quick as thought Christopher seized and held it tightly, at the same instant rising up and flashing his lantern.

There was a stifled gasp; the hand struggled vainly; he pulled it towards him, though its owner stumbled and nearly fell, and Christopher found himself face to face with Mrs. Morley Chester.

"Let me go!" she panted. "Oh, I implore you!"

"I'll not let you go," said Christopher, in a voice as low as hers, but mercilessly determined. "This game is up. You shall tell me everything, or I swear I'll alarm the house, send for the police, and have you arrested, you and your husband."

"Not my husband!" faltered the "dear little cousin," the pretty, timid creature who had always seemed to Christopher pathetic in her gentle self-effacement, her desire to help Cousin Sidney. "He—he has nothing to do with this. I——"

"Oh yes, he has; everything to do with it," insisted Christopher brutally, meaning to frighten her. "You couldn't have managed this yourself. I'm not an ordinary guest. I'm here as a detective, and I've been working up the case for a fortnight. Now, I want your confession. Be quick, please, or you'll regret it."

"How cruel you are!" sobbed the woman.

Christopher laughed. "How cruel you have both been to those who trusted you—and to others likely to be suspected in your stead."

"I would do anything for Morley," said Morley's wife.

Still holding her wrist, he pulled her gently, but firmly, up to the top of the steps, and did not loosen his grasp until he stood between her and the stairway.

"If you wish to save him you know what to do," the young man said.

"You won't send us to prison if I tell you the whole story?"

"I'll do my best for you, if you make a clean breast of it; but the contents of these boxes must be restored to their owners, for your cousin's sake if nothing else. I promise to shut my eyes to your escaping with your husband, before any public revelation is made, provided I'm satisfied that you tell me the whole truth now."

"I will, oh, I will! You know, Morley would have had this place if common justice had been done—if the entail hadn't been broken."

"Ah, *he* is the heir of whom Miss Chester spoke!"

"Of course, who else could be? He's the only one left in the male line. And think what it was for him to find out through an expert, whose word he couldn't doubt, that there's coal enough under the park to make him an immensely rich man, if only he hadn't been robbed of his rights."

"He didn't tell Miss Chester of this discovery?"

"Naturally not. If she or her mother gave up living here the estate would come to him after all. He hoped for that. And when he heard of her plan to open a kind of hotel he helped her get a licence and offered to manage the business. That was because

he had an idea, which he hoped he could work. His father, who died when Morley was a boy, was a professor of chemistry, and made some clever inventions and discoveries, but they never brought in money. There was one thing he found after spending a year in Persia for his health. He discovered that out of a plant there—a plant no one had ever thought of importance before—an extract could be produced which would make people unconscious, at the same time causing their muscles to remain so rigid that if they were standing they would remain on their feet, or would not drop what they might be holding in their hands. When they came to themselves again they would not feel ill, would not even know they had lost consciousness for a moment.

"Morley's father was much excited about this preparation, and hoped it would be as important as curare, if not chloroform. He named the stuff arenoform, as nearly as possible after the plant, and published his discovery to the medical profession. But then came a dreadful blow. After many experiments to change and improve it, nothing could be done to prolong unconsciousness enough to make arenoform really useful to doctors and surgeons. The effect wouldn't last longer than five or six minutes, and the patients were terribly exhausted next day, so that the stuff would not do even for dentists in extracting teeth, as it was more depressing than gas. One of the most wonderful things about it was that a lot of people could be made unconscious at once, even in a big room, by a spray of arenoform floating in the air. But though that was curious and interesting, it was not of practical use, so arenoform was a failure.

"The disappointment was so great that Morley's father was never the same again. He always hoped that some experiment would make the thing a success,

and, instead of gaining the fortune he'd expected, he spent more money than he could spare from his family in importing quantities of the plant from Persia, and manufacturing the extract in his own laboratory. Then he died, and there were hundreds and hundreds of the bottles in the house, of no use to anybody; but Morley had promised his dying father not to let them be destroyed. Everyone forgot the discovery of arenoform, for you see Dr. Chester has been dead twenty years. Only Morley didn't forget; and it was the existence of that quantity of arenoform in the house left him by his father which put the idea of coming here into his head. He experimented with the stuff on a dog, and found it was as powerful as on the day it was made. Then he told me, and I promised to help in any way I could.

"Next to the dining-hall on one side, and separating it from the two rooms used as private sitting-rooms for guests, is a long, rather ugly room which Morley asked Sidney to give him as a private office. Night after night he worked there before the house was opened to the public, and afterwards too, perfecting his scheme. He perforated the walls, so that, by means of a little movable machine which I could work, a spray of arenoform could be showered through the oak wainscoting either into the dining-hall on one side or the two sitting-rooms on the other. Then he had the tables ranged along the wall; and as one peculiarity of arenoform is that it smells like wood,—wonderfully like old oak,—no detective could have suspected anything by coming to sniff about the place afterwards. Besides, the perforations in the wainscoting are so small that they seem no different from the worm-holes which are slowly spoiling the old oak.

"When Morley was in the dining-hall or one of the sitting-rooms—whichever place we planned to have

something happen—I would be in the locked office, and at a signal which he would give me when most of the servants were out of the room waiting to bring in a new course, I would turn on the spray. He always kept at the very farthest end of the room, behind the screen, and put his face to an open window there. Then, when everybody in the room was under the influence, which they were in a minute or two, he would take whatever he wanted from some unconscious man or woman, or even several persons, before anyone woke up. We've had no one to help us except an assistant of the cook, whom I bribed to make it as long between courses as possible. When I was ready to have the servants go in with the next dish I would touch a little electric bell in the office which Morley had arranged to communicate with the kitchen. The cook's assistant knows nothing, though, except that for some reason it was convenient to me not to have the meals hurried, and to be able to regulate exactly the moment when the different courses should go in.

“Of course, the horrid stuff has affected our health—Morley's and mine—as well as that of everybody else who has been near when the machine was worked, or lived in the house for any length of time. But we hoped that Sidney and her mother would soon give up. Then the place would be Morley's, and we would be repaid for everything. While if they held on we should at least have the jewels.

“When Morley was working at the walls he discovered the way into this secret place out of our office,—not the only 'hidie hole' in the house,—but neither Sidney nor her mother knows of its existence. We thought it would be useful to get things out of the way, for fear of detectives searching our boxes, and so it has been. Morley has always sent me up, because I am so light and small and don't make as much noise

on the creaking stairs as a man would. Now you know the whole story. And if you have any sense of justice you'll admit that Morley isn't to blame, when the place should have been his, and not Sidney's or her mother's."

Long before dawn Mr. and Mrs. Morley Chester left Wood House. Next day Christopher told Sidney and Sir Walter Raven the tale as it had been told to him. Also, he showed them the store of jewels and bank-notes.

Where the Morley Chesters went Christopher and others did not know, and did not want to know; but when an advertisement was put into all the most important papers that the mysterious thief at Wood House had been discovered, and that everybody who had lost anything could have it returned by claiming it, the enlightened police were unable to get upon the track of the missing ones.

Christopher would not accept any payment from Sidney Chester. But he would like to have a piece of her wedding-cake to "dream on." He did not think that it would cause him to dream of old oak.

## CHAPTER XI: NOVEMBER

### THE GOLD CIGARETTE CASE

CHRISTOPHER could not make head or tail of the thing.

In the first place, the letter was not properly addressed; and it ought to have flattered his vanity that it had reached him at all. "Christopher Race, Motorist, London," was scrawled in pencil, and in an uneducated hand, on a common envelope: that, and nothing more; yet the powers that be in the post-office had sent it to him without delay. This was a tribute to his fame, but it was not enlightening.

In the common envelope was a half-sheet of thick and creamy parchment paper with a monogram in pale blue and silver: a pretty monogram, but so intricate, consisting as it did of three letters, as to be almost impossible for an uninitiated person to decipher. On this half-sheet, written in a firm and somewhat original hand, which might be that of a man or a woman, were two sentences and part of another.

"DEAR SIR,—I have heard of you and your car, and saw photographs of both: I know that you are a gentleman and can be trusted. I hope very much that you are free and can come here by Thursday, if possible early in the morning, as it is a matter of life and death to me, to get away——"

Here the letter broke off, giving no clue to the nature of the errand, or to the whereabouts of the

nameless writer. But Christopher was able to make out the postmark. The scrawled envelope had been sent out from Stoke d'Estcourt, in Warwickshire.

Of course, he said to himself, there was nothing to do about it. Perhaps the thing was a hoax. Or perhaps the person who began the letter had changed his or her mind, and a servant, knowing something of the circumstances, had found the half-sheet of paper and mischievously posted it.

No, there was nothing to do; and yet the last, broken sentence haunted Christopher. He found himself constantly repeating it, and wondering whether his coming with Scarlet Runner really had been a matter of life and death to the writer. Again and again he pondered at the breaking off of the sentence, which, if finished, might have explained all. He studied the monogram, fancying that it must mean V. L. H.; and though the handwriting was uncommonly strong for a woman, the monogram was essentially feminine.

The letter reached Christopher on a Wednesday.

It was a dull day of mid-November; and he had nothing better to do with it and the week to come than to conduct a plain, middle-aged Australian widow (with as many fckles as she had shekels) upon shopping expeditions, and short runs about the country.

A chance of this dull but profitable engagement had come to Christopher through a friend who had introduced him to the widow. She was in London for the first time, and had thought it distinguished to be seen in Scarlet Runner. Then she had met Scarlet Runner's owner; and now, after a few days in the lady's service, Christopher would have been a dull man if he had not understood that there need be but a step, and an easy step, from chauffeurhood

to husbandhood. He did not mean to take that step, though it would have made him richly, gloriously independent of his uncle, and he had been wondering for the past day or so how best to find some excuse to end the engagement.

If he chose to take it, here was the excuse. "A matter of life or death." . . .

Mrs. Lawson would be offended if he wrote "regretting" that he was urgently called out of town, and must send her a substitute: but all the better if she were offended. That would once and for all put an end to an embarrassing situation.

Altogether, from telling himself that there was nothing to do in the affair of the unfinished letter, Christopher went in a few hours to the extreme of determining to do a great deal. He would throw over a chance of marrying a millionairess, and start off on a wild-goose chase after a client of whose name, sex, address, and intentions towards himself he was equally ignorant.

So he wrote to Mrs. Lawson at the hour when he should have gone to her hotel, and sent the letter by a good-looking, gentlemanly youth who owned a car about one-half as smart as Scarlet Runner.

Then he looked up Stoke d'Estcourt on his road-map, and in a handbook of Warwickshire.

The handbook told him that Stoke d'Estcourt was a small but interesting hamlet situated about three miles from a railway station. The church was celebrated for its brasses and a Norman font. The sixteenth-century inn, still unspoiled, attracted artists. There were several fine old houses in the village and on the outskirts, also a number of picturesque cottages; and tourists were advised to visit the ruins of a castle in the neighbourhood.

This description encouraged Christopher in the

somewhat wild idea that, by going to Stoke d'Estcourt and making inquiries, he might be able to find out who had sent him the unfinished letter. In such a small village everybody must know everybody else, or at least everybody else's affairs; and if he really had the detective talent for which he had lately gained credit in the New Forest, he ought to have a chance of testing it successfully.

It was Wednesday, and he would arrive at Stoke d'Estcourt in the evening; therefore, if he could contrive that night to discover the name and whereabouts of his mysterious client, he would still be in time to report himself early on Thursday morning. The idea of doing this appealed to Christopher intensely, both through his sense of humour and his fondness for adventure. It would be, he thought as he flashed swiftly along the Banbury Road, very amusing as well as dramatic, to draw up before the door of a house (as yet unknown to him) and calmly send in word (to whom it might concern) that Mr. Christopher Race had called with his car according to instructions.

Somebody would be surprised, and pleased or displeased, as the case might be. And so delighted was Christopher with the blurred, mysterious, and piquant picture he conjured up of his arrival and reception — somewhere — that he made a bet with Christopher Race that, if he succeeded in finding the writer of the letter before ten o'clock on Thursday morning, he would give himself a present of an extravagantly handsome stop-watch he had lately seen and coveted. If he failed, he would bestow the same sum of money in charity. There was, he believed, a fund for broken-down chauffeurs, and it should have the benefit of his non-success.

His journey was smooth and uneventful, and it

was still early in the murky evening when the blazing rays of his lamps illuminated the quaint front of the old inn of which he had read in the guide-book. Welcoming lights, streaming through red blinds, seemed to speak of warmth and comfort within. He drove his car into a barn which had been converted into a garage, and engaged a bedroom.

The first thing he did while his dinner was being prepared was to call for the local directory, and pore over its pages in the hope of finding someone with the initials "V. L. H." But he was disappointed. The population of the village and the immediate neighbourhood was only a few hundreds, and among the Harrises, the Harboroughs, the Hickses, and the Harveys there was none who owned the initials "V. L." This was a check for which he had been quite prepared.

He argued that, as the note-paper on which the letter was written was of good quality, and the monogram a dainty thing, the mysterious writer was probably a person of culture, perhaps of wealth; but the common scrawl upon the common envelope introduced an element of confusion into his calculations. He was the only guest of the inn, and he called in the landlord to talk to him while he ate. He asked questions about the neighbourhood, and led his host on to tell of the village magnates and the "county families" whose houses lay near. Judging from the man's laconic accounts of them, they seemed to be the usual sort of people, with whose staid lives it was difficult to associate the idea of romance or mystery, and "affairs of life or death." There were the Earl and Countess of Melden, an elderly couple, with no children. There was Sir Edward Leigh, the Lord of the Manor, an old man slowly nearing his end, whose distant cousin, a young man in the

diplomatic service abroad, would be his heir. There was a retired general with half a dozen boys and girls; and there were J.P.'s, doctors, and solicitors who lived in or near the village, none of the latter apparently being persons of importance or interest, unless perhaps a certain gentleman who had—according to the landlord—made a name in the legal profession, in London, before coming to settle in the neighbourhood of Stoke d'Estcourt, choosing the country for the benefit of his niece's health, the young lady being delicate and of a retiring disposition.

Discouraged by the unpromising nature of this information, unsatisfactory in every detail as well as that of initials, Christopher inquired if there were strangers lodging in the village or houses roundabout—artists, perhaps, attracted by the picturesque charm of the surroundings. But, after thinking the question over for a minute, the landlord of the Leigh Arms shook his head.

Plenty of artists came in spring and summer, and even in early autumn, to paint the ruins of Kennerwick Castle, or the old almshouse, or the old cottages on the green, or the lych-gate of the churchyard. The inn was full then, to say nothing of two or three of the best cottages where lodgers were taken in, and a farmhouse or two within a mile of Stoke d'Estcourt. But by the end of October everybody was gone. Now there was no one, and there would be "nothing doing" except for motorists and bicyclists, who didn't mind cold or dull weather, until April.

It seemed as if there would be "nothing doing" for Christopher either. But on arriving he had ostentatiously driven Scarlet Runner through the whole length of the village High Street and past the cottages and old Queen Anne or Georgian houses which surrounded the famous green, thus advertising

his advent to whom it might concern; and though the country air and strong ale made him sleepy, he sat up late pretending to read old numbers of magazines, in the hope of receiving a letter or word of some sort from his nameless correspondent.

No word came, however: no sign was made to let him know that the person whose summons he had obeyed was aware of his presence. Still, the less hope of success that remained, the more Christopher rebelled against failure. He always hated to fail, hated obstinately to be thwarted, and in this particular instance success alone could redeem him from looking a fool in his own eyes. There can be no excuse for a wild-goose chase except catching the wild goose; and Christopher was up with the first grey hint of dawn, ready to catch it.

By seven o'clock he was dressed, and it was not yet eight when he had breakfasted and was starting *Scarlet Runner* before the door of the inn. The first thing he did was to teuf-teuf conspicuously to the post-office, where he inquired if there were any letters for Mr. Christopher Race. He had left directions at his London lodgings to have everything forwarded in one large envelope, registered and expressed, for there might, he reflected, come another letter containing the missing link of the mystery. But nothing of interest was forwarded; and nobody at Stoke d'Estcourt had taken this means of communicating for the second time with the owner of *Scarlet Runner*.

"Do you ever get letters here for anyone with the initials V. L. H.?" he ventured to ask of the post-mistress, who was too pretty and coquettish to snub a polite and good-looking man even if he put eccentric questions.

No, so far as the young woman could remember, none of her "regular people" had such initials. As

for the transient folk, she could not pretend to say: but there had been few or no transient ones for a month or more. There was Mr. Holford, the doctor's assistant, but neither he nor his wife had a "V" to bless themselves with. There was the Reverend Mr. Henderson, the vicar, but there were no "V's" in his family, nor "L's" either; and there were Mr. Hardcastle and his niece; but Mr. Hardcastle's name was Henry (she pronounced it Enery), and the young lady scarcely ever received any letters. Those which did come were simply addressed to "Miss Hardcastle."

Baffled, as if he had been the villain of the piece, Christopher went out of the post-office with only one card in the game left to play. He determined to drive Scarlet Runner slowly, temptingly, through every street of the village, and past the gates of the great houses and even farms of the surrounding country, weaving the car through from road to road as his map made possible. Then, if the writer of that unfinished letter were waiting somewhere in the hope of a response to the broken appeal, he or she would not be disappointed, and—Christopher Race would win his bet with himself.

He sounded his new and singularly sweet-toned musical siren unnecessarily often, and faces peered out of cottage windows, and fresh faced girls turned to look at him and his handsome red car in the village streets; but no one beckoned, no one called to him.

He drove out of the village and took the road which, he had been told, would lead him past several gentlemen's houses and outlying farms, past the ruined castle, past General Newcome's place, on to Lord Melden's. Beyond the last estate he did not intend to go, but would turn there in order to pass Sir Edward Leigh's, and so go back towards Stoke d'Estcourt by another road.

Here and there he caused his siren to discourse snatches from the opera of *La Traviata*; but when he came in sight of the castle he forgot to play his own accompaniment, even forgot for a few moments the business which had brought him to Stoke d'Estcourt.

It really was a very fine and striking ruin. Christopher drove very slowly to take in its full magnificence, and finally stopped *Scarlet Runner* in the shadow of the dark, towering walls, though he did not stop her engine.

Compared to the castle, this road which ran close to the ancient moat, was impertinently new. In ancient days, when this stronghold had been the strength and glory of the great family of Kennerwick, now extinct, there had been a longer way round. This short cut had been made since the days of Oliver Cromwell, when the castle had been reduced to ruin, and the last of the name had perished, fighting for his king. All the other places to which the new road led had been built since those troubled times.

Looking up from his seat in the gently purring car, the huge Norman keep loomed above him. From this point of view the massive shape of the castle showed no appearance of decay: and as Christopher's lively imagination pictured moving figures in quaint costumes and gleaming armour, suddenly there was framed in a small, ivy-draped window a face as lovely as any for which a knight of old ever did battle.

A girl was gazing down at him—a girl whose yellow-brown hair was bright gold—against a background of darkness. Christopher had just time to catch an impression of a beautiful face, white and large eyed with terror or some other emotion strange for a peaceful English morning, and then an extraordinary thing happened. The large eyes met his in

appeal; the lips opened without speaking; a hand and arm were thrust through the aperture, and something small that glittered as it fell was thrown to him.

The thing, whatever it was, was flung with a woman's aim, and instead of reaching its intended destination, landed noiselessly in a clump of dead grasses and nettles by the roadside.

Instantly Christopher was out of the car. Without minding the nettles' sting, he thrust his hand and arm deep among rough stems and prickly leaves, coming almost immediately upon the object of his search, which his touch told him must be a metal card case or cigarette case. Before his eyes had a chance to inform him further, a low, inarticulate cry from the window made him, still stooping over the bed of nettles, lift his head to look up once more. The girl, silent after the one faint sound which had drawn his eyes to her again, was signing to him eagerly to mount and ride away.

Astonished, but ready to obey a lady's command no matter how strange, Christopher sprang into the quivering car, and taking off the brakes put on speed which sent Scarlet Runner flying along the road like a red arrow.

It was not until the first turn, when the castle towers were hidden from sight by an intervening hill, that Race slackened the car's pace and looked at the thing which the girl had thrown to him. Then he saw that it was a very handsome though small cigarette case, made rather flat to avoid bulging out the pocket which held it, and ornamented with the letters "M. N." in diamonds.

Completely puzzled, Christopher stopped for a moment in the empty road to satisfy his curiosity by examining the cigarette case inside as well as out.

There was nothing in it, not even a cigarette; but there was one peculiarity which caused Christopher to jump at the conclusion that the thing had been made by special order, and for a lady. The inner part of the case was entirely covered on one side with a mirror set into the gold and surrounded by a frame of tiny brilliants, thus leaving place for cigarettes on the opposite side only. The fall had cracked the glass across, and the loose bits would have fallen out if Christopher had not closed up the case, fastening it with a snap. He then put the dainty little affair into his pocket, and drove along his intended route in almost hopeless quest of "V. L. H."

His first thought, on seeing the girl at the window of the castle keep, was that he had found V. L. H.—that V. L. H. had been waiting there for him, in the hope of a rescue, like some persecuted damsel of old. But, though she had certainly flung him a gage, she had shown no desire to go with him. On the contrary, she had expressed in vivid pantomime her wish that he should get away as quickly as he could. And then, the initials on the cigarette case did not connect its giver with the writer of the unfinished letter.

What to think of the odd thing that had just happened Christopher did not know.

He could not bear to harbour in his head for an instant the idea that so beautiful a creature might be of unsound mind. Still less would he tolerate the thought that the girl had merely chosen a bold way of scraping acquaintance with a young man, with the view of a lively adventure.

Brief as had been his glimpse of her, Christopher was sure that she was not that type of girl. Besides, she had sent him no alluring smile to wile him back to

her. It was certain that she had been in a state of excitement, that she was anxious, distressed. Christopher was inclined to believe that her act, whatever its meaning, had been one of sheer desperation; that she had chosen a course because she could see no other.

She was so beautiful, so altogether interesting, that Christopher would gladly have seized upon the theory that she was "V. L. H.," because if that were so, she must have known of him and summoned him. But common sense—if common sense had any place here—did not support the theory. "V. L. H.," who had wished to make use of Scarlet Runner for a "matter of life or death," would hardly have sent Scarlet Runner instantly away out of her sight.

In the circumstances, Christopher felt constrained for the sake of V. L. H. (and of his bet) to carry out his original intentions. But he made his round of the roads and returned to the village by a different way, as he had planned; and no one had come forward to claim his services, to say, "It was I who wrote to you. I am glad that you are here." Nevertheless, Christopher had no thought of leaving the neighbourhood. There were two mysteries instead of one to be puzzled into clearness now.

He had kept on his room at the inn, and when he had put away Scarlet Runner he shut himself up for another look at the cigarette case. Opening it, the broken pieces of glass fell out, and he saw what he had not guessed at before. The mirror concealed a false back to the case, and hidden there he found a photograph of a young man. He was an exceedingly good-looking young man, with a strong, clever face softened by the dreamy arch of the eyebrows, over fine dark eyes. And between the photograph and the thin strip of gold which held it in place was a

slip of paper on which were written, close together and all in capitals, the letters TVBXCHTAY.

"A key to a cipher, perhaps," Christopher said to himself. Was he intended to pluck out its secret, and profit by what it taught him? He could not tell. And after staring at the nine letters for ten or fifteen minutes on end, hazarding all kinds of conjectures and trying to fit them together, he was no wiser than before.

It could not be, he thought, that the girl had wished him to keep the cigarette case. For some reason it had been necessary for her to get rid of the thing at the moment, to hide it from someone perhaps; and seeing him pass, she had believed him gentleman enough to help her. Of course she would count upon his taking the first opportunity to return her property; and the only possible place where she could expect him to look for her was at Kennerwick Castle. He decided, as the person from whom the girl wished to conceal the cigarette case might have seen a fleeing motor car, that it would be well for her sake to appear on the scene next time in the guise of an ordinary tourist. He therefore exchanged his chauffeur's cap for one of tweed, which matched his clothes, and went out on foot without his motor-coat.

In half an hour he had reached the castle, and was knocking at the door of a cottage built up against one of the half fallen walls. This was the dwelling of the caretaker whose business in life it was to guard the ruins from vandals and to show visitors about.

He was obliged to lift the knocker two or three times before anyone answered, though there was a faint stirring inside the house; and he fancied that he heard suppressed voices. Presently the door opened, and an old woman appeared. She was small and bent, though strong looking, with hard features and

singularly bright eyes that glittered piercingly out of a yellow network of wrinkles.

Christopher said civilly that he had come to visit the castle, and hoped that he had not chosen an hour when it was not to be seen by the public. The old woman, who seemed somewhat agitated, though these requests must have punctuated the hours of her daily life for years, replied that the guardian, her husband, had had an accident and was in hospital, but that she would take the gentleman round. She then unhooked an enormous key from a nail on the wall, and led the way out of doors.

To enter the ruins, one passed under a portcullis, and so on up a gentle slope between thick, broken walls. At the end of this passage an ugly modern door had replaced the old ones long ago destroyed; and following his guide, Christopher found himself in the castle. The old woman apologised for not knowing as much of the history of the place as her husband did; and had the young man really come as a seeker of knowledge his visit would have proved somewhat of a disappointment. They went from room to room, many of which were open to the sky, with mere stony suggestions of what the upper storeys had been; but, as Christopher had been led by his late adventure to expect, the keep was in a better state of preservation than the rest. He asked no questions; but going up a steep stone stairway which would lead, he knew, to a certain window, his heart began to beat rather more quickly than usual. He hoped, and more than half believed, that he would find a beautiful girl waiting for him at the top of the steps; but he found—stone walls, and emptiness; a silent place where nothing moved save the wandering sprays of ivy which peered and beckoned at the window where she had been.

Deeply disappointed, Christopher walked about, pretending to be interested in the thickness of the walls. The old woman stood still, watching him as he went to the window and looked out. Turning quickly he caught, or fancied that he caught, a cynical expression on the dried-apple face.

"I suppose you have a great many visitors here, even at this time of the year?" he said, by way of working up to a point which he hoped to reach.

"Not many now, sir," his guide answered stolidly.

"Well, for instance, how many to-day before me?" he went on.

"A couple of cyclists this morning. That's all, besides yourself."

"Ah," exclaimed Christopher, trying to be subtle, "I wonder if I saw them at the inn. Were they ladies?"

"Two gentlemen, sir."

"But," he persisted, "you have people who come regularly, no doubt. Artists, who sit here and paint—in this room, perhaps——"

"No, sir, there hasn't been one for weeks."

"I saw a young lady looking out of the window this morning, whom I took to be an artist," said Christopher, growing impatient. "Very pretty, with yellowish-brown hair and dark eyes—might have been brown or violet. I think she had on a dark blue dress."

"You must have been mistaken, sir," replied the old woman. "I didn't bring any such young lady in this morning."

"Well, she was here," Christopher insisted. "Or else it was a ghost."

As he added this supposition, he laughed; but the woman's hard face remained grave. "There may be many a ghost about this place, sir," she returned

calmly. "Sometimes I've thought I seed them myself; and oftentimes o' nights I've heard sounds I couldn't account for in no other way."

Christopher might have argued that ghosts do not throw solid gold cigarette cases from castle windows at young men in motor-cars; but he said nothing. Perhaps the woman was speaking the truth, and had not seen the girl, who might have followed some other tourist into the castle while the door was open. Perhaps she was not telling the truth; and if so, it would be better for him to follow her example of cautiousness.

In silence he looked down from the window which had framed the beautiful, anxious face, and made no comment when, wound round a tangled branch of ivy he found a bright, curling hair that glittered like a delicate thread of gold. In the room there was no other trace of the girl for whom he searched; but he was sure that this was one. She had caught her hair in the ivy as she leaned out to throw the cigarette case. Then she had hurriedly withdrawn her head. But why had she been in such haste? What had happened, or what had been about to happen?

Christopher asked no more leading questions, but meekly allowed himself to be shown the usual things and told the usual legends. Then he gave the old woman the usual fee, with the usual extra tip, and took his leave. But turning to glance back at the guardian's cottage, when the door was shut he saw his late guide at the window, peering out. Behind her stood a man, looking over the stooping shoulder; and though, as Christopher's eyes met his he moved away and was gone in an instant, Race caught a clear enough impression to feel that he would recognise the face again. It was that of a man passing beyond middle age. The eyes and skin were singularly dark in contrast to

thick white hair, and there was something peculiar—Christopher had not time to see clearly what—about the prominent nose.

"Can it be the guardian, back from hospital, got too lazy or feeble to take people over the castle?" Christopher asked himself. But though the face was that of a man well past fifty, it was still young in contrast to the wrinkled visage of the old woman. Besides, though seen for no more than a second, it struck Christopher that the features were those of a cultured and intelligent person. Possibly a tourist had arrived while the woman was absent, and taken shelter in her cottage from the drizzling mist; but why should a new arrival be so interested in a departing one as to peer eagerly over the caretaker's shoulder? Christopher was half minded to go back and have a good look at the man who had flattered him by such an attention; but he could think of no excuse to make for returning.

Dissatisfied with the result of his quest, he resolved to return to the castle after dark, and linger about in the hope that the girl might return under cover of dusk—to demand her property and explain her strange manner of disposing of it. Meanwhile, however, he had half the day to get through, and—save for such interludes as meals, nothing to do with it except to make inquiries concerning the girl.

Describing her, he questioned the landlord at the inn, and afterwards the coquettish young woman at the post-office; but neither the one nor the other could tell him anything; and when after nightfall he groped his way through a thick mist towards the castle ruins, he had still no clue which might help him to find the lady of the cigarette case. The chance that darkness would afford her a chance to recover her treasure, on the spot where she had parted with it, was so obvious that Christopher hoped greatly she might take it; and if

her movements were unhampered, he felt morally sure that she would.

The hour was still early, but already—as the French say—"it made night," when he saw the broken towers of Kennerwick Castle thrown like great splashes of ink against a murky sky. The mist was rain, and the rain was mist; and there was no gleam of light anywhere except a weak yellow blur which meant a window of the guardian's cottage.

What if the girl were waiting for him somewhere near, waiting and trusting to his intelligence for the keeping of an unmade tryst? It would be easy to miss her on a night like this.

Sauntering, as if aimlessly, along the road dominated by the vast ruins, Christopher began softly to whistle the air from *La Traviata* which Scarlet Runner's new siren played. It must have been those musical notes, heard from a distance, which had drawn the girl to the keep-window before he arrived beneath in the car.

If she remembered, and recognised them now, she would know what they meant, as they fluted a message out of the night.

Once in a while he paused, half expecting a call in answer; and at last, as he mounted the rising ground which led to one wing of the castle, farthest from the moat and the cottage, he thought that he heard a faint rustling among the dead grass and bracken. Stopping to listen, the sound was hushed. Again he whistled the same air, while he lighted a cigarette which should also have its special meaning for the girl if she were near, as well as giving her a hint of his whereabouts.

Yes, there was the sly rustling once more. Perhaps she wanted a reassuring glimpse of his face before speaking. Well, she should have it. He held up the lighted wax match to the cigarette until its flame

began to burn down. Then, as it flared up before the end, suddenly there came to his ears a hiss sharp and wicked as a snake's, and at the same instant he was conscious of a stinging pain in his left arm.

Away went match and cigarette, their sparks drowned in the wet grass; and Christopher, surprised and pricked to anger, realised that he had been shot at with an air-gun. Suspecting no lurking malice, he had calmly made himself a target for someone to pot at; and with a quick desire for vengeance he started to run in the direction whence the first rustling had proceeded. Now and then he thought that he heard the stealthy sounds again; a crackling fern, a tiny breaking stick, on this side or on that. He believed that he should catch the person who dodged him, for the way was clear ahead, and there was a slight descent towards the castle moat. A shadow loomed ahead. Christopher sprang at it, only to seize the beetling branches of a young larch or yew tree, and at the same time to receive a blow on the shoulder from behind—a sharp, unexpected blow which sent him pitching forward. Before he could recover his balance, the ground seemed to vanish from under his feet, and he plunged with a great splash into the stagnant water of the moat.

For a few seconds he floundered clumsily, then got to his feet—for the water, though ice-cold, was not deep. Slimy weeds festooned his head, and hung, clinging and oozy, over his eyes. He shook them off, and forgot the hot pain in his arm, his indignation at the unknown who had caused it, in fear for the cigarette case. Had it fallen out of his pocket, to lie hidden in the mud at the bottom of the moat?

No, it was safe, and Christopher could turn his attention to getting out of the scrape into which the enemy had so cleverly plunged him. By groping he came upon a broken place in the moat wall, where he

could get foothold and handhold of a precarious kind. After a slip or two he succeeded in climbing out, and despite the danger of being shot at again, devoted his attention to ridding himself of as many weeds and as much loose mud as possible. The person who had played him these two sorry tricks, one upon the other, had probably exhausted his forces for the moment. In any case, no further attack was made, and after a walk which restored his circulation if not his temper, Christopher regained the inn. Passing through the bar as he was obliged to do to reach his room, he lightly explained to the surprised landlord that he had slipped and fallen in the mud. But a red stain on his sleeve he concealed as well as he could, only laughing when the landlord asked if he had hurt himself.

The wound in the arm was not serious, and Christopher, determined to keep his own counsel, attended to it unaided. But he could not help reflecting that it had perhaps been rather a close shave for him. That noiseless air-gun need only to have been a little better aimed to have reached his heart, instead of inflicting some slight damage on his left arm. Clearly, the enemy had not been in play. And if in falling he had struck his head on some jutting stone of the moat wall, why, the end as far as he was concerned might have been the same. And the cigarette case would probably have changed hands.

Christopher began to see that this affair was of a far more serious and complicated nature than he had supposed at first, even when its mystery had most puzzled him. In his own room at the inn he took out the cigarette case and considered it with interest, the while he rid himself of his soaked clothes. Certainly the little gold box was of great value to someone, a value far beyond its intrinsic worth, in spite of weight and sparkling diamonds. Was it for the concealed

photograph, or the slip of paper with the queer cipher, that someone had lain in wait to shoot or drown him?

In his mind, Christopher absolved the girl of all blame, and he chuckled a little as he thought how the enemy had made all the deductions concerning his probable movements that he had expected the girl to make. The question was, how and where would the enemy try again? If he were determined, without being subtle, he would very likely make another attempt in the night.

The man (since only a man would have had strength for that push) must have been near the girl when she threw the cigarette case. He must have seen a young man jump from a motor and pick it up: also he must have somehow identified the night wanderer by the castle with the young man of the car. Having done this, it would be easy for him to find out where the motorist was lodging, and, unless his reasons for prudence were even greater than his desire to have the cigarette case, he might pay an anti-midnight visit to the inn.

Christopher's one window was directly over a low-roofed porch at the quietest side of the house. This porch roof could easily be reached even by a small boy; and Christopher determined to lay a trap. He pushed back the white curtains, and passed and repassed the window several times before finally putting out his light. At last he went to bed leaving the window wide open, and lay in the dark waiting, even hoping, for something to happen. But nothing did happen, although Christopher did not allow himself to drop asleep until dawn had crept like a grey ghost through the open window.

It was after nine when he waked again, and he was much annoyed with himself for wasting time in bed,

when he might have been better employed in playing detective. During the long, wakeful hours of the night he had planned, when day came, to find out something about the man who had peered at him through the cottage window, over the old caretaker's shoulder. But when, by his request, a London newspaper and breakfast were brought to his room, a paragraph in the personal column of the *Daily Recorder* turned his attention in an instant from people and events at Stoke d'Estcourt.

"T. V. B." stared at him in large black capitals at the head of that famous column. "Whoever can supply information as to these letters and those following, will be richly rewarded if he communicates Box 2001, *Daily Recorder* Office," he read with a keen stab of excitement.

"Quick work!" Christopher said to himself. For he did not doubt that he was the person for whose benefit the paragraph had been put in print. He was in a position to supply the wished for information, but he would not supply it until he could be sure that the advertiser was the rightful owner of the cigarette case, with such secrets as it contained.

Of course, the girl might have been forced to leave Stoke d'Estcourt yesterday, after throwing him the cigarette case, and if she had gone to London by train she would have had time to put this advertisement in to-day's paper. On the other hand, somebody else, remaining near the village in the hope of waylaying the possessor of the treasure, could easily have sent the paragraph up to town by messenger. He might even have left the place himself late in the evening, after failing in the object for which he had stayed, and still have contrived to insert the paragraph.

Christopher was at a loss to decide between these deductions; but he made up his mind that in any event

he would have a better chance of getting into the thick of the mystery if he left Stoke d'Estcourt and went up to London himself. Having dressed hastily, therefore, and confined his researches for the white-haired man to a few inquiries which brought him no satisfaction, he paid his bill at the inn and departed with Scarlet Runner.

*En route* to town he concocted a telegram, which he would not have thought it wise to send from the Stoke d'Estcourt post-office, and got it off from a small town where he stopped to lunch. The wording of the wire cost him a good deal of thought, ignorant as he was whether it would reach the hand of friend or foe. But on the whole he flattered himself that he had steered cleverly between Scylla and Charybdis. "Should the advertiser wish to hear more of T. V. B., the only way of doing so will be to call nine o'clock to-night (Friday) on Christopher Race, who may be able to give information but will accept no reward."

This was all, save for the address of his lodgings, number and street.

He arrived at home late in the afternoon, and found no letters of interest, since one of reproach from the Australian widow could not be entered under that heading. His soaked clothing, packed all day in his bag, he gave to his landlady as a present for her son; and so pleased was she that she favoured her lodger with a marvellously good dinner. Thus it was in a moderately serene mood that he waited in his sitting-room for the caller invited to come at nine. Would it be a beautiful girl; and if so, would she turn out to be V. L. H., or would the writer of the unfinished letter remain forever behind a curtain of mystery? Would it be the man who had shot in the dark, or an agent of that man; and what might be the scene which would then be enacted?

But neither man nor woman came. Nine o'clock passed; ten o'clock; eleven; and at last Christopher went to bed.

The first thing he did in the morning was to open the *Daily Recorder* and cast his eyes down the personal column. "T. V. B." was conspicuous only in absence; but towards the end of the column appeared something else which caught Christopher's attention at a glance.

"V. L. H. is earnestly implored to communicate immediately with one who hoped to meet on Thursday at address V. L. H. knows. Great anxiety. Can't bear suspense."

So, Christopher Race was not the only person who had been given reason to count upon meeting V. L. H. on Thursday!

Christopher wished very ardently that he as well as V. L. H. knew the address of the anxious advertiser; but as he did not, and could think of no means of finding it out, he could do nothing to match the pieces of the puzzle together. It was certain that he would be given no information whatever, if he applied at the advertising offices of the *Daily Recorder*; and his only hope was that the delayed visit to his lodgings might be made during the day. He stopped in the house, therefore, writing letters and trying to interest himself in a novel not as exciting as his own experiences; nor was there much inducement to go out, as a fog, thoroughly characteristic of the month, hung brown and loathly over London. The air was heavy and sulphurous, and Christopher grew restless. He began to think that after all the advertiser had changed his or her mind, and that in any case it was not worth his while to hang about the house waiting for something to happen. When the four o'clock post brought him the offer of an immediate engagement for *Scarlet Runner*, therefore, he was inclined to accept. A Mr. Warren Lockwood

wrote from The Laurels, Pleasant Avenue, Barnet, saying that friends had recommended Mr. Race and his car. He—Mr. Lockwood—had been suffering from bronchitis, and his doctor advised him not only to escape London fogs as soon as might be, but to escape in a motor. Having business connected with mines in Wales, it had occurred to Mr. Lockwood that pleasure and health might be combined with this. He wished, if possible, to start in a day or two, but would naturally like to have a glance at Mr. Race's car before deciding positively to take a long tour in it. The only time for this glance would be on Saturday evening. Would Mr. Race be so excessively kind as to drive his *Scarlet Runner* out to The Laurels, arriving as near eight o'clock as he could make convenient? If Mr. Race would dine, Mr. Lockwood would be delighted, as they could then discuss mutual friends. And for a week's trip, Mr. Lockwood was prepared to offer the round sum of a hundred guineas, he stated in a postscript, which also asked for a wire.

A hundred guineas was a decent sum to earn in a week, even in these days of *Scarlet Runner's* success; and as the year of Christopher's probation with his uncle was now drawing towards an end, he wished to swell the total of his twelve months' earnings to a more and more goodly sum. Of course, he was keen on stopping in town until the mystery of the cigarette case (if not that of "V. L. H.") should be cleared up; but if Mr. Lockwood were not in too great a hurry to be off, there might be a chance of finding out something more before the start. Taking everything together, Christopher determined that it would be as well, at least, to call at The Laurels, and sent a wire to that effect, pleading an engagement for dinner.

This engagement being with himself, made on the spur of the moment, he had something to eat at home,

very early, hoping up to the last moment—and in vain—for a call from the expected visitor. Then, starting from Scarlet Runner's garage at seven, he found the fog so densely thickened, that he doubted if he could find the way. On all sides, as he moved cautiously along near the pavement, were shouting drivers, snorting horses, and the muffled sound of horses' hoofs heard in murky darkness. More than once the poles of omnibuses threatened him with injury, and the leviathan forms of motor-'buses loomed at him out of the gloom.

Towards Regent's Park the fog lifted slightly, but in Finchley Road it settled again as densely as ever, and he could go at little more than a walking pace.

Suddenly, at what seemed to be a corner of the wide country road not far outside Barnet, a voice cried to him.

"Scarlet Runner?" it shouted; and Race, astonished, answered before he had stopped to think: "Yes."

Next instant a black figure was silhouetted strangely in the pale haze of the car lamps, and three short, sharp reports barked dryly in the night.

"Tyre burst!" was the first thought that flashed mechanically into Christopher's mind. Yet—when he had time for the question—how could three tyres burst almost simultaneously, and on a cold, damp evening?

A few seconds later the acrid smell of gunpowder mingling with the sulphur-reek of the fog gave him his answer. Someone had fired a revolver at his driving-wheel tyres, and two shots had taken effect, for he could feel the car settling down on the deflated inner tubes. Hot with fury at the outrage, Race leaped from his seat to the roadway, peering into the darkness, tingling to inflict punishment, and reckless of all danger for himself. There was no sound of running footsteps. The scoundrel must be lurking— But the thought

was cut short abruptly as the breaking of a thread. As he touched ground, something thick and soft was thrown over his head from behind, and twisted tightly round his neck.

Taken by surprise in the heat of his rage, for an instant Christopher lost his breath. He stumbled under the onslaught, staggered, and nearly lost his balance. Hands deftly, swiftly, tore open the buttons of his overcoat, and he knew instantly with returning presence of mind that he had two men to deal with. Pitting all his strength and intelligence against the pair who had him at so great a disadvantage, he fought desperately and with the skill of a trained boxer. The cigarette case was in an inside pocket of his waistcoat, and he resolved that he would only lose it with his life.

A fierce upward swing of his right arm was just in time to prevent the man at his back from twisting the hood too tightly round his throat. Stepping back heavily on the feet of this fellow, he shot out a left arm like a battering-ram and caught the would-be pick-pocket squarely in the face. There was a grunt of pain, and the prying hands fell away from Christopher's coat; but the man behind flung an arm round his neck, and the folds of cloth pressed stiffly against his mouth.

There was no time to be lost, or he would have them both on him again, and twisting like an eel, Christopher slipped round face to face with the enemy at his back. Tearing at the hood with one hand, and striking out fiercely if wildly with the other, Christopher knew that he had got in a blow somewhere. In another second he was free of the muffling hood; but the man he had flung off did not wait to be attacked. He fled,—swallowed up in the fog; and Race, wheeling rapidly to find the other whom he hoped that he had downed, found only darkness. Soon, far away he heard the

humming of a motor, and wondered whether the pair of ruffians had gone off in a car.

To attempt pursuit in the fog would be useless. Besides, he had seen the face of neither man. Panting from the struggle, he assured himself with some sense of triumph that the cigarette case was still safe in his waistcoat pocket.

What an innocent he had been not to suspect the letter from Barnet as part of a plot! He saw how easily he had been duped, now that it was too late; nevertheless, he made up his mind grimly to go on and seek out the gentleman at The Laurels, if such a house existed. If "Mr. Lockwood" were at home, there might be an interesting interview, and Christopher enjoyed it in anticipation as, by means of an ingenious tool he carried, he rolled the old tyres off and new ones on to the rims of Scarlet Runner.

By the time the car was ready to go on again, he had made up his mind not to pay the call alone, but to take for a companion a member of the local police.

Most policemen within motoring radius of London had heard the name of Christopher Race, and he was received favourably at the police station in Barnet. Without telling the story of the cigarette case, he confided to the inspector in charge the fact that a piece of jewellery in his possession was apparently coveted by an unscrupulous stranger. He showed the letter, with the address of "The Laurels," which was written, not embossed, and gave an account of what had occurred to him on his way to keep the appointment. The house was looked up in the directory, and found to exist; and with a plain-clothes policeman beside him in the car, Christopher went on towards Pleasant Avenue.

The Laurels was surrounded by grounds of considerable size, and the gate, admitting to a gravelled

drive, stood open. Christopher saw no lights as he turned in; but as Scarlet Runner purred an announcement of her arrival, the front door was partially opened, throwing out a narrow stream of light which sought to focus on the motor. Already, however, the policeman had slipped from his place, and as Christopher descended, sheltered behind him, moving on step for step with his leader, whose broad shoulders screened his stooping figure from sight. Then suddenly, and unexpectedly to the man who held the light inside the half-open door, Race pushed his way in, the policeman following close.

The person behind the door evidently had no wish to prevent Christopher from entering. He gave way readily, but at sight of the other man, who suddenly appeared like a Jack-in-a-box, he uttered an oath and dashed the lamp he held on the floor. Out went the light, as the glass crashed in a hundred pieces; but instantly the policeman's dark lantern flashed into the darkness.

"No use, Tommy, I've spotted that mug of yours," said the plain-clothes man cheerfully. "We haven't come for you; but it'll be the worst night's work you've done yet, if you don't act with instead of against us."

As he spoke, the bright ray of his lantern shone full on the man who had opened the door—a big, hulking fellow with the face and build of a prize-fighter. He had been in the act of trying to bolt, but recognised and addressed by name, he thought better of it.

"I ain't done nothin' to be ashamed of," he explained sulkily.

The policeman laughed. "I suppose you're engaged here as butler, eh?" Then, turning to Race: "This is an old acquaintance of mine, Tommy Birkett. We've knocked up against each other from time to time, eh, Tommy? Birkett's name you may remember, Mr. Race, in sporting papers, some years ago. Not a bad

one with the gloves, but a blt down on his luck of late—had some little trouble—same sort of trouble he can avoid now by confiding in the police. Just tell us who engaged you to battle for him, Tommy."

"By Jove, this is an empty house!" exclaimed Christopher.

"The caretaker's a pal of mine," said the big, sulky man stolidly.

"Not good enough, Tommy; try again," smiled his old acquaintance with the lantern. "Better call me your pal, and tell the truth."

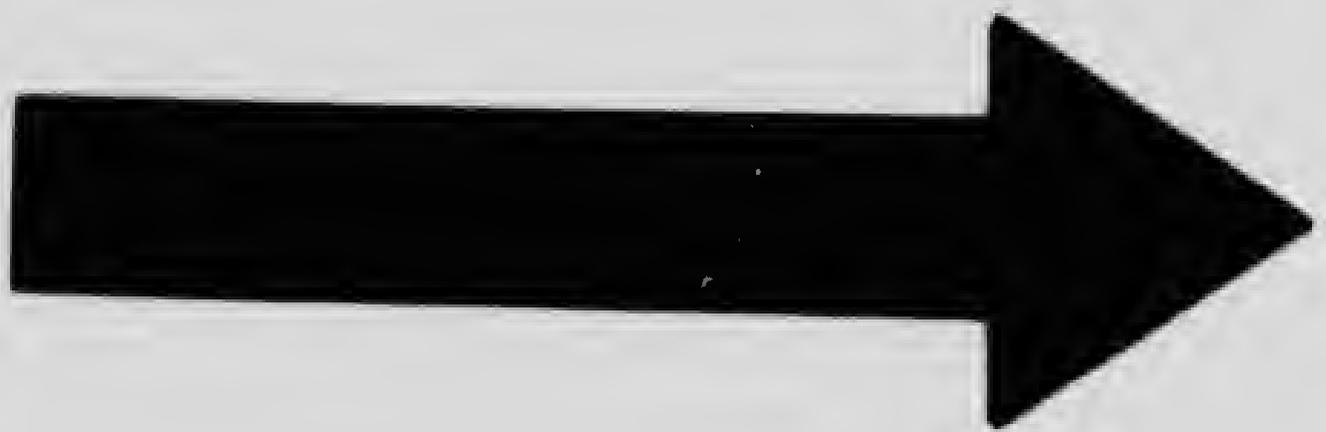
Then Tom Birkett did tell the truth, or something that might pass for it until he was found out. He mumbled a tale of a "pal of his" who had come to him from a gentleman who wanted a strong chap to "pay out" a bad man the gentleman was too old and weak to punish himself. Birkett was to have ten pounds in advance for the job, and another tenner when it was finished. He was introduced to the caretaker at The Laurels, a "doddering old Johnny," with a nose like a lantern, made up a quick friendship with him, invited himself to spend the evening, and bring drink, for which refreshment the caretaker was now much the worse, in the kitchen. Instructions received through the "pal," with the advance, were to wait near the front door with a lamp, from a quarter to eight till the arrival of a motor-car, on hearing which he was to open the door part way, and not allow himself to be seen until the visitor was inside, and the door locked behind him. Then he was to "lay out" the newcomer in first-rate style,—nothing serious, but enough to "knock him silly," and keep him in that condition for several hours. Having accomplished this end, he had permission to leave the house, and the unconscious man in it. With anything that might happen afterwards he need not concern himself, except to claim

the rest of the "stuff" at a certain public-house in the Mile End Road next day. On the strength of his willingness to take his "old friend" the plain-clothes policeman to the rendezvous at the time named, Tommy Birkett was allowed to go; though, as soon as his back was turned, his friend followed him, at a respectful distance, having meanwhile ascertained that his diagnosis of the caretaker's condition was not exaggerated.

It was pretty clear that Birkett's employer, or the "pal" who had been the go-between, intended to arrive sooner or later at The Laurels to take the cigarette case from the body of its helpless possessor. Christopher arranged to wait, therefore, and the policeman promised to return as soon as he had been able to "put someone else on to Birkett." In half an hour he was back again, therefore, having despatched a comrade upon the shadowing business.

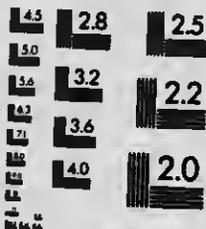
Scarlet Runner was left standing before the house door, to give the impression that her master lay unconscious within; but hour after hour passed on, and Birkett's mysterious employer neither came nor sent. A merciless douche of cold water at length restored the caretaker to partial possession of his senses; but he could throw no light upon the matter, knowing nothing, indeed, of what had happened, except that he had a new chum in to spend the evening. He said that "The Laurels" belonged to a maiden lady who had sold her furniture and gone to live abroad. The house had been in the hands of several agents for nearly a year, and during that time he had been in charge. He knew nothing of a gentleman named Lockwood, and nobody had come to look over the house since September, so far as could remember.

Christopher's idea was that it was the organiser of the plot who, with an assistant, had waited for and waylaid him on the road. If they had succeeded in



# MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



**APPLIED IMAGE Inc**

1653 East Main Street  
Rochester, New York 14609 USA  
(716) 482 - 0300 - Phone  
(716) 288 - 5989 - Fax

getting what they wanted, they would have left him lying stunned, with empty pockets, Birkett's services not being needed after all. Most likely, he and the policeman agreed, one if not both had come back to watch The Laurels until after the departure of Birkett; but seeing him followed from the house, had guessed that the game had gone wrong, and hastened to vanish.

"Whoever this man is," said the policeman, "he thinks more of his reputation than he does of getting what he wants from you, though he's evidently keen on that. You can count on The Laurels being watched; but my opinion is that the hunt won't come back that way. You'll find the wind blowing from some other quarter, an unexpected one, maybe, and my word to you is, consult Scotland Yard."

With this advice still echoing in his ears, Christopher at last drove Scarlet Runner rapidly back to London, the fog having lifted with a hint of breeze. He was tired and hungry; and knowing that he would get nothing to eat at his lodgings, when he had put up the car he went to his club, where refreshment, liquid or solid, was to be had at any hour.

The Wayfarers, as most people know, is a loved resort of all sorts and conditions of men, from dukes down to mere geniuses. Travellers and soldiers, actors and artists, men of letters and men of law frequent the dingy yet ever cheerful rooms. To-night, a musical entertainment was going on, and the club dining-room was almost deserted when Christopher walked in. Two men sat at a table in a corner, talking earnestly; and hearing him enter, they looked up, as if not too pleased to have the room invaded. Both were young, and strangers to Christopher; yet the face of one seemed curiously familiar to him. "Now, where have I seen that good-looking chap before, and lately, too?" Race asked himself.

Then, suddenly, the answer sprang into his mind. This was the original of the photograph in the gold cigarette case.

A wave of excitement swept over Christopher. In a low voice he asked the waiter who took his order, if he knew who were the two gentlemen at the other table.

"Why, sir," replied the old fellow, who had been a "feature" of the club for years, "don't you know by sight the celebrated Mr. Fergus O'Brien? He's as famous as—as you are, only in a different way. He started his career in the law; but, though he's a gentleman by birth, he's——"

"Oh, I've heard of Fergus O'Brien, of course," said Christopher,—“the private detective; which of the two is he?”

"The one at the head of the table, sir. I don't know his guest. Not a member of the club, sir, unless a brand new one."

Christopher was disappointed. His man—the younger of the two—was the wrong man. But he determined that neither he nor his neighbours should leave the room without his finding out what he wanted to know. He took the gold cigarette case from his pocket and laid it on the table, where its diamonds flashed in the light of a red shaded candle. Three minutes later its gleam caught the eye of the young man who was not Fergus O'Brien; and Christopher saw his face go through the changes from astonishment and incredulity to intensest eagerness.

"What will he do now?" was the question in Christopher's mind. But it was almost instantly answered. What the young man did was to jump up, and on pretence of going to the fireplace to warm his hands, pass close to the table where Race sat. He paused, and Christopher's eyes and his met. His were

honest eyes as well as handsome ones, and any doubt that might have crept into Race's mind concerning the original of the photograph died in a second.

"You will think it very strange," said the young man, "but I must beg you to tell me how you got that cigarette case."

"I don't think it strange," returned Christopher. "When I recognised your face, I put the case there hoping you'd ask me that question. I'll answer it with the greatest pleasure: and there are also some questions I trust you'll answer me."

Fergus O'Brien got up and came across the room. "You're Mr. Race, aren't you?" he asked.

Christopher assented, and added that he had just learned who the other was.

"This is my friend—indeed, my distant relative—Mr. Maurice Naylor," said O'Brien.

"M. N.!" exclaimed Christopher impulsively.

"Exactly. We were speaking of that cigarette case, when you showed it. When you've finished your supper——"

"I have finished it," said Race, who had already done justice to a devilled bone.

"Then perhaps you'll accept an invitation to my chambers."

"I'd rather you'd both come to my rooms," replied Christopher. "You'll understand why, perhaps, when we've had a talk about the cigarette case. You won't have far to go."

And they did understand, in a way that was a surprise to all three; for on arriving at Christopher's lodgings, they came upon a scene of wild confusion in his sitting-room. Everything had been ransacked and left in disorder; and it was the same in the bedroom. Someone, under cover of the thick fog, had made an entrance, probably climbing across from the balcony of

an adjoining house which was unoccupied. Nothing had been taken away, so far as Christopher could tell; but nothing had escaped the most minute examination. Not only had every drawer been searched, but books had been taken from their shelves, pictures had been turned face to the wall, and photographs had been pulled out of their frames.

"This is also on account of the cigarette case," said Christopher. "There's a man who wants it badly. I don't know who he is yet, but——"

"I think I can tell you," cut in Maurice Naylor.

"Can you also tell me who is V. L. H.?"

"She is Violet Hardcastle, the niece of the man who probably paid this room a visit while you were out. She——didn't give you the cigarette case?"

"In a way, she did——probably to keep it out of her uncle's hands, as it looks now. Can you tell me where she is?"

"I wish I could. I've been advertising for news of her in the *Daily Recorder*. My friend Mr. O'Brien knows the whole story. When we saw you, I was consulting him about the best way of reaching Miss Hardcastle, who is engaged to me again by her uncle's will."

"Perhaps if I tell you how I got the cigarette case it will help you both," said Christopher: and then, beginning with the unfinished letter, he gave them the whole history of the affair, ending with the episode in Barnet.

"Certainly it's Hardcastle who has planned it all; if he hasn't done it all," exclaimed Naylor. "I'll bet it was he who grabbed you from behind, to-night. He's as big a coward as he is a scoundrel, though O'Brien was saying that I'll have difficulty in proving him a villain."

"He has a good enough reputation as a solicitor,"

said O'Brien, "but I begin to think from things Naylor has been telling me that he's got into low water—been speculating with his client's money, perhaps, or——"

"He's his niece's guardian," explained Naylor. "Brother of her dead father, who thought everything of him. But Violet's mother was an American; and she never liked the man—never trusted him. The money was all hers, but he's got a lot of it in his hands somehow,—against the mother's wish, I fancy,—and naturally he doesn't want Violet to marry, as by her father's will he has charge of her affairs until she does. He had her at school in Paris till she was twenty, to keep her out of the way of men; but I'm attached to the Embassy there, and we met. I fell in love with her at sight—who wouldn't?—and when Hardcastle heard what had happened, he came and carried her off at once. He was clever enough, though, to stop me from making a row by saying he'd inquire about me, and if all was well, would allow the engagement to go on. Meanwhile Violet was to stop with him in some country house he was taking. Hardcastle promised to write, and promised that if everything went as he expected, Violet should too. He'd let me know the address and all that. Well, I heard nothing. I found out his office address, and wrote several times. No answer. Just then I couldn't get leave, which was a horrid bother; but after a fortnight of worry and suspense I received a letter from Violet, evidently written in great haste. Here it is. You shall see it, Mr. Race."

From an inner pocket, Naylor produced a half-sheet of paper, at sight of which Race had to restrain an exclamation, for it exactly matched one which he himself possessed; and the writing which covered it was the same as that in the letter over which he had so often puzzled.

"DEAREST MAURICE," he read, "this is in the greatest haste. I've run away from my uncle's house—escaped, I might call it; for, since a dreadful scene we had, I've been practically a prisoner. I've been planning this for days, but have only just succeeded. I've got to a farmhouse not far from the village, giving a different name, and making up a stupid story about myself; but it answers very well, for they're keeping me as a lodger for a night or two. Really, I'm in hiding here, for I daren't leave the house lest my uncle or that hateful, wicked old valet of his you saw in Paris, pounce down on me like hawks and carry me back again. I tell you, dearest, I'm *afraid* of them both. I don't know what they mayn't do, and all because of my money. I'm sure uncle must have done something dishonest with it. Anyway, he came to me one night and said that he knew my mother had left me a great deal which had never come into his hands; that he'd got information about there being valuable bonds in a bank in New York of which he ought to have known. I admitted that it was true, and that dear mother had given me a letter about the bonds, just before she died, saying that they were never to be put in his charge. He said he must have them, that he was in difficulties, but this extra money would tide him over, and he would make it all right afterwards. He begged and pleaded so that I began to give him the letters of the combination-lock, and had got as far as TVB when it seemed exactly as if mother's voice spoke in my ear and forbade me to go on. There was a miserable scene between us after that. His eyes were awful, and frightened me. You know, in my little cigarette case, which you gave me with your initials in it, and your photograph hidden inside, I told you I would keep the thing most valuable to me after your picture. That thing is the combination by which the safe at the bank

which contains the bonds can be opened. No one has opened it and cut the bonds since mother was in New York last, not long before she died. Not a soul living except myself knows the combination, not even the manager of the bank. I'm sure mother was right in not trusting uncle, and that this secret fortune is all I have left. I daren't wait for you to come here, but shall try to get to London by motor, rather than show myself at a railway station, and will go straight to the Savoy. You will get this just in time to meet me there if you start from Paris Thursday morning. I shall finish this letter and write another arranging about the motor; and to do both, I've but one sheet of paper.—Your loving  
VIOLET."

Christopher stood silently thinking for a minute with the half-sheet of paper in his hand. He guessed now that the girl had been interrupted in the midst of her letter to him, by warning of her uncle's arrival. The man had traced her to the farmhouse she spoke of, no doubt, and Violet, before escaping the second time, must have given the unfinished letter to someone at the farmhouse, begging that an envelope might be addressed and posted. Maurice Naylor's letter had probably been posted by the same hand.

Race remembered now hearing the name of Hardcastle mentioned by the village postmistress, and how she had said that Miss Hardcastle was an invalid, who had not been seen about since her arrival. He fancied that Mr. Hardcastle must in reality have taken the house near Stoke d'Estcour some time before, though, to excuse himself from giving an address, he had told Naylor that he was looking for a place.

As to the girl's appearance at the window of the castle keep, Christopher could only account for it by

supposing that she had fled to the castle from a farmhouse near by, hoping not only to hide from pursuit, but telling herself also that he might possibly pass that way with Scarlet Runner, if he received the unfinished letter. Perhaps the guardian's wife, in the absence of her sick husband, had been bribed to keep the girl in the cottage overnight, and then had either been treacherous enough to let out the secret, or else Hardcastle had discovered his niece's whereabouts in some other way. In any case, Christopher believed now that the man must have been upon the stairs, or even in the room of the window, when Violet had seen Scarlet Runner, and thrown out the cigarette case. As she knew of Christopher Race's existence, she had probably seen a photograph in some newspaper, and it must have been a relief to her to feel that he had come to the rescue, even though too late for her to be able to carry out her plan.

The question was, what had become of the girl after the car drove away?

Christopher recalled the hard features of the old woman. She had looked capable of doing almost anything for money. If a man like Hardcastle asked for her help and offered to pay for it, she would have given it. Certain it was that the woman had lied to him—Christopher; and perhaps the two had shut the girl up in a back room of the cottage, keeping her there until it seemed safe to smuggle her away to Hardcastle's house, not far off.

All these thoughts passed through Race's mind in the fraction of a minute, and Naylor had hardly time to grow impatient at his silence over the letter, before he brought out the other half-sheet and matched the two together. He and O'Brien compared deductions, and arrived at the same conclusion.

"I think," remarked O'Brien gravely, "that we'd

better go down at once into Warwickshire, and pay a surprise visit to Mr. Hardcastle's house, the sooner the better."

"We can go in my car," said Christopher. "And we can start whenever you like—in half an hour, if suits you."

"You think she's in danger!" cried Naylor.

"Well, I think anyhow that combination's in danger," replied O'Brien, "if Miss Hardcastle's committed it to memory, which no doubt she has, only keeping the paper in case of fatal forgetfulness. If that man can induce or force her to tell him, now he's failed to obtain the memorandum in the cigarette case, he'll do it."

"He's got a good start already," exclaimed Christopher. "He and the other man—the 'wicked valet' Miss Hardcastle speaks of, perhaps—very likely had a motor-car themselves. I heard the sound of one in the fog, after they ran off and left me broken-down. After failing in all three of his attempts to-night, Hardcastle can have gone flying back to Stoke d'Estcourt if he likes, and if so, can be well ahead of us reaching there, no matter how soon we go or how fast."

"For Heaven's sake, then, lets get off without a minute's delay," implored Naylor, "since you say you'll take us, Mr. Race. The thought that harm may be done to my beautiful girl is intolerable."

"There's just one thing we must do before we start," said O'Brien, "and that is, get a warrant for Hardcastle's arrest. I can do it, through Mr. Race's evidence about what occurred to-night; and afterwards will get the pugilist Birkett to produce his 'pal,' who will probably be able to identify his employee. Hardcastle may have disguised himself while making his arrangements to carry out that little scheme, but he's got a broken nose, which he can't hide."

"The man who looked out of the cottage window," murmured Race.

"Also," went on O'Brien quietly, "we shall very likely find out that the spinster who's said to own The Laurels is a client of Hardcastle's. In that case he would have known about her house standing empty, and perhaps about the convivial habits of her caretaker. It's a good thing we can get that warrant, or the man might give us trouble yet, his niece being still a few weeks under age. Besides, if he's got the secret out of her, the first thing he'll do will be to step off to New York and open that box at her mother's bank. I suppose you don't know what bank it is, Naylor?"

"No, I don't; and hang the bonds. I want to get to Violet," answered the young man. "I've money enough for us both."

"Still, I've a fancy for saving those bonds," smiled O'Brien.

It was five o'clock on Sunday morning, and still pitch dark, when they got off in Scarlet Runner; but they had the warrant; and the good car seemed to know that there was stiff work to be done. She flew as she had seldom flown before along the silent, empty roads; and at nine, three haggard mud-spattered men arrived at Stoke d'Estcourt after a non-stop run.

They learned of the first person they passed in the village where to find Mr. Hardcastle's place, and were there within the next ten minutes, flashing through the gates up to a severe, grey Georgian house.

Mr. Hardcastle, pronounced a sour-faced, middle-aged woman who opened the door, was not at home.

"Are you his valet's wife?" asked O'Brien sharply.

"What business is that of yours?" was the equally sharp answer. But a look in the woman's eyes told

the detective that he had hit upon the truth. Violet Hardcastle had had grim jailers.

"We will see Miss Hardcastle, if her uncle is here," he said authoritatively. And to his surprise and the astonishment of his companions, the servant made no objection. Ushering all three into a handsome if sparsely furnished drawing-room, she said that Miss Hardcastle was not well, but should have the gentlemen's message, and would either come down or send word.

"Tell her it's Mr. Naylor," cried the girl's lover. "Mr. Maurice Naylor, who's found her, though she gave him no address, and he couldn't make out the postmark on her letter."

"Will she come?" was the question in the mind of the three men. And in two minutes it was answered by the girl herself, pale and lovely, in a tea-gown white, her beautiful hair disordered as if she had risen hastily from bed.

"Oh, Maurice!" she sobbed, running to him, with eyes for no one else.

It was true that Mr. Hardcastle was "not at home" as his servant had said. But he had returned early that morning, by motor, as O'Brien had guessed, and by threatening to kill Maurice Naylor, whom he knew to be in London, he had induced Violet to tell him the carefully guarded secret, to save her lover's life. Then with his confidential man, her uncle had gone off again in his car.

"But luckily," remarked the detective when he had heard these details from the girl, "he can't sail for New York to-day."

"I wonder?" she said. "I happen to know that he lately bought or hired a big steam yacht, but I don't know her name."

"We'll know it before we're many hours older," O'Brien assured her. "We'll know whether she's sailed; if so, from what port and for what port. We'll know all there is to know, in fact; and when Mr. Hardcastle steps on shore across the water, he'll find himself under arrest"; which was exactly what happened. Therefore Mrs. Maurice Naylor is a rich woman, as well as a happy one, in spite of the enormous speculations of that now famous defaulter, the solicitor, Hardcastle.

Thus, after all, Christopher thought that he might fairly say he had won his bet with himself; so he bought the repeater, and Violet Hardcastle made him a present of the gold cigarette case.

## CHAPTER XII: DECEMBER

### CHRISTOPHER AND THE CHAUFFEUSE

CHRISTOPHER and his uncle had just been to look at the cars that were to start next day in the great "freak race," as the coming event was popularly called, and for which Scarlet Runner was already entered—at the important relative's request.

The Royal Automobile Club, under whose auspices the race was to be run, had taken temporarily a brand new garage to house the competitors, and ever since early morning, when the cars had begun to assemble and to put themselves on view, devotees of motor racing had been pouring in and out. Everyone was interested for not only was a well-known millionaire offering a ten-thousand pound prize and several cups for the encouragement of originality among inventors, but most of the motors themselves were worth seeing. As for the old man who held Christopher's racing destiny in his hand, as the driver of a car holds his steering-wheel, he was interested for several reasons though his interest had come as a surprise to Christopher.

Now he was talking excitedly as they walked together into the big white and red and gold restaurant near the garage, which for the last day or two had been practically given over to the motoring world, and where he was to be his nephew's guest at luncheon.

"Well, Chris," he said, as they sat down at the table

Christopher had engaged, "you win that first prize and there's nothing of mine you can't have now or in future, though there was one of my wishes which you refused to carry out. It isn't so much the prize money I'm keen on for you, though it would be a tidy little sum to add to the allowance I mean to make you again, until I'm gone and you come into the lot."

Christopher laughed. "Aren't you giving yourself away a bit, uncle? You weren't going to let me know my fate until next month, when the year of probation will be up."

"It was you who set the limit and made the stipulation," the elder man reminded the younger, watching the champagne as it bubbled into his glass. "You've been pretty plucky this last year, and shown that you've good stuff in you—better stuff than I thought when you were fooling your time away and running into debt. I've been pleased with you; I don't mind saying I've been proud of you once or twice. Instead of disgracing our name, as I was afraid you were going to do at first, hiring yourself to Tom, Dick, and Harry as a paid chauffeur, you've brought some credit to it. Whatever happens, now that you've proved what you're made of, I shan't leave you penniless. As things have fallen out, you won't have to wait till the 1st of January to learn as much as that from me. I intend to restore your old allowance, not because you need it, but because you *don't* need it. That's where you deserve credit. Also, I shall certainly leave you something in my will; enough to secure you the same income you enjoyed through me up to eleven months ago, and will now begin to enjoy again—that is, eight hundred a year. But I want you to show the world that you're more than a good chauffeur and the owner of a handsome red car—or a second-rate amateur detective. I want you to show that you're the best

there is, and that Scarlet Runner's the same kind. Win this prize, my boy, win it, and I shall say, 'Here is my successor—a young man who's done something for the world to talk of, and done it alone.'"

"First prize it must be? Second or third would do?" Christopher wanted to know.

"Decidedly not. Worse than nothing!" protested his uncle. "Think of your name: 'Race.' A man with that name, if he *does* go in for a thing, must win the best there is, or lose all. What puns they could make on you if you failed!"

Before Christopher could reassure him, even if he had felt inclined to do so, a man who had been about to pass the table turned at sound of the excited voice, stopped abruptly, and came back a step or two.

"How do you do?" he asked, speaking to both men but putting out his hand to the elder.

It was Sir John Maverick, ardent motorist, millionaire proprietor of the *Man on the Car*, and—tactful organiser of the freak race. He knew Christopher only slightly, having met him a few times at the Automobile Club; but his father, the late baron, had been a great friend of Christopher's uncle and young Sir John—who had not seen the elder man for some years—had memories of him in early boyhood.

Old Mr. Race was delighted at the meeting, as much for his nephew's sake as his own, for he felt vaguely that it would be a good thing for Christopher to know this important person. He remembered his dead friend's son instantly, for Sir John, though he was some years older than Christopher, had one of those faces which remain always boyish.

"Sit down and have some lunch with us," suggested Mr. Race, as if he were the host, for he was sure to see Christopher, as a competitor for Sir John Maverick.

big prize, would not trade upon a slight acquaintance to give such an invitation.

The millionaire accepted without demur, saying that a friend whom he had asked had failed him, and he had thought himself doomed to eat alone. The last course was reproduced for the newcomer's benefit, and talk was, of course, all about the race which would begin to-morrow morning.

Sir John spoke freely of his object, which was to encourage inventors. He had, he said, made the first prize one worth winning, otherwise good men would not have thought it worth while to risk building cars for the competition. Many inventors who were too poor to exploit their ideas unaided would be able to get themselves financed by people who would hope to share the ten thousand pounds; and as the big plum ought to fall to the car combining the most original with the most practical ideas, a result extraordinarily interesting should be worked out from this thousand-mile reliability race.

They had not got to any discussion of Christopher's car when the old man found that he was in danger of making himself late for an engagement. Had he and his nephew finished their luncheon alone, the meal would have been cut short to suit his plans, but the arrival of the unexpected guest had made a difference. Mr. Race was obliged to excuse himself before the coffee and liqueurs, but he insisted that luncheon must not be curtailed by the others, and hurried away almost before the two he had left behind could rise from the table.

The table was near the entrance, therefore Christopher had to take only a few steps to see his uncle as far as the door. As Mr. Race went out, two ladies came in, passing by the old man and the young one apparently without a glance. But if they did not pay

the smallest attention to him, Mr. Race was seized with the most lively and compelling interest in one or both of them. He started, stared, and peered through his gold-rimmed eye-glasses, his lips, just parted for a last word with Christopher, remaining open.

Even when the two ladies had passed and their backs were turned to him the old man stood lost in admiration or emotion of some sort, while Christopher looked at him in surprise. His uncle, during his knowledge of him, had always posed as more or less of a woman-hater.

"What's the matter, uncle?" asked the young man, with rather a humorous light in his eyes. "You seem rather struck."

"Lord bless my soul!" exclaimed the old man. And with no other answer, and not so much as a glance for his nephew, whose very existence he seemed to have forgotten, Mr. Race marched out of the restaurant, looking like one who has seen a ghost.

Sir John Maverick, at the table, smiled as Christopher came back. He had caught the expression in his old friend's face and in the eyes that peered at the two beautiful women from behind their glass windows.

"I didn't know Mr. Race was a ladies' man in these days," he said. "But that couple are attractive enough to make a Don Juan out of a Diogenes."

"I shouldn't have thought even they would have that effect on such a hardened old cynic as my uncle," said Christopher.

"I remember my father saying that Mr. Race had had a great disappointment in love as a young, or a fair, young, man," remarked Sir John, "and that it was quite a romance."

"I've heard of it," returned Christopher. "The lady jilted him, I'm afraid, and married someone else."

Uncle James and I nearly ceased to be friends because he had an idea of sending me on a wild-goose chase after the family, to find and marry the daughter. I kicked at the proposition, and never even learned the young woman's name. Anyhow, neither of these ladies is nearly old enough to have been the heroine of Uncle James' love story. One is a girl, and the other can't be much over thirty."

"The girl I never saw before," said Sir John, "but the woman I know by sight, and I suppose you do. No? Why, it's Madame du Guesclin, the famous French sportswoman. She can drive a racing motor like—like a demon or an angel. A very handsome woman, but can't quite go into the same class with the girl, eh?"

"They're just sitting down at the table behind you," murmured Christopher, in a low, warning tone. "Apparently there was a misunderstanding about some other table they thought they'd engaged, and they've come back to the only one in the room that isn't."

"Madame has probably run over to see the 'freaks,' and the start to-morrow," said Sir John, dropping his voice, "but I thought the girl looked English. I suppose they have friends who are competing. By the way, if it isn't indiscreet to ask, what particularly novel features has your car? Of course, I've heard of some of your exploits with her, but I got the idea that she was neither more nor less than an exceptionally good touring car; and she must be a year old, isn't she? Or are you coming in with something newer?"

"No, it's my Scarlet Runner," answered Christopher. "My uncle persuaded me to enter for the race. I shouldn't have thought of it myself, but he's tremendously keen—rather to my surprise; makes a great point of it." Then Christopher went on to

explain the originality of Scarlet Runner's system of transmission: the compressed oil-drive to turbines on the back axle. He told how he had made the acquaintance of the young inventor, who was too poor to experiment upon a grand scale on his own account how the compressed oil-drive had well repaid him for the money spent, and how there had from the first been only one difficulty. Owing to its compression by the force-pump, the oil became too hot and lost some of its consistency, but—Christopher went on to say—he had suggested that the whole mechanism should be water-jacketed. The inventor had agreed, the thing had just been done, and would, Christopher thought, prove a triumphant success.

"I mean to try and touch your money," he finished, laughing. "I've had a look round among the 'freaks' in that Zoo across the way this morning, and though Scarlet Runner isn't, perhaps, in her first youth, and can't flatter herself that she's a monstrosity, she's as sweet a 'runner' as she is scarlet, and the proportion of engine-power she manages to transmit to the road-wheels is so enormous that I have the highest hopes for her."

"Well, I wish you luck, I'm sure," said Sir John Maverick; "but if I were a competitor, I think I should be a bit shy of the freak that, from all accounts, out-freaks everything else."

"What, the gyroscopic freak?" inquired Christopher, a suspicion of a sneer in his voice.

As he asked this question the two ladies who had lately come in turned quickly, as if on an impulse, and looked round for the first time. They had both taken seats on the same side of their table, with their backs to that at which sat Sir John Maverick and Christopher Race. In thus turning, they could not see Sir John's face, if they had not happened to notice it before, but

they could obtain a full view of Christopher. He, however, being now deeply interested in the conversation with his companion, missed the sudden slight flutter at the adjoining table. He was looking straight at Sir John, and had not the vaguest idea that a pair of large and beautiful grey eyes had given out a flash in quick response to that veiled sneer of his.

"The gyroscopic freak," echoed Maverick. "It's just on the cards that that particular freak is going to revolutionise automobilism. I would not care to bet high against it."

"I wouldn't care to bet high on it," laughed Christopher. "There *will* be a monstrosity, if you like, judging from what one hears. But it doesn't look as if the gyroscope would 'gyre' to-morrow."

"You mean because the thing isn't with the lot in the garage?"

"Yes. If it were ready it would be there, getting all the preliminary 'ad.' that was to be got."

"You think old Dick Herbert won't run his car?"

"I should think it's premature to call it a car. My idea is that it's proved a big disappointment."

"I wonder. Poor old chap! It won't be the first he's had."

"No. He came a cropper over that other invention of his," said Christopher, "the compressed-air engine that was so cracked up in the halfpenny papers."

"If he comes another cropper, so much the better for your Scarlet Runner. One rival the less. But do you know Herbert? I never saw him myself, he's lived so much abroad; but I have friends who've met him, and say he's rather a fine old fellow."

"His is a mere name to me," answered Christopher, "associated only with the failure of the compressed-air business; so, naturally, I don't expect much now. And if he's old, he may well funk to-morrow."

There was a sudden brisk movement at the next table, so brisk that it attracted Christopher's attention. The younger of the two ladies had twisted round in her chair, sitting with her arm flung over the back, her flushed face turned upon her surprised neighbour.

"He funks nothing," she said, in a low but intensely angry tone. "It's sheer jealousy which makes you talk like that. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. It's disgusting. To call your sneers at a brilliant inventor and his invention bad taste would be too mild."

"Dorothy!" protested handsome Madame du Guesclin, with her charming French accent. But the girl, flaming in beauty and rage, like a wind-blown poppy, would not listen.

"Beware of the monstrosity to-morrow," she went on, her voice quivering. "Like a monster, it may devour you and all your self-conceit. When you're swallowed up, when you're just simply *nowhere*, perhaps you'll be sorry for speaking as you have of a man like Richard Herbert behind his back."

Christopher was overwhelmed by the torrent of her wrath, and, vexed as he was at having inadvertently given offence to such a beautiful young creature, he was half-inclined to laugh in the midst of his astonishment, so extraordinary, so almost childish was her tirade.

"I am indeed sorry," he ventured, "to have unintentionally distressed you."

"You have not 'distressed' me," broke in the girl. "You wouldn't have the power to do that. You have annoyed me, for I hate jealousy and injustice, and I felt bound to protest—that's all."

"Allow me to say that I think you exaggerate my offence," pleaded Christopher. "I said nothing——"

"You call it 'nothing'!"

"Nothing against Mr. Herbert or his invention, and would not have dreamed of doing so. If you can recall what I did say I believe you would have to admit that, as you proclaim yourself a friend of justice. But I don't ask you to admit anything. On the contrary, I apologise for my indiscretion in expressing any doubts whatever of any invention, without stopping to think that the absent inventor might have present friends." As he made this apology, worded with a spice of boyish malice, to which he was tempted by the fury of the girl's onslaught, Christopher's eyes twinkled a little, though his face was perfectly grave and expressive of regret. That twinkle was as the glitter on the last drop of water in an overflowing cup. The girl gave him an indignant look from her great eyes, and, without deigning to bandy further recriminations, turned a well-shaped and slender back upon him.

Her companion asked the waiter for the bill, and three minutes later both ladies had trailed their graceful frocks out of the restaurant.

Sir John Maverick laughed, and so did Christopher; nevertheless the latter was far from happy. He was a little amused, for his sense of humour insisted on being heard, but he was more angry than amused. He felt as if the girl had boxed his ears, and, though he laughed and talked with Sir John, they still tingled.

The great freak race was to start from Regent's Park, and finish, after a roundabout thousand-mile run, at Edinburgh. It was not to be a speed test, nevertheless elaborate preparations had been taken to protect the public; and there was a tacit understanding that for this occasion there were to be no police traps. Scouts told off by the Automobile Club and other organisations were to be stationed at all dangerous spots to warn cars to go slowly, and any chauffeur driving

to the public danger would be at once struck off the list of competitors.

Early on the morning fixed for the start the automobiles began to move out of the big garage and take up their allotted places. An enormous crowd assembled to criticise or admire them. Never before had been seen such a collection of fearful and wonderful cars. It reminded many of that famous foggy November day in 1896 when motors were first allowed to run on English roads, and twenty or thirty coughing, barking, shaking machines started on the historic run to Brighton.

Everyone felt that this occasion was also historic. Accustomed for so long a time to the conventional design of motor-cars, people could not restrain their laughter at some of the extraordinary-looking creatures that came to the starting-point. Inventors seemed to have taken full advantage of the licence allowed by the conditions of the race, and it would be difficult to imagine an odder collection of self-propelled vehicles. Race himself stared round him, bewildered, as he took the place that had fallen to him by lot, and wondered if he had not stepped by accident into pantomime land. Scarlet Runner looked strictly conventional among all her queerly-shaped rivals, as all arrangements for the oil-drive were, of course, under her body; and to the ordinary eye Christopher Race's car proclaimed no special feature entitling her to rank among the freaks.

The place immediately in front of Scarlet Runner was vacant. No freak had yet come to take it; and officials organising the race flitted nervously by, now and then, to glare at the untidy gap caused by somebody's tardiness. Very soon the leading car would be sent off, the others following at two-minute intervals; but the remaining time was slipping away without bringing any arrival to fill the vacancy.

back off the

the auto-  
e and take  
assembled  
had been  
erful cars.  
November  
ed to run  
ing, bark-  
ric run to

o historic.  
nventional  
rain their  
g creatures  
seemed to  
ed by the  
ifficult to  
l vehicles.  
as he took  
wondered  
hime land.  
among all  
ts for the  
nd to the  
aimed no  
e freaks.  
t Runner  
e it; and  
y by, now  
y some-  
would be  
intervals;  
y without



"AN AMAZING VEHICLE WAS GLIDING, SILENT AND SNAKE-LIKE, TOWARDS THE EMPTY PLACE  
IN FRONT OF SCARLET RUNNER."



Christopher was sitting in his car ready to move up when his turn should come, when an "O-o-o-h!" of astonishment from the crowd, sounding like the sudden indrawing of a breath, made him turn his head to glance curiously about for the cause of the excitement.

An amazing vehicle—If vehicle it could be called—was gliding, silent and snake-like, towards the empty place in front of Scarlet Runner. In shape it suggested a gigantic cigar; in colour it was black; and its jointless metal casing glittered in the wintry sunlight. Half-way down its length the great cigar was cut out into a nick, and in the nick sat, very upright and alert, the slender figure of a woman. She wore a leather jacket; her hair was covered by a kind of curtain descending from her leather cap, and fastening over her chin; and her eyes looked through goggles an elfin mask, which protected and concealed the whole upper part of her face.

"A woman!" was the whisper that went round the crowd; and Christopher heard one hurrying official say to another: "Only arranged last night for her to do it. Old Dick Herbert's hurt his right hand, and so she——"

Race caught no more, but he instantly sprang to the conclusion that the trim figure in the strange car must be that of the famous woman motorist he had seen yesterday, Madame du Gueselin, the pride of sporting France. She and the beautiful but bad-tempered girl in the restaurant were undoubtedly on terms of intimate friendship with Richard Herbert, the inventor of this gyroscopic freak; and what more natural—since Herbert found himself unable to drive in the race—than that this accomplished lady should offer to be his proxy?

Whether or no the hidden eyes behind the goggles

recognised the young man in Scarlet Runner, for a instant the masked face turned to regard him, while by means of a little wheel, the "chauffeuse" (as people were naming her) steered her extraordinary car into the vacant place. Christopher was half-inclined to take off his cap to her, so much did he admire her pluck and loyalty to her friend. Indeed, he felt as if they had a kind of acquaintance, even though it had not begun favourably.

Everything combined to focus the attention of the crowd upon the new arrival. A woman, apparently young, certainly brave and skilful, was to conduct the car during a long and trying race, and that appealed to the chivalry and romance latent in most men's hearts, even those who are most matter-of-fact. Besides, the car itself was so astonishing that, when it was in sight, no one would look at any other.

So swift, so stealthy, so snake-like was the motion of the remarkable machine, that it produced upon the minds of the crowding onlookers a sensation akin to awe. In no single feature did this car copy the usual automobile, and all the assemblage of freaks suddenly looked quite commonplace compared with it.

The thing had no side wheels; but from under the metal casing two central wheels could be seen revolving, one placed behind the other, in a straight line. Running as it did upon these two central wheels alone, the marvel was that the vehicle could keep upright. Only while it was moving could it possibly do so, after the manner of a bicycle, thought the interested spectators, most of whom had heard of this new invention without really believing in it. But when the gyroscopic car had slid into its place directly in front of Scarlet Runner, and had come silently to a standstill, it still remained upright on its two central wheels. Those who were completely ignorant of the real nature of the invention regarded it

as a kind of motor miracle; but Christopher and others who had read with intelligent interest of the machine which was being made, understood more or less what was happening. They knew that the cigar-shaped vehicle was kept on its feet, so to speak, by the two small gyroscopes spinning in sealed chambers, one on each side of the car, and driven by the current from a small electric battery.

People who had looked forward to seeing the gyroscopic motor had given up the idea that it was likely to run; therefore its dramatic arrival at almost the last moment added to the interest created by its extraordinary appearance. A shout of applause rose, in response to which the trim chauffeuse nodded gaily, as if she took part of the tribute for herself. Then, doubtless with the feminine wish to "show off" what her car could do, she jumped lightly out to speak to an old man who came towards her. She had touched a hidden spring, and a step had dropped from the side of the carriage, enabling her to alight with ease. This was another score for the car, but there was better to come; for, sudden as was the displacement of weight, the vehicle only swayed through a small angle, immediately assuming its upright position again.

A new burst of applause arose, and the throng, pressing from all quarters to gaze at the marvel, nearly broke down the barriers put up to prevent interference with the competing automobiles.

This time the young woman did not bow, for she was talking earnestly to the old man who had come to her with one of the officials. He had his right hand swathed in bandages, and Christopher was sure that he must be Richard Herbert, the inventor of the now popular favourite. Race recalled, too, having seen the face in newspaper photographs at the time when the earlier invention had not yet turned out a failure. It

was a fine face, keen, clever, and brave in outline, and Christopher asked himself, with a recurring qualm whether he really had said anything sneering about the old man to Sir John Maverick yesterday. He did not think so, except, perhaps, in the way of a careless gibe; but if he had, he was more sorry than he had been.

He was thinking complimentary thoughts alike about the inventor, car, and chauffeuse when the masked young woman raised her voice to a tone loud enough for him to hear.

"Yes," she said laughing, "we *are* the freakiest freak of all. And I'm glad; for this *is* a race for new inventions, and the newest ought to win. I really don't see what that poor, old, uninteresting red thing is doing in this *galère*, do you?"

It was the voice of the girl who had attacked Christopher in the restaurant yesterday; and so far from being repentant, she was now gratifying her desire for revenge by attacking his car.

Abuse of Scarlet Runner was to Christopher what a red rag is to a bull, or a sneer at her first baby to a young mother.

"Vicious little vixen!" he said to himself, turning a colour to match his car. And instantly a furious desire to beat this girl in the race swept over him. He knew that it was childish, petty, what you will that is stupid and wrong-headed, to care in the least for her stabs; but he was as angry as if she had stuck her hatpins into one of Scarlet Runner's beautiful fat tyres.

"I can beat her, and all the rest of them, and I will. Women shouldn't come into this sort of thing. I can't stand mannish girls," he thought. "This one shall see what the 'poor, old, uninteresting red thing' can do, anyhow."

As he thus resolved, the freaks were busily getting away. The girl had hopped up into the gyroscopic car once more, an official observer from the club by her side, and then, with scarcely a sound from the engines, the black, cigar-shaped car shot ahead like a shark chasing its prey. Two minutes later came Christopher's turn, his own "observer" having by this time mounted to the seat beside him. They were off to cover the first mile of the thousand which would complete the test. And not one man but was his own chauffeur.

Through London and the stretch of suburbia that lies between town and country the long line of strange-looking automobiles—many built for the running of this race—ran slowly enough, serpentine in and out of traffic. The order had been given that no competitor must pass another until open spaces had been reached, therefore Christopher was compelled to keep at the enemy's back. He had but too many opportunities for observing the big cigar and its chauffeuse, of seeing the ease with which the car wormed in and out among big vehicles, how neatly it could whisk round a corner, swinging outwards, not inwards as other motors must; how sturdily it kept upright on its almost hidden wheels, and how the stares of people in the street followed it as if it were a magic thing.

Whatever the result of the race might be, it began to look as if the gyroscopic car was a success, and had come to stay.

Of its pace Christopher had been able to form no estimate until open country was reached, but then it shot forward with the speed of a newly-discovered comet. Opening Scarlet Runner's throttle he also leaped ahead, keeping close on the enemy's heels; and he realised with delight that, even without acceleration,

he was holding his own in the race which seemed now to be beginning.

Soon the gyroscope, with Scarlet Runner close behind, gained upon the other cars that had started before them. Two were swiftly passed; others still ahead could be seen clearly through a light haze of dust, then more rivals were outdistanced; and so the day went on.

North-westward swept the long string of cars, keeping to the course mapped out; flying through English landscapes that were charming despite naked tree branches and frozen grass; slowing down for the controls in town after town; speeding out again on the white roads between bare meadows. And always the cigar-shaped car gained upon those that had started in advance, passing them one by one. Always, too, Scarlet Runner gave chase, never outdistancing the gyroscope, but never getting far outdistanced herself. Sometimes Christopher had the queer black thing well in sight, sometimes he lagged a few miles behind according to the road surface; for the gyroscope had the great advantage of running on a single track, the inequalities of the road mattering little; besides, level surface was presented to the wind.

The Cigar (as Christopher began to call the Herbert invention) and Scarlet Runner had started in the race on the fifteenth and sixteenth respectively; at the end of the first day the former was already ninth, the latter tenth. But Christopher was beginning to doubt his power to keep continually close to the enemy, much less to pass him ahead; and he tried to console himself by thinking that his dangerous rival ought not to have been admitted as a competitor in this race. The thing was too much like a racing car.

The first night halt was in an important Midland town, where all the automobiles were driven to garage

and locked up, so that no driver could touch his car without the knowledge of his own official observer. Most of the competitors stopped at the largest hotel in the place, and Christopher had the doubtful pleasure of seeing the fair chauffeuse (very smart and pretty in her dinner dress) being congratulated in the dining-room by a number of her chivalrous rivals. Madame du Guesclin (for whom he had mistaken the girl before the start) had arrived by train, to chaperon her friend and hear the latest news. Once, from across the room, Christopher saw her draw the attention of the chauffeuse to himself; but the girl immediately looked away again, shrugging her shoulders daintily. She appeared anything but mannish now; yet Christopher repeated to himself that she was one of those detestable young persons who, with all a woman's vanity, aped man. Even when he learned through a motoring acquaintance that she was Richard Herbert's daughter and only child, driving in her father's place because he was disabled, Race did not soften towards her in his heart. He wanted to beat her because she had made fun of Scarlet Runner; and in his desire to do that he half-forgot how much winning meant to him in other ways, until he received an encouraging telegram from his uncle. Then he remembered.

The race was to last five days, the competitors zigzagging about England to fill up the allotted distance before finishing at Edinburgh; and for the Cigar and Scarlet Runner the second day was almost a repetition of the first. Both passed other cars, but Christopher could not pass Miss Herbert, try as he might.

On the third day she had only three rivals in front of her, and the contest seemed to be resolving itself into a duel between the gyron and Scarlet Runner, the rest nowhere; for those still ahead were hardly holding their own.

Not once during the long, hard hours had the black Cigar made an involuntary halt, and Scarlet Runner could have uttered the same boast if she had cared to waste time in talking. Public excitement was whipped up by long reports in the newspapers, and crowds lined the roads outside towns and big villages to cheer Miss Herbert and her dogged pursuer.

"Keep it up!" or, "Spurt, why don't you?" boys would yell; and on the fourth day Christopher obeyed. He did "spurt," and to his wild joy shot past the Cigar to take the lead.

By this time the two were well in front of all pursuers, and they were breasting a steep hill when the gyroscope seemed to lose power and falter a little on the difficult incline. Perhaps there was a temporary failure of petrol pressure; perhaps a fault of ignition; but whatever the explanation, Christopher was quick to seize his chance. With a few gay notes of his musical siren he flashed past, leaped to the summit of the hill, and swooped down on the other side. But despite the lightning speed at which his manœuvre was accomplished, Christopher had had time to glance at Miss Herbert as he tore by.

Up till now she had been distinguished for her neatness, but it was as if excitement and anxiety had somehow disarranged the girl. A curling lock of hair the colour of a copper-beech leaf had escaped from its leather covering to fly in the wind like a flag signalling distress. Her mask, unfastened on one side, was hanging from the dust-covered cap by a cord, and the beautiful young face was pale and strained. Christopher suffered from a brief spasm of compassion, and his delight in triumph was dashed for a moment, but he said to himself that the winning of the race meant far more to him than it could to her. She would have no mercy upon him, nor did he want it. She would wish

for none from him or any man if she were a true sportswoman, and this she really did appear to be, though Christopher liked her none the better for that. If women would thrust themselves into the sports of men, there was little credit to them in not claiming chivalrous forbearance, for they would probably not know how to appreciate it if it were offered.

He pressed Scarlet Runner for all she was worth, and was happy in maintaining the lead throughout the rest of the day. Naturally it fell to him to start first next morning, an advantage he expected to use to the utmost; but it is an old story that pride comes often before a fall.

For once Scarlet Runner did not work loyally with her master. What was the matter Christopher could not tell, for she had no recognisable symptoms, and of all things he did not wish to stop. But she was listless and out of sorts; her engine did not pull with its usual joyous energy. Evidently bracing northern winds were not so much to her taste as the milder airs of the south. The red car's heart beat sluggishly, and ten miles beyond the last halting-place he heard a horn-blast in his ear, pulled a little to his near side, and saw the Cigar dash by in an insulting cloud of dust. So swiftly flew the gyroscopic car that it tossed up a tornado of tiny whirling stones, which gave Christopher all he could do to keep Scarlet Runner straight, so did they obscure his view. Nevertheless, on the principle that disagreeable things are always the ones easiest to see, he was able to make out, in that swift bird-flight, that a small gloved hand threw him a mocking salute.

As if conscious of her wrongdoing, no sooner had the Cigar swept out of sight, and the cloud subsided, than Scarlet Runner picked up strength and energy, leaping forward like a hound that strains at his leash.

There were still some hours left of this last day. Who could tell what the good car might do yet to retrieve her fortunes?

The morning fled. Christopher came to the next control without having had another glimpse of the gyroscope. There he learned that the enemy must be at least five miles in advance of him—an easy victory at last within reach, as it must seem to everyone.

Race, bitterly chagrined, tried to choke back his disappointment and make the best of it; but he felt that, if his successful rival had been anyone else rather than this revengeful-tempered young woman, it would have been less hard to bear defeat.

In his first rage at the news which seemed to mean failure he blurted out something of what was in his mind to the official observer who had been his close companion from the start.

"Pretty and young as she is, that girl seems to have not one feminine grace which isn't of the body," he said venomously. "What bad form to wave her hand as she passed me! But you can't make a woman understand how to play the game."

"I think you do her injustice," returned the observer whose name was M'Lellan. "I believe she's a very nice girl, really; but her father is her idol. She'd do anything for him, people who know her say. It nearly broke her heart that other invention of his proving a failure a few years ago, when she was fifteen or sixteen. Old Dick Herbert practically brought her up by hand. He was middle-aged when he married her mother, who died at the girl's birth, and the two have been everything to each other since. She learned motor-driving and something of mechanics to please her father, because she knew he was inventing this gyroscopic car, and she thought, as he was old, a little

practical chauffeuring might come in handy in the family. A friend of theirs told me the other day that this girl—Dorothy, I think her name is—has nearly used up a legacy left her by some relatives as a *dot* in having this car built. It must have cost a good bit of money, and they have next to nothing to live on. If the car wins the first prize a big syndicate has promised to take up the invention, I understand, and will manufacture for the market. That'll mean fortune as well as fame for Dick Herbert, so you see it isn't exactly unfeminine in the girl to want to win the race."

"I see," said Christopher; and he did see—several things. Having an almost uncomfortably strong sense of justice, he understood in this flash of enlightenment exactly how Dorothy Herbert, the father-worshipper, must have felt when she heard him freely discussing her idol and his inventions with the organiser of the race. Well, at least she was going to have her revenge! It was hard on him; but suddenly he realised that he did not grudge it to her as he had done five minutes ago.

"Look!" exclaimed M'Lellan, abruptly breaking a long silence. "What's that we've just come in sight of—down there, under the third hill?"

"By Jove! it's the Cigar!" cried Christopher.

There it was, a mere flying speck, seen far away across broken and undulating land, as Scarlet Runner, with heated pneus, topped a commanding hill.

At first there was doubt in Christopher's mind. It might be the Cigar; it might be some other automobile not connected with the race at all. But curiously soon doubt merged into certainty. There was no mistake about that queer, long shape; therefore, since he was going at his top speed, the gyroscopic car must have slowed down. Something was wrong; clearly something was wrong.

Assuredly Christopher was gaining on his rival, and gaining rapidly. He could see the outline of Miss Herbert's slim figure, with the broad back of the stolid official observer by her side.

Scarlet Runner was at her very best, but, until now that best had not been enough to defeat this conquering enemy.

Christopher felt like patting the car as if she had been a mare, and chirruping words of encouragement.

"You've got a chance yet," said M'Lellan; and Race's heart leaped.

He was hot on his rival's trail now—so near that to his surprise and almost horror he could see that the snaky gyroscope was slowing, and rocking strangely from side to side.

The stolid observer seated in that strange "nick" of the Cigar was stolid no longer. In alarm he had risen from his seat; the car swayed more violently, like a ship wallowing in the trough of the sea; then two little legs shot down, one on either side, as if in self-defence. The black, shark-like object ran in toward the near side and came to a standstill.

"Was the stop involuntary?" Christopher eagerly asked himself. It looked as if it were. And, if so, his own chance of winning was redoubled. The car that got in first and had had the fewest mishaps would win. He had had no mishaps yet, and it only remained for him to arrive first at the winning-post.

So far he and Miss Herbert were the two drivers who had not had to make involuntary stops. Other cars had had two or three each. Now, he alone had had none; for even as he thought it became clear that the gyroscope was in trouble.

It stood sturdily upright, but helpless, on its little metal legs, and as Christopher came up the girl had just got down, utter dejection in every line of her

figure and the droop of her once proud head. Something in himself, which he did not understand and could not account for, made him disconnect the oil force-pump and put on the brake. Scarlet Runner stopped, pulsing, by the side of the sad Cigar.

"What on earth are you about?" growled M'Lellan. "Don't you know you're giving away your race?"

"Can't help it. Think something's wrong with me," Christopher muttered, a misleading answer. For if something were wrong with him, there was nothing wrong with his car.

He got down from his car and walked towards her.

"Can I do anything for you, Miss Herbert?" he asked correctly, raising his cap, as if he had come across a stranded motor on an ordinary road excursion.

The girl was gazing at him in astonishment. Her mask was off and her charming face, white to the lips, was bathed in dusty tears. Oh no, there was nothing mannish about her now! But Christopher had forgotten that he had ever accused her, in his mind. She looked so young, so forlorn, so broken-hearted, that her brave attempt to rally and ignore her tears at sight of him seemed doubly pathetic to Christopher.

"Do anything for me?" she echoed, in astonishment so profound as to reveal how entirely she had regarded him as the implacable enemy. "I—don't understand. I'm *en panne*. You've beaten me. Please go on. I—I can't start again, that's all."

Her voice wavered and choked. She turned away her face to hide tears that would begin to fall again to water the dead ashes of her hopes.

"I should like to help you, if I can," said Christopher.

"But—but why?" asked the girl, almost suspiciously.

"I've been most horribly rude to you—not that you didn't deserve it. But anyhow, *I* don't deserve anything of you now, except—except hatred."

"You haven't exactly put yourself out to please me," returned Christopher dryly. "But why should you? And I'm not doing this to please you. It's because I can't do anything else. What do you think of the matter?" he inquired.

"Oh, short-circuit somewhere, and the gyroscope won't spin," she answered desperately. "If they don't turn, the car can't keep upright when in motion. You're awfully kind—quite incredibly kind, heaping coals of fire on my head. But you can't do anything for me, except go on and leave me to my fate."

"Let me see if I can't do something," the young man patiently persisted. "Dog can't eat dog, you know."

There was nothing concerning mechanism, coils, accumulators, batteries, and wires that Christopher Race had not studied and learned by heart. From remote days of early Benzes and original Léon Bollées he had wrestled with these things by the roadside until his knowledge of their myriad eccentricities had eaten into his very being. Now, it needed no very profound research to discover what had happened to the Cigar. One accumulator was exhausted, as Miss Herbert would soon have found out when she had had a chance to examine the inner workings of her car. There had been short-circuiting through a badly-insulated wire.

"Accumulator used up," announced Christopher.

"I was afraid so. Oh, poor father! What will become of me?" wailed the girl, in a very small, heart-broken voice.

"I have a spare one," Christopher said. "You're very welcome to it."

"No," she cried, "I wouldn't take it from you. I

couldn't possibly. Oh, you don't know how you're making me feel, offering me the chance to win the race from you, when already it was as good as yours. And *you*—of all people! I——”

“Don't say any more,” cut in Christopher. “I want you to have the accumulator. Then we can start fair again, when you *have* your chance. I shouldn't enjoy a win now unless you had that chance. No credit to me, you see. If we linger here some of the others will be on us, and neither of us will win. What? It won't take a minute to fit.”

The temptation was too great for her. She let him run back to his car (which she couldn't help remembering that she had called a “poor, old, uninteresting red thing”) and take from under the seat that spare accumulator which might mean salvation for her and defeat for him.

Then he began working with quick, deft fingers at the Cigar, while the two official observers, who had seized the opportunity for cigarettes, looked at their stop-watches and made a hasty jotting or two in their note-books.

“There! exclaimed Christopher. “You've plenty of power for your gyroscopes again. See, they're spinning round like mad. Now you can get off.”

As he spoke the girl sprang to her seat, the observer following her example, as M'Lellan climbed expectantly back into Scarlet Runner. “I can never thank you enough for—for the coals of fire,” Miss Herbert said, her hand on the steering-wheel. “But—I'm going to let you start first. Oh, why *don't* you go? We mustn't wait. I almost think I see a car coming in the distance behind.”

“No, you mustn't wait,” echoed Christopher laconically.

He was standing against one of his own driving-

wheels, looking up at her with an odd expression in his eyes, as if he were suddenly very tired. She was no longer white. A bright colour stained her cheeks but it was Christopher who was pale under dust and tan. He felt rather dejected, for he was in the act of doing a hideous thing—wounding his best friend. Also he was throwing away ten thousand pounds, and a fortune from his uncle, just because a girl had cried and looked forlorn—a young girl, brave and loyal, who had impoverished herself for her father and was fighting for him now against all odds.

Christopher had quietly, stealthily taken a penknife from his pocket and, with his hand behind him, had driven the little blade deep into Scarlet Runner's tyre. Poor, faithful Scarlet Runner, who had served him so well, and whose heart was throbbing still with the desire and power to bear him on to victory! Yet he couldn't take that victory, and see the girl lose. He had hated her, but he didn't hate her now. He simply couldn't be the cause of making her fight in vain.

'I said *we* mustn't wait. And you must go first,' she repeated.

"Sorry," said Christopher dully, with a lump in his throat, as he hoped that Scarlet Runner would forgive him. "I'm afraid I can't obey. I appear to be hung up too. Tyre down, I see."

Dorothy Herbert stared at the flattening rubber and M'Lellan whistled faintly, making a sound rather like the escaping air which gushed from the tyre's wounded inner tube.

"It would be quixotic of you to wait for me now," went on Christopher. "Fortune of war. But I don't give up yet. It won't take me long to replace this tyre, and I have a fighting chance still. But there's no fun for either of us if you don't start at once. I beg you to go on."

Hesitating, half-reluctant, half-eager, the girl let herself be hypnotised by the command in her late enemy's eyes. Almost mechanically her foot pressed the clutch lever; a touch on another lever drew up the supporting metal legs. The car moved forward. Once the driver looked back, maskless; a few seconds later she had dropped over the brow of a hill.

"I suppose I shall have to record this—er—stop against you," said M'Lellan, as Christopher renewed the inner tube and forced on the cover by means of the new American tool which had served him bravely not long ago, on a certain eventful journey to Barnet. "It's my duty to do that. All the same, I—well, I think it's about the finest thing I've ever known a man to do—jolly lot finer than the record you might have made, if you hadn't done it."

"There are some things you *must* do—you don't know why," grumbled Christopher, once more taking his seat.

Far beyond the outskirts of Edinburgh crowds began to line the roadway on either side—cheering, enthusiastic crowds, prepared to give the winners a hearty Scotch welcome. Then, thicker and thicker grew the press in the southern suburbs. It seemed that Lowlands and Highlands had banded together to form one huge, shouting throng.

"Put on a spurt, master!" roared a tall soldier in kilts. "The lassie's no far ahead o' ye the noo!"

Christopher smiled, but not very gaily. He was beating down the temptation to lessen the distance between the cars, and he had conquered it just enough to give that smile.

At last he struck the superb line of Princes Street, and far away at the other end he could see a crimson banner, which marked the winning-post. Speeding towards that flutter of red (yet not so fast as it might

have gone if the chauffeuse had chosen) was the gyroscope.

The air rang with applause as the snake-like car with the pale girl driving, passed beneath the flag and Christopher, hearing, could not have analysed the feelings which surged in his breast.

He had timed his own arrival as he followed, and he came in at the finish precisely as he had started exactly two minutes behind the car which set off before him.

Those who did not know doubtless thought he ought to be glad and proud to win the second prize and an exceedingly handsome gold cup; but Christopher knew, and if he had not known he would have become unpleasantly certain when he saw his uncle's face.

The old man had come by train to Edinburgh to meet the winner of the first prize, who, from telegraphic accounts, he had little doubt would be his nephew.

He had taken a suite of rooms at the hotel which he considered best, and had ordered the most elaborate dinner the *chef* could produce, to be accompanied by plenty of the most expensive champagne. And behold, his joyous preparations were wasted!

This was bad enough, but a few words from M'Lellan (to whom he had been introduced on the day of the start) made matters worse. The two met in the hall of the hotel where Mr. Race was all but dancing with rage as he waited to berate the Failure who was putting up Scarlet Runner in the garage. A few words, well meant on M'Lellan's part, and spoken in praise of Christopher's chivalrous generosity, gave the old man some idea of the true state of the case.

Unable to trust himself longer in the society of his fellow-man, he stumbled upstairs to the private dining-room, where the flower-decorated table com-

pletely maddened him. He had left word for his nephew to follow, and when Christopher arrived he was in the act of throwing a large bunch of hothouse roses into the fire.

"Don't do that, uncle. It's murder," said the young man, whose mother had taught him to respect the rights of flowers.

"I—I *want* to commit murder," stammered Mr. Race, too furious to be coherent. "I'd—I'd like to murder you, and smash up your beastly car."

"Come, isn't that rather hitting a man when he's down?" suggested Christopher. "I didn't enjoy getting beaten, you know."

"Oh, didn't you, indeed? Then why did you let yourself be beaten?" shouted his uncle. "You needn't think to deceive me. I *know* what you did. You'd play Quixote, would you? Well, you'll find it an expensive part to keep up. Perhaps you didn't think I meant what I said; but I did, every word of it. You've chucked away ten thousand pounds of good money you might have had for the taking, and a hundred thousand besides—which I'm not going to leave to a love-sick fool."

"Love-sick fool?" echoed Christopher, surprised. "What do you mean?"

"Perhaps you didn't know that M'Lellan saw you stick a knife into your tyre because you'd fallen in love with some baby-faced girl, who——"

"Oh, *did* you stick a knife into it?" cried a horrified voice at the door.

Neither man had heard a knock, or seen the door—which had not been closed—gently pushed open.

Dorothy Herbert had lain in wait vainly outside for someone who had deliberately (but from the best intentions) avoided meeting her. Then she had inquired, and learned that Mr. Race had a private

sitting-room—No. 19—on the first floor. She had asked to be taken there, not knowing that there was more than one Mr. Race; and, hearing an angry voice, had been seized with a terrible idea. The man who had made a great sacrifice for her was being reproached, she thought, by some official connected with the race for giving it away. She must defend him! . . . But though she had suspected something she had not known what effectual means he had taken to give her a long start at the end.

As both men turned to look at her, and she saw the elder's fierce old face, dark red with anger, her spirit rose.

"You shall not talk to him like that; I don't care who you are!" she exclaimed. "It's nonsense to say he cared about my 'baby face,' for *I'm* the girl he allowed to beat him. Why, he *hates* me—and I deserve it. He did the noble, chivalrous thing you're scolding him for, simply because I was a woman crying there in the road, and perhaps because he knew how much it meant for me to win. My father is Richard Herbert—"

"I don't care who your father is, child—but, for Heaven's sake, who was your mother?" faltered Mr. Race, in a changed voice, staring with eager eyes at the girl. "I saw you in London the day before the start. You were in a restaurant. I—you are the image of someone I once knew—someone I once loved—who went out of my life and disappeared."

"They say I'm like my mother who is dead," said the girl, her face softening. "Her name was Dorothy Lindell."

"I thought so!" exclaimed the old man. "You are Dorothy Lindell over again. She was the only woman I ever cared for, though she was almost young enough to be my daughter. She promised to be my

wife; but before the time came she ran away, and left a note saying she couldn't make up her mind to have me; she'd only consented to please an aunt of hers who'd brought her up—consented because I was rich. I never saw her again, and I hated her for awhile; but she wasn't the kind a man could hate long, no matter what she did to him, or how hard he was. I forgave her in time—so thoroughly that last year when an old friend told me Dorothy had died, leaving a daughter and a husband somewhere on the Continent, I wanted my nephew here to look up the child. So you're the girl Christopher Race risked ruining himself for?"

"I'm the girl to whom he's behaved like a knight of King Arthur's table," Dorothy Herbert answered.

"Then—I wish he *would* be a love-sick fool. Anyhow, I forgive him now. I wouldn't have had him do anything different. Do you hear that, Chris? Shake hands."

Christopher shook hands. And even as he did so he began to realise that, perhaps, after all, he was what his uncle called him. He had often been half in love, but never wholly in love until—could it be possible he *was*?—now. But then he had never known such a girl, and if he did not regret refusing his tender request of last year, it was because by granting it he might never have won Dorothy Lindel's daughter.

After all, they ate the elaborate dinner and drank the expensive champagne, and Mr. Race sent down for more roses—many more roses, because Dorothy Herbert, the winner of the race, and her friend Madame du Guesclin were his guests.

By the time the evening was over Christopher did not wonder any more about the matter, but was quite sure, once and for all, that he *was* a love-sick fool. When his uncle accused him of it again—in a very

different tone—he confessed. No scolding followed however.

“She’ll get a rich husband if she takes you,” the old man said. “But—I don’t believe she’ll be marrying you for your money. You have certain attractions, and I’ve an idea she’s aware of them already. It’s only fair you should get a prize of some sort, and I expect she’ll see that. She seems wonderfully fair-minded—for a woman, and not conceited either; so whether she’ll think she’s good enough to make up to you for the ten thousand pounds you flung her, to say nothing of the hundred thousand you’d have lost if she hadn’t had her mother’s face, who can tell?”

Nobody could tell. But Christopher asked the question, or something equivalent, and Dorothy answered that she would do her best. It is easy for a girl to “do her best” for the man she loves; and the chauffeuse of the gyroscope thought the chauffeur of Scarlet Runner the only man in the world—except old Dick Herbert.

g followed

you," the  
she'll be  
ve certain  
e of them  
ze of some  
ns wonder-  
conceited,  
enough to  
ounds you  
thousand  
s face, who

asked that  
Dorothy  
is easy for  
loves; and  
e chauffeur  
d—except

