

The Colossus of Arcadia

E. Phillips Oppenheim

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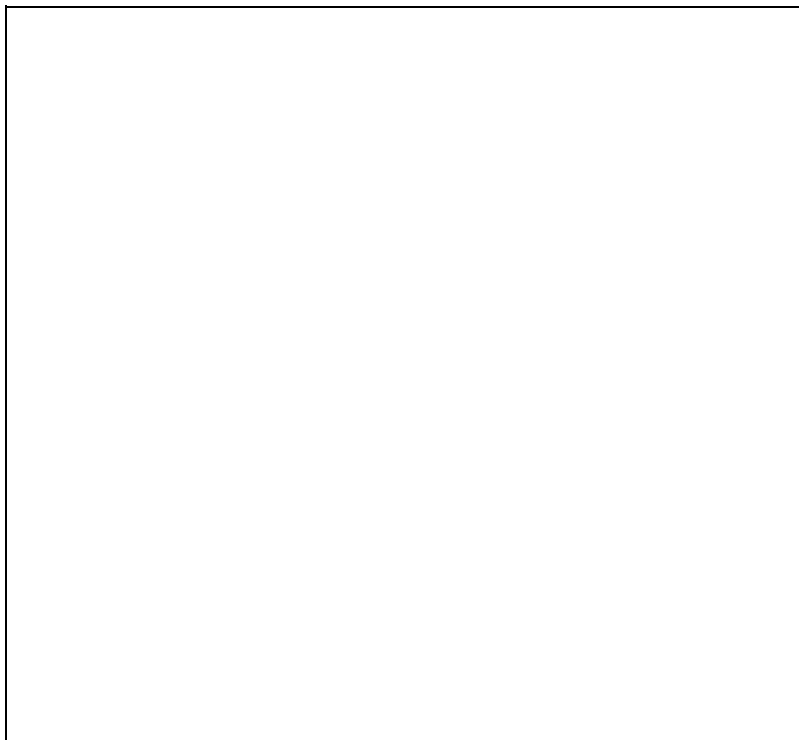
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THE COLOSSUS OF ARCADIA

By
E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM



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THE COLOSSUS OF ARCADIA

CHAPTER I

There was nothing graceful or sinuous-like in the ponderous wheezing approach of the long train with its enormous engine into Monte Carlo station. It may have been, indeed it was, the famous Blue Train; but it came to its final standstill with a clanking of couplings and a succession of convulsive jerks which threw off their balance most of the passengers, who were standing in the corridors hanging out of the windows eager to attract the notice of porters. Whilst the majority of them were fumbling for their tickets and registered luggage slips, a quiet-looking man of indeterminate age, neatly dressed and showing no signs of the night journey, passed out of the barriers, gave up his ticket, and, followed by a porter carrying two suitcases, stepped into the nearest *fiacre*.

“Place one of the bags here beneath my feet,” he told the porter. “Give the other to the driver. Tell him to go to the Hôtel de Paris.”

The *pourboire* was adequate, his client’s accent proved him to be no stranger to the country, the sun was shining and there was plenty of time to get another job from the same train. The porter removed his hat with a broad smile and with a sweeping bow he stepped aside. The little carriage, with much cracking of the whip by the *cocher*, mounted the first steep grade, proceeded at a more moderate speed up the second, and entered the *Place*, with its gardens a blaze of flowers, and the white front of the Casino in the background dominating the busy scene. Again the *pourboire* offered by the new arrival was satisfactory; and the *cocher*, removing his hat, seasoned his word of thanks with a smile which was an obvious welcome to the Principality. The late occupant of his vehicle, followed at a respectful distance by the hotel *bagagist*, who had taken his suitcases, presented himself at the reception desk.

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“My name,” he announced, producing a card, “is Stephen Ardrossen. I wrote you from the Travellers’ Club in Paris.”

“Quite so, sir,” the clerk replied, with a third smile which exceeded in graciousness and apparent sincerity any welcome which the newcomer had yet received. “We have reserved for you a small suite upon the third floor. If you will be so kind as to come this way . . .”

The newcomer hesitated.

“It occurred to me,” he said, “that since the removal of the Sporting Club, you might perhaps have some difficulty with regard to the rooms in the Nouvel Hôtel.”

The young man shrugged his shoulders.

“Later on,” he confided, “every room in the hotel will be taken. At present they are considered a little out of the way.”

“I am acquainted with the geography of the establishment,” the new arrival said. “I like the quiet, and I imagine they would be less expensive.”

The clerk, after a whispered consultation with a *confrère*, took down a couple of keys and led the way around the corner along a passage to the row of apartments on the ground floor opening out on the gardens, in the direction of the Nouvel Hôtel. He threw open a door which led into a small semicircular sitting room. The newcomer glanced casually at the bedroom and bathroom beyond, unfastened the French windows, and stepped out on the gravel walk.

“The price for this suite,” the clerk told him, “will be a hundred francs less than the one in the hotel.”

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“I shall take it,” Mr. Ardrossen decided. “Will you kindly have my bags sent round?”

“Immediately, sir.”

The young man bowed and withdrew. The newly arrived traveller seated himself upon a bench a few feet away from the window and gazed lazily at the sun-bathed view. In the far distance he could see the train which had brought him from Calais winding its way around the bay towards Menton, below him the picturesque little harbour gay with shipping; and, on the other side, the rock of old Monaco, the Palace, the Cathedral, and the State buildings, strange and yet somehow impressive in their architecture. He looked upward to the hills dotted with red-roofed villas and beyond to the less clearly visible line of the snow-capped Alps. Below there were strains of music from the orchestra playing on the Terrace. Promenaders were crowding the streets, and back and forth an ever-flowing stream of cheerful, lighthearted holidaymakers entered or issued from the Casino.

It was, without a doubt, a place in which one might find amusement.

The suitcases were presently brought in by one of the porters. The traveller rose from his place, dispensed a satisfactory recompense, unlocked his bags and rang for the valet. He ordered a bath and handed the man a large sponge-bag and a *peignoir*. Then he pushed back the lid of the other suitcase, and lifted from it a heavy metal coffer which he placed upon the writing table.

The valet reappeared. Behind him was the pleasing sound of running water.

“Your bath is ready, sir,” he announced.

“You will find a suit of flannels there,” he said, “with linen and a change of underclothes. Put them out in the bedroom.”

The man disappeared with the case. As soon as he had left the room, but without undue haste, Ardrossen took off his coat, turned back the cuff and, rolling up the left sleeve of his shirt, disclosed a small band of gold fashioned like the modern bracelets in vogue amongst a certain type of young Frenchman. Touching apparently a spring from underneath, he drew from the interior a small key of curious design with which he unlocked the coffer. The latter contained several bundles of documents, all neatly secured by rubber bands. There were also two small books bound in Morocco leather, each having a lock after the style of a private ledger. Ardrossen, having checked its contents with great care, closed the coffer, relocked it, replaced the key in the aperture of the bracelet; and, sniffing up the warm steam with an air of content, he made his way into the bathroom.

The second person to pass the barrier leading from the station platform to the paradise beyond was of a very different type from her predecessor. She was a girl—slim, with a healthy, intelligent face, brown eyes dancing with happiness, *soignée* in her neat travelling suit, and with the air of one already feverishly anxious to drink in the unusualness of her surroundings. She, too, scorned the bus but handed to the porter a crumpled-up registration ticket.

“For myself,” she declared, speaking French fluently and with a tolerable accent, “I take a little carriage. I drive to the Hôtel de Paris. You will get my luggage and bring it right along—yes?”

“With great pleasure, Mademoiselle,” the man answered, standing hat in hand. “Mademoiselle will stay at the Hôtel de Paris?”

“Mademoiselle intends to do so,” she told him, handing over a more than adequate *pourboire*.

She stepped gaily into the *voiture*, and at the very sight of her happiness the porter smiled as he received his *bénéfice* with a sweeping bow.

“Welcome to Monte Carlo, Mademoiselle. It is the first visit—yes?” he asked, as he drew on one side.

“The first visit,” she admitted, waving her *adieux*.

Again the *cocher* cracked his whip, the vehicle rattled up the hill, and she looked about her with the eager interest of the young woman who has ventured into a new world. She laughed aloud with happiness as the *voiture* crossed the *Place*.

Everything was as she had fancied it—the fantastic façade of that nightmare of architecture, the Casino, the wide-flung door of the Hôtel de Paris flanked with its huge pots of scarlet geraniums, even the black Senegalese in his marvellous livery. There were the flowers, the music, the sunshine, the soft air, the snow-capped mountains in the distance—everything of which she had dreamed. She almost ran up the steps of the hotel into the arms of the Chief of the Reception, who was waiting to welcome her.

“I wrote from Paris,” she told him. “My name is Haskell—Miss Joan Haskell.”

The man bowed.

“Everything is as you have desired, Mademoiselle,” he declared. “You have one of our best rooms on the second floor. If Mademoiselle will give herself the trouble to come this way —”

Mademoiselle was perfectly content to follow her guide. She passed lightly across the hall into the lift.

“Tell me, does the sun always shine like this in February?” she asked.

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“Very nearly always,” her companion assured her. “To-day it is with pleasure to welcome your arrival. Mademoiselle has been long in Europe?”

“Some years,” the girl answered. “In Paris only long enough to do a little shopping.”

“Mademoiselle is alone?”

“Quite alone. American girls are used to travelling alone, you know,” she added as the lift stopped and her guide stood back for her to pass out.

“We have many of your country people here always,” he confided. “We are very pleased to see them. They are good clients. We shall endeavour to make your stay an agreeable one, Mademoiselle. To begin with—this room—it is to your taste—yes?” he asked, throwing open the door of a very delightful apartment.

The girl drew a little breath of pleasure as she looked out of the window towards Mont Agel and down into the gardens bright with colour and bathed in sunshine.

“It is very much to my taste—this apartment,” she laughed; “but what about my pocket?”

“It is one of the best,” the man pointed out. “We will quote a low price to Mademoiselle, though. Shall we say two hundred and fifty francs?”

"There is a bathroom, of course?" she enquired.

"But Mademoiselle!" he expostulated, throwing open the inner door. "A bathroom of the best, with shower. We have rooms at a lower price, of course."

The girl sighed.

"I shall take this one," she announced. "It is more than I thought, but it is perfect. When I have lost all my money I shall sit on the balcony and watch the poor idiots streaming in there to do the same."

"It is not everyone who loses," he reminded her. "Many of our clients have taken fortunes home with them. One young lady, of about your own age I should think, won a hundred thousand francs last week."

"Don't dazzle me," she smiled. "Send my trunks up, please, when they come."

"*Parfaitement*. I hope that Mademoiselle will enjoy her stay."

With a courteous bow he took his leave. Mademoiselle, as though drawn by a magnet, turned once more to the window. She wheeled an easy chair out on to the balcony, took a cigarette from her case, lit it and began to smoke. The smile had left her lips. She had become a little thoughtful, even though her eyes were still fixed upon the gay scene below.

"Two hundred and fifty francs a day," she soliloquized. "That is one thousand, seven hundred and fifty francs a week. Eighty-eight dollars. Say I hold out for a month. Something should happen before then."

She threw aside her abstraction, drew her chair a little closer to the rails of the balcony, watched the people entering the Casino, listened to the music and marvelled at the deep blue of the sea. She was blissfully happy.

The third person to pass through the barricade, to deliver over his ticket with a little gesture of relief and to pass his slip for registered luggage on to the porter, once more differed entirely from either of his two predecessors. He was a tall, good-looking man of early middle age, fresh-complexioned, broad-shouldered and with a general air of prosperity, happiness and well-being. There was a touch of distinction, too, in his tweed clothes, well-cut overcoat and the tilt of his smart Homburg hat. He welcomed the beaming *concierge* with a slap on the back.

"How are you, François?" he enquired. "Looking as miserable as ever, I see! Is there room for a small person like me in the bus or shall I take a *petite voiture*?"

The man was obviously flattered by this greeting from an old patron.

“If I were your lordship,” he suggested, “I should take a little carriage. We have a great deal of luggage to collect yet.”

A hopeful-looking *cocher* who had been watching the proceedings brought his horse up at a gallop. The tall man scrambled in, paused to light a cigarette and leaned back with an air of supreme content.

“If it isn’t my old friend,” he exclaimed, smiling at the driver. “Here, Jacko!”

Without a moment’s hesitation the little dog perched upon the front seat jumped on to the knee of the passenger and commenced to lick his hand furiously.

“Jacko is like that,” his master confided, as he cracked his whip. “Never does he forget an old friend and a good patron.”

“Jacko without his fleas,” the occupant of the *voiture* declared, “would be a marvellous companion. Why don’t you wash him sometimes, my friend?”

The *cocher* shrugged his shoulders. It was one of those questions which one does not answer. He drove his distinguished passenger up the hill and swung round, surmounted the lesser gradient and passed into the full beauty of the *Place*. His lordship drew in a long breath of supreme satisfaction. He smiled at the Casino, waved his hand to one or two acquaintances who were sitting outside the Café de Paris, moved his forefinger to the time of the music which the Hungarian orchestra was playing, overpaid Jacko’s master, shook hands with the Senegalese door porter, and disappeared into the comparative gloom of the hotel. He passed through the large entrance hall, where again he was greeted on every side with vociferous welcomes. The manager himself came hastening forward.

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“This is a great pleasure, your lordship,” the latter declared. “Your old suite is prepared, the servants already await your arrival there. If your lordship would be so good as to follow me . . .”

The newcomer, Lord Henry Maitland Lancaster, who was the third son of a genuine duke, followed the manager to the second floor, inspected the suite, demanded a few extra pieces of furniture and approved.

“Capital, *mon ami*,” he declared. “I stay here for two months. Everything as usual—the same newspapers, the same hours for calling, and mark you, Monsieur Mollinet, the same discretion if it pleases me to entertain a little lady for dinner at any time.”

Monsieur Mollinet coughed.

“I quite understand, your lordship,” he said. “By-the-by, Madame Céline occupies the suite above this. She is to sing in ‘Louise’ within the next three weeks.”

“Intriguing,” the other observed. “In any case, I shall love to hear her sing. A great opera—‘Louise.’ And now, Monsieur Mollinet, I shall trouble you to give orders that your servants await the arrival of the faithful William, that more flowers be put in my room and my trunks suitably bestowed. But first a small *apéritif* in the bar with you.”

“I am deeply honoured, your lordship,” the manager replied.

The two men walked down the passage and Monsieur Mollinet, with a bow, pushed open the swing door and ushered his old client into the bar.

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Perhaps, of all the newcomers to Monte Carlo on that sunny February morning, the person who had not travelled by the Blue Train was feeling the most complete satisfaction at his safe arrival in the Principality. A slim, fair man, with lean, sunburnt face, dressed in nautical clothes, wearing a rimless monocle and a cap with a Squadron badge pushed a little far back on his head, he stood on the deck of the newly arrived motor cruiser, the *Silver Shadow*, smoking a cigarette, directing the final efforts of the pilot to whom he had just relinquished the wheel, and the seaman who had already stepped on to the quay and was busy attaching a rope to one of the fixed iron rings.

“All fast, sir,” the latter reported, as the yacht finally came into position.

The owner nodded.

“Let down the gangway,” he ordered. “And you, John,” he added, turning to the white-coated steward who stood by his side, “fetch me one of those little carriages from the top there.”

The youth hurried off, pausing only for a moment to secure the light wooden gangway.

A man stepped out of the wheelhouse. Something about him seemed out of character with the trim appearance of the yacht. He wore a nautical blue shirt open at the throat and a pair of soiled mariner’s trousers. His jet black hair was tousled and unbrushed. He was olive-skinned, with narrow eyes, black as his hair, almost unnaturally bright. His mouth was bitter and unpleasing. The slight tinge of respect with which he addressed his master seemed infused into his speech with difficulty. He spoke in French with a Niçois accent, obviously that of his native tongue.

“I want twenty-four hours’ leave, sir. The other two they

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remain on board. They have no friends in the port.”

“Have you?” his employer asked.

“In Nice,” the man replied. “I am a Niçois. Monsieur would be pleased to grant me a portion of my pay?”

Townleyes drew out a wallet from the inside pocket of his double-breasted coat and held out a five-hundred-franc note. The man stowed it away in a battered cigar case.

“Report in twenty-four hours,” Townleyes told him.

“Monsieur will not be leaving port?” the man asked.

“I shall be here for twenty-four hours, anyhow,” was the curt reply.

The little carriage came rattling along the quay and drew up opposite the gangway. The *cocher* touched his hat with his whip and Jacko for the second time that morning emitted shrill barks of welcome. Townleyes stepped lightly down the gangway, greeted the driver with a pleasant nod and patted the dog. He leaned back amongst the frowsy cushions with a sigh of content.

“The Hôtel de Paris,” he ordered. “Bar entrance.”

“*Parfaitement, Monsieur.*”

The *cocher* cracked his whip; Jacko, with his colony of fleas, leaped down on the passenger’s knee. Townleyes’ air, as he looked around him, was one of complete satisfaction. The leather seat of the *voiture* was hard and its upholstery soiled, the driver had recently had a meal containing garlic and Jacko needed a bath. Nevertheless, he had arrived. He was in Monte Carlo. Above him the sun was shining and a soft breeze swept in his face as they swung round into the main road. The white villas with their red roofs stretching like an amphitheatre around the bay, the crazy Casino, the smooth pleasant curving front of the Hôtel de Paris, the blaze of colour in the gardens—all was exactly as he had hoped to find it. Pleasure, distraction, rest—they were all here. He drew a little sigh of relief. He had really had rather a strenuous time during the last few weeks.

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Suddenly the blow fell. The sigh of relief was choked in his throat. Standing on the gravel path, the French windows of the small suite from which he had just issued open behind him, was a quiet-looking gentleman wearing dark spectacles, his hands behind his back, gazing seawards, apparently enjoying the view. A more harmless-looking individual to all appearance it would have been impossible to find in the whole Principality, but Townleyes, the Right Honourable Sir Julian Townleyes, Bart., knew very well that from that moment his days of tranquillity were numbered.

CHAPTER II

The entrance of Mollinet, the manager of the Hôtel de Paris, into the bar, accompanied by his distinguished patron, created something in the nature of a sensation. One or two men rose from their places and came over to shake hands with the new arrival. Several women waved their hands. Phyllis Mallory, the famous tennis player, even threw him a kiss. Nina de Broussoire, the French *danseuse*, who was seated by herself on one of the high stools, triumphed now in the isolation which a moment or two before had made her peevish, and was the first to offer her greetings to this popular visitor.

“Where are the De Hochepierres?” Lord Henry asked Colonel Brinlinton, the secretary of the Tennis Club, who had hurried up to pay his respects.

The latter glanced at the clock.

“They will be along in a few minutes,” he replied. “We have made a sort of a club of the round table in the window at the bottom. Just the old gang—Phyllis Mallory, Maurice Donnithorne and Foxley Brent, who has just turned up from Deauville, and of course the Domiloffs.”

“What about Dolly Parker?”

“Oh, she’s one of ’em, naturally. She’s playing tennis this morning. I left her in the middle of a set.”

Lord Henry smiled happily.

“Jove, it’s good to be here, Brinlinton,” he declared. “If you had had a month of our fogs! Why, we had to break up the last shooting party I was at in Norfolk. To think that I can push open my windows and look out on that sea in the mornings and let the sunlight into my room makes me feel young again!”

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“Monsieur is always young and always gay,” the little lady on the stool observed.

Her neighbour patted her back gently.

“Meet me, my child,” he groaned, “on Blakeney Marshes towards dusk when the keeper’s whistle has sounded and we are bending forward trying to peer into the mist, not a thing to be seen and our trigger fingers pretty well numbed. Then there is a sudden rustle and the birds we have been trying to get a shot at, standing in the biting cold for over an hour, go swooping by—not one of them visible! You won’t find me gay then, I can promise you! . . . Any chance of a knock-up at tennis this afternoon, Brinlinton?”

“Rather,” was the prompt reply. “I’ll get it up for you. Ah, here’s Domiloff at last. I thought he would have been here to greet you.”

A man of apparently early middle age, notable even in that crowded place for his air of distinction, entered the bar from the *Place du Casino* and came swiftly through the room to the farther end of the counter.

“My dear Henry!” he exclaimed, holding out both hands. “This is delightful! I meant to get down to the station to meet you but at the last moment there was a rush and I found it difficult to get away. Now at last Monte Carlo is itself again. Pretty fit, I hope?”

“I’m all right now I’m here,” was the hearty response. “Who would not be? And you? But you never vary.”

Domiloff smiled a little cryptically. His eyes were bright, his mouth firm and steady and there were as yet only thin streaks of grey in his hair. Nevertheless, there were deep lines in his face. He possessed the easy, gracious manners of a diplomatist. His voice was pleasant, his carriage still full of vitality. He seemed to bring with him the atmosphere of great places, reminiscent of the Court of St. Petersburg, at which he had been a famous figure.

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“Life has been a little strenuous lately,” he confessed, “but one survives.”

Louis, the head barman, who had hurried up to pay his respects to the unofficial ruler of the Principality, produced as though by magic a cocktail shaker, poured out its contents and handed the result to the man he worshipped. The latter poised the glass for a moment delicately between his thumb and first finger, then he threw his head back and drank. He set down the glass empty.

“You choose always the right moment, Louis,” he said quietly. “Two more of those. His lordship will join me, I am sure.”

The latter nodded. The little girl by his side had slipped away for a moment and the two men were alone.

“In town one has been hearing curious rumours about this place, Baron,” Lord Henry confided. “Is there any truth in them?”

Domiloff’s features were a study of impassivity. He was gazing out of the opened door through which one caught a glimpse of the gardens and the *Café de Paris* beyond. He looked through the lacework of the swaying boughs to the splash of colour created by the gay uniforms of the Hungarian orchestra. He listened for a moment to the throb of the music pleasantly blended with the murmuring voices of the crowd who were taking their morning *apéritifs* in the gardens. He

looked away and answered his companion's question indifferently, almost casually.

"There is always gossip about this place," he remarked. "More fools the people who talk about what they do not understand. This time, however, there is some foundation for the rumours which you may have heard and which you will know more about in a few days. We have had to make some changes in the Constitution."

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Lord Henry leaned forward and glanced out of the window across the harbour towards the Palace. He looked back at his companion, who smiled faintly and shook his head.

"No one there," he confided. "Between ourselves, I do not think there will be just yet. That particular trouble comes not from us but from the people down in Monaco. We have had to take sides, of course. For the first time in my life I find myself on the side of democracy."

"It is not going to affect you personally, I hope?" the other asked bluntly.

Domiloff shook his head.

"No fear of that," he replied. "I have done more real honest work in this place than I ever did before in my life and I believe the fact has been appreciated. We will talk of this again later. Here come Lydia and our friends. Lucille is prettier than ever and breaking more hearts. We must go over and join them."

The two men walked the length of the bar and presented themselves before the little company who were eagerly awaiting them. There was Lydia, Domiloff's wife, a beautiful woman of supreme elegance, with sombre, passionate eyes, silent usually, with little gaiety of manner but with subtle charm of speech and expression. By her side was Lucille, Princesse de HochePierre de Martelle, who, notwithstanding the magnificence of her title, was a daughter of one of the industrial multi-millionaires of a far Western state in America. Her husband, Prince Léon de HochePierre de Martelle, pallid of complexion, flaxen-haired, dressed with almost indecorous and flamboyant perfection, chubby-cheeked but languid, lounged in the background, a curious contrast to his attractive wife—*petite*, with hair the colour of red gold, deep-set soft eyes of an indescribable shade, the shade of falling leaves—a Watteau-like figure in her grace of movement and expression. With them were Phyllis Mallory, the international lawn-tennis player, athletic, good-natured but a little noisy, and Dolly Parker, witty, elegant and reckless, good-looking in a well-bred restrained sort of way, but approaching the forties and, as the Princess used to say in one of her spiteful moments, desperately unmarried. They all welcomed Lord Henry effusively. He was given the place of honour at the round table.

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The Prince called for caviar sandwiches and Louis brought over a trayful of champagne cocktails. The Princess, who was seated by Lord Henry's side, devoted herself to the new arrival.

"You must come to my dinner on Saturday night," she told him. "I am so glad that you arrived in time. You will meet all your old friends."

Lord Henry was not enthusiastic. He took, perhaps, advantage of his long acquaintance with his would-be hostess.

"My dear Lucille," he protested, "don't ask me. You know how badly I always behave at large dinner parties. There are very few people who are good-natured enough still to invite me, and even then I seldom go. I cannot sit still long enough and apart from that, when I dine I like to choose my own dishes."

"You are the rudest and greediest man I ever knew," she told him severely.

"It is not rudeness," he assured her. "It is sincerity. I suppose you will have your own way with me. If you insist I shall probably come, but, in a general way, why should I accept invitations to gala dinners, which I detest? Dine with me alone, dear Lucille, any night you like—anywhere—preferably when Léon is away," he added, raising his voice a little.

"You—with your reputation!" she exclaimed in horror. "Dine alone with you, with all the world looking on! My dear Henry! Besides, Léon would not permit it."

"You needn't dine with my reputation," he told her. "I'll leave that behind, if you like."

"You are incorrigible! You will have to come to my dinner, though. I am getting tired of the old gang. Dolly was right when she said yesterday that life was too intensive here."

"There's a new face for you and an extraordinarily pretty one," he remarked, leaning forward in his place. "American, too, by the cut of her clothes. She's sitting in that corner alone."

The Princess glanced towards Joan Haskell, who had just come in and was seated in a distant corner. She made a little *moue*.

"I am never overkeen on meeting any of my country-people," she admitted coolly. "They know too much of one's antecedents. Tell me, who is the man in the yachting cap who has just come in? He's talking to Foxley Brent at the other end of the room."

Lord Henry glanced in the direction she indicated and waved his hand cheerfully to the newcomer.

“By Jove, it’s Julian Townleyes,” he confided. “I heard he was cruising about one of those dangerous Spanish places—Barcelona, I think it was—in a converted barge or something.”

“He looks interesting!”

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“He’s the man for your dinner party,” Lord Henry continued. “Used to dine out five nights a week in London, and enjoyed it.”

“Is he anybody in particular?” the Princess, who was a terrible little snob, enquired.

“I always tell you you should give up your flat in Paris and your country house at Les Landes and settle down in London,” he reminded her severely. “You would get to know who we all are, then. Townleyes is the seventh Baronet, has been a notable figure in the Foreign Office, and if he had not got into some slight diplomatic trouble—I don’t remember what it was, but he had to suffer for someone else’s mistake—he would have been a Cabinet Minister before now.”

“You must present him,” Lucille insisted.

Her neighbour held up his hand and the man in the yachting cap, who had just arrived from the port, picked up his cocktail glass from the counter and came across to them. Lord Henry rose to his feet and exchanged greetings.

“Townleyes,” he said, “the Princess has asked me to present you. Sir Julian Townleyes—the Princess de Hocheperre de Martelle.”

Townleyes bowed over Lucille’s extended fingers in the best Continental fashion. He murmured a few words suitable to the occasion.

“The Princess,” her sponsor went on, “is the uncrowned Queen of Monte Carlo, as you would know, my dear fellow, if you visited us a little oftener. Whatever she bids us to do, we do—cheerfully if possible—if not, we still do it. I believe that she is going to ask you to dine.”

“Princess,” Townleyes replied, “I should hate to be considered a rebel at your court, but Lord Henry is being a little unfair to me. He knows that I very seldom dine out and that I am just taking an ex-sailorman’s holiday down in these parts.”

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“Nevertheless,” she begged, liking him the more as she realized the smooth charm of his voice, “you will come to my party?”

“You have added a very dull guest to your gathering, Princess, but I will come, of course.”

She smiled with an air of relief. At the moment, she scarcely

realized how anxious she had been for him to accept her invitation. Townleyes had a gift of attraction which was quite unanalyzable.

“We are a small party—only about twenty,” she confided.
“There are nine other men and I promise you that every one of them is a duller person than you seem to me. At half-past nine on Saturday night at the Sporting Club.”

“I shall be very disappointing,” he warned her.

“Finish your cocktail and have another,” she invited, “or rather don’t finish it. It has lost its chill.”

She signed to the barman who was passing at the moment.

“Bring Sir Julian another cocktail, the same as he is drinking,” she directed. “Lord Henry, too, myself, and heavens!—all this time with you two fascinating people I have forgotten to present my husband. Léon!”

The Prince, who had been talking vociferously to the crowd at the next table, moved back at his wife’s injunction.

“This is Sir Julian Townleyes, Léon,” she said. “My husband—Prince de Hochepierre de Martelle. Sir Julian dines with us on Saturday night.”

“Delighted,” her husband murmured. “I watched you bring your boat in an hour ago, Sir Julian. I put you down as a sailor rather than a politician.”

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“I started life in the Navy,” Townleyes explained, “and yachting on a small scale has always been my favourite hobby. You must come down and have a look at my boat, if you are interested.”

“It would give me great pleasure,” the Prince declared. “I myself am fond of the sea. Tell me,” he went on, leaning forward in his chair, “who is the very attractive young lady in the corner?”

The Princess raised her lorgnette. Lord Henry glanced admiringly at his late travelling companion. Townleyes screwed in his eyeglass for a moment, then dropped it quickly.

“I have never seen her before in my life,” he said in his calm, pleasant tone. “I agree with you, though, that she is attractive.”

“She is from my country, without a doubt,” the Princess said. “She wears her clothes with too much chic for an English girl and too little for a French *demoiselle*.”

“Fortunately,” Lord Henry remarked, “Mollinet rather looks upon me as one of the male chaperons of the place when there are new arrivals. I shall make myself known to the young lady

at the first opportunity.”

“Rascal!” the Princess murmured. “I shall tell her of your reputation.”

“Tell her the truth, dear Lucille,” he replied amiably, “and I shall be content. You might put in a word of warning about that scoundrel of a husband of yours.”

The Princess laughed softly. She took her cocktail from the salver which was being extended to her.

“On second thought,” she decided, “I shall not say a word to her about either of you. I have an idea—”

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“Share it with me, beloved,” her husband begged.

“Well, I have an idea that you are neither of you exactly what that young lady is looking for.”

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CHAPTER III

The dinner party given by the Princess a few nights later was, as usual, gay and amusing. Townleyes, who was seated on her left, seemed delighted to find as his neighbour on the other side Lydia Domiloff, who entertained him readily with all the gossip of the place. It was not until after the first course had been removed that the Princess was able to engage his attention.

“Tell me,” she begged, “about your adventures in that intriguing-looking yacht of yours. Did you bring it all the way from England?”

“All the way. For the size of the boat we have quite powerful engines.”

“And you were your own navigator, Léon tells me.”

“I have my certificate,” he confided. “Yachting on a small scale has always been my chief recreation.”

“And the name of your boat is the *Silver Shadow*. Hadn’t you a little trouble somewhere down the coast—was it at Marseilles?”

“Yes,” he admitted. “I had a little trouble. It was my own fault. I took on board at Barcelona a refugee who had been thrown out of his own country and who was hanging about there in danger of his life.”

“And after playing the Good Samaritan,” she observed, “you apparently shot him.”

“Not without reason,” Townleyes assured her calmly. “The man tried to rob me and scuttle the boat. I saw no reason why I should risk a life which is of some value to myself in an uneven fight with a desperado, so I took the advantage of having a revolver in my pocket. The—er—Court at Marseilles, where we put in afterwards, sympathized with me.”

“So do I,” she agreed. “I like to hear of a man who acts quickly in his own self-defence. I was just interested in the affair because I had read about it. My French is not very good so I take the *Éclaireur de Nice* and read about some of these terrible things that go on around us. You know, Sir Julian, no one has the faintest idea what a country of dramas this really is, unless they read the *Éclaireur de Nice*. You learn of happenings there which never seem to get into the other papers.”

“Your tastes lead you into the sensational byways of life,

Princess,” he murmured.

“How clever of you to find that out! Yes, I like life served up with all its side dishes—perhaps that’s because I am American.”

He drew his chair a trifle nearer to hers. The floating shawl of a dancer as she passed had touched his cheek.

“The trouble of it is,” he observed, “that so many of these seasonings are simply the exaggerations of the journalist. If we could only be sure that they were true, the life of a police agent in this part of the world might seem to be a very exciting one.”

“But isn’t it?” she asked. “Look at Monsieur Bernard over at that table with his fat wife and his two dowdy daughters. Did you ever see a more, to all appearances, typically bourgeois quartette? Yet Bernard could make your hair curl with his reminiscences if he were allowed to write them, which he is not in this country.”

“Who is he?” Townleyes enquired.

“He is the under *Chef de la Sûreté* in Nice,” she confided.

“You see him in those ill-fitting clothes and paternal aspect and you will see him dancing presently with one of those lumpy daughters, and you are just as likely as not before the evening is over to see him tapped on the shoulder by one of the officials and hurried off to Nice—a murder or something of that sort! Those things happen to him often.”

“An interesting fellow, I should think,” Townleyes observed carelessly. “All I can say about it, with due respect to his profession, is that he doesn’t look the part.”

“Why is Nice such a centre of crime, I wonder?” Lydia Domiloff speculated.

“Because it is the danger spot of France, as Barcelona was of Spain,” Lord Henry declared, leaning across the table. “There are more Red Flaggers there to the kilometre than there are anywhere else in the country.”

“It is a rotten world,” Oscar Dring, the great Scandinavian agitator, pronounced from the other side of Lydia Domiloff.

“To plan for war is barbarous. To hope for peace is imbecile. To find a quiet corner where one can settle down, read philosophy and try to give the world a little food for real and serious thought is becoming an impossibility. The world whose byways we tread is corrupt, poisonous with intrigue and fanaticism.”

Lord Henry rose to his feet.

“Meanwhile we must live,” he ventured with the air of one a little bored with the conversation, “and it is our duty to enjoy

ourselves in order that we can pass on the spirit of enjoyment to others. May we dance, Princess, and will you honour me?"

"It is an opportune idea," she assented. "We can make the world no better, can we, by sitting and gloating over her sad condition? There in the corner is the girl I envy," she added as they glided into the throng. "She is young, she is beautiful, she is, I imagine, unburdened with over-much intelligence. She sits alone watching the dancing and obviously hoping that someone will find an excuse to present himself. For the moment she is thinking of nothing else. Will heaven send her a partner for this delightful waltz?"

"Heaven has given me one, anyhow," he declared.

"Heaven is always kinder to you than you deserve," she told him. "You go through life without a care—without an effort."

"What would you have me do? Join one of the foreign legions of lost causes?"

"There are many causes not yet lost which are worth supporting."

"Are you serious?"

"I am never serious," she assured him. "You ought to know that. I choose for my associates the most frivolous people I can find, and look what happens! That strange man, Oscar Dring, forced himself upon me to-night when we were assembling for dinner in the foyer. Do you know what he had the impertinence to tell me?"

"Dring would say anything to anybody. Fortunately no one ever listens to him."

"He told me," the Princess went on, "just before we came in, that Monte Carlo had become the European centre of international intrigue and that I had several well-known international spies amongst my guests to-night!"

"Oscar Dring has one serious fault for a man who is really a brilliant thinker," her partner commented. "He does enjoy pulling your leg sometimes."

The Princess, in a diaphanous costume which even a French *couturière* had regarded with mingled admiration and doubt, laughed quietly.

"I am showing as much of my leg as any woman in this room," she confided, "but I should hate to have it pulled by Mr. Dring. You think then that I need not put black crosses against the names of any of my guests?"

"I am sure of it," he answered. "We are all too much occupied in ourselves and in our affairs. Espionage, with all its risks,

was never a paying game. Every novelist whose works we have devoured has assured us of that. Fellows like Dring are simply scaremongers—wild asses braying in the wilderness.”

Oscar Dring was dancing with Phyllis Mallory. She was rather afraid of her partner with his almost patriarchal beard, his flashing eyes, his upright presence, so upright that he seemed to be continually pushing her away from him.

“All this talk—talk—talk—” he muttered. “It is maddening!”

“Why?”

“Can you not divine,” he went on, “that there is trouble coming over all the world? You can read it in the faces of the people. It is the logical outcome of all this cynical indifference on the part of the world’s rulers towards the suffering proletariat.”

“I should think we are as safe here as anywhere against anything in the nature of a revolution,” Phyllis Mallory observed hopefully.

“We are safe nowhere,” was the angry retort. “Science has conquered geography.”

“What an unpleasant thought,” she said, wondering how soon she could escape from this man with his fierce awkward movements and cascades of bitter speech.

“And therefore you reject it,” he replied quickly. “That is so always. Dig your head into the ground at the first signs of danger, close your eyes if anything ugly comes along! Let me tell you this,” he continued, breaking into what was almost a run but keeping time so perfectly that she was forced to follow. “Last year I worked ten hours a day. I wrote a hundred and fifty thousand words. I addressed the world in three languages, of all three of which I am a perfect master. I stretched out my right hand and I pointed to the writing on the wall. What do you think I earned?”

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“I have not the faintest idea,” she confessed.

“Four hundred pounds,” he told her furiously. “Not enough to starve on. And why? Because not even with my name there would anyone read. I might as well lay down my pen forever. I have no audience. The ears of the world are stuffed with cotton wool. They will tear it out only to listen to the music of the machine guns!”

“Why do you work so hard,” she asked, “to make people believe unpleasant things?”

He stopped in the middle of the floor but he had instinct enough to keep that slight swaying to the music which would enable him to start again whenever he liked.

“Why do it?” he repeated. “Your question possesses common sense. Sometimes I ask myself that. All I can say is that I dream of myself sometimes as a prophet and that the words which come to me I must speak. I find no pleasure in writing. I give none to those who read me. Come—I find you not unintelligent. Listen and I will tell you something. It is the secret of my life.”

He recommenced dancing. Her curiosity was excited.

“Well?” she asked.

“If I did not write,” he confided, “if I did not get rid of this burning weight of prophecy, of prescience I call it, do you know what I should do? Just this. I should drink. I should benumb my agony. I should become the wild man of the cafés of Stockholm, of Berlin, of Paris. That is why I go on. That is why I shall go on until someone thrusts a knife into my back or a bullet into my chest. They will do it some day. I have been threatened.”

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The music stopped. Phyllis Mallory drew a breath of relief.

“Shall we sit down?” she suggested, already leading the way to her chair.

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CHAPTER IV

Ardrossen, a silent, detached spectator, stood behind the rail which separated the lounge from the restaurant and watched the gay scene below in which the Princess' dinner party was the focus of interest. The hostess herself was dancing with Townleyes, a graceful and polished performer lending himself now entirely to the charm of the music. That vague air of detachment which at the beginning of the festivities had made him rather a difficult neighbour had completely disappeared. Lord Henry, vigorous, happy and genial, had chosen Miss Dolly Parker for his partner. The popular young woman was always a prominent participant in Monte Carlo rejoicings. Amongst those who remained at the table, Oscar Dring sat without immediate neighbours, his hands thrust deep in his trousers pockets, a terrific frown drawing closer together his massive eyebrows. He represented adequately and in sinister fashion the revolt against this gay scene which he undoubtedly felt. A grim, portentous figure his, grotesquely out of place in its present environment.

The Princess, with a little grimace, whispered into Townleyes' ear as they passed.

"Why on earth did I ask that terrible man! Why did someone not tell me that he was crazy?"

"What puzzles me is why he came," Townleyes confessed.

"I imagine," she suggested, "that it gives him a spectacular opportunity of posing as the modern prophet of woe."

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"He has the ear of the whole world, at the moment," her companion observed. "They told me in Marseilles that he was the most prominent figure in the Cercle Rouge at Nice. I even heard that the French would deport him to-morrow if they dared."

The Princess gave herself entirely to the music. Really, this apparently stiff Englishman danced very well. Then they passed Dring once more and she turned her head deliberately away.

"Talk about the writing on the wall . . ." she remarked irritably. "This man, I should think, has been emblazoning the skies."

"We must drive him back to his wilderness of woe," Townleyes said smiling. "A prophet with a spleen! He really isn't worth taking seriously. He'll probably find out for himself before many days are passed that this is the one corner of the world where political unrest really doesn't matter. We come here to find happiness and we mean to be successful."

She smiled, effectively reassured, and leaned a little closer to her partner. Townleyes, after all, was a man of strength. He was one of those who counted. It was difficult to believe what Lord Henry had hinted—that he was not always entirely sincere. . . .

Stephen Ardrossen, turning his back upon the panorama of colour and movement, made his way by lift and passage to his own room. Arrived there, he stepped out of the French windows and, looking down on the harbour, counted the yachts, starting at the lighthouse end. At the fourth in the line he paused. Apart from the nautical lights, there was a single lamp hanging from far aft, evidently there for the benefit of the crew or visitors. He drew his watch from his pocket. Even as he looked at it the bells from the Roman Catholic Cathedral halfway up the hill began to chime the hour. He counted the strokes. Eleven o'clock. Precisely at the final reverberation the light on the yacht was extinguished. He waited—waited for two minutes without movement. At the end of that time the light shone again.

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As though it had conveyed to him some sort of signal, the watcher turned swiftly back into the room, secured the door, selected a key from the bunch which he drew from his pocket, and unlocked one of the larger steamer trunks which as yet had been undisturbed. He plunged in both hands and drew out an armful of clothing.

There was a wind stealing in to the harbour—an east wind which ruffled the still surface of the placid water and brought with it the nip of the snows. The warmth of the Café du Port seemed more than ever agreeable to the dark, silent figure of the man in engineer's overalls who pushed his way through the swing door, glanced round for a moment and seated himself on one of the bare benches set against the wall. He placed a couple of spanners, a handful of waste which he had been carrying and a mechanic's bag of tools on the table in front of him and summoned a waiter. He growled out an order for a *café* and *fine*, and a packet of *Marylands*, and on their arrival he commenced to smoke. A man in the costume of a yacht's captain a few feet away leaned towards him. They were out of hearing of the rest of the company.

"You going on board?" the latter asked.

The mechanic nodded.

"If you can't do your work, I must," he replied.

The seaman spat out his extinct cigarette, produced a packet of almost black tobacco with some papers and began to roll another with filthy, yellow-stained fingers.

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"*Vous êtes fou!*" he exclaimed contemptuously. "I myself have

been alone there for two hours. With the keys you gave me I opened every door and every cupboard. Nothing—*absolument rien*.”

“There’s one cupboard which you have not opened,” the other reminded him, gazing hard at the opposite wall.

“No more will you,” was the sneering retort. “Not a book—not a packet—not a letter.”

“Twenty men were at work in the hull of that boat at Gosport for ten days. What were they doing there then?”

“*J’en sais rien*,” the seaman scowled, feeling with his foot for a spittoon.

“If you have searched the whole ship,” the mechanic asked, “what has become of the papers your master took from the man he shot in Marseilles harbour? We all know that amongst them was an account of the meeting of the secret session of the *Cercle Rouge* and a copy of the resolutions passed by the secret committee of the sixth division of the frontier army.”

“You find them,” was the disgruntled reply. “I cannot. I ask myself whether they are not on the way to Whitehall.”

The man in overalls puffed at his cigarette, swallowed his coffee and toyed with his *fine*. He glanced incuriously about the place. There were half-a-dozen sailors from the oil boat on the other side of the harbour talking to a couple of women who had wandered down from Beausoleil. Their conversation was vociferous but of a staccato nature, owing to the fact that the men hailed from Sunderland and the women were Monégasques speaking no language but their own. There were also some seafaring men from the two or three coasting steamers which had put in late in the afternoon from St. Tropez. No one showed the slightest interest in these two seated a little apart from the others. Even the proprietor of the Café glanced at them only now and then to see whether their glasses were empty.

“Tell me precisely,” the mechanic whispered, “what you know about your master’s movements to-night.”

“That is simple,” was the prompt reply. “John made the *toilette* for him about nine and mixed him a cocktail. I was standing by when he spoke. ‘You can go ashore, if you like, to-night, John,’ he said. ‘I am dining at the Sporting Club and playing Baccarat afterwards until two o’clock.’ And with that he hopped it. You have got a clear two hours and there is not a soul on the boat. I shall be at the end of the gully and I will blow my whistle if he should turn up before his time. You can slip into the dinghy the other side and get round under cover of the *Lady Rose*, or it is quite dark enough for you to leave by the gangway. If you meet him why disturb yourself? You can say that I sent for you to

look at the piston in number two engine and that you have been and put it right. I have left the engine room door open.”

The mechanic nodded, paid his reckoning, said good night to the captain and swung through the door into the darkness of the quay.

A few minutes’ stealthy walk, threading his way amongst the shadowy figures of the one or two loungers left on the quay, brought him to the fourth boat in line from the lighthouse. The gangway was carefully placed and without a moment’s hesitation he swung himself on board, made his way to the aft hatch, which was raised, and slid down the steps to the small saloon. Arrived there he remained a tense, motionless figure for several seconds. His eyes were searching the whole place as though for any signs of recent occupation. All the time he was listening. There was no noise except the sucking and the lapping of the water against the sides of the boat, the dull, distant hammering of some men on the other side preparing an anchor chain, and nearer along the front the faint sound of a guitar in one of the caf  s. On the boat itself there was just that silence which a man might pray for who had secret work to do.

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The moment arrived when he was apparently satisfied. He moved noiselessly forward, pushed open the hooked-back door at the farther end of the saloon and entered what was obviously the owner’s sleeping apartment. For a boat of that tonnage this cabin appeared to be of unusual size; it stretched from beam to beam and was quite as spacious as an ordinary-sized bedroom. The intruder wasted scarcely more than a few seconds in looking around him. He produced a large bunch of keys from the pocket of his slacks and with the fingers of a conjuror he opened one after the other every drawer in the built-in bureau which occupied almost the whole of one side of the wall. Drawer after drawer he pulled out and with almost incredible speed he drew out letters, papers, documents of every description, examined them and thrust them back into their places. Sometimes he paused for a few seconds to study the figures or written words, but in most cases he seemed to know by instinct the nature of the papers amongst which he was making his breathless search. When he had finished there was scarcely a visible sign of his search. He crossed the room. There was a writing table against the opposite wall with drawers on either side of the knee-hole. Again he searched with the same incredible speed, selecting his keys as before with almost miraculous accuracy. Once he paused and read over a letter with the air of one committing its words to memory. He replaced it, however, in its envelope, exactly as he had found it. In almost the last drawer he found two or three pages, pinned together with a paper fastener, which seemed as though they had been torn from a child’s exercise book. One swift glance down what seemed to be a list of names and the document was transferred to his pocket. Again he locked up the drawers, replaced the chair and glanced searchingly around

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him. There was not a sign anywhere to denote that the room had even been entered. . . . He passed into the saloon, opened one or two cupboards, tapped their backs, glanced at their contents and left the doors closed or open as he had found them. Somewhere upon this boat, if the news from Spain were true, lay documents containing some of the secrets of the world, brought from Madrid by the man who, in terror of his life, had sought refuge on the *Silver Shadow* and whom Townleyes had shot. If these papers were still in existence, if this wild-looking captain were telling the truth, Townleyes had brought them to Monte Carlo. Why? His brain was working like a quietly purring, perfectly regular instrument. He counted the chances. He could destroy them. That was the limit of his power. In the short spaces of time he might hope to steal on board, the task of discovering them was a superhuman one. There remained the alternative—destruction. He weighed the chances in his mind. Destruction would be easy enough. Just a bomb—one with an ultra-modern time fuse such as he could have put his hand on any moment—anywhere down in the hold and the *Silver Shadow* would exist no more. Yet destruction would be a clumsy subterfuge. They must wait a little longer, these impatient people who kept flashing him messages across the skies. No one—not even he, the doyen of all spies—could achieve impossibilities. He moved quietly away towards the door, mounted the few steps and stood upon the deck. The breeze had freshened, the boat was swaying slightly and there was a fresh salty taste about the wind. He groped his way forward. His fingers played in the darkness with the line of wire. He traced it to the lantern head, found the catch and turned on the light. A vivid streak of illumination showed him the gangway a few feet away. He leaned towards it, placed one hand firmly upon the rail, then, leaning back and fumbling for the switch, he turned out the light. A second or two later he was walking along the quay in the shadow of the wall.

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From a room in the Sporting Club overlooking the harbour a man with a girl by his side had been gazing downwards. He gave a sudden exclamation.

“What’s the matter?” his companion asked.

“Nothing,” he answered. “But here is an extraordinary thing. I know for a fact that there is no one on my boat to-night, yet at that moment the light we have rigged up aft near the gangway shone out and was then extinguished.”

“Burglars!” the girl laughed.

Townleyes shrugged his shoulders lightly.

“Then the member or members of that ancient and honourable profession,” he remarked, “who are playing about on my boat at the present moment, are doomed to disappointment. Come and have a drink with me to give me courage.”

“I don’t think you need courage,” she observed as they moved away towards the crowded bar. “The bold way you came and asked me to dance with you without any introduction almost took my breath away. The restaurant is not the night club, you know, and you were the Princess’s guest.”

“We were two men over, anyway,” he told her. “Besides, you smiled at me.”

“I didn’t,” she declared indignantly.

“Then you ought to have done,” he replied. “Your subconscious mind should have insisted upon our previous acquaintance. A glass of champagne or a champagne cocktail?”

“Champagne cocktail and Virginian cigarettes, please. Anyway, I am very glad you asked me and I don’t believe the Princess minded a bit. Everyone says she is such a good sort. You mustn’t look so glum, Sir Julian. You’ll never win if you sit down at the tables like that. What are you thinking about?”

“Just at that moment,” he confessed as he ordered the drinks, “I was wondering who on earth could have been playing about on my boat. It really isn’t of the slightest importance, for I haven’t a thing on board worth stealing except the Ship’s Papers and an Admiralty Warrant. Here’s to a happy month at Monte Carlo, Miss Haskell,” he added, lifting his glass.

“I’m certainly having it with all you nice people!” she laughed gaily.

CHAPTER V

This night of the Princess's dinner party was one of the most successful gala nights of the season at Monte Carlo. Two minor Royalties and one major Royalty had been dining at villas in the neighbourhood and the house parties from all three arrived almost simultaneously. The distinguished staff of officials attached to the Administration took on a new aspect of graciousness and amiability. Baron Domiloff had a pleasant word even for those he was accustomed to snub mildly. The newspaper magnate who was reported to have invested the whole of his great fortune in the place during the last few years lost his haggard appearance and seemed never tired of looking around him with absolute content. The Baccarat table was a glittering circle of beautiful, marvellously gowned women wearing their jewels fearlessly and with great effect. Famous men of every nationality were to be met with at every corner, with just a few, perhaps, whom the chances of life had pitchforked into the wrong places, spoiling what would otherwise have been a perfect atmosphere. The piles of chips in front of those who were playing high were amazing. Townleyes indulged in a little grimace as he produced the minimum—a hundred thousand francs—for his bank.

“When you have won that, my friends,” he remarked to his intimates who had gathered round, “I shall retire and go back to rest. Someone has been moving about my boat and I am uneasy. Come to think of it, Princess, I fear your last two letters to me are lying about somewhere.”

“You men are terrible,” she declared. “You are always forcing us into the hands of the blackmailers. Utterly callous about it, too. To save my reputation, however, confess that we only met a few days ago and that they were both of them invitations to dinner!”

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“One to lunch,” he corrected her. “But unfortunately,” he added with a sigh, “both on the most non-compromising of cards and unsigned. *Voilà*.”

“*Messieurs et Mesdames*,” the croupier announced, “*la banque est ouverte*.”

The game commenced. The first three *coups* Townleyes won on both sides. It was not until the quiet but not undistinguished-looking man with the grey hair and strangely low voice had slipped into the place which had been kept for him and thrust out his bet of five *mille* that the fortunes of the game changed. Ardrossen's side of the table began to win. Whether it was he who took the cards or not—he staked—he won. The Princess touched one of the officials upon the arm and asked his name.

The man leaned down confidentially.

“He is a Monsieur Ardrossen, Your Highness,” he confided.
“English, one believes, but he speaks every language.”

“An *habitué*?”

“*Parfaitement*. He speaks to very few people but he likes to gamble.”

“He plays very well,” the Princess admitted. “Very quietly, too. Some day I must meet him.”

“He will esteem it a great honour, Your Highness,” the croupier murmured, passing on with a farewell bow.

Lord Henry, from a standing up place behind the Princess, was content with his modest *mille* each time the cards were dealt. The Princess played according to the school of moderate gamblers. She left her stake and her winnings on until after the third *coup*, then she drew them away and started again with her initial unit of ten *mille*. Ardrossen’s game was more mechanical. He drew in his winnings and added them to his little pile but his stake winning or losing remained always the same—five *mille*. He followed always the approved tenets of the best players. He took up his cards promptly as soon as they were dealt and he never hesitated as to his course of action when he held a doubtful hand. Not a muscle of his face ever moved even when he laid down, as he frequently did, a natural nine against the banker. There was no exultation about his winning, no depression when he lost.

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“The most robotlike gambler,” Lord Henry declared, “I ever knew in my life. Can’t see how he can enjoy it.”

“You are a little peevish, *mon ami*, because you have been losing,” the Prince, who was enormously wealthy but who played the same sort of modest game, observed.

“Of course I am,” his friend agreed. “What is the good of gambling at all if you are not peevish when you lose and happy when you win? Gambling is worth while simply because the exultation of winning lasts longer than the depression of losing. Observe the joy with which I take up these four *mille*. Let’s go to the bar and have a drink. The professional will be coming on at two o’clock and I would always rather win from those Johnnies.”

The two men strolled away together towards the bar, which was just then packed with people. Every table was taken and the most polyglot crowd in the world were jammed together at the two oval counters, one at each end of the room, and in all the places where there was an inch or two to breathe. Ardrossen, who had been standing patiently against the wall, moved quietly up to where the American girl was drinking a

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lemon squash at a small round table for two.

“Mademoiselle is perhaps expecting a friend?” he asked with a slight bow, his fingers resting upon the unoccupied chair.

“No such luck, Monsieur,” she answered.

“You permit me that I sit down then?” he ventured. “I find the atmosphere of these rooms somewhat fatiguing.”

“I wonder whether you remember me?” she asked curiously.

He looked at her with slightly upraised eyebrows.

“I believe I saw you on the train,” he reflected. “You will pardon me if I am mistaken.”

“I was on the Blue Train,” she admitted. “We sat not far away in the dining car—but I have seen you before then.”

“I regret very much,” he said tonelessly. “My memory seems to be at fault.”

“I saw you about two months ago,” she told him, “sitting at a corner table at the Café de l’Univers in Geneva.”

He shook his head.

“I am afraid that was not possible, Mademoiselle,” he said. “Geneva is one of the few continental resorts which I have never visited.”

She accepted his statement without demur.

“That is strange,” she said indifferently. “I have rather a good memory for faces and you—I mean the person I thought was you—were with a man whom everyone was talking about those days.”

“Yes?”

“Litinoff—the Russian, you know.”

“I have read about him,” Mr. Ardrossen admitted, “but I have certainly never sat at a table with him any more than I have ever visited Geneva. You yourself were there for a long time, Mademoiselle?”

“A few months only,” she answered. “I was doing a little very amateurish newspaper work. The bureau came to an end, however, and my occupation was gone. I was on the point of taking my departure for home when a fortunate accident happened.”

“Tell me about it,” he begged. “One is often hearing of the ill luck of one’s acquaintances. It would be a novelty to hear of

someone whom chance has befriended.”

She laughed.

“It befriended me all right,” she acknowledged. “I had a legacy just when I needed it, just when I thought I would have to go back home and rejoin my maiden aunts in Washington.”

“That,” he remarked, “was opportune.”

“I should say so,” she agreed. “I don’t want to find fault with it but all the same it was one of those awkward-sized legacies,—you know what I mean, I’m sure,—too small to invest with the idea of adding to one’s income, and too large to ignore. I decided to give myself a holiday.”

“You chose an excellent spot,” he observed.

The waiter, whom it really seemed as though Ardrossen had mesmerized into his act of service, brought two champagne cocktails and set them down. Ardrossen handed him a note and ignored alike the change and the man’s profuse thanks.

“Yes, it is a wonderful place to visit,” she acknowledged, “but I don’t know that it is very cheerful for anyone arriving alone and without friends.”

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“It is scarcely probable,” he said, “that you will remain in that unenviable situation. To-night, for instance, I think I saw you dancing with Lord Henry Lancaster. He knows everyone here.”

“He assured me,” she replied, “that he was one of the props of the whole establishment and that he had been practically asked by the manager to act as chaperon to anyone in need of one. I hadn’t the faintest idea who he was until he introduced himself and I don’t suppose I should have danced with him, especially as he belonged to another party. He was very charming, however, and I love dancing. He seems to know all the gossip of the place, too. A good deal of what he told me will be useful.”

“Useful?” Ardrossen repeated speculatively.

“A newspaper has agreed to pay my expenses here if I can send them a few items of news. Perhaps you, too, might help me.”

Something as near a smile as Ardrossen ever permitted himself parted his lips. The eyes of the two met for a moment. The girl stooped down, fumbling in her bag for a cigarette.

“Why should you not help a struggling journalist?” she queried. “You don’t give anyone the idea of being exactly a social butterfly, but I expect you have been here heaps of times before and you must know a good many of the people.”

“The people whom I know,” he replied, “would not, I fear, be

interesting to the readers of your newspaper.”

“You are not an American, are you?”

“I am not. I am English.”

“Why did you speak to me just now?”

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“Because I wanted your chair. I was tired and I needed to sit down.”

She leaned back in her seat and laughed softly.

“I should never suspect you of being a *boulevardier*,” she told him. “Still, it seemed odd to have you making overtures to anyone. At the two cafés in Geneva where I imagined that I saw you, or rather at the café and the restaurant, you occupied always the same table; you spoke—if one heard your voice at all—in exactly the same tone, you wore the same sort of clothes, you covered those rather penetrating grey eyes of yours with the thickest of glasses. You just passed from place to place looking at no one—always with the air of one who wished to remain apart.”

“So I, or rather my double, earned nicknames?”

“You did,” she admitted.

“Such as?”

“They got boiled down to one in time,” she told him. “They all called you ‘The Shadow.’”

She knocked the ash from the cigarette she had been smoking.

“‘The Shadow’?” he repeated curiously. “I wonder why? I am not a poseur in any way. The trend of my daily life is always, I think, quite natural. I have an idea that I must seem a hopelessly obvious person to anyone who took the trouble to watch my movements.”

“That, I suppose,” she reflected, looking at her rose-tipped fingernails, “must be the reason. You evidently don’t read fiction, Mr. Ardrossen, or you would know that the old-fashioned type of spy is extinct. A spy nowadays is an insignificant, harmless little man with the appearance of a city clerk, or a blond, loquacious sort of a person looking all the time like a carpetbagger. Even your retiring habits would be out of fashion for the real international disciple of espionage.”

“‘The Shadow,’” he reflected. “I still wonder why they called my double that—especially you.”

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Her delicate eyebrows were slightly raised. She looked at him with a puzzled gleam in her clear brown eyes.

“Why especially me?” she asked.

Again there was the beginning of that elusive smile which never developed. He pressed his cigarette into the ashtray and rose to his feet.

“I was forgetting,” he said, “that I have kept a seat at the Baccarat. I must hurry or I shall lose it. I will say *au revoir*, Miss Haskell.”

“So you know my name!” she exclaimed.

“Could I help it,” he answered, “when I have heard all those introductions? Thank you so much for the few minutes’ rest—and your company.”

He left her with a little bow. His departure was so quiet and unostentatious that she scarcely realized until she looked at his empty chair that she was alone.

CHAPTER VI

"I am not sure," Joan confided, later on in the evening, "that I like to watch you people gambling."

"Why not?" Townleyes, who had just joined her, enquired. "It is as good a way of passing the time as any."

"People seem to lose their individuality."

"Not a bad thing to escape from sometimes," he replied. "I don't want to be always remembering that I have responsibilities."

"What are your responsibilities?" she asked curiously.

He paused to exchange a passing word with an acquaintance.

"My responsibilities," he repeated, as he fell into step with his companion again. "Oh well, I am still in our Foreign Office, you know."

"Yes, I have heard that," she said, "but I don't think you are very serious about it."

"Wrong time this for being serious about anything," he declared.

"Why? Is the world coming to an end or anything of that sort?"

They had gravitated somehow or other towards the bar, which was now almost deserted. He established her at a retired table and ordered drinks.

"To tell you the honest truth," he said, and it was the first time he had spoken seriously for several days, "I should not be the least surprised if a cataclysm did happen before long."

She lit a cigarette.

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"You alarm me!" she exclaimed, her eyes mocking him. "I wish I had started life a little earlier, then."

"Oh, you may live on," he replied, "although this world goes crash. A few of you will survive. I don't think they will give me a chance. They won't even let me walk to the scaffold like my great-great-grand-mother, who was a Frenchwoman, and show the world how the really well-bred people go marching into eternity. When the madness comes, it will be a fury such as the world has never known before and they won't stop to cut off our heads in gentlemanly fashion. They will come out of their hiding places in all the great cities with knives in their hands and the red fire before their eyes."

“Are you being serious?” she asked.

“Absolutely,” he assured her. “I am not often. I think that the world is moving on towards drastic and horrible changes. Very likely there may be a wholesale purification in the years further ahead than we can see. If so, there will be such an orgy of massacre first, as history has never recorded or the mind of man dreamt of.”

She set down her glass and looked at him fixedly.

“Am I really talking to that butterfly of fashion, Sir Julian Townleyes?”

“You are talking to Julian Townleyes all right,” he acknowledged, “but I assure you I can be a very serious fellow now and then. I am over forty, you know, and I have poked about in all manner of odd corners in Europe. I suppose it was a sort of reaction after Eton and Oxford and doing everything to pattern that when I got old enough to travel I took a fancy to slumming, and I have seen things—things I shouldn’t like to talk to you about. Oscar Dring knows all about them. He belongs to a club in Nice which is about one of the most poisonous spots in Europe.”

The Princess came hurrying in, fanning herself vigorously. She made directly for their corner.

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“Sir Julian, get me a drink at once,” she begged. “A glass of champagne—not a cocktail. They’re making the cards and the place is getting hotter and noisier every moment. Present your friend, if you please. I thought you two looked so nice dancing together this evening.”

He summoned a waiter, gave the order and presented Miss Joan Haskell almost in the same breath.

“Sir Julian is not in the least inclined towards such frivolities as dancing, just now,” the girl observed as she smiled at the Princess. “He is foretelling all the horrible things that are likely to happen to the world, or to Europe, at any rate. I think I am beginning to feel like getting back to my own safe country.”

“Not so safe as you imagine,” he assured her. “However, the mood has passed. Henceforth I promise to be frivolous for the rest of the evening.”

“The game is rather tiresome to-night but exciting in patches,” the Princess told them as she sipped her wine approvingly. “That mad young compatriot of ours, Hayden Smith, has lost a million and just cashed in with another.”

“And you?”

“I am two or three hundred thousand up,” she admitted, “chiefly because that queer little grey man whose name I

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always forget was on our side of the table. He plays a very quiet, pleasant game but he is more like a machine than anyone I ever knew. One cannot imagine his making a mistake. Sir Julian, will you make a fourth at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning, if Léon wants to play, and have a light lunch afterwards? My tennis is pretty rotten these days but I promise I will do my best."

"You won't be up at eleven o'clock," he replied dubiously.

"I shall be if I make a date," she answered. "If Léon can get Phyllis Mallory—or what about you, Miss Haskell, do you play?"

"Only moderately," Joan confessed. "I am very fond of it, though."

"You will be quite good enough for us. We will give the professionals a cold shoulder for once. Shall we meet in the bar at a quarter to eleven and have one little drink before we go down? We might lunch at the Country Club afterwards."

"I'll take you to Beaulieu," Townleyes suggested.

"Fine," she agreed. "And bring Miss—Miss—"

"Haskell," the girl reminded her.

"If Miss Haskell is agreeable, I shall be delighted," he acquiesced, taking the Princess's glass. "We will come and watch you in a minute or two. Perhaps if you see my reproachful figure in the background you won't sit up so late."

The Princess sighed. She was looking very beautiful in her apparently simple but wickedly alluring white gown.

"It's a filthy game," she said, "but it's the hardest to leave so long as it is still going on. *Au revoir*, anyhow."

She flitted away with a little gesture of farewell. Joan Haskell looked after her admiringly.

"No wonder everyone is fascinated by her," she murmured. "Do you really mean that I am to come to luncheon?"

"Of course," he answered. "You heard what the Princess said."

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"But you don't know anything about me or who I am," she protested. "You had not the slightest right really to ask me to dance."

"Oh, this is Monte Carlo," he reminded her. "This is the place where we realize that life is short, and if we want to do a thing we had better do it quickly. What about ten minutes more watching the Baccarat and then a sandwich upstairs and a few minutes' dancing before we finish up?"

"It sounds delightful," she admitted. "But what about the rest of your party?"

He smiled as he led her across the still crowded salon.

"Dinner parties in Monte Carlo," he told her, "break up when you leave the restaurant. You look for your hostess towards the end of the evening and make your *adieux*, but except for that you have no responsibilities. You enter the *Salle des Jeux* and that is the land of liberty."

"I felt there must be something like that about it," she observed. "I am feeling almost lightheaded. It must be this new sense of freedom."

"You said you knew no one here," he remarked as they strolled across towards the increasing crowd round the Baccarat. "Didn't I see you speaking to that strange man, Ardrossen?"

She hesitated.

"I don't really know him," she confided. "He spoke to me very much as you did. What is a poor girl to do? Especially if she is lonely."

"You won't be lonely long," he assured her. "I don't suppose I should have noticed you together but I have not yet seen him speak to another soul. If you pass him anywhere he has the trick of looking as though he were gazing into another world."

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"Do you know anything about him?" she asked.

He paused for a few seconds before he replied.

"No. I can't say that I do. I shouldn't think anyone does," he went on meditatively. "He is like one of those people you meet in life who seem to come from God knows where and pass on off the edge of the world. There's nothing remarkable about his appearance, either. He might be anything from a chartered accountant to a gangster."

"There is nothing remarkable about his appearance," she agreed, lowering her voice as they approached the table, "and yet in a sort of way he is interesting. I am perfectly certain that I met him in Geneva twice with a very dangerous man—a Russian—but when I tried to remind him of it he assured me blandly that he had never even been in Geneva. As you say, he might be anything."

"Anything at all. If he is a chartered accountant, I should think he is top of the profession. If he is a gangster, well, I should hate to be a policeman."

Ardrossen passed them almost at that moment on his way to the *caisse*, a trim, neat figure, correct in his clothes, correct in his leisurely walk, absolutely negative in his expression. He was

carrying *plaques* in either hand. Sir Julian watched him curiously as he laid them down in neat little piles before the cashier.

“Has he won or lost?” the girl asked.

Her companion took the question seriously. There was a little frown upon his forehead as he shook his head.

“That’s why the fellow gives me such a queer feeling,” he confessed. “I have watched so many of them in the rooms and for a good many years, and he is the first person I have ever seen whom I could not sum up on the spot. He is worse than a professional croupier. He is inscrutable.”

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She watched his fingers as he passed over the *plaques* to the cashier, who was rapidly counting a huge pile of notes. When she turned away, she, too, was puzzled.

“I am rather glad that I don’t really know Mr. Ardrossen,” she confided. “I don’t think I should like him, and to tell you the truth, I am just a tiny, tiny bit afraid of him.”

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CHAPTER VII

Everybody was laudably punctual on the morning following the Princess's party. They met Baron Domiloff as they passed through the lounge. He was looking a little weary and there were dark rings under his deepset grey eyes.

"Lucky people," he sighed, glancing at their tennis kit. "Are you lunching down at the club?"

"We are going on to Beaulieu," De Hocheperre told him.

"And you, my dear friend," Lucille said, thrusting her arm through Domiloff's, "are coming with us. You look as though you needed a rest. Do come," she pleaded, looking up at him with her most bewitching smile. "You work all the time. Why are you such a slave?"

He hesitated. The others added their persuasions. Domiloff laughed suddenly.

"Why not?" he exclaimed. "I shall be free at one o'clock for two hours, anyway. Pick me up here if you will."

Everyone was delighted. They had a very light drink of ginger ale and lemon peel skilfully iced and drove down to the tennis courts, the Prince and Princess in the former's wonderful Isotto and the other two in Townleyes' car, which had arrived overland the night before. The tennis was cheerful and pleasant. Townleyes, who was a famous performer at squash and very good indeed at lawn tennis, played with the Princess. Joan Haskell turned out to be the surprise of the party. She was the Prince's partner and displayed almost tournament form. De Hocheperre, who very seldom won a set, was delighted, and having picked up Baron Domiloff in the bar of the Hôtel de Paris, they all started off to luncheon in the best of spirits.

At half-past one they drove through the gates into the picturesque garden of the Restaurant de la Réserve, the pleasant fatigue of their morning's exercise already forgotten. The famous restaurant was looking its best when the Prince parked his very luxurious supercharged coupé in the shade of the trees and with his wife joined their companions. Joan Haskell was the only stranger and to her the place seemed like a little paradise—with its huge banks of flowers, the strange statuary, the clear pool with the swimming fish, the conservatory-like restaurant between them and the sea, through the glass windows of which they could catch sight of the hurrying waiters and from the wide-flung doors hear the low strains of a violin. They sent for their cocktails out in the gardens and a smoothly smiling and gentle-mannered maître d'hôtel brought out the wonderful menu.

“*Les spécialités de la maison, Mesdames,*” he replied to the Princess’s question. “*Mais parfaitement. Les Petites Demoiselles de Beaulieu*—small *langoustes* of most divine flavour! *Les petites épaules d’agneau*—*très, très petite comme cela,*” he went on, holding up his hands. “The new peas we have, the new potatoes, *sauce de menthe à l’Anglaise*—and fresh strawberries.”

“It sounds perfectly heavenly,” Joan murmured.

“And I am so hungry,” Lucille confided.

Monsieur le patron, with his broad shoulders and his huge flowing tie, came to pay his respects to the Princess. The maître d’hôtel stood respectfully on one side. There was a good deal of bowing and many compliments. Monsieur took the order from his head waiter and studied it.

“It is very good,” he approved. “With the *Petites Demoiselles, Monsieur le Prince*, one should drink a *Vieux Chablis—le Montrachet 1911*. With the lamb—Burgundy would perhaps be a little heavy for the ladies—a *Château Mouton Rothschild*. Afterwards, *les asperges*, of course, and with the strawberries just one bottle of *Château Yquem*.” He kissed the tips of his fingers. “*Exquis!*”

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Townleyes murmured something about a whisky and soda. The patron half-closed his eyes and repressed a shiver. Domiloff threatened to duck the offender in the pond. Cocktails were brought to them whilst they were sitting happily there talking over the noteworthy tennis they had played that morning.

Suddenly Joan Haskell broke off in the middle of a chaffing speech. She clasped the Prince’s arm.

“What is that place?” she asked, pointing to the square, grey building, flower-wreathed, with a picturesque red roof, in the shadow of which they were seated.

“The Hôtel de la Réserve,” he told her. “Very interesting establishment, my dear Mademoiselle, but it is one concerning which you must not ask too many questions. It is where the *haut monde* commit their indiscretions. Perhaps sometimes it is not only the *haut monde*. People come here from all corners of the Riviera.”

“*Un nid d’amour,*” Domiloff observed. “A *rendezvous* which many have found a happy paradise.”

“Dear me,” the Princess sighed, “why have I never heard of it?”

“It is one of those places,” the Prince explained, “the existence of which a discreet husband does not reveal to a flighty wife.”

“Who dares to call me a flighty wife?” Lucille demanded. “But

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what is the matter with Miss Haskell? She looks frightened.”

The colour, which had left the girl’s cheeks as though from some sort of a shock, was slowly returning. Her eyes were fixed upon a window on the third storey of the hotel, a window hung with a sunblind and drooping sprigs of clematis. In front of it was a small balcony overlooking the restaurant to the sea.

“Silly of me,” the girl apologized. “A man stepped just outside on to the balcony, and directly he heard our voices he disappeared.”

“It was a man of repulsive appearance, perhaps,” the Prince asked, “or what was wrong with him? Why did he frighten you?”

“He only frightened me,” the girl explained, “because of the look of terror on his own face. He stepped half-way across the threshold, caught sight of us, or perhaps of those two men behind who have just driven up, and sprang back into the room. You see, he has closed the window now.”

Sir Julian grinned. Even the Prince smiled.

“It is probably,” he said, “a little adventure—a clandestine affair—and Monsieur does not fancy the interference of unexpected visitors. I should certainly imagine that somewhere within the compass of this gay region there is a missing wife from the luncheon table to-day.”

“How fortunate you are, my dear Léon,” Lucille exclaimed as she took his hand, “that you have no anxieties of that sort!”

“Whether I have or not,” he observed, “I keep them to myself.”

“I make no protestations,” she continued, “nor any promises—except one. If ever I am lured inside those enticing walls, I shall never be found out. That is the only crime in these pleasant lapses. What do you think, Miss Haskell?”

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The girl smiled.

“I am not married and I am more than of an age to do as I choose in life,” she said. “It makes adventures, perhaps, a little dull when one reflects that there is no one who has the right to complain of what you do.”

“Is that the American point of view, Miss Haskell?” Domiloff asked.

“I cannot speak for my country,” she replied. “Only for myself.”

A *chasseur* in brilliant scarlet uniform, looking exactly like a pageboy from a revue, left the hotel and approached their party. He held in his hand a small silver salver and in the middle of it

a twisted-up sheet of paper. He presented it to Townleyes with a bow.

“From a visitor in the hotel,” he announced in a low tone.

Townleyes, with a muttered word of excuse, untwisted the sheet of paper and read. The message consisted of a few words only, but it was obvious that they were of a disturbing nature. He rose to his feet.

“Mind excusing me for a few minutes?” he asked. “This note is from an acquaintance who seems to be in distress.”

“The *chasseur* looks truthful,” the Princess observed, fluttering her parasol a little. “Don’t stay away too long, though, Sir Julian. This morning when I awoke I thought I should never be hungry again. I was mistaken. The anticipation of those *langoustes* is becoming pleasant to me.”

“I won’t be long,” he promised, “but if I am not down when you are ready, do commence lunch without me.”

Townleyes turned away and disappeared in the hotel. They decided upon a second round of cocktails and before they had disposed of them he reappeared. By his side was a tall, slim young man, exceedingly good-looking, with dark blue flashing eyes and well-cut, almost fine features. He carried himself well, but he had the air of one who was recovering from an illness or was suffering from some sort of shock.

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“*Ma foi, mais c’est Sagastrada!*” the Prince exclaimed.

“*Monsieur le Prince*,” the young man murmured, as they shook hands.

“*Mais c’est incroyable ceci!*” the Prince continued. “Where are you from, my friend, that you make so sudden an appearance?”

The Princess gave her fingers to the newcomer, who raised them gallantly to his lips.

“*Princesse!*”

“Let me also introduce you,” Townleyes went on, “to Miss Joan Haskell and the Baron Domiloff. My young friend here you know by name, I expect—Rudolph Sagastrada—famous polo player, owner of the most successful racing stable at Chantilly and what counts for so much these days, alas, a world renowned banker and a great industrialist.”

“But unfortunately at the present moment,” the young man put in with a rather attractive smile, “an outcast from my country. In fact, I seem to have made rather a mess of my affairs.”

Townleyes nodded sympathetically.

“Of course we have read the newspapers the last few days,” he remarked, “but I should never have thought that they would have dared to touch anyone of your house.”

The young man sighed.

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“It may sound conceited,” he said, “but as a matter of fact I had the same idea. My uncle and one of my cousins left the country a fortnight ago. I remained. There were a great many financial interests to be considered and I did hope that as powerful supporters of the State and of many industrial enterprises we should have been left alone. On the contrary, as I discovered almost too late, my name and the name of a friend, Dr. Rothmann,—the editor of the *Neue Presse*,—were the most prominent on the black list.”

“Are things really as bad as the newspapers tell us?” Townleyes asked gravely.

“Worse,” was the firm reply. “The last fortnight has been hideous. I have lost many of my friends—hurried off to prisons. I never expect to see them again. What our offence is no one seems to know, but unless we are out-and-out supporters of the new *régime*, we are immediately under suspicion. I had to delay a few hours to get hold of Rothmann, who seemed to be in it worse than I was, and when we crossed the frontier it was with the knowledge that both of us might have been shot at sight if captured.”

“It seems incredible,” the Prince declared in genuine amazement.

“It is nevertheless true,” Rudolph Sagastrada assured him. “Even now,” he went on, “we are not safe. My planes—I have several at my own aerodrome—were all confiscated, also my cars. Fortunately I had a racing Bugatti which I was keeping a secret. I was just able to smuggle Rothmann into it at the last moment. We crossed the Alps, came down through Savoy by Aix-les-Bains, Sisteron and Nice. The road to Paris was too dangerous. We were expected to take that route. Even now, I believe we have been followed. From the window up there I thought I saw a suspicious-looking car with two occupants, a few minutes ago. It seems to have vanished, though.”

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“They could not arrest you here, surely?” Domiloff asked.

The young man smiled bitterly.

“They would not stop to arrest either of us,” he said. “They would just shoot. Rothmann, I am afraid, is worse in it than I am. It is not arrest we have to fear just for the moment. It is murder.”

The Princess shivered as she rose to her feet.

“I suggest that we form ourselves into a bodyguard and take

you into the restaurant,” she exclaimed. “Those little *langoustes*! The cooking here is so perfect and Henri, the maître d’hôtel, is looking at us reproachfully. We will send for your friend.”

“It is exceedingly kind of you,” Sagastrada acknowledged. “I accept with pleasure. As for my friend, he has ordered something in his apartment, where he is writing letters.”

They moved down to the restaurant and with many flourishes of the hand, with smiles and bows and pleasant words, were conducted by the patron to a round table in the window recess. The leader of the music came slowly up the room playing a violin solo. The atmosphere was one of laughter and gaiety and melody—even Sagastrada’s face lost its tense expression. With the first glass of wine he drank he drew a long breath and threw back his head with a little gesture of relief. It was perhaps a symbolical action. He was drinking in draughts of a new world.

“Soon,” he exclaimed, “I shall begin to realize that perhaps—one never knows—perhaps for a time I have escaped.”

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The luncheon, long protracted, came to an end at last. The final glass of the famous *Fine de la Maison* had been drunk. The little party rose to their feet. Sagastrada was decidedly more cheerful.

“This brief space of time,” he told De Hochepierre, “has been an immense relief to me. You may not agree with my politics, in fact I am sure you do not, but then you have not lived in my country, you have not seen the suffering which I have seen. You are all so sympathetic, though, and you have given me the best luncheon I ever ate in my life. It is a paradise, this little oasis of rest and beauty. I am grateful.”

“What are your plans?” Townleyes asked. “Are you staying on here at the hotel?”

“I do not know,” was the tired answer. “There are those who would help me if they could but I doubt whether they have the power. I had thought of Italy but of course I may find the frontiers closed against me.”

“Come with us to Monaco,” the Prince suggested. “You will be all right there, anyway. Take a week or two’s rest. Domiloff will see to it that your name is kept out of the papers and, after all, Monaco is a Principality of its own. You might find refuge there, where in other places you would still be in danger. Am I not right, Baron?”

Domiloff assented thoughtfully.

“Your young friend,” he said, “visits us at the psychological

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moment. The legislature of the Principality is undergoing important changes. Even at the present moment, Sagastrada,” he went on, “I believe that you would be safer in Monaco than any place within easy reach of here, and it is possible, in a few days’ time, that we might be able to offer you absolute security, provided that your offence is only political.”

Sagastrada hesitated. He had the air of one sorely tempted.

“I have committed no crime whatever,” he declared, “but I doubt whether I am still a creditable acquaintance. You are aristocrats. I have not actually carried the red flag, but I found the money which financed Rothmann’s press and that is where I got into trouble. Although I will not say that I follow Rothmann entirely, I have subscribed to some of his doctrines.”

“Oh, let’s forget about it,” Townleyes suggested. “You have the brains of a Disraeli, Sagastrada. I remember hearing you talk at the Reform Club one night when you were staying with young Edward Massoon. Let’s forget politics and talk literature—not that I know much about it, but I do understand literature better than I do present-day world politics.”

“Townleyes is right,” De Hochepierre declared. “Come along with us, Sagastrada. We will look after you for a time.”

“For a few days,” the latter ventured, hesitating. “Well, I am tempted.”

“Go and fetch your bag,” the Prince insisted. “We have two huge cars here—plenty of room for everybody. We will take you in to the Sporting Club and show you how the game of Baccarat should be played.”

Sagastrada’s eyes were aglow. He had the look of an overgrown, engagingly eager boy.

“I have very few clothes—only the barest necessities,” he admitted, “but if you will take me to Monaco I will come. You should understand, though, all of you, what you are doing. I am not a person in favour with the world just now. I should not be seen in your company. I helped Rothmann to escape, I financed his papers, and for that alone they will kill me if they get a chance.”

“No more of it, my dear fellow,” Sir Julian insisted. “We will not talk politics or think about them. I can promise you that. We are going to talk about Heine, and Shelley, and Shakespeare. Better worth the trouble—better even than the Byronic enthusiasm you used to indulge in. If you ask me, things are getting so mixed up that politics on rational lines will be an impossible subject for many years to come.”

The glow faded for a moment from the young man’s face as they lingered outside the hotel.

“You speak like a prophet, Sir Julian,” he declared. “Sanity and common sense are what are needed. . . . I fetch then my bag.”

He hurried into the building and they watched him spring lightly up the stairs.

The Princess and Joan amused themselves strolling about the garden. The Prince started up his long silver-grey car and brought it silently round to the front. A huge weather-beaten racing car stood at the angle of the building, covered with dust, and with a single man all muffled up occupying the driving seat. The Prince stared at it distastefully.

“Whose is that awful-looking caravan?” he asked the *concierge*.

The man shook his head doubtfully.

“I do not know, *Monsieur le Prince*,” he answered. “It passed here just before you went in to lunch, going at a terrific speed on the way to Monte Carlo. It must have come back again while I was away. I have been off duty for a time. There were two men in it when it arrived. I ask myself what has become of the other.”

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The *concierge* moved towards the stationary automobile and addressed the driver. The latter made no reply. He did not even turn his head. The *concierge* repeated his question. Suddenly a man, who came round the side of the hotel as though he had issued from the back quarters, also muffled up and wearing a long motor coat, pushed him rudely to one side and sprang in. His companion at the wheel leaned forward. The automobile gave a convulsive jump into the air and went off, leaping and bounding, up the drive, swung into the main road and disappeared in a cloud of dust.

“Of all the filthy-looking rig-outs I ever saw in my life,” Sir Julian remarked in disgust, “I should think that one takes the cake.”

“Twelve cylinders,” the Prince observed. “A big bore, too. You would think she had been built for racing in a mountainous country. She looks as though she had just come a few thousand miles, too, and those registration figures are indecipherable. Who on earth does she belong to?”

“I have no idea, sir,” the angry *concierge* replied. “The man who got in must have come from the back quarters somewhere. I ask myself what queer game they can have been playing round here.”

The sun was disappearing in a vaporous cloud over towards Nice. There was a sudden chill in the breeze.

“This is the most dangerous hour of the day,” the Prince

grumbled. "I think we ought to be getting along."

Domiloff suddenly issued from the restaurant and, hurrying past the two women, joined the little group at the entrance to the hotel.

"Where is your friend Sagastrada?" he asked quickly.

[68]

"Can't imagine," Townleyes replied. "He's been gone nearly ten minutes."

Domiloff, who never seemed to be in a hurry, was already in the small square hall of the hotel.

"What number?" he demanded.

"Twenty-nine," the man replied. "Shall I tell Monsieur you are waiting, sir?"

"I will go myself," Domiloff answered.

He climbed the stairs swiftly, but without apparent exertion, to the first floor. On the second, his feet scarcely touched the thick, velvety carpet. The third *étage* was like a deserted wilderness. The air of pleasant mystery at which they had laughed an hour or so ago had gone. Number twenty-nine . . . There it was at the end of the passage. The door stood wide open. As he reached the threshold there was sufficient light for him to see everything clearly, even down to the small horrible details. A tall, bulky man, clad in shirt and trousers only, was lying face downwards upon the floor, a knife protruding from the centre of his back, a knife which had been driven right through to his chest with prodigious power. There was very little blood and the features of the man were hidden, but the long fingers were still gripping at the rug, in the thick folds of which they were almost hidden. Standing looking down at him with a ghastly look of horror upon his face was Rudolph Sagastrada.

"Rothmann?" Domiloff demanded, pointing downwards.

"Paul Rothmann," Sagastrada answered, speaking like a man in a trance. "Stabbed from behind—brutally murdered."

[69]

CHAPTER VIII

The *Commissaire* of Police of Beaulieu was young in years and had only recently been appointed to his post. He had never seen a murdered man, looked upon a Prince, or examined a millionaire bearing a name famous throughout Europe. The situation was a little beyond him. He sat at the desk in the disarranged salon. The Prince and Sagastrada occupied a divan. Townleyes was seated in an armchair. Domiloff lounged in the background. Across the centre of the room was still stretched the body of Paul Rothmann, pinned to the ground by that terrific thrust. His hair was wild and dishevelled. Death had laid its icy touch upon the ghastly distorted features. The blood had congealed round the shaft of the knife, but the weapon remained in its original position—upright and sinister.

“It seems to me,” Domiloff suggested, “that there is no reason for detaining our young friend Rudolph Sagastrada any longer, *Monsieur le Commissaire*. He has told you all that he knows of the affair and you have our evidence when you require it that he lunched with us in the restaurant, leaving his friend writing letters here in his apartment.”

The *Commissaire* waved his hand.

“Yes, yes, yes!” he exclaimed, “but my senior officer is on his way from Nice. He also wishes to examine Monsieur Sagastrada.”

“Monsieur Sagastrada is not going into hiding,” Domiloff replied. “He is going to Monaco. I suggest that you have the body removed at once to the *gendarmerie* here, and if your senior officer from Nice wishes to interrogate further our friend, he can come to Monaco.”

[70]

“The situation presents difficulties,” the official at the table pointed out.

Domiloff touched Sagastrada on the shoulder.

“I think,” he said, “that we had better take our leave. What do you say, Prince?”

“Indeed, yes,” the latter declared, rising promptly to his feet. “I am beginning to hate the sight of this room. There is nothing further we can tell the authorities.”

“But *Monsieur le Baron*,” the *Commissaire* protested, “you do not entirely understand. The Police *Commissaire* who is on his way from Nice holds a high position. He is a person of great importance. He comes himself, as he told me on the telephone, to question the companion of the murdered man.”

"Then he can follow us to Monaco," Domiloff repeated, his fingers already upon the handle of the door. "If he takes my advice he will devote his efforts to organizing a pursuit of the two men whose description we have given you, one of whom was without a doubt the murderer. Come along, Sagastrada."

Domiloff opened the door. The *Commissaire* sprang to his feet. He summoned up all his courage.

"*Halte là!*" he exclaimed.

Domiloff turned his head. There was a shadow of surprise on his face. His eyebrows were slightly raised.

"Is it not that you forget yourself, Monsieur?" he asked coolly.

"I have to obey instructions," the *Commissaire* pleaded. "They are to detain Monsieur Sagastrada until the arrival of *le Général Roussillon*. It can be only a matter of a few minutes, *Monsieur le Baron*."

"Ah, so it is Roussillon who comes!" Domiloff exclaimed.

"One knows something of *Monsieur le Général*. Sagastrada, I have offered you the protection of our small Principality and I beg you to accompany me there forthwith. Descend, *Monsieur le Prince*. Come with me, Sagastrada."

[71]

Townleyes moved forward from the shadows; his face was as usual expressionless, but there were the beginnings of a frown upon his forehead.

"One moment, Baron," he intervened. "You permit that I say a word? Remember that it was I who introduced Sagastrada."

"Speak, by all means," Domiloff assented.

"What I have to say is simply this," Townleyes continued. "I recommend strongly that our young friend here wait for the coming of General Roussillon."

"And why?" Domiloff demanded.

"It is contrary," Townleyes went on, "to all precedent that Rudolph Sagastrada, who was the last person to see Rothmann alive, should not remain to be questioned by Roussillon. The delay is so slight—and Roussillon is a man of great importance. He is the head of all the police not only in Nice but in this district. He will think it strange indeed if he finds Rothmann's companion has hurried away rather than face a few simple questions which the circumstances demand."

"Does it matter?" Domiloff asked coldly.

"I consider it of great importance," Townleyes insisted. "We may know that Rudolph Sagastrada and Rothmann were great friends. The world knows nothing of that. Roussillon will not

be satisfied without questioning the man who found the dead body.”

The *Commissaire* rubbed his hands together.

“The Englishman whose name I do not know,” he declared, “is speaking sense. His words are the words of truth.”

[72]

“Nevertheless—” Domiloff began.

The *Commissaire* interrupted brusquely.

“Sergeant!” he called out to the *gendarme* who was standing on guard at the door. “These gentlemen are not permitted to leave.”

The Prince, who had been chafing in the background, suddenly lost his temper.

“Get back to your place, *Monsieur le Commissaire*,” he ordered. “You are aware of my official position. If your men touch my companions or myself it will be the end of their career and yours—that I promise you—I, Léon de Hochepierre de Martelle.”

The *Commissaire* was torn with indecision. The Prince’s authority was genuine enough but he knew very well that this was no ordinary murder. The man whom he dreaded more than any other was even now rushing over from Nice. How he prayed that he might hear the arrival of the car! There was a great issue here without a doubt.

“I beg of you, *Monsieur le Baron*,” he pleaded. “If I do not carry out my orders I am finished.”

“There is nothing more certain in this world,” Domiloff replied sternly, “than this: If you interfere with my companions or myself you are worse than finished. You can make your peace with your superior officer. The Prince is in a position to protect you so long as you do nothing foolish in this matter. . . . *Gendarme*,” Baron Domiloff went on, “you must allow us to pass. It is the Prince who commands you.”

The man glanced helplessly at the *Commissaire*. The latter was listening feverishly for the sound of a motor horn. Domiloff led the way down the stairs.

“Is there really any particular hurry?” Townleyes asked.

[73]

For answer, Domiloff gripped his companion by the arm, pushed him across the threshold and into the car.

“Prince,” he said, “you say you can do a hundred an hour. Get through those gates and turn towards Monaco. I shall watch the needle. You understand Roussillon is already suspect. He might give Sagastrada up where others would refuse.”

Even as they turned into the main road, Domiloff, looking behind, saw a huge grey police automobile swing around by the Bristol. He smiled.

“It would be advisable,” he added, “that you make that hundred—one hundred and twenty. There may be a devil of a row about this, Sagastrada, but if we once get you into the Principality I’m damned if we are going to let these fellows get hold of you.”

The hundred kilometres an hour promised by the Prince was no fable. In rather less than fifteen minutes the long silver-grey car, which hugged the road so closely, came to a graceful stop at the side entrance of the Sporting Club. Domiloff looked up and down, then passed his arm through Sagastrada’s and hurried him through into the building. They took a lift up and a lift down, passed along a corridor where workpeople were still laying carpets and arranging electric lighting, and then to a suite of rooms which neither the Prince nor Townleyes had visited before.

The Baron’s private secretary, Nicholas Tashoff, a tall young man wearing heavy glasses, came hurriedly forward. The Baron drew him on one side and gave him some whispered instructions. Then he turned to the others.

“I have a few words to say to our young friend here,” he told them. “Prince, you will probably like to discover that Lucille has returned safely. Sir Julian, it is you who introduced Sagastrada to us. If you wish to remain and hear what I have to say, pray do. That is entirely for you to decide.”

[74]

Townleyes understood but ignored the innuendo.

“You pique my curiosity,” he said quietly. “I will remain.”

For a single second, Domiloff, who so seldom betrayed himself, gave some slight evidence of annoyance. He shrugged his shoulders, however, and turned to the Prince.

“In that case, De Hochepierre, you had better remain, also. Let me ask you a question, Sagastrada. Supposing you had stayed with your friend Rothmann and taken lunch in your salon, as we understand you were on the point of doing, do you believe that you would have shared his fate?”

“I imagine so,” Sagastrada admitted. “The only thing is, I should probably have killed one of the men, as I carry a revolver. Rothmann hated firearms and would never touch them. He was a man of peace. His murder was nothing but an act of butchery.”

“There would have been no discrimination between you two?” Domiloff continued.

“I should think not.”

“Then you may congratulate yourself upon the fact,” Domiloff went on, “that if you take ordinary precautions you are probably safe for a day or two.”

“Why safer here than elsewhere?” Townleyes asked curiously.

“On French soil,” Domiloff replied, “Sagastrada might have been handed over to the authorities of his country on a trumped-up charge. Roussillon is for the moment all-powerful, and he is a man of violent prejudices. The whole thing would have been done quickly and almost secretly. Here that cannot happen. We could neither hand over a political refugee nor one accused of any sort of crime not yet substantiated.”

[75]

“But Monaco is under French jurisdiction,” Townleyes objected.

The Baron smiled.

“Sometime within a few hours or days,” he confided, “a new charter will be signed in Paris. Monaco is no longer in its former anomalous position. It will consist of a Republic governed by seven members of the old House of Assembly and two others. It will have a new charter—I hope a new lease of life.”

“God bless my soul!” Townleyes muttered. “You’ve kept all this very quiet.”

“There were excellent reasons why we should do so,” Domiloff assured him. “The reigning House, of their own free will, exist no longer. The Palace, which the State has refused to purchase at their present price, remains the personal property of the Grimaldis. The whole affair,” Domiloff went on, throwing himself into an easy chair, tapping a cigarette upon an ashtray and lighting it, “is a triangular bargain between the Monégasque Assembly, the *Société des Bains de Mer*, and the representative of the House of Grimaldi.”

“When is the public announcement to be made?” Townleyes enquired.

“At our discretion,” Domiloff replied. “There will be a public holiday proclaimed, a manifesto issued, and a new flag flown.”

“And who is the head of the State?” Townleyes asked.

“Regnier and myself,” the Baron answered. “Regnier is in control of the municipal side and the public works. I have everything to look after which was formerly managed by the *Société*—also the finances of the State, and, so far as it can be considered to have any, its politics. In this respect I may be considered the liaison officer between the State of Monaco and the French Government.”

[76]

"I begin," Townleyes reflected, "to understand the position."

"A person with your brains could scarcely fail to do so," Domiloff replied with faint sarcasm. "Our standing army, of course, is small. Our *gendarmerie* force is barely equal to present demands. On the other hand, every able-bodied member of the new State is, to use an English word, a fully appointed 'special constable,' having permission, when engaged on State affairs, to carry arms. The protection we can offer you, Sagastrada, may not be a great thing, and we may have to withdraw it at any moment, but we have now a distinct voice in our relations with foreign powers, and that is an important consideration."

"It sounds like a fairy tale," Sagastrada murmured.

"There are elements of the fantastic in the birth of this new State, of course," Domiloff admitted, watching the curling upwards of the smoke from his cigarette.

"What I should like to know," demanded the Prince, who was in a frivolous frame of mind, "is when will the 'beano' take place? When is the day of announcement? When is the new flag unfurled? When do we all go 'wonky'?"

"As soon as the formalities are completed," Domiloff told him. "I may tell you this, however, that officially the State of Monaco, under the new *régime*, may be said to exist at the present moment. People have been asking for many months what we are going to do with this wing of the Sporting Club, and wondering why workpeople have been engaged here night and day. Very soon the truth will be known. The new House of Assembly is here. The room in which we are seated at present is part of the new *bureau*. My own apartments open out from here, and various committee rooms beyond are where the real business of government will be carried on."

[77]

"I heard rumours of a change," Townleyes acknowledged, "but never of anything so sweeping as this."

"The secret has been well kept," the Baron agreed. "It was not my intention to have divulged it at this particular moment. Fate, however, has forced our hand. The murder of Rothmann at Beaulieu had its own significance. I, on behalf of the State, shall make myself responsible, for a time at any rate, so far as is humanly possible, for Sagastrada's safety."

The Prince glanced at his watch.

"Six o'clock!" he exclaimed. "Baron, you will excuse?"

"I myself have affairs," Domiloff said. "But, my friends, the few words I have spoken are for yourselves alone. There will be gossip almost at once. An announcement is imminent. Until Regnier returns from Paris, however, it is important that there

should be no anticipation.”

There was a little murmur of assent from the three men; Domiloff touched a bell and rose to his feet.

“One moment, Sagastrada,” he begged.

The young man lingered behind. The secretary put in his appearance. Briefly the Baron presented him.

“Nicholas,” he said, “kindly take Mr. Sagastrada to the Strangers’ Suite. It is ready, I believe, for occupation.”

“Quite, sir,” the secretary replied.

“Mr. Sagastrada is my guest in this part of the building for a few days,” Domiloff went on. “Afterwards he will make his own arrangements with Monsieur Mollinet. That is understood?”

[78]

“Perfectly, Baron.”

“Take him now and show him his apartment,” Domiloff directed, waving the two young men away. “We will meet again presently, Sagastrada.”

“You are being very kind to me, sir,” the fugitive said gratefully.

Domiloff waited until the door closed behind them, then he lit a fresh cigarette and with his hands in his pockets strolled to the window. He looked across the crowded *Place*, over the heads of the people sitting about listening to the music at the Café de Paris, out across the grey pearly pool of twilight where the lights of the villas were glistening from the hills. Although he had the brain of a maker of laws and had proved himself a fine administrator, Paul Domiloff had much of the romantic idealism of his race. He had lived in the great places of the world, held his own bravely against disaster; he had defied fate, and taking his courage into both hands he had plunged into a new world. More than ever, during the last few hours, he had realized how near he had come to success; more than ever during these last few minutes he had realized what a mistake might cost him. He was conscious of a certain momentary misgiving. Was he, after all, too ambitious? The drama of the last few hours had been perhaps more real to him than to any of the others. The murder of Rothmann, a man of whom he had never heard, was only one of the ugly episodes of life. There was more real tragedy in the flight from his country, the exile, and the present imminent danger of Rudolph Sagastrada. The aristocracy of the world, during the last few years, had been driven remorselessly from their high places, but the House of Sagastrada had represented throughout Europe the very bulwarks of safety in life. At the most exclusive court that Europe had ever known, he himself had been taught to think and

speaking respectfully of the Rothschilds and the Sagastras. This young man with his proud, graceful presence and that haunting light in his eyes, seemed to have taken him back to those days of terror. Was it all to come again—the débâcle—first the aristocracy and then . . . There was a light touch on his arm. His dreams suddenly passed away like the fancies of an opium smoker. Nicholas Tashoff was standing by his side. In the background was Sagastrada.

“You will excuse, Baron? It is Monsieur Sagastrada who desires a word with you.”

[79]

Domiloff nodded a trifle curtly.

“Well, what is it, my young friend?” he enquired.

Sagastrada was momentarily embarrassed. His tone was apologetic.

“You are busy, without a doubt, Baron,” he remarked. “I should have waited.”

“Now that you are here, proceed, if you please.”

“The young lady—Miss Joan Haskell—to whom I was presented—”

“Well, what about her?”

“I should like to know everything about her,” Sagastrada admitted. “I meant to ask the others but there was no opportunity.”

“It is early days to commence philandering here,” Domiloff declared a little brutally. “You will have plenty to think about during the next few days.”

“I am not a philanderer,” Sagastrada remonstrated. “My interest in the young lady is entirely sincere.”

“She is a stranger here,” the Baron told him. “Everybody likes her, she is very popular, she is American with connections in Washington, she came over to do some work at Geneva. When it was finished she had a small legacy and she has come here to spend it. That is all we any of us know.”

[80]

“I apologize for taking up your time,” Sagastrada said, preparing to take his leave. “I am very grateful.”

Domiloff waved his hand. The two men hurried away. A moment later the telephone rang. Domiloff took up the receiver. He listened for a moment.

“Paris speaking? Yes, Domiloff. . . . Yes, is that you, Regnier? . . . *Bien, j’écoute.*”

The voice at the other end dropped almost to a whisper but the words themselves were significant:—

“Keep it secret until I return but for your information only the charter is signed.”

CHAPTER IX

Ardrossen, returning from his usual afternoon promenade a day or two later, and preserving always that curious air of detachment which saved him the trouble of greetings from possible acquaintances, made his way across the lounge to his own quarters in the Nouvel Hôtel. Here he carefully divested himself of his outdoor clothes, rang the bell for his usual afternoon beverage—a cup of pale but strong tea which he drank with a slice of lemon—and, drawing a recently arrived packet of letters to his side, carefully dealt with them. He slit the envelopes with a long stiletto-shaped opener, tore the former into minute fragments which he deposited in the wastepaper basket, and read slowly and with meticulous care the few which he deemed worthy of notice. The remainder he reduced also to small pieces and consigned to oblivion. There were three communications only which he preserved, and they came apparently from various countries. Each one he studied carefully; and one in particular, which seemed to be in the nature of a report divided under many headings, gave him food for much thought. Finally he rose to his feet, laid the letters face downwards upon the table, locked both doors, and drawing from the cupboard the coffer which he had examined the week before upon his arrival, turned up his sleeve and unlocked it by means of the key which he drew from its secret hiding place. From underneath the neatly disposed packets he drew out a leather-bound volume with the lock of a private ledger. This he opened with another key attached to his chain and carried across to the table. With a small fountain pen he made notes on various pages of the volume—some brief, some involving writing which covered several pages. Once or twice he paused for reflection. At no time did he write with fluency. It was obvious that he was using a cipher which he had committed to memory. In the end, when he had finished his task, he destroyed the three letters he had selected with the same precision and completeness as his other correspondence.

It was nearly an hour and a half before he had finished. He then returned the ledger to the chest, which he carefully relocked and pushed back in the spot where he had found it. The keys were then replaced, one in the aperture of his bracelet and the other on his chain, and everything was in order. Afterwards, he sat down and wrote one or two letters which apparently gave him little occasion for thought, and left them, properly stamped and addressed, in a little heap upon the table. He glanced at his watch. It was now a quarter past six. He opened the window and leaned out. The showers which had been falling now and then during the day had ceased. The sky was clear, a very pleasant breeze was rustling amongst the leaves of the lime trees. He stood there for several minutes watching the lights appear in the harbour and in the old town opposite. Then,

wearing his sun glasses, although the need for them existed no longer, and abandoning his umbrella for a Malacca cane, he left the hotel and descended the hill until he reached the point where the tramcars started for old Monaco. Arrived there he stepped into one of the waiting carriages and indicated the ascent with a little wave of the hand.

“*La vieille ville?*” the *cocher* enquired.

Ardrossen nodded assent. He leaned back under the hood of the victoria and was driven with a noisy burst of speed at first, but afterwards with slow and painful efforts on the part of the horse, and a good many exclamations and crackings of the whip by the *cocher*, to the summit of the hill. In the shadow of some trees, Ardrossen descended from the vehicle.

[83]

“Presently,” he told the driver, handing him a ten-franc note, “I return. In the meantime, sit at the café opposite but drink only the light beer.”

The *cocher* removed his hat with a sweeping bow, and his patron crossed the road, climbed a little higher, and entered the *Place*. He made slow progress up some steps set between two of the prominent buildings. Halfway up he paused at a beautifully carved oak door with a highly polished brass bell. Above it rose three storeys of dark unlit windows. He pressed the bell. A light flashed out almost immediately from behind. The door opened before him. He passed in and again there was darkness whilst the door was closed. The air, however, was heavy with the scent of some unusual perfume and the eyes of the woman who had admitted him flashed a welcome as she stood by his side.

“Thou hast found the courage, then, *mon brave*,” she whispered, leaning down towards him.

“Turn up the light,” he directed.

“*Oh, la la!*” she scoffed. “Is it that thou art afraid to be alone in the darkness for a moment with thy Hortense?”

“I hate the darkness,” he muttered. “I like to see my way wherever I am. Good.”

A subdued light shone out into the square entrance hall with its massive furniture, thick rugs, its air of cold luxury. She took his hat and cane from him.

“Come, *chéri*,” she said. “You will mount, or we talk here below?”

[84]

“We will talk in your salon,” he decided.

She ushered him into a large, very handsome apartment, so large, indeed, that the single light she turned on left half of it in gloom. Massive paintings with heavy gilt frames were dimly

visible upon the walls. A broad divan spread with cushions was drawn up before a closed stove set in the recesses of the huge chimney place. She turned on other lights and the room developed a more hospitable aspect. There were cupboards filled with old china and glass, beautiful cupboards, themselves of great value, and the faded painting upon the dimly seen ceiling might almost have been the work of Watteau himself. The woman had passed her first youth but she was still attractive. Her eyes were beautiful, her complexion perfect. She moved so lightly that one might easily have forgotten that the slightness of girlhood had passed. Her unringed hands, one of which was clasped through his arm as she led him to a seat, were beautifully shaped.

“Sit down, my man of stone,” she invited. “Relax, I implore you.”

“Tell me your news,” he enjoined, removing her hand gently. They were seated side by side upon the divan.

“News!” she scoffed. “What interest can the news of what passes in these few square yards have for you? Passionate talk—fiery words—a lot of rubbish! Men who would kill others—excitable fellows tired of vapouring in the cafés who come to the Assembly and would draw down the thunderbolts. Oh, they talk, they talk, they talk!”

“And sometimes,” he said quietly, “things happen.”

She looked at him, a flash of curiosity in her bright eyes.

“Yes,” she admitted, “there is movement.”

[85]

“Your husband?”

“*Eh bien?*”

“He has returned from Paris?”

“Last night—by car from Marseilles.”

“And now?”

“He is with *Monsieur le Baron* at the new meeting place. You know where that is.”

“I think so. Continue, if you please. I came to hear what you can tell me about that trip to Paris.”

She slapped him lightly upon the cheek.

“I thought that you came to see me,” she complained.

“Afterwards,” he said patiently.

“Well, this is what Pierre said to me when he arrived last

night. He had a very good dinner and he drank a bottle of old Burgundy. He was sober enough. 'It is not here any longer,' he told me, 'that the affairs of Monaco are to be transacted. It is not at the *Préfecture*. It is across the harbour.'"

"It is as I thought," the listener said slowly. "It is where those hundred workpeople have been employed in the secret part of the Sporting Club."

Ardrossen nodded meditatively. For a few minutes it seemed that his thoughts were far away. Then he patted Madame gently upon the knee—a gesture which she seemed to appreciate.

"You are very kind to me, Hortense," he said. "You tell me the things I wish to hear."

She drew a little closer to him but he remained rigid.

"Why do you not tell me the things I should like to hear from you?" she whispered.

He had the air of one striving to the limit of his powers to humour a child.

"Hortense," he confided, "there are few men made in whom your words, to be near you in this darkened room, would not light the great fires, but I am one of those for whom they burn less often. I have a different life. I live towards a different end. Nevertheless, I am grateful."

[86]

His hand stole into his breast coat pocket. The eyes of Madame Hortense were more beautiful than ever when she saw this plain but very impressive-looking pocketbook between his fingers.

"You are treated cruelly by Monsieur," he went on. "You are a woman of beauty who loves the styles and the fashions, and here, within a mile of where you might study all the women whom you could outshine, he keeps you a prisoner. But Madame, as you have told me once before—there is Nice."

"Nice is permitted," she admitted breathlessly.

He passed a little roll of notes into her eager grasp. She grabbed them, counted them by sense of touch even in that dim light, and thrust them into the bosom of her gown. It was amazing, this. It was the gift of a prince—and for how little!

"You will not permit, my dear friend," she whispered, "that I give you just a little of my affection?"

Her arm stole towards him. He did not actually move away but something in his attitude chilled her.

"Hortense," he said, "I have told you before, there are few men breathing who would not be on their knees, but I am one of

them. Treat me as something inhuman—inhuman save for one redeeming quality, gratitude. You have told me something I desired to know. Very soon you may tell me something else.”

“I can tell you something now.”

“Please.”

“When you leave here,” she whispered, “glance backwards towards the Palace. The blinds are drawn, there is not a light in the windows, the flagstaff is empty and gaunt. . . . So it will remain. All that is finished. You understand?”

[87]

“The new charter?” he exclaimed.

“It is arranged,” she told him. “Domiloff signed provisionally ten days ago. Pierre signed whilst in Paris.”

His hand gripped her wrist.

“Hortense,” he whispered, “a copy of that charter, an abstract of it even, will be an affair of one hundred thousand francs.”

She felt a thrill pass through her whole body. The grip of his fingers upon her wrist had stirred that ever-consuming passion. One hundred thousand francs! For that, if it were necessary, Pierre could go over the bluff into the sea below!

“You shall have it,” she promised.

“When?”

The grip of his fingers upon her wrist was like a band of steel—now hot, now cold.

“I will send you the message in the usual way,” she told him, “but this time it must be at night.”

“Let it be soon,” he begged.

“It shall be soon.”

He rose to his feet. She walked arm in arm with him across the room, turned on the dim light in the hall and drew down the latch of the ponderous, stately door.

“When the time comes,” she whispered, “my message will arrive. Remember—it will be at night.”

He bowed over her fingers and looked away from the eyes which were filled with so much unspoken pleading.

“I thank you, Hortense,” he said. “Until I receive the message, then.”

The door closed behind him so softly that its framework might

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have been of velvet. He descended the steps, walked on the dark side of the square and climbed noiselessly into his *voiture*.

“We return,” he directed the *cocher*. “Drive carefully down the hill.”

The *cocher* gathered up the reins, the little dog by his side, who had come to life since the patron’s return, wagged its tail furiously, and so they descended.

CHAPTER X

At six o'clock on the fourth evening after his arrival in Monaco, Rudolph Sagastrada, with a sigh of relief, caught up his cap, made his way through the network of passages, and on the steps of the Sporting Club almost collided with Joan. She gave a little start of genuine surprise.

"So you really are still here!" she exclaimed. "What on earth have you been doing with yourself?"

"On parole," he answered, with a very attractive grimace. "Piles of books—French, English and German—brought me by the charming Baroness, a priceless Bechstein small grand piano, far too much to eat and drink, but a prisoner in two rooms till six o'clock this evening. Now I am free, for the present at any rate."

"You poor dear! What use are you going to make of your freedom?"

"Drink in long draughts of this marvellous air," he answered. "Show me the Terrace. I can walk on the Terrace for an hour. Some of the Baron's new body-guard—special constables—are to be there. I am not to notice them. They will not address me, but it gives one an odd sort of feeling all the same to realize that they are necessary. Have you the courage to walk with me?"

"Of course I have," she laughed. "Come along. We cross the road here. There's the Terrace below."

"And music," he cried. "They are playing *O sole mio*! And the perfume of those hyacinths—marvellous! Do you know," he went on, "that I have been alone all day? I had breakfast alone in my room, luncheon alone, I have read the papers alone, I have watched the people go by and all the time I have been doing only one thing."

"And that?"

"Waiting until six o'clock," he replied. "I hate solitude."

"Hasn't the Baron been to see you even?"

"Not for two days. Have you seen him? Has he told you anything about my affairs?"

She shook her head.

"I think that he has been keeping out of our way. Certainly he has not been in the bar or the restaurant. We have all been so

sorry,” she went on after a moment’s hesitation, “about your friend Paul Rothmann. I hope you have got over the shock just a little.”

“Yes,” he answered quietly. “Those were terrible moments and it was a cruel, a bitter death, but Rothmann knew all the time that he was doomed. He was too deeply committed. I did my best but he was not an easy person to move. He was full of fiery genius and immovable prejudices.”

“Nothing fresh has happened—about yourself?” she asked eagerly.

“You mean about the police and that sort of thing? Roussillon came the day before yesterday. I was put through what seemed to me rather an absurd examination. Afterwards I had an hour alone with Roussillon and an official from some Foreign Office. They tried hard to get me to return to my country of my own accord. They offered no guarantees. Every sentence they spoke was a threat. Since they left, no one has come near me except the Baroness and Nicholas Tashoff, the secretary. The only other people I have spoken to have been the servants and the telephone operator.”

“So you have been telephoning?”

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“A matter of vanity,” he admitted. “Fortunately I have been somewhat cosmopolitan in my habits and movements—it has been necessary. I have a flat and a servant and clothes in Paris and the servant and most of the clothes are on their way down here now. And you?”

“I have had plenty of tennis and I have been over to Cagnes twice for golf,” she told him. “I think this is the most wonderful place in the world.”

“In what way?”

She laughed happily.

“Well, people seem so delightful. I came here almost a stranger on a voyage of adventure. I have been here now more than a week and it has been the most enjoyable week of my life.”

“I have been here four days,” he reflected, “and certainly they have been the quaintest four days of my life. I am a prisoner in paradise. It is too fantastic. I talk to myself with my music, I read from the books which the Baroness has lent me, sometimes I get beautiful thoughts, yet I have the feeling all the time that I am in a frozen world. I think of that mad drive down, of the tragedy at Beaulieu—poor Paul, raving to the very last—and then I look out of my window down on to the *Place* and see the people entering eagerly the Casino and realize where I am. It is barely credible.”

They walked on in silence for a few moments. Earlier in the

evening it had been raining. The stone pavement of the Terrace when they first reached it was damp under their feet. Now it almost seemed as though that round yellow moon rising in the distance, was wrapping the coming night in her voluptuous embrace, clearing the air and bringing warmth everywhere. A faint breeze blew through the vaporous wreaths of mist, a breeze that came from somewhere the other side of the mountains, which seemed to have crept across their barren places and brought the perfume from the flower fields of Bordighera. Joan turned away from the shadowy vista of the sea. She threw back her head and half-closed her eyes.

“You are dreaming to-night,” he remarked.

“Only a momentary lapse,” she assured him. “I am not a dreamer really. It is this wonderful Monte Carlo which gets me sometimes. It seems so difficult to acquire any sort of perspective.”

“I know nothing about you except that you are charming,” he said simply. “Where do you come from?”

“From work,” she told him. “I am an American, you know, a graduate of Wellesley, and I went straight into a job on an American newspaper when I left College. I had a little money and I came here for a holiday. I suppose I must have had wonderful good fortune. The first few days were like a fairy dream. Then came the luncheon at Beaulieu, the terror of your expression—I saw you look out of the window. Your panic-stricken face really did frighten me—and those awful men. How you must have felt when you ran upstairs to get your luggage and found your friend—murdered!”

“And realized,” he added gloomily, “we are all so filthily selfish, you know, that I would probably have been murdered myself, too, if I had come in a little earlier.”

“Why were you hunted down like that?” she asked. “Have you really done anything very terrible?”

“I was born a millionaire; I could not quite adapt my political views to this newfangled autocracy, and I financed a great literary journal that was anti-government. No more than that.”

She turned and looked at him freely and frankly. To the passers-by, of whom, just at that time, there were few, they must have seemed a very handsome couple. Joan, with her long, slim body, her pleasant features, her fresh complexion and clear brown eyes, her carriage—essentially the carriage of the girls of her nation—untrammelled, free, yet somehow rather the carriage of a Diana than of an Aphrodite. He, Rudolph Sagastrada, at that time something a little furtive about his manner, with his fine, intelligent forehead, pleasant voice, something of the lounging grace of the scholarly athlete, his eyes a darkish shade of blue, his complexion pale, redeemed

by its slight coating of sunburn, conforming to none of the usual types but possessing without a doubt distinction.

“The men of my family have helped to make our country what it is—financially, of course,” he went on gloomily. “It is not our fault, that I know of, that we are born with clear heads for figures. I would rather have been a student. I would rather have written that life of Heine which I have always had in mind, written it from a different standpoint, taken more account of his Gallic outlook. I could not do it, of course, but it was not my fault. I did the work I had to do. I took up my inheritance.”

“You are not really a politician, then?” she asked.

“Not a practical one,” he confessed. “I have more or less kept my ideas to myself and they are not in any way destructive. Now that I suppose my rooms have been searched,” he went on, frowning, “they may have found papers, articles which I have taken care never to publish, addresses which I have never delivered, which might be termed—well, anti-governmental at any rate. If ever they get me back, I should probably share Paul Rothmann’s fate.”

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He relapsed into a gloomy silence as they continued their slow promenade. A few drops of rain cooled their cheeks and a misty filigree of vapour drifted now and then across the face of the moon. Occasionally a shadowy, unobtrusive figure passed them. They were conscious of others, some on the seats, some leaning over the Terrace. Joan shared his silence, but it was simply because her brain was at work trying to understand.

“What should you call yourself in politics if you had to define your position?” she asked.

“Never mind,” he replied, with one of those quick glances around to which she was becoming accustomed. “Politics should never be mentioned in these days between people like you and myself. This is the paradise of the sensuous. I shall do my best to accept it for what it is, to live for each day that is born, for each night that drifts away. Gambling amuses me. If they allow me to I shall gamble. There are many emotions which give me pleasure. I shall embrace them. It is an oasis I have found. If only they will let me remain here, I shall let the others fight it out for a time.”

They passed up the steps from the Terrace towards the hotel. Joan felt the diaphanous shawl upon her shoulders.

“I am going in to change,” she announced. “Our promenade has been very pleasant but a little moist.”

“You will come back to the Sporting Club?” he asked eagerly. “I am permitted to go there now.”

“If you like—yes,” she assented.

“Can I come and wait in your salon while you change?” he begged.

“Of course you must do nothing of the sort,” she reproved him, with a little laugh. “As a matter of fact, I have not a salon. Sit down here in the lounge, if you like, and wait for me, or I will see you at the Baccarat table in half an hour.”

“In the bar of the Sporting Club?” he suggested. “Until tomorrow I have no money and if I see the Baccarat table I must gamble.”

She laughed.

“All right. In the bar,” she agreed.

Joan went slowly back to her room, found her clothes were even damper than she had imagined, filled her bath, shook bath salts into it, stripped off her clothes and stretched herself out in a cloud of vapour. Somehow, even the soothing luxury of the warm water failed to calm her altogether. She found herself thinking all the time of this strange waif from an unknown world, strange in tongue and ideas and outlook, yet possessing that peculiar appeal, against the lure of which she was fighting all the time. He was unlike her type, unlike the men of her world, who were mostly overgrown college boys. He was something they would half-wonder at, half-despise; yet the recollection of his voice, the even flow of his well-chosen words and phrases, the touch of spirituality in so much that he said, of aspiration, of sorrow, seemed to have cast a curious spell upon her. . . . She stepped from the very nearly cold spray refreshed in body, clearer a little, perhaps, in mind, but still impregnated with a certain indefinable excitement. When she entered the *Salle des Jeux* in the Sporting Club half an hour later, the Princess, who was just leaving, greeted her with a little exclamation.

“Why, Joan Haskell, what have you done to yourself?”

“Got wet moon-gazing and had to change my clothes,” Joan laughed.

“It is not that—I mean your expression. Has anyone been frightening and then soothing you?”

“Not that I know of.”

“Don’t go near any of the menkind—especially that fiery young northerner or my impressionable husband,” the Princess begged her. “You are dangerous to-night, young woman. Perhaps you are in danger yourself—I don’t know. We are always in danger if we begin to feel.”

Joan smiled.

“I’m afraid I haven’t that sort of susceptibility,” she declared.

“I did promise to meet Rudolph Sagastrada, though. He is sitting in the bar waiting, or ought to be. Come with me.”

“This is the third time,” Lucille lamented, “that I have tried to leave this room and failed. I cannot let you go alone, though. I must try and get the young man to look at me with those large soulful eyes instead of devouring you all the time, as he did at Beaulieu.”

She turned and they made their way together to the bar. Rudolph Sagastrada was seated at a faraway table half-hidden by a curtain. He had the air of one trying to escape notice. Directly the Princess and Joan entered, he rose to his feet and placed chairs for them courteously. It was obvious, however, that he was *distract*.

“It is wonderful to be back in this atmosphere again,” he confided. “It is a long time since I ventured to cross the threshold of a Casino.”

“Why ‘ventured’?” the Princess asked.

“I do not trust myself,” he explained with an apologetic smile, “in old bookshops, at Christie’s in London on a day when there are pictures to be sold, or at a Baccarat table.”

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“So you are a gambler, amongst all your other extravagances,” Joan said severely.

“Only when I am in the atmosphere,” he told her. “Whether at my work or my pleasure I am a very sober person. For instance, my people are bankers and sometimes I am in almost sole control at the headquarters where I chance to be. I have never speculated. That is why I have been so much trusted and why I have made my way up in the firm. But I have the gambler’s instinct all right. Nothing but my empty pockets kept me away from the Baccarat when I first entered the room.”

“I will lend you some money if you really want to play,” the Princess offered.

He shook his head.

“Thank you, no,” he answered gently. “I am not one of those who believe in the good fortune of borrowed money. We lend all over the world, even money to the Government which will drive us to the shambles,” he added, a note of bitterness creeping into his tone. “We borrow from no one. By to-morrow I shall have ample supplies. I should like—”

He hesitated.

“Well, go on,” the Princess encouraged him.

“I should like,” he proposed, “to give you all a dinner party to-morrow night or any night soon—a little party of thanks for

your kindness to me at Beaulieu.”

“It sounds like a wonderful idea,” Joan said.

“It must be soon,” he went on eagerly. “Those two assassins have only half-completed their task. They may have to go into hiding for the present but so long as I am alive I should think that they would hang about the neighbourhood. I am sure that the Baron thinks so too. That is why he has made me stay in the hotel all day.”

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“You will never be able to hide in Monte Carlo,” the Princess remarked.

“Then I must travel on,” he sighed. “What I thought was, one week here—one week of happiness. When that is over, if I am an embarrassment to anyone I will find some manner of slipping away.”

“What will happen to your business?” Joan, who was at all times a practical young woman, asked him.

“There are eleven partners in the firm,” he said. “Three belong to the aristocracy of the country. They will be allowed to remain. They will be allowed to control their affairs. The authorities may rob us but they cannot take everything. Then, too, one of my uncles has always had the fear of something of this sort happening. We have money in most of the capitals of Europe. I have already telegraphed in cipher to London and Paris.”

“Really, you are a very interesting young man,” Lucille told him softly. “Don’t you like him, Joan? I do. I should like to be a guest at that dinner.”

He turned to Joan.

“Would you?”

“I, too,” she assented.

“Very well then,” he declared. “I will take that risk. You shall bring whomever you choose. I saw two Austrians whom I know slightly. I might ask them. They are of the *haut monde*. Then with the Domiloffs and your own people we shall make up a party and dine in the Sporting Club.”

“Would you rather go to Cannes?” the Princess asked.

He shook his head.

“I must stay in the Principality,” he confided. “In fact the Baron has warned me not to cross the frontier. They have queer laws here. The bank manager, too, has been giving me some hints. We will have the dinner within these walls, if you please.”

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The Princess raised her hand suddenly and waved to the man who stood upon the threshold of the bar.

“The elusive Baron at last,” she exclaimed. “Now we may have some news.”

CHAPTER XI

Paul Domiloff came at once to the table where the three were seated. Several people who endeavoured to arrest his progress or engage his attention for a moment he waved on one side with a courteous gesture of excuse.

“Lucille,” he confided, “and Miss Haskell—I agree with our august potentate, Lord Bishopsthorpe, whom I have just left. We all work too hard to make this place attractive. It is not necessary. The fact that we have here the most beautiful women in the world is enough.”

“Have you come all this way to pay us compliments, Baron?” Lucille laughed.

“As a matter of fact, the real object of my coming,” he replied, “is to have a few words with you, Sagastrada. I must apologize for having left you altogether to yourself these last few days but I literally have not had a second to spare. I wonder whether I could ask you to come with me now into my bureau for a few minutes.”

“Here in the building?” Rudolph asked, rising to his feet.

“Quite close to your own quarters.”

“If I might be excused, Princess?” the young man begged.

“You must come back again,” was the imperative reply. “We insist upon that.”

“I have received a command,” he answered.

They left the room together—Rudolph half a head taller than his companion, although Domiloff was a fine figure of a man. The latter led the way into a small, plainly furnished room at the back of one of the pulpit-like *caisses*. The entrance to it was by means of a door let into the panel so ingeniously as to be almost invisible. Domiloff laid his hand on his companion’s shoulder as he turned the key in the door.

“Sagastrada,” he said, “you will forgive plain speech. It is entirely in your own interests. Although nothing is settled and although I should bitterly regret having to go back upon my word, I think it is possible that you may have to give up the idea of staying for any length of time in Monte Carlo.”

“Why?”

Domiloff hesitated for a moment. He was himself somewhat disturbed.

"It is really your own friend, Townleyes," he confided, "who has the wind up. Of course, he has been in the English diplomatic service and he is much better informed as to the European situation than I am. I feel one must take what he says seriously."

"I do not wish to cause you any embarrassment," Sagastrada said slowly, "and if you say the word, I must go."

"Well, I have not said it yet, have I?" Domiloff pointed out, smiling. "I do not mind telling you, though, that within twenty-four hours of your arrival I was rung up from the Quai d'Orsay. They wanted your tickets taken away, your *viatique* issued and you yourself placed upon the train."

"What are you going to do about it, Baron?" the young man asked.

"Well, not that nor anything like it," Domiloff assured him. "We shall do our best to ensure your safety before we part with you but I do feel that it would be unwise of you to count upon staying here for any length of time."

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Sagastrada had become very still and cold.

"You perhaps think that this persecution and massacre of all those whose political views happen to clash with the Chancellor's is justified?" he asked.

"Do not put it like that, my dear fellow," Domiloff begged. "It is a disgusting business. But listen. You must admit that Rothmann's publications have been stirring up the people, and they are entirely revolutionary in tone."

"Yes, that may be," Rudolph acknowledged. "Still, I, personally, Baron, have I committed any sin? Politically I may be hateful to the rulers of the country, but I cannot continue to finance a journal which no longer exists. Is there anything which would warrant my being sent back there to be massacred?"

"There is nothing. They do not even claim that there is anything," the Baron conceded. "But there it is. They want you back. If I were obeying instructions at the present moment, instead of giving you advice I should be taking away your papers and your *carte d'entrée* to the Casino and this place. I should take away your passport. You would then be arrested by the local police and remain in prison until an accredited envoy from your home town came to fetch you. What about that?"

Rudolph shrugged his shoulders.

"Fetch me back to be propped up against a wall and shot, I suppose," he remarked bitterly.

Domiloff had seen too many men shot to be greatly stirred by

the idea.

“They seem to be pretty ruthless all over the world nowadays,” he admitted. “It is just a foretaste, I suppose, of what will come when the floodgates are really opened. All the same, Sagastrada, although I have felt justified under the altered conditions here in refusing the suggestions from the French Foreign Office, we are scarcely yet established as an independent State, and I tell you frankly, there may be trouble. A month ago, if I had taken up the attitude I have taken to-day, I should have been packed out of the place. As things are now, they cannot go as far as that but I am bound to warn you of what is going on.”

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“I have told you before,” Sagastrada said, “that I would not for the world be the cause of any embarrassment to you. I have to thank you already for all that you have done. Give me a few more days and I will take my leave.”

“We can promise that, certainly,” Domiloff assured him.

“I may be sure of to-morrow?”

“Absolutely, and the day after.”

“Very well then. To-morrow night or the night after I give a dinner party in the club here to pay off my friends who have been so kind to me. You and the Baroness will come?”

“We shall be enchanted,” was the prompt reply. “Do not take my warning too lightly or too seriously, though,” Domiloff went on, placing his hand on the other’s shoulder as they moved towards the door. “We live in queer times, my young friend. You have been in the thick of it. You know. There is something coming to the world—not before it is due perhaps—and that icy sort of feeling that goes before a great calamity is in the atmosphere already. Personally,” Domiloff continued, suddenly very serious indeed, “I have been down in the depths already. If I allowed myself to think of the past and what I have seen and known I should go mad. People think I have turned time server because I have become a sort of glorified Master of Ceremonies here. They can think so, but I shall never mind the end when it comes. For you youngsters it is different. I would help you more, Sagastrada, if I could. I know it is no use offering you money. It is pouring in for you already. I will advise you hour by hour how things are going. And remember this—do nothing without consulting me. Go about armed every second you are here and sleep with a revolver under your pillow. There was more in the message than I have told you. They want you back in your country but so far there has been no ultimatum. Do not go—unless we are forced to give you up—without guarantees.”

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Rudolph sighed.

“And yet,” he lamented, “it is the country of my birth. I have been to their Universities. I have won all the higher honours. I have been a patriot. But I could not accept this new creed of a divinely appointed autocracy.”

“And if this government falls—what afterwards?” Domiloff asked.

Rudolph made no reply. The lamps in the room were crude, unshaded and penetrating and the one under which he stood was shining with a ghastly light upon his finely moulded features. He was forced to shade his eyes from its brilliance. Domiloff, nevertheless, understood. He never quite forgot the sight of the young man with whom he passed out of the room a few minutes later. . . .

“Well?” the two women asked him as he reentered the bar.

“I am on parole,” Rudolph announced. “Domiloff is a sort of uncrowned king here and he is doing his best to guard me for a few days, anyway. He and the Baroness will come to my banquet. Three hours of dancing, eating and drinking, and being merry! I shall also try to wangle an hour or two for gambling. What do you say, Miss Haskell?”

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“I think you are taking things much too lightly,” she answered. “If you really are in political trouble at home and they are trying to get you back, I think you ought to be making your plans to escape, instead of staying to give a frivolous dinner party. You have plenty of money. There are planes to be bought here at Cannes.”

“I cannot pilot a plane,” he confided.

“You can hire a pilot.”

“The day after to-morrow,” he declared. “After then I will make plans.”

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CHAPTER XII

Rudolph Sagastrada was in the clouds, and the knock on the door of his salon passed unheeded. He was seated at the piano which had been the joy of his luxurious imprisonment and he was nearing the last bar of one of his favourite nocturnes. His eyes were half-closed, his head thrown a little back. The melody which was flowing from his fingertips seemed to him, after the mingled agonies of the last few days, like a soothing message of joy. Suddenly he felt cool, sweetly perfumed hands over his eyes. He was enveloped in a delicious darkness.

“Do not move,” he begged. “Whoever you are stay like that. So I finish the last few bars.”

Slowly and more slowly the music died away. His fingers left the notes with a queer little sense of reluctance. As he opened his eyes the Baroness was smiling down at him.

“My young friend,” she cried, “you play divinely. Last night when you were playing Mozart I was not so sure, but now I know. You are an artist, Rudolph. What do you do with banks and money changing?”

“It is not impossible,” he assured her, “to be something of an artist, to have some small measure of artistry in your brain and senses, and yet to hold your place in the counting houses. My uncle Leopold was Paderewski’s favourite pupil and when he died great things were said of him. Whoever thought of this,” he went on, touching the instrument lightly, “deserves my eternal gratitude. I came in here with my nerves awry. Very soon, all memories of ugly things will have passed.”

“On your knees then, young man,” she enjoined smiling, as she sank into an easy chair and lit a cigarette. “It was I who thought of it. It is even my piano. It was *en route* to our new apartments here. I stopped the men in the corridor. I told them to bring it here.”

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“I have never before,” he said simply, “met so many kind friends in so short a time. It is a tragedy that I must leave you all so soon.”

She nodded.

“Paul is worried about you.”

“I know.”

“One thing is quite certain,” she went on. “He will not give you up until the last moment. The new constitution which he has been working for so long gives us far greater powers. His only

immediate fear seems to be—”

She hesitated.

“Assassination,” he interrupted smiling. “At least he is doing his best to protect me from that. I walked on the Terrace this evening and I had a bodyguard of something like half-a-dozen zealous but furtive Monégasques. Someone had an eye on me all the time.”

She smiled.

“Paul is very thorough,” she said. “This apartment is really part of our new suite, and both entrances are guarded by men who have been in the service of the police here for many years.”

Sagastrada’s rather petulant grimace was the gesture of a boy.

“They need not worry about me at this hour,” he said.

“Why not?”

“I cannot leave the place,” he confided. “To-morrow I shall have as extensive a wardrobe as any man in the Principality. To-night I have only the clothes I stand up in. I have not been able to dine in the restaurant or to go into the *Salle des Jeux* except in the afternoon.”

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There was a knock at the door—rather an official knock. In response to Rudolph’s invitation to enter, a clerk from the main bureau presented himself, accompanied by a *gendarme*. The latter saluted. He addressed the Baroness.

“This is Monsieur Patou,” he explained, “the senior cashier. He presented himself as having important business with the young Monsieur Sagastrada.”

“*Eh bien?*” the Baroness queried.

“According to instructions,” the man continued, “I first searched him and then brought him here. He has no concealed weapon—only a very large sum of money.”

Sagastrada threw up his hands.

“Hurrah!” he exclaimed. “It is for me. It is the first instalment.”

“The money is for you, sir,” the clerk admitted, producing the packet. “It arrived through Barclays Bank late this afternoon and they have had insufficient time to collect it all. There are two hundred thousand francs here and Barclays note payable on demand for five hundred thousand.”

“I breathe again,” Sagastrada declared, holding out his hand.

The clerk counted the money. Sagastrada disposed of it in his various pockets, he gave a receipt, everyone thanked everyone else and the two men withdrew.

“It is my first credit which has arrived,” Sagastrada announced, “and, alas, the Baccarat is finished. What can I do—like this—with the best part of a million francs to spend?”

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The Baroness considered the matter.

“Let it be supper,” she suggested. “I am starving. We dined too early and nothing was really good. At the Night Club here your costume will be accepted.”

Sagastrada was like a boy.

“Supper by all means,” he agreed. “Imagine, dear Baroness, the joy of it,” he went on. “I have not given a franc away nor paid for anything since I came here. Everyone has been wonderful but one cannot live at Monte Carlo without small money in the pocket and big money in the *portemonnaie*. How can we get hold of our friends?”

She rose to her feet.

“I will see to that,” she promised. “First of all, I will take you to the Night Club. There you must remain until I can find them. The De Hochepierres, I suppose, and Mademoiselle Haskell, Dolly Parker and Lord Henry and Sir Julian Townleyes—and Paul if I can find him.”

“Anyone you like.”

“Wait,” she begged. “One moment.”

She spoke on the private telephone. It was an affair of very few minutes.

“Paul is in his office,” she confided, as she rang off. “You may go into the Night Club. Three of your guard are there rather expecting you and everyone who enters will be watched. I will show you the way.”

They descended in a newly established lift and Rudolph found his way into the Night Club. A maître d’hôtel, all smiles and bows, hurried forward to meet him.

“*Monsieur le Baron* has announced your coming, Monsieur,” he said. “The best table in the room has been prepared. It is a great pleasure to welcome you.”

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Rudolph glanced at the wine list which the man presented.

“*Pommery* ’21 in magnums,” he ordered. “There may be twelve—fourteen—perhaps more.”

“*Parfaitement, monsieur. Et pour manger?*”

Rudolph glanced at the card.

“Caviar—plenty of it,” he directed, “served with the ice; hot toast; flasks of vodka. Afterwards everything that you usually serve. You know your patrons and their tastes.”

The man bowed once more.

“*Entendu, monsieur.*”

Rudolph handed him a *mille* from his bursting pocket.

“See that we are well served,” he concluded. “Give us everything of the best—but this is nothing to the supper I shall offer on the night of my party. Tell the orchestra that I send them a present. No—take them this,” he went on, drawing a handful of notes from the packet. “They must play their best to-night and when we come up after dinner on the night of my party. We like the music of the waltz but there must be music in all that they play. No bumping jazz, you understand—melodies, rhythms.”

“I shall speak myself to the *chef d’orchestre*.”

“My guests arrive,” Rudolph announced.

They were trooping into the room—the De Hochepierres, Lord Henry, Townleyes with Joan Haskell, Dolly Parker and in the background Domiloff himself. Rudolph welcomed them all joyously.

“Cast one eye on my clothes and forget,” he begged. “To-morrow you shall see me as Solomon in all my glory. To-night I apologize. It is all that can be said. Princess,” he added with a bow, “until the caviar arrives—five minutes?”

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“Delightful,” she murmured.

They glided away across the perfect floor.

“All the same, I can assure you that I need no exercises to give me an appetite. For dinner we ate nothing. I think we were all too excited.”

“Alas,” he sighed, “the festivities will soon be over. Very soon I have promised the Baron that I will prepare to leave.”

“But where will you go?”

“Who knows—who cares? A week ago I counted for something in the world. To-day I am a real outcast.”

“You hear what he calls himself,” Lucille scoffed as they finished their dance and rejoined the others at the table. “He

calls himself an outcast.”

“I think that he is a fairy prince in disguise,” Joan laughed.
“The Baroness tells me that his pockets are dripping with money. Whatever is he going to do with it all?”

“I wish I could tell you that or that someone would tell me,” he answered. “Will you dance with me, Miss Haskell, while the champagne cools and the hot toast for the caviar arrives? One turn, please.”

She rose to her feet willingly enough.

“I am not like the Princess,” she confided. “I was not hungry but I did not starve at dinnertime. All the same, your message was delightful. I can’t really tell you how pleased everyone was.”

“And you—you yourself?” he asked, bending down. “You are still glad that you rescued me from those bandits at Beaulieu?”

“I’ll say we all are,” she declared. “We were talking about it in the bar this evening. Fancy if you had gone up to look for your friend a little earlier!”

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For a single moment he seemed to lose his nerve. He slowed down in the dance and peered into the dark corners of the room. He looked right and left and everywhere, then he saw Domiloff standing at the table, serene and watchful. There were others whom he recognized in the background. He seemed reassured.

“Is the Baron really afraid that they will try to arrest you here?” she asked.

“He believes that they may try. After all, though, I am only a political offender. What he fears is that when they find difficulties in the way they may try other means of getting rid of me.”

They were near the table and Joan glided to her place.

“I can smell the hot toast!” she exclaimed. “The caviar looks delicious.”

“You must not touch your champagne yet,” he warned her.
“You are going to drink vodka first.”

“I think that you must have spent a great part of your life learning how to eat and drink,” she told him as they settled into their places.

“I should like to spend the trifling part that may be left to me,” he rejoined, “in sharing my knowledge with you.”

He looked her in the eyes. There was a touch of banter in his

tone but an undernote of sincerity which thrilled her.

Monsieur Mollinet and a maître d'hôtel in the background whispered together.

“*Un type*,” the former confided. “See that he is well served and keep your eyes upon him. His pockets are full of money. He has dangerous enemies, they say, but fortunately he has also good friends.”

CHAPTER XIII

Ardrossen sat the following morning in his favourite seat on the Terrace, his back to the sea, a glimpse of the scarlet coats of the Hungarian Band visible through the swaying boughs of the lime trees, the ebb and flow of their music in his ears, and the panorama of the passers-by always before his eyes. Though there was sunshine, there were also occasional puffs of wind, such as sometimes disturb the tranquillity of the broad walk.

Ardrossen, being a man careful in his habits, wore a comfortable overcoat, a scarf tied neatly round his neck and very disfiguring spectacles shielding his eyes, with the aid of which he remained unrecognized and unnoticed. There was a constant clamour of conversation around him, a chorus of gay voices, little knots of people, mostly casual acquaintances, standing about everywhere talking over the latest scandal—the Baccarat of the night before, Lady O’Dowd’s latest and most amazing costume, the story of the gigolo who had been missing for three days and the husband who was expected back to-night, the latest war news from Spain, various exchange rumours. Everyone seemed interested and happy. But no one spoke to Mr. Ardrossen.

Lord Henry, very smart in a light grey tweed suit, a deep red carnation in his buttonhole and his Homburg hat at a slightly rakish angle, accosted Joan, who was walking with Rudolph Sagastrada.

“What about lunch at the Château de Madrid?” he suggested.
“Grand day for a view. I will telephone for a terrace table, on the chance.”

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Joan glanced towards her companion and looked a little doubtful.

“It is outside the Principality,” she observed, “and I am not quite sure that the Baron has not constituted us a sort of bodyguard to take care of Mr. Sagastrada.”

“Well, part of the bodyguard have deserted already,” Lord Henry told them. “I had a note from Lucille just before I left the hotel to say that they had gone off to Cannes for luncheon.”

“I had one, too, and no one knows where Sir Julian Townleyes is,” Joan said. “The Princess’s lunch was really rather important. They are playing tennis with Royalty. It was arranged a week ago. She is coming back early though. We are all to meet at the Sporting Club at five o’clock. Until then, I am afraid I am the only one, except the Domiloffs, left in charge.”

Lord Henry, who was a little too much inclined to have his own way, and would have liked very much to have lunched

alone with Joan, looked distastefully at her companion.

“My clothes are not very *chic*,” Rudolph declared, “but you can put fifty million in your pocket and still, if you may not step across the frontier of Monaco, you will not find it easy to buy wearing apparel. The flannel trousers I thought were not so bad, and this white jersey covers the pattern of a shirt which is loathesome. However, do not let me stand in anybody’s way. I will renew my parole. I will lunch in my room.”

“You will do nothing of the sort,” Joan insisted indignantly. “As if it mattered about your clothes.”

Lord Henry still looked as though he thought it did a great deal.

“Well, see you all later on,” he remarked, preparing to depart.

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“You will not forget,” Rudolph said, “that you are coming to my salvation dinner, Lord Henry. I should not have been here now but for that little episode at Beaulieu.”

“Thank you very much,” was the not too gracious reply. “*Au revoir*, then.”

He passed on. Rudolph touched his companion on the arm.

“Who is the stiff little man who seems to watch nobody, and yet watches everybody,” he asked, “on the seat there with a newspaper in his hand?”

Joan walked on for a few paces before she answered.

“I don’t know who he is,” she admitted. “His name is Ardrossen. I have been told that he is a Swedish timber merchant and again that he is an English chartered accountant. He plays Baccarat and he possesses more than anyone I ever knew the gift of silence. There is one thing more. He has the most wonderful double going about, or he is the most marvellous liar in the world.”

“He was pretending not to notice us but he was trying to hear all we said,” Rudolph remarked uneasily.

“You are getting too full of fancies,” she told him. “Wait until you get on the move again before you begin to worry.”

“I shall keep my word, of course, unless the Baron changes his mind,” he said, “but I am not too anxious to make that move. I am pretty certain that those two ruffians who were over at Beaulieu are still hanging around.”

She reflected for a moment. Probably he was right. There was murder in those men’s faces—that eager, lustful desire to kill which most people in the world know only from imagination. She had seen and recognized it.

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“But what have you done?” she demanded, “that anyone should want to kill you? To be a banker seems to me a harmless occupation.”

“I am also supposed to be a politician,” he reminded her.
“Everyone knew that I found the money for Rothmann’s paper.”

“But nowadays, except in Russia,” she argued, “men are not killed because of their political views.”

“What about Spain?”

“Spain is different. There is a civil war going on there.”

“There is a civil war going on in nearly every country of the world,” he told her. “The only thing is that it has burst through the soil in Spain and come out on the surface. In many other countries the battle is being fought just as furiously, but under the crust of the earth. Some day there may be a simultaneous eruption and then all the nations of the world will be fighting.”

“You must be very unhappy if you believe all this,” she said.

“In my calmer moments,” he replied, “I am a fatalist. I am not at all unhappy. I play polo, I play golf, I keep race horses, I have a flat in Paris for the sake of the theatres. I should keep a mistress there if that sort of thing amused me. I get as much out of life as other people but I know what is coming all the same.”

“I am not going to be frightened out of my life,” she declared, “especially on a glorious morning like this, with the music playing and the sun shining. You know that I came here for a holiday, and I have just had more than one glorious week of it. I am not going to be disturbed.”

“It is not my desire to talk seriously,” he assured her. “I will be as frivolous as you like. Shall I borrow that man’s Tyrolean hat and a monkey and a lute and sing to you of Avalon? You could go round and collect the francs.”

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“That is a much better note,” she laughed. “Seriously, where can you lunch?”

“Anywhere in the Principality,” he groaned.

“My dear man,” she scolded him, “why make such a hardship of it? Why don’t you get one of those small tables for two on the terrace of the hotel and invite me to look after you?”

“I should love it,” he declared eagerly.

“But only on condition that you don’t talk politics,” she warned him.

“We will talk of Heine and of the great loves of the world,” he promised. “Nothing of this ugly life.”

“Ugly life, indeed,” she remonstrated. “Look around you!”

“Look inside,” he countered quickly. “But then what should you know of it? You and your kind are the prizes for the survivors.”

She turned away from him a little impatiently. He was a difficult person to talk to in the midst of a gay and fashionable crowd. His fine features, his eyes full of fire, even his somewhat unkempt clothes, gave him an almost Byronic appearance. The soft cadence of his voice, through which rang so often those notes of passion, was unusual. She felt suddenly a little embarrassed and waved her hand to Foxley Brent, a well-known international *boulevardier* who dressed like a coxcomb but had the voice of a lion, and who was now exercising his favourite mastiff a few yards ahead. He paused at once.

“I am glad to see, young lady,” he said, “that you are not one of those who misuse the morning by staying in bed. You were up as late as I was,—I saw you dancing at four o’clock this morning,—but here we both are—you at twenty and I at seventy, as fresh as paint. Diana, shake hands with the young lady.”

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The dog sank on to its haunches and extended its paw, which Joan smoothed gently.

“Famous dog, that,” he confided. “Seven first prizes last year. Two this year already. I’ll show her in Paris next month and get another.”

He glanced curiously at the girl’s companion. She murmured a word of introduction.

“Any relation to the New York bankers?” Foxley Brent enquired.

“The heads of the firm are my cousins.”

“I know one of ’em—Nicholas Sagastrada—quite well. He does a bit of racing in the States. Sent some horses over to Nice one year but never did much good with them. I wish you good-morning, young lady, and you, too, sir. There is little Ninette over there from the night club. I must go and pat her on the back for getting up so early.”

He ambled off. Rudolph laughed softly to himself.

“How he hated my clothes, that old dandy,” he remarked. “He just could not take his eyes off my soft collar. It is a spick-and-span world here, is it not?”

“You can’t blame them,” she replied. “These people who come here just for a month’s holiday are different, of course, but the *habitués* cannot have very much to think about beside their gambling and their clothes. One seems so cut off,” she went on.

“All sorts of things may be happening in the outside world but they seem unreal when we read of them down here.”

He nodded.

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“The brain does not act normally,” he observed. “Moonshine instead of sunshine. The whole sonata of life written in a minor key. Tell me which table I am to engage for luncheon, please.”

They had reached the far end of the Terrace. They mounted the steps and crossed the road.

“That one in the corner,” she pointed out.

“I shall have to go up to the bank again for a few moments,” he said.

“Then I will order the table,” she told him. “Why do you draw any more money? Much better get drafts on the place you are going to when you leave here.”

He smiled rather thinly.

“I would if I knew where it was,” he replied as he waved his hat and started up the hill. . . .

Joan met Monsieur Mollinet, the hotel manager, in the lounge. He paused for a moment to pay his respects.

“Mademoiselle is finding Monte Carlo all that she expected?” he asked.

“A great deal more,” she assured him. “I think it is the most wonderful place in the universe. Everyone has been so kind to me, too. One makes friends here more easily than anywhere else in the world.”

The smile faded from his lips. He was watching Mr. Ardrossen crossing the foyer.

“Nevertheless,” he ventured, “one should have perhaps a little care. There are strange people who come here, you know, as well as charming ones. Mademoiselle is content with her room? There is nothing one can do for her?”

“You can tell the maître d’hôtel to keep that small table for two in the corner of the terrace there,” she pointed out, “at about half-past one.”

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“It shall be done,” Monsieur Mollinet promised, making his bow and turning towards the restaurant. “It is perhaps fortunate that Mademoiselle addressed herself to me. The table was engaged but given up by the Duc d’Orviato only a quarter of an hour ago, and it happened to be I who received the telephone message. You would like to order lunch, Mademoiselle?”

“I think,” she told him, “we will wait for inspiration.”

The first inspiration of Joan and her luncheon companion took them to the famous cocktail bar. The back row of easy chairs was filled and the rest of the place was rather a scrimmage, so they seated themselves upon high stools and indulged in light conversation with Louis while he mixed their cocktails. Louis, as he concluded that last delicate operation of hanging the twisted lemon rind over the side of the frosted glasses, leaned forward.

“Mademoiselle on her first morning here,” he said in a low tone, “begged me to point out any notabilities.”

“Quite right, Louis,” she assented eagerly. “Has anyone fresh arrived?”

Louis looked around for a moment with well assumed carelessness. Then he leaned forward once more.

“The stout gentleman with the grey moustache—he looks like a soldier—with his hair cut short—”

“Yes, yes,” she interrupted. “Who is he?”

“His name is General Müller. He flew to Marseilles from somewhere in the north of Europe, and came on by the Blue Train.”

There was a very grim look upon Rudolph’s face. Joan was still all eagerness.

“But who is he?” she asked. “I never heard of him.”

The barman smiled.

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“I shall take the pleasure of mixing you another cocktail,” he said, commencing the task. “This time I can see I must be very careful with the vermouth. So. Just one drop of Italian, I think. Mademoiselle, the gentleman I pointed out is the head of a new international police force.”

“What on earth is he doing down here?”

Louis smiled cryptically.

“I do not suppose any one of us is likely to know that. He arrived with a secretary and an attendant who looks as though for the first time in his life he is out of uniform. The secretary is out somewhere now. One does not know their business. And Mademoiselle,” Louis concluded as he prepared to obey an urgent call elsewhere, “it is perhaps wiser not to wish to know.”

She turned to Rudolph. His face was expressionless, but his

eyes were half-closed and she fancied that those long, delicate fingers of his were trembling.

“Courage, *mon ami*,” she whispered. “He is not likely to have come all this way, and so quickly, after you.”

Rudolph made no reply. His fingers strayed out towards his glass, held it firmly for a moment as though for a test, and then, raising it to his lips, he drained its contents. At that moment the swing doors were thrown open. Baron Domiloff, bareheaded and with his hands in his pockets, strolled in. He glanced round the room quickly, nodded to a few intimates, but, somewhat to Joan’s surprise, passed her and her companion without any greeting. He gave his left hand to Foxley Brent, who had just entered, and patted the mastiff. Then, as though recognizing him for the first time, he crossed to where General Müller was seated. He drew a chair from a small empty table.

“You permit?” he asked smiling as he seated himself.

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The big man half-rose and made a courteous bow. His voice when he spoke was unexpectedly low.

“It is without a doubt the Baron Domiloff?” he said.

The Baron nodded, tapped a cigarette on the table and looked for a moment out of the window.

“I have just received a visit from your secretary,” he said. “If you would step up to my office with me we could converse more agreeably.”

The General nodded acquiescence and rose to his feet.

“I am at your disposition, Baron,” he agreed. “You understand that the business is urgent.”

“My dear General, yes,” was the quiet reply. “All I shall ask you to remember is,” he went on, as they threaded their way through the tables, “that business is a word we do not often hear in Monte Carlo, and haste is unknown. I will do what I can to meet the situation which your secretary has explained to me, but it is not an easy matter.”

The General laid his hand upon the other’s shoulder.

“I have a letter in my pocket,” he confided, “which will perhaps change your attitude, *Monsieur le Baron*.”

Domiloff held open the swing door with a little bow.

“A year ago, most certainly, *mon général*,” he said. “Six months ago—perhaps. To-day—”

“Well—to-day?” the General repeated.

“It is the period of doubt,” was Domiloff’s cryptic reply as the door swung to after them.

CHAPTER XIV

Rudolph recovered his spirits in amazing fashion as soon as the two were seated at their pleasantly placed luncheon table in the angle of the terrace.

“I suppose you think I am a terrible coward,” he reflected, as they played with the *hors d’œuvres* and sipped some wonderful White Hermitage which he had found listed in a corner of the wine card. “I think sometimes that I am a coward. I think that all intellectuals must now and then feel fear because their apprehensions are more sensitive and vital.”

“I don’t blame you,” Joan assured him. “The only thing is that I don’t quite see what it’s all about.”

“If you did,” he said grimly, “you would not be sitting there quite so calmly. You have never heard, I suppose, of General Müller?”

She glanced vaguely across towards the glimpses of blue sea visible through the swaying boughs of the trees.

“General Müller . . .” she repeated. “You mean the man Louis pointed out just now? I never heard of him before.”

“In the innermost official circles of my country,” he said, “General Müller has been the man of blood. How on earth they have been able to spare him to come down here I cannot imagine. If it is really to make sure of taking my head back on a charger—I am flattered. Those other two butchers are hanging about still, I see. Look at them! One actually on the steps of the hotel talking to the Senegalese, the other on the seat with his back to the gardens.”

“Heavens!” Joan exclaimed. “How dare they come here? Why don’t you send word to the Baron?”

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Rudolph laughed at his companion’s gesture of consternation.

“Do not let them worry you, my dear friend,” he said quietly. “I think they are better left alone. They are simply butchers. They would think nothing of killing me in the way of business but they are not out to risk their own skins. So long as there are plenty of people around, I am safe from them.”

“What did they want you for up at the bank?” she asked a moment or two later.

He smiled.

“Nothing to do with money,” he told her. “Just a word or two

of warning. That is all. . . . Now advise me, Miss Joan. I have an unlimited credit. What shall I do with it? Shall I take the bank at Baccarat or shall I buy the Casino?"

"Wouldn't that be rather amusing?"

He shook his head doubtfully.

"A plaything one would soon tire of."

"It must seem strange," she reflected, "to be so overpoweringly wealthy. Tell me what you would rather do than anything else in the world."

"Bargain with the Almighty," he answered quickly. "Hand in my life to-day and be born again in a hundred years."

"What an odd idea!"

"It seems so, but think. There is no hope, no possible chance of any world settlement in any lesser space of time. The men who live to-day will have to toil for the sake of posterity. What is the good of that? Fifty—seventy years of blundering progress. We can only prepare the way. We can give our passions and our energies and our wealth, what we have of genius—and we die like everyone else before our task is accomplished. Two generations later may reap the benefit. We ourselves shall see nothing of the new world. A man needs to have a will of iron to stick at it. Sometimes I feel terribly weak. I would like to give it all up, just give myself to music and to love and to sunshine, to sailing my boat and racing my horses, drinking the fine wines of France and Germany and having with me always the one person who made life for me. Why not? Why do any of us sacrifice our lives, I wonder?"

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"Fortunately for posterity," Joan confessed, "I am not called upon to make any of those sacrifices. It seems to me that one would have to have a very strong moral or religious urge to deliberately sacrifice so much for the coming generation."

"Well, perhaps I will not do a thing about it," he decided, sipping the fine Burgundy which the *sommelier* had just brought them reverently in a cradle. "Smell it, my dear companion. It is like violets, violets happy to be released from that dull bottle—asking for the sunshine. Tell me about yourself. Have you ever been engaged? Have you had lovers? Have you had ambitions?"

"I have been engaged once at College in America," she answered. "It only lasted a term or two. We had no future, either of us, and flirtations did not amuse me."

"You could never be like some of these great women of history," he meditated. "Take a lover for a week, a month, a year, to help you drink more deeply of the wine of life, then finish at a second's notice, with a crop of memories like

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flowers that never fade—memories to bring out and dwell upon when life went ill. I had a dear friend, I remember, who fashioned her life in that way. She needed love and she took it. Then when the time came that she had to make a great alliance, she put it all away. She had her memories. They were all that she wanted out of that side of life. She is still doing her duty—a great lady in a great place.”

“Wild sort of talk—all this to me—a humble secretarial journalist, with two maiden aunts in Washington!” Joan declared. “I would have you know, Mr. Rudolph Sagastrada, that I am a well-brought-up American and you are talking of life in a manner which we do not understand.”

“You are not plastic enough yet,” he told her. “You have not soul enough. It may come to you some day.”

“Not to me,” she answered. “I have not the slightest objection to hearing you talk in this wild fashion and it doesn’t matter to me how many lovers the Princess, for instance, or any of our friends, might have. I have a limitless toleration for everyone except myself.”

“You should read Spinoza.”

“I don’t want to read anyone just now. I am content with you for a companion and this delightful lunch. Actually peaches!”

“They are part of the forthcoming banquet,” he confided. “They sent a dozen *chasseurs* out to search for them everywhere between here and Cannes.”

He peeled one delicately and passed it across to her.

“Sip your wine with it very slowly,” he advised her. “Let us go on talking about ourselves and our own particular little niche in life. The world is too vast a place. I have always given too much time and thought to my fellow creatures. Tell me whether you were always as obdurate as this.”

“And always shall be,” she replied. “What would interest me, would be to know what you propose to do after the next few days, supposing you can no longer find safety here.”

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“If I am alive,” he answered, bending forward to look once more at the man seated on the bench across the way, “I shall very likely be locked into an aeroplane with the great General and his aide-de-camp and the executioner. What a sell for them if we did not mount quickly enough over the mountains here and crashed! I think the world would do very well indeed without General Müller, but a great many of my friends would miss me very much.”

“Conceit,” she murmured.

“I am not conceited,” he assured her. “Remember, wealth

counts for everything nowadays. They have robbed us all they could. They have drained everything they could away from the firm but we have brains there that have been working for years, just as acute as their men of finance, and I am still a very rich man. Not that it is likely to do me any good, that I can see, after the end of the week. Paradise, hell, extinction or anything! What a lot I may know! No good trying to solve riddles, though, unless you have the brain to understand them. You will be very careful with the coffee, *maître d'hôtel*," he went on, turning to the man who was always in the shadows near their table. "Very hot, very strong, but perfectly strained."

"It is at your command, Monsieur," the man replied. "I make it myself the moment you say the word. Jean is bringing the *fine* and warming the glasses. It is Jean who will take care of your party, Jean and I between us."

The Baron appeared on the terrace a few moments later. He lit a cigarette and exchanged greetings with half-a-dozen people. He came down presently towards their table and leaned gracefully against the wall.

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"You have been well served, I trust?" he asked.

"Perfectly," Joan replied. "Monsieur Mollinet has been out himself. This place is a paradise, Baron, for the epicure."

"Yes, the day-by-day result is all right," Domiloff admitted. "Things are in a curious state, though."

"You would not think there was anything wrong, to watch the people," Joan observed, "and to listen to the music over at the Café de Paris. They play divinely, Baron. Just as well as that orchestra for which you pay such an amazing price in the Sporting Club."

He nodded.

"I know," he agreed, "but then they only play the music of their country and here the one cry is for variety."

The coffee and *fine* arrived. A place was made for Domiloff.

"I have been thinking," the latter said, lazily lighting another of his endless chain of cigarettes and turning towards Rudolph. "You have kept strictly, I notice, to your parole, but I am afraid I will have to draw the band a little tighter still."

"Well, I am not thinking of leaving sanctuary just at the moment," Rudolph replied. "You see that horrible-looking fellow over on the seat there and the man who is pacing slowly up and down in front of the Casino? Those are the two would-be executioners who tried to snatch me away from the world at Beaulieu. They are the men you and Sir Julian Townley saved me from. One of them murdered Paul Rothmann. I cannot understand why your Nice police have not arrested him."

Domiloff nodded.

“We have them marked down,” he said shortly. “We are doing everything we can for you. No strangers are allowed in the Sporting Club unless we really know something about them, and those two men you have been speaking of have been refused entrance cards even into the Casino.”

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“What about General Müller?”

Domiloff knocked the ash from his cigarette.

“He is rather a poser, that one, is he not? I have left him sending off cables while his aide-de-camp is trying to telephone. There was a little trouble brooding over this place, my young friend Sagastrada, before you came, but you seem to have stirred it up to boiling pitch. Have you made any plans, may I ask, on your own account, for the future?”

“None at all,” was the cheerful reply. “I am rather hoping you will ask me to stay on here.”

Domiloff smiled.

“You are a very agreeable young man,” he remarked, “although I do not like your clothes.”

“Wait until you see the contents of the five trunks which have just arrived on the omnibus from the station,” Rudolph rejoined. “Both my servants seem to have come along, too. I hope they will turn me out decently, for the rest of my stay at any rate.”

“I have not the slightest doubt that you will pass muster under those new conditions,” Domiloff assured him. “Our only trouble is that I am afraid we have not sufficient bodyguard to keep you on here indefinitely. Besides, it is not what we are out for. It is true that we want to make money, but this in the main is a pleasure resort, not a sanctuary for political refugees. To tell you the truth,” he went on, with sudden seriousness, “I am having a devil of a time with General Müller. I rather think that he is now telephoning for a warship. I can see him anchoring in the bay there and training his guns upon the Casino, if we do not deliver you up!”

“When that time comes I shall offer myself as a sacrifice,” Rudolph declared, “rather than that one strip of plaster should fall from those sacred walls.”

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“You have a few more hours, anyhow, in which to drink and flirt, to gamble and make love,” Domiloff told him. “All those four things you can do better here than anywhere else in the world. Make the most of your time. It is all that I can say at the present moment.”

He left them with a good-natured little nod of farewell to Rudolph and a more formal gesture to Joan. They watched him thread his way amongst the tables and disappear in the restaurant proper.

“There goes a man,” Rudolph said, “who has had all that he wanted of pleasure, not only here in Monte Carlo but in St. Petersburg, Paris, Rome—wherever he chanced to be—and paid for it in charm.”

“It is comprehensible,” Joan admitted.

CHAPTER XV

Baron Domiloff, on the evening of that momentous dinner party, was having an exceedingly busy time. He glanced at the card brought in by Tashoff, frowned slightly and studied it for a moment without speech. It was a very presentable-looking card of its sort. The plain printing was beautifully engraved and the quality of the pasteboard was of the best. The information it gave was scanty.

MR. STEPHEN ARDROSSEN <i>St. James's Club, Travellers' Club,</i> <i>London. Paris.</i>
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There was no permanent address, no indication of the status of the visitor.

"Know anything of this fellow?" Domiloff asked.

"Nothing definite, sir," was the prompt reply. "He has rather the reputation of living the life of a recluse. On the other hand, he sometimes plays high in the Sporting Club. If I might be permitted—"

"Proceed."

"I believe, sir, Monsieur Mollinet might be able to give us some information about him."

Domiloff reflected for a moment.

"That will do later," he decided. "At present you can show him in."

Mr. Ardrossen was duly admitted to the very handsome and tastefully furnished apartment in which the presiding genius of the place occasionally welcomed a distinguished guest. His entrance was characteristic. He contented himself with a slight bow and accepted with a word of thanks the chair to which Domiloff pointed. The latter leaned back in his place and looked speculatively at his visitor. He was a person, without a doubt, as others had remarked, aiming at the unobtrusive. His clothes, his linen, his tie, everything he wore was the best of its sort but chosen as though to escape notice. Domiloff had a queer idea that this was a stranger with whom it might be well to be on one's guard.

"What can I do for you, sir?" he asked.

Ardrossen's grey eyes, which had seemed to be studying the pattern of the carpet, were raised. He looked at his questioner

with a searching gaze as though for the first time he were curious to know what sort of man he might be, and Domiloff began to have still further ideas about his visitor.

“I called,” Ardrossen explained, “because I think that as day by day the activities which you have undertaken are leading you into deeper water, you will presently need help. A few words between us just at the present moment might be advantageously spoken.”

“What do you mean by my increasing activities?” Domiloff asked curiously.

“When I first knew this place,” Ardrossen replied, “it was managed by one man. As years rolled on a committee was formed, managers of departments spread out all the time, the Administration was under the guidance, if not the subjection, of the reigning Prince of Monaco. Coming to our own time, a man who was not quite strong enough for the post became a sort of dictator, failed on one of the slippery places and disappeared. The bad years came. *The Société des Bains de Mer* let the money of its shareholders drip through their fingers. Then a stronger man stepped to the front. There was a Cromwellian interlude in the Principality of which few people know. How far he would have succeeded in bringing back prosperity to the place no one will ever know, for again there was a rude shock in world events. The great war was over but its aftereffects remained. A terrible wave of subterranean anarchy and communism and general discontent upset the whole of Europe. For the first time even the Monégasques pricked up their ears and listened. They are listening now. The situation is critical.”

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Domiloff had remained steadily silent without the twitch of an eyebrow. At his visitor's pause he lit a cigarette. His face had fallen somehow into grimmer lines. He was no longer the great aristocrat, the man of pleasure toying with a child's kingdom. He had a different air.

“What is your concern in these matters, Mr. Ardrossen?” he asked. “What is your calling in life?”

“I,” Ardrossen confided, “am a spy.”

There was nothing about the speaker to suggest that he was talking for effect. He had the air of a man who was stating a plain fact.

“A spy? In whose interests?”

Ardrossen smiled—if it could be called a smile. At any rate, there were faint lines at the corners of his eyes which came into vision.

“The true spy would never answer that question—nor shall I,” he said. “The true spy works for a hidden master and his right

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hand and his left are strangers, but there are many times in his life when he comes into contact with other interests—interests which he could serve or injure. One of those moments has arrived with me. I am not in your confidence, Baron Domiloff, but I am inclined to believe that there is no other man in Monte Carlo who knows that you and Pierre Regnier are the joint rulers of the Principality. There is probably no one else who knows that the interests of Royalty over Monaco have ceased, that the meetings of the deputies over which Pierre Regnier presides are directed from the background by you.”

“This,” Domiloff acknowledged, “is very interesting.”

“A list of your shareholders to-day,” Ardrossen continued, “would make strange reading. It would be discovered that three parts of the shares stand in your name. Proxy for whom? It does not matter.”

“Do you mean to tell me that you know even that?” the Baron demanded, forced for the first time from his nonchalant manner.

“Of course I know,” Ardrossen replied. “It is my business to know. For the moment I am not concerned—perhaps I never may be. I am more concerned in the attitude you propose to take towards the young man whom you are sheltering here, the young man Rudolph Sagastrada, the young man who is entertaining the whole of fashionable Monte Carlo at dinner to-night.”

Domiloff bowed ironically.

“I congratulate you, sir,” he said. “Your sources of information, considering the smallness of this community, are amazingly correct. Still, what you know, you know. And then?”

“I require to know what course of action you propose to take with regard to this young man, Rudolph Sagastrada? Do you propose to let him take his chance, are you going to hand him over to General Müller or hold him here more or less a prisoner while you consult with the French Government?”

Domiloff raised his eyebrows slightly. He took up his visitor’s card from the desk, glanced at it for a few moments and replaced it. Then he leaned back in his chair.

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“Mr. Ardrossen,” he said, “this has been quite an interesting talk. You have told me more about my position here in Monte Carlo and Monaco than I knew of myself. Now that you have adopted the rôle of questioner, however, I find the conversation less interesting. I do not know for whom you are working, I do not know where your interests lie, I do not see any reason why I should take you into my confidence. That is plain speaking, is it not?”

“So also is this,” Ardrossen replied. “Answer my questions

concerning Rudolph Sagrastrada, tell me your intentions with regard to him, or this famous dinner party which he is giving to-night may not take place.”

Domiloff lit a cigarette thoughtfully.

“That is rather a curious threat.”

“I don’t look upon it as a threat,” was the cold reply. “I look upon it as an undertaking.”

Domiloff tore off a page from a memorandum book which was on the desk and scribbled a few words upon it with his pencil held in his right hand, while he pressed an electric button with his left. Tashoff appeared almost at once. Domiloff handed the paper over to him.

“See to that, Tashoff,” he directed.

“Certainly, sir.”

Very softly and very quietly, Mr. Ardrossen had risen to his feet. Tashoff was in the act of passing him but felt a sudden grip of steel upon his wrist. The paper fluttered from his nerveless fingers. Ardrossen picked it up, glanced at the few written words and tore it in two.

“Merely a tactical error, Baron,” he said quietly. “You must not send for *gendarmes* to arrest one with whose complete identity you are unacquainted. Permit me.”

He drew a slim morocco pocketbook from some hidden place in the left hand side of his coat, extracted from it a half-sheet of parchment on which were stamped some official arms and passed it to Domiloff. The latter read the few lines it contained, glanced at the seal and the signature. He replaced the document and returned the pocketbook. Ardrossen stowed it away in its hiding place.

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“I have not yet found it necessary,” he acknowledged, “to use this—what shall we call it?—*laissez passer*, but at any rate it may serve to convince you that our interests may not be wholly at variance. Send your secretary away, if you please. We will discuss our plans for this young man.”

Domiloff, who had risen to his feet, stood for a few moments in stony silence. There was nothing in his expression to denote the fact that he was facing one of the crises of his life. There was no indication whatever of the decision he was presently to make. Ardrossen, to all appearance, was left the victor in this duel of words. Suddenly, however, Domiloff smiled. It was a smile which might well have been the smile of a man admitting defeat but it left Ardrossen with a weird sensation of uneasiness.

“You can leave us, Tashoff,” he said to the secretary. “Mr.

Ardrossen and I will finish our conversation.”

Domiloff tapped a cigarette upon the table and lit it. He sat down and leaned back in his chair. He was no longer the debonair man of leisure. His gravity matched his companion’s imperturbability. They both seemed to realize that the battle of words was over and that they were up against stern and fearsome reality.

“We will, if you please,” Ardrossen said, “pass on from the discussion of this purely local change. It is of import only because it has happened at this particular moment. You realize, without a doubt, that in all probability it is you, Baron Domiloff, who must decide whether in less than a week the new European war commences.”

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“I do not admit that,” Domiloff replied. “Even supposing I offer to this young man the protection of the Principality, I cannot bring myself to believe that any great power would accept that as a *casus belli*.”

“General Müller is in the Principality,” Ardrossen pointed out, “to demand that you hand over Sagastrada. You have temporized with him, I understand, until your new charter was signed. That was signed last night. Immediately the fact is proclaimed, he will renew his demand, but what will be your reply?”

“That is a question,” Domiloff declared, “which I do not feel called upon to answer.”

“There is no necessity for you to answer it,” Ardrossen assured him. “If you refuse there is a small warship lying outside Barcelona which in a few hours’ time could reduce the whole of the Principality to a mass of smouldering ashes. That, of course, would be an incredible happening. On the other hand, the alternative is that you are driven to make a humiliating apology and hand over the young man, or you appeal for protection to France. If she gives it you are responsible for the war that follows; if she refuses it you are in the same cul-de-sac. You are in a difficult position, Baron Domiloff. Why do you not admit it?”

“I admit it freely,” Domiloff acknowledged. “Does it help the situation?”

“Very much,” Ardrossen replied. “I will treat you with a confidence which you have denied to me, Baron. I will tell you that for forty-eight hours a special military conference has been sitting receiving hourly reports from a certain district of France and having hourly consultations with the government. You are a military man, Baron.”

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Domiloff shook his head.

“I fought with Nicolas, but I was only a boy,” he said.

“I will tell you what all the world knows,” Ardrossen continued. “France to-day, for all her so-called wealth, owes more money than any other country. The greater part of that money has been sunk in the most marvellous scheme of defence which any engineers in the world have ever conceived or carried into effect. That scheme is under rigid and close observation at the present moment. I am only a spy. I can tell you only what I know and suspect for what it is worth. A small majority of the French Cabinet and the French military authorities believe that this is the hour for war. Until they decide one way or the other you must temporize.”

Domiloff was silent for several moments.

“You talk like a man of knowledge, Ardrossen,” he confessed.

“I am,” was the calm reply. “I will tell you one thing more which may convince you that I am also a person of system. I was within fifty yards of the spot eleven days ago when the warrant for the arrest of Sagastrada was signed. I knew of it days before any movement was made. I knew, too, in which direction Rothmann would urge him to try and escape. I flew to Paris, boarded the Blue Train and arrived here, as you know. I offer my advice to you, Baron Domiloff. You are a diplomat and you should know the meaning of the word procrastination. It will be a matter of four days—no more.”

Ardrossen rose to his feet and picked up his hat. Domiloff rang the bell. It was perhaps typical of the two men, typical of the whole interview, that no further word was spoken between them. Ardrossen, with a little bow, followed Tashoff out of the room.

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CHAPTER XVI

At a quarter to eight that evening the bar at the Hôtel de Paris was packed up to and beyond the limits of its capacity. Additional chairs had been sent for, people were seated even on the arms of the *fauteuils* and every stool at the bar was occupied. The hubbub was deafening. Lucille, whose voice like her person was charming but *petite*, leaned back in her chair, with Lord Henry on one of its arms and Townleyes on the other.

“Like this,” she explained, “one of you can repeat to me what people on either side are saying, then I shall hear all the gossip. The last thing I heard was that the quails are coming over by aeroplane from Egypt and Céline is going to sing.”

“Both rumours, although founded on fact,” Lord Henry assured her. “I met Céline just now on the stairs. She is cutting the last act to-night and giving her understudy a chance by permission of the management. She is to sing, I think, at half-past eleven.”

“I have selected my dinner already,” the Prince remarked. “Plovers’ eggs, nightingales’ tongues and larks’ breasts.”

Lucille sighed.

“You have the most exotic tastes for the unattainable, Léon,” she protested. “I suppose that is why you really never appreciate me.”

“My dear,” he complained, “of all the women I know, you are the most unattainable to your poor husband.”

“Men have been dragged through the divorce court for less than that,” she warned him. “Should you consider me unattainable, Henry?”

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“I have been trying to find out for the last five years,” he lamented. “This little domestic party at the present moment is a proof of my failure.”

“We shall shock Miss Haskell,” Lucille said, glancing across at her.

“A fortnight ago you might have,” Joan admitted. “Not now. I am beginning to understand that everything in this little corner of the world begins like a firecracker and ends in talk.”

“Poor child,” Lord Henry sympathized. “You shall change your mind this evening. I will propose to you during the first dance.”

“I would rather have it in writing,” she suggested. “Please send

me a note to my room and get someone to witness your signature.”

“Pooh, this is all too serious,” the Prince observed, his fingers toying for a moment with his closely cut moustache. “Miss Haskell has no taste for unfledged youths like you two. She prefers to exchange whispers with a *roué* of my type.”

“You apple-cheeked little cherub,” his wife murmured, “flattering yourself that you could ever be called a *roué*! I could almost more easily imagine Henry here as the unfledged youth.”

“We are all talking a lot of nonsense,” Townleyes remarked.

“Doesn’t everyone in this part of the world?” Lucille asked, stretching out her hand towards the tray of cocktails which Louis had just brought from the bar. “Louis, you are the only sensible person in this room. You have the art, too, of hiding in your cocktails the things we scarcely dare whisper.”

“She means the absinthe,” her husband muttered.

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“All the same,” Townleyes went on, “we are bound to indulge in a lot of nonsense here because if we began to talk seriously we should probably end by going crazy.”

“I don’t care a bit what’s going on in the world,” the Princess declared. “We are in Monte Carlo.”

“But I am not so sure,” Townleyes said, “that the shadows may not be looming over us. What, for instance, will become of our wonderful host?”

“And where is he now?” Joan asked. “That seems to me to be more to the point.”

“I should imagine,” Townleyes suggested, “that Domiloff has put him somewhere in cold storage—locked him up out of the way. He is bursting with money now that his banks have found out where he is.”

“It must be rather intriguing for a young man who has had the world at his feet to know that he is badly wanted by the police at pretty well every frontier,” Lord Henry observed.

Domiloff suddenly appeared through the swing door leading into the hotel. A dozen people shouted to him to join them, one or two even rose from their places to struggle towards him, but he waved them back with a courteous gesture.

“Presently,” he begged. “Excuse me.”

Somehow or other he made his way to the far end of the room to where the Princess’s party was established in the bow window. He went straight to Joan.

“Miss Haskell,” he said, “I wonder whether you could spare me a moment. We could stand on the steps outside there.”

She rose to her feet doubtfully. She was still in her tennis clothes, a scarlet wrap hanging from her shoulders and a muffler of the same colour around her neck.

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“Do you really want to speak to me, Baron?” she asked.

“If you please,” he apologized. “I will not keep you more than a few minutes. Lucille, I beg your pardon for disturbing your party. Miss Haskell can return immediately.”

“No fresh news, Baron?” the Princess enquired.

“Nothing, dear lady,” he assured her. “Everything goes well for the great dinner to-night.”

“Where is the young man?”

The Baron shrugged his shoulders but made no reply. He led Joan out on to the steps and, with a glance at the stream of passers-by, on to the front door of the hotel and into the foyer. He chose a retired corner and drew his chair close to hers.

“Miss Haskell,” he confided, “that young man in whom we are all more or less interested presents just now a somewhat formidable problem.”

“I’m sorry,” she murmured, “but how am I concerned in it?”

“He seems to talk to you more than to any of the others. Do you believe that you have any influence over him at all?”

“Not the slightest,” she assured her questioner. “I think the only reason he talks to me a little more is because all the rest of them are so wildly frivolous and every now and then he has these serious fits.”

“I do not wonder at his being serious,” Domiloff remarked grimly. “I could not make those others believe it if I tried, but I am convinced that there are people down here bent on getting him back to his own country by fair means or foul. Müller, who has just arrived, for instance. He is practically chief of the new international police and he is here for no other purpose.”

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“Why are you telling me all this?” she wondered. “Is there any way in which I could help?”

“I believe there is,” he told her frankly. “Outside in the bay there is an American steamer just arrived on a trip round the world. She is sailing under the American flag, which ought to secure him against arrest if he once gets on board, and so far as regards—er—the sort of thing that happened to his friend Paul Rothmann, I should imagine he would be safer there than anywhere else I can think of.”

“What does he say about it himself?” Joan asked.

“He is not very polite,” Domiloff admitted. “He says he would rather go to prison than be cooped up with a lot of strangers for six months. You see,” he went on, “Rudolph Sagastrada, although he is in business as a financier, is a young man of very fine tastes. He likes the best in life of food and drink, pictures and music, scenery and women. There would be a hundred things on the ordinary tourist steamer which would grate against his sensibilities and I suppose very few compensations. It would be just the same,” he continued hurriedly, “if it were a steamer of British or any other nationality, only he feels—and I think he is quite right—that there would be very few whom he met with whom he would be able to exchange anything in the shape of ideas.”

“But where do I come in?” Joan asked.

Domiloff avoided the point.

“He has shown a marked partiality for your society,” he reminded her. “I thought you might talk to him about it.”

“I don’t see what good talking would do,” she replied. “You have probably pointed out the whole situation to him. He would be safe on that boat if you can manage to get him there and he is not safe anywhere else. I can’t see why, if he has any common sense at all, he hesitates.”

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“I can,” Domiloff asserted. “He is afraid of being bored. I recognize the type. Every susceptibility he has would be offended. He would hate the whole time, unless . . .”

“Don’t mind me,” Joan begged. “Say what you want to.”

“Unless there was someone on board who was agreeable to him and shared his tastes.”

“Meaning me?”

“Meaning you.”

She laughed softly. Then she was silent for a few minutes. She found it quite impossible, however, to concentrate her thoughts upon the ideas called up by her companion’s tentative suggestion. She was looking at her feet—extraordinarily pretty feet she had—rather admiring her stockings. Everyone declared that her legs, which she was not bashful about showing on the tennis courts, were the most beautiful in the place. She was congratulating herself upon having changed at the dressing rooms before she came up. Then suddenly she remembered that she was supposed to be considering something very much more serious. Of course, the whole thing was ridiculous. She was not at all sure that she ought not to be offended, except that no one ever was offended with Domiloff.

“You are not seriously suggesting,” she asked, “that I should go off alone with Rudolph Sagastrada, give him six months of my company and sacrifice my reputation to save him from boredom, even though it were to save his life?”

Domiloff wrinkled his fine forehead. More than ever, he had the appearance of an ambassador.

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“A union with that young man,” he insisted, “should not present itself in the light of an impossibility. He has one sister who is a Princess, married, at any rate, to demi-semi-Royalty. She might be a queen one day, if there was any readjustment of Balkan affairs. One of his brothers is chairman of the Polo Club in New York and could marry absolutely anyone he wanted to out there. Then his Uncle Leopold still entertains what remains of the great world in Paris and his collection of pictures is the finest in France. Rudolph Sagastrada, even if he is hounded out of his country, is not a person to be dismissed lightly.”

“But my dear Baron,” Joan expostulated, “your young *protégé* has said many charming things to me but he has not asked me to marry him.”

Domiloff was not inclined to consider that fact of much importance.

“Perhaps you have not given him the opportunity,” he remarked.

“Why should I when such an idea has never entered into my own head? As a matter of fact, I should think that since the time we brought him home from Beaulieu, he has paid more attention to the Princess de Hochepierre than to me.”

“Lucille is perhaps more accessible,” Domiloff pointed out. “The young man is just the type with whom she loves to indulge in a little gentle flirtation. But we know Lucille. We know just how far that would take her. I am not asking you to do anything stupid or crude. That, I know, would be out of the question. My suggestion is that you have a few words with Sagastrada to-night and try to get him interested in this scheme.”

Joan laughed again, her peculiar self-communing laugh. It was the mirth of one sharing a humorous idea with oneself.

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“I came to Monte Carlo,” she confided, “with a thousand dollars for a month’s holiday—a well-brought-up young woman with very definite ideas of how I was going to spend my time and my money. My ideas certainly did not include anything like offering myself as companion to a hunted young multi-millionaire.”

“Never mind about that just now,” he begged. “I have lent Rudolph Sagastrada part of my new suite in the Sporting Club. It enables me to place sentries at his door. I should like to take

you up there. Perhaps he might offer us a cocktail before we change for this great function. We can tell him that we were driven out of the bar by the crowd. It would only take us a few minutes to get there along the passages.”

She hesitated for a few moments. Then she rose to her feet with a little laugh which was not altogether devoid of nervousness.

“Very well,” she agreed. “They say that no one ever denies you anything in Monte Carlo. I’ll try and see if I can be eloquent about the tourist steamer.”

The salon in which Domiloff had installed his young visitor, although it was essentially a man’s room, seemed to hold everything possible in the way of luxury. Rudolph, dressed in his own well-fitting clothes, looked very much at his ease and in keeping, seated there in a comfortable easy chair, a shaded lamp by his side and a volume of his beloved Heine’s *Florentine Nights* in his hand. He sprang to his feet at the entrance of his visitors.

“What a relief to welcome someone human,” he declared.
“That sentry at the door in uniform, and such uniform, makes me feel like Royalty under restraint. Shall I play the host or will you, Baron?”

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“I am going to ring, if I may, for a cocktail,” Domiloff suggested. “People are queuing up for drinks in the bar—a level hundred of them, I should think, and all talking at the same time.”

“I am not quite sure,” Rudolph confided, turning to Joan with a pleasant smile, “whether I am a prisoner or a guest, but order the cocktails by all means, Baron. Here comes your own butler.”

“Get out one of my shakers,” Domiloff instructed, “some large and small glasses, a bottle of Clicquot, the gin and French vermouth, and send up some ice. We will make them ourselves, if you do not mind, Sagastrada. The whole place is in confusion with this big dinner of yours.”

“No bad news then?” the young man asked. “I am allowed to be host at my own party?”

“You are indeed,” Domiloff assured him. “I have given you the run of the place until to-morrow morning and I do not break my word. This for the moment is my little kingdom. Legalized arrest I should protect you from anywhere in the Principality, but it is only within these walls that I can protect you from these strange gentlemen who seem to be travelling all round Europe nowadays with the weapons of the gangster concealed about their persons.”

Joan drew off her wash-leather gloves.

“Would you like me to make the cocktails, Baron?” she suggested.

“The voice of a divinity,” Domiloff declared with a sigh of relief. “I have a hundred things to do but first of all listen to me, Rudolph. I understand that you wish me to ask whomever I think worth while to the party.”

“You have *carte blanche*, Baron,” Sagastrada assured him. “Ask as many as the room will hold. All that I demand from you in return is that you arrange my table for me and that I have my friends within speaking distance. There is your divine wife, for instance, who gave me permission half-an-hour ago to call her by her *prénom* Lydia, the Princess, of course, and Miss Haskell as near as possible.”

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“One of my secretaries will see to all that,” Domiloff promised him. “You will receive in the foyer, the whole of which is being curtained off. The dinner is going to cost you not a small fortune but a large one. I have never before spent so much money belonging to another man!”

“There are certain conditions in life,” Rudolph observed, “where money does not matter in the least. It has been an encumbrance to me up till now, for I am sure that I should have been a poet if I had not been born a banker. The more you strip me of the easier I shall find it to get some of my thoughts on to paper. Ruin me, Baron, with pleasure. I am a willing victim.”

“Hear him talk,” Domiloff laughed. “Not one of the Rothschilds I ever met was quite so contemptuous of his possessions.”

“So far as I can remember,” Rudolph rejoined, “not one of the Rothschilds was ever placed in such a position as I am. If you are running the risk of a bullet in your chest at any moment, you do not sit counting your pennies. You spend them while you have the chance!”

Domiloff drank his Martini quickly and turned away.

“I am going to leave Miss Haskell to entertain you until she has to go and change,” he said. “I shall be back in plenty of time to escort you up to the reception place. Ring for anything you want,” he added, looking back from the door. . . .

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Rudolph established his guest in a comfortable chair and took over the business of mixing the cocktails. With a beautifully frosted glass in his hand he seated himself opposite to her.

“It is kind of you to come and comfort me in my solitude,” he said. “That dear fellow, Domiloff, was absolutely brutal this afternoon. He would not even let me go into the rooms until tonight. Must be the old General who has disturbed him.”

"I think he is quite right to take every precaution," she declared.

"Good tennis?" he asked.

"No one was playing well," she replied. "The Princess insisted that she was too excited about to-night."

"It is very kind of everyone to be so interested in my party," he said earnestly. "I shall never forget how charming everyone has been down here. The way I was rushed away from Beaulieu, too. It was marvellous! Tell me why you are looking so serious, Miss Haskell?"

"Well, just at that moment," she confided, "I was thinking how well you spoke English."

"All my family are born linguists," he told her. "We seem to have all the minor accomplishments and yet we cannot keep out of mischief."

"Have you any idea what is going to happen to you to-morrow?"

"Not the slightest. Has Domiloff made up his mind to throw me to the lions?"

"That is rather his idea," she replied, "only the lions in your case will be the tourist steamer that's lying off the harbour."

Rudolph shuddered.

"I would rather stay here. It is something to say, for I am inclined towards cowardice, you know, yet I would rather face a certain amount of danger and remain here."

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"I don't think that the Baron wants you to remain here," she told him.

"You seem to want me to go," he complained gloomily.

"I do not," she assured him. "I like talking to you. I should miss you very much."

He smiled across at her from his place, a queer smile, for at that moment it seemed to make his pale, drawn features almost like the features of a sick man.

"Then come with me," he invited. "You said you came here wanting a holiday. I will give you one. We need not take any notice of the people on the boat. I will show you Athens as it ought to be shown. I have friends there and I know that we should be perfectly safe—"

"My dear man," she interrupted, "how do you suppose I could get ready to go round the world as companion to a strange man

with less than twelve hours' notice? We American girls may be adventurous, Mr. Sagastrada, but we don't do that sort of thing!"

"Why not?"

She shrugged her shoulders. He persisted.

"Why not? What is there against it?"

"It might bore me. I don't care about personally conducted cruises."

"I will save you from that," he promised. "I will be your guide."

"I wonder where you would lead me."

He rose suddenly to his feet. The light had flamed into his soft dark eyes.

"This room is insufferably hot," he declared. "Forgive me."

He threw open the French windows. His outstretched hand invited her to his side. Below was the Casino blazing with lights. The stars were pale in a filmy sky, but the moon, a deep orange red, was every moment becoming more evident. The mantle of hills seemed like a vast velvety blanket through which little pinholes of lights were beginning to show themselves.

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"Someone painted this," he muttered. "Every one of the scenes in *The Divine Comedy*. It is not real—it could not be. Look out there."

He pointed to where, eastwards from the Casino, the great liner was lying with lights blazing from every porthole. The wind which fanned their cheeks, a little dry with the heat of the room, brought with it a flavour of the sea and the flowering shrubs from the gardens.

"Our refuge," he pointed out, with a wave of the hand downwards.

"Not mine, necessarily," she replied. "Yours—perhaps."

"Why will you not come with me—Joan?" he asked.

"Why should I?" she answered. "I am not in need of safety. I have no enemies that I know of. Life here is marvellously pleasant."

"It will not be so amusing when I have gone," he assured her.

"Someone will take your place. Life is like that. Before the smoke from those three stacks has finished fouling the skies, I

shall have found someone else to talk nonsense to and you will be only thinking of the joy of not having to listen for footsteps behind you or peer round the corners in the unlighted places.”

“I shall be lonely,” he said.

“So might I be if I came with you.”

His sensitive lips twitched and she would have recalled the words if it had not been too late.

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“I’m sorry,” she went on, “but to-night I am indulging in a fit of profound egoism. They say that a woman can never learn to be happy until she has learnt to be selfish. Men seem somehow or other to have drifted into the idea that the only place for a woman in the world is to become the willing or unwilling partner of a man’s passion, or his sentiment, or if he is a weakling his nurse. I don’t see any reason, Rudolph, why I should leave Monte Carlo and travel round the world in that steamer with you just to make you a little lighter-hearted.”

“Do you know what they said about you the other day?” he asked abruptly.

“Don’t disturb my good opinion of myself,” she begged.

“They said that you were a girl with a delightful disposition, that you were charming in every way, but that you were American to the backbone and that meant that you would never be capable of sacrifice.”

“Why should I make sacrifices?” she demanded. “People make them for the sake of love or strong duty. I am not impelled by either. I am here in the world to be made happy and to help myself to happiness in the sanest possible way. I don’t think that it would be a sane way if I packed my steamer trunks and came on board with you at six o’clock to-morrow morning.”

He passed his arm around her waist. She made no effort to draw away but when he leaned down she offered only her cheek to his lips.

“Well, neither of us is any good at pretending, anyhow,” he sighed. “You are a real mistress of what I suppose they call the new materialism. Have you ever heard, I wonder, of the passion that waits on opportunity?”

“I don’t think,” she confided, “that I should care for that sort of passion.”

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“Are you capable of passion at all?” he asked.

“Absolutely,” she assured him.

Her voice was perfectly calm but something more electric had crept into the atmosphere. The breeze might have become

chillier, for she suddenly shivered in his half tentative embrace.

“Listen,” he begged. “I shall make you an offer.”

She shook her head.

“Not of marriage.”

“No, not of marriage,” he agreed. “I am going to try and imitate your magnificent materialism.”

“It will be a thorny path for you,” she warned him. “I am in a hypersensitive frame of mind. I shall be quick to take offence.”

“Nevertheless, I proceed without fear,” he declared. “The thought of that boat, of six months alone without sympathy, without friends, without any of the graces of life, chills me. I would rather stay here and risk my very existence. I ask you to come with me, Joan, and to be or become my companion in any way you will. You shall have your own suite. The Baron has made enquiries for me and there are half-a-dozen vacant. It shall be at the far end of the ship from mine, if you like. You must give me as much of your time as you can spare. I must see you every day. For the rest, you are there and I am there and anything that might come to pass would be born of the closer communion between our thoughts and minds as the days passed on. I make no condition that you become my mistress. If I become your lover it will be because fate directs it. At the end of the voyage we shall have found one another out. Neither of us can prophesy, but one thing I do believe—if great things come to either of us they will come to both.”

“Have you done much love making of this sort?” she asked, with a delightful little smile which robbed her words of everything that was bitter.

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“It is my first essay,” he assured her. “I marvel at my own courage. I marvel still more at the effrontery with which I must conclude. If we part at the end of the voyage, which is very possible, I shall want to have one memory always with me and that will be that I have made your path through life a little easier. Money to me simply represents the counters with which one gambles on the board of happiness. You will leave me a rich woman. That is my one condition and you must accept it.”

“But, my dear man, I have not promised to go,” she declared. “You don’t think I could make up my mind in a minute? It is the most extraordinary decision any girl ever had to make. Listen to that steamer hooting now. When it hoots at something after dawn to-morrow I may be on board!”

“You will let me know,” he said, “before the night has passed. I have an idea, somehow or other, that it will be a night of adventure. The greatest adventure of all will be those few

words from you.”

They both heard the door open. They were standing close together but they remained unflurried.

“I am not your lady’s maid, dear Miss Joan,” the Baron said, “so I do not know how long you take to make your *toilette*, which, mark you, must be one of the most ravishing you have ever attempted to-night.”

She waved her hand and departed. She felt him watching her but she kept her eyes averted. Domiloff closed the door.

“Sagastada,” he said, as he turned round, “I hope to God you are going to be sensible in this matter.”

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“So far,” the young man replied, still looking with a curious sense of disappointment at the closed door, “I think I have been almost too sensible.”

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CHAPTER XVII

The secret of the popularity which Rudolph Sagastrada achieved so completely on the night of his banquet was without a doubt due to what Lord Henry Lancaster, who was not in the best of humours that evening, described as his almost too perfect manners. As host to a cosmopolitan gathering, many of whom were unknown to him, he never made a *faux pas* and his soft, well-modulated voice possessed a clarity of tone and distinction which seemed to prevail in whatever language he spoke. One of his guests, a famous Admiral, asked him bluntly:

“Why are you giving us this Lucullan feast, Mr. Sagastrada? I hear you are only a passing visitor so we shan’t even have a chance of returning your hospitality.”

“The reason for my offering you this homely meal is quite a simple one,” Rudolph replied graciously. “This is one of the few parts of Europe where I am almost a stranger, and my entertainment is meant to be a slight return for the kindness I have received from some of you. I think you all know, as nothing travels faster than this kind of news here, that I was snatched from the arms of desperadoes in Beaulieu and since then our patron saint, Baron Domiloff, has been looking after me like an elder brother. And you need not think, any of you,” he went on, smiling at the Admiral’s wife, “that you are being entertained by a criminal, because I am one of the most innocent persons in the world of any sin against anybody or any country. I am just a refugee.”

“But not a penniless one,” Léon de Hochepierre ventured.

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“Quite true,” Rudolph admitted. “I did not happen to have my fortune in my pocket when the blow fell. It is the only advantage I know of being a banker,” he went on. “No one can wipe you out at one fell swoop.”

Lydia Domiloff, who, although extremely reserved in her manners and deportment, was one of the most popular as well as almost the most beautiful woman in the Principality, leaned forward in her place.

“You must not let yourself be deceived, Monsieur, by my husband’s apparent kindness,” she said. “Just now he is making a great fight in this little corner of the world and everyone with moneybags—especially of your profession—is welcome here.”

Rudolph shook his head.

“Dear Baroness,” he rejoined, “there is a swift answer to that. The Baron, your husband, is doing his utmost to get rid of me!

Even a few hours ago, he made the most odious suggestion. It was that I should embark upon the tourist steamer which is riding the seas there on the other side of the Casino and take a tour round the world—I, who love the quiet spots and who would be perfectly content never to see one yard more of the world than I already know.”

“Then my husband, for all our sakes,” the Baroness replied, “should be ashamed of himself.”

“Sheer humanity on my part,” Domiloff declared. “I do not know how many spies may be present at this table,—I was told only the other day that Monte Carlo was full of them,—but it is very certain that our young host is better in retreat for a little time.”

“Retreat!” Rudolph laughed. “And you recommend a tourist steamer!”

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“There is sometimes safety in crowds, provided it is the right sort of crowd,” Townleyes observed. “Seriously, though, as an ex-politician, I think these political upheavals and denouncements, terrifying though they may seem, are speedily forgotten.”

Rudolph turned towards the Princess.

“It is permitted that we dance, Madame?” he asked.

“It is for you to say,” she replied.

“Then, may I have the pleasure?”

They joined the small crowd already upon the floor.

“Something disturbs you,” she remarked.

He hesitated.

“Well, perhaps,” he admitted. “Many people have made merry at their own feast when the writing has been upon the wall but it is not too amusing to hear it talked about.”

She leaned a little closer to him.

“You don’t think it is really as serious as that?” she asked, her big eyes softening as she looked up into his face.

“Who can tell? Domiloff seems to have got it firmly into his head that this fellow, General Müller, is going to whisk me off by some means or other and if he cannot succeed by the ordinary methods that I am likely to make one of those graceful disappearances—the sort of thing, you know, that has happened here before.”

“What have you done so terrible beside being a great deal too

rich?" she enquired.

"Well, we have not subscribed to the Chancellor's doctrines of finance, for one thing," he admitted. "I certainly did finance Paul Rothmann's wonderful journal, as you know. He proclaimed boldly that the Chancellor's doctrines represented Imperialism carried to excess, and constituted a thoroughly unsound political faith."

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"Léon is sometimes a thoughtful person," she remarked. "He finds in Dictatorship the only barrier against anarchy and Bolshevism."

"But has he satisfied himself," Rudolph asked, "that what he looks upon as anarchy and Bolshevism, properly diluted, might not produce as sound a form of government as any kind of Imperialism?"

"You startling person," she exclaimed. "Don't tell me that you are an anarchist!"

"I have been accused of being a communist," he confided. "That is pretty well the same thing, is it not? A communist banker. I was cartooned once in a so-called humorous paper as the greatest living paradox—a communist banker."

"All too serious for me," she sighed. "No more talk of that sort, please. I like you, Rudolph Sagastrada, and we don't want you to go away. Shall we take you up to our château in the mountains and hide you until this tempest is over?"

"It would be marvellous," he answered wistfully. "A few years ago I was a fierce politician. I really felt that I was making my way slowly but thoroughly into the great beating heart of the world. Since then I have been disillusioned. It is the things beautiful that I should like to seek and with them peace. Spain has sickened the whole world of bloodshed. If I go on that cruise and if we come into any of the unspoilt parts of the world I shall get off and buy an island. I am only dangerous to those fellows, after all, in Europe. If I once get out of it and my money disappears, my power and influence will go with it. . . . The only trouble is that in those outlying parts I shall find no one whose voice is so like music as yours, Princess, and whose feet move so wonderfully to it."

"You are a very precocious young man," she said, "to have become at your age such a power in politics that they send people down here to hunt you to death, to be able to quote your wonderful Heine and to have browsed in so many beautiful places, actual places and imaginary, and to talk as you talk. No wonder you are in trouble already. You began to live too soon."

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"Well, I can assure you that I have not the least desire to leave off living," he said, "only I should like to live my own way."

“You should marry someone not without imagination but healthy and beautiful and with plenty of common sense like Joan Haskell.”

“I wonder,” he replied. “She is splendid in her way, of course, but I sometimes think she is more akin to the type of your friend Lord Henry.”

“I don’t think that Henry will ever marry,” she said. “But we must not forget your dinner. The quails are arriving. Does that sound greedy?”

They returned to their places. Conversation was flowing now more smoothly. World subjects were eschewed, Dolly Parker had started a violent flirtation with Hayden Smith. The Baroness, who was seated next to the dullest Duke but one in the peerage, was becoming more abstracted than ever, and her husband, some distance away, was talking seriously to Joan Haskell. . . .

From his small round table set against the wall on the other side of the restaurant Mr. Ardrossen had a complete view of the room. He seemed to be watching nobody and yet he had the air of seeing everyone and everything. General Müller, with his small suite, was seated not far away. His was by far the grimmest and most unbending personality amongst the diners. Céline, who had decided to retire from the whole performance at the opera and take an evening’s vacation, was restless and annoyed because so far Rudolph Sagastrada had not asked to be presented. Her dark eyes were full of the most unaccustomed displeasure. She was crumbling to pieces her toast Melba with restless, nervous fingers.

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“It is because the young man is in some sort of trouble that I promised to sing,” she told her companion peevishly. “The Baron promised that he would bring him to me early in the evening. He has not been here. I watched him dance with the Princess de Hochepierre de Martelle and he never so much as glanced in my direction. What is there about that little doll of a woman, I ask myself, that men should forget to look at others when they dance with her?”

Her companion was Céline’s constant friend who had much experience in soothing irritable prima donnas. His voice was gentle and persuasive.

“The young man is surrounded,” he pointed out. “His is a curious position. I fear it is a fact that there are men dining in this room who have followed him here from his country with the sole intention of taking him back dead or alive. He is just seeking forgetfulness for a few hours. The Baron is terribly absorbed, almost distracted. I was with him in his room to-night. I have never before seen him show a single sign of discomposure, yet to-night, underneath, he is disturbed. I, Adolf Zabruski, who am here for many months in the year, I

saw the signs.”

“If this young man needs forgetfulness,” Céline exclaimed,
“who could bring it to him more than I? Why does he not come
to me? Why does he offer me this huge sum to sing to him and
then apparently forget? I sing and he has no more fears.”

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“That time will come,” her companion reminded her. “I told
the Baron that before eleven I could promise nothing. After
that, if all was favorable and the room quiet, you would keep
your word.”

“The young man interests me,” she declared. “I shall not fail
him. I will sing. See that you keep your promise, Adolf. I must
have the lights lowered—I must have silence. This place is too
like a Beer Garden.”

“When you have sung your first few notes,” he assured her,
“the silence will descend.”

“Why do you not bring him to me if the Baron forgets his
word?” she asked. “You present him. I talk to him. I tell him
what I will sing. Oh, he knows plenty of music. He has it in
him, that young man. I shall tell him in my own way what is
coming for him. After that, he will not waste his time talking to
those dull people. He will wait until I sing again and then he
will come and thank me. But I want to speak to him first.”

“Alas,” her companion regretted, “I have not his acquaintance.
You must wait, Céline.”

“I wish I had not promised to sing,” she declared petulantly. “I
think I will not. I will go to my room.”

She sat back in her chair and snapped open her vanity case.
Her companion leaned towards her. After all, he was her man
of affairs, and ten per cent. on fifty thousand francs . . . it was
worth all these efforts with a fractious woman.

“Remember, Madame,” he begged, “fifty thousand francs will
buy a pearl as large as the tears in your eyes. Sing with them in
your throat, if you will. Afterwards, he will listen to no other
woman’s voice to-night.”

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Céline was mollified. She condescended even to smile.

“Fifty thousand francs,” she repeated in a tone of good-
humoured scorn. “It is always money with you, Adolf.”

She waved her hand to Lord Henry, who was dancing with
Joan. He responded with fervour.

“*Un homme très galant*,” she murmured. “A great lord in his
country. He has much spirit, but, alas, no music.”

“Too much tennis to-day?” Lord Henry was asking his companion.

She shook her head.

“We played three rather hard sets this morning,” she said.
“Since then I have done very little.”

“Absorbed in the Sagastrada crisis?” he enquired a little bitterly.

Joan laughed but without any real gaiety.

“Oh, I don’t think so,” she replied. “Still, you do live some in Monte Carlo, don’t you? A wonderful banquet like this, wonderful music, Céline about to sing and that young man, Rudolph Sagastrada, on the borderland between exile and assassination.”

“They say that he was in league with the Russians and one of the most dangerous communists in Europe,” her partner confided.

“I don’t believe it,” she answered. “And anyhow it isn’t our business. Everyone has a right to their opinions.”

“I don’t like the fellow,” he declared impetuously.

Joan danced on in silence. After all, Lord Henry was the first person who had been kind to her in Monte Carlo.

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“Seems to have upset the whole place,” he went on. “If he is really a communist he deserves to be shot, if he’s not let him go back and face his trial.”

“They don’t wait to try them, just now,” she replied. “They shoot them first. Germany and Italy are both afraid of Russia, France is afraid of Germany, England is afraid of everybody. It seems to me that mine is the only country with common sense, after all. Come and visit America, Lord Henry, we cannot show you anything like this but we can live without having our nerves racked all the time.”

“My nerves are not being racked,” he assured her. “I am enjoying myself more than I have ever done in my life, or rather I should be if you would be a little kinder to me.”

“Well, you don’t look like it!”

“That is only because I am sick of all this fuss about Sagastrada,” he said. “I hope he takes the Baron’s advice and clears out to-morrow.”

“I don’t think he would be very comfortable on that steamer,” she observed.

“Who cares?”

“Well, I do, for one. I think he is a very charming young man. He knows more about music and poetry than anyone I have ever met and he appreciates beautiful things. He may have evil qualities that one does not know of, but he has some very excellent ones.”

“He seems to have had a queer effect upon you,” Lord Henry declared.

“What, in these few days?” she laughed.

“I saw you go into the Baron’s rooms early this evening—the suite he has lent Sagastrada. Domiloff came out almost immediately because I met him on my way into the club. I must have been there for an hour and a half. When I came back you were just leaving.”

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“And so?” she asked coldly.

“Oh, don’t be offended,” he begged. “I’m jealous—that’s all there is about it. If I asked you to come and have cocktails in my rooms you would look at me out of those beautiful brown eyes of yours quite reproachfully and suggest that we have them in the bar.”

“You are too stupid,” she scoffed. “I am not going to be cross with you.”

“You’d better not be,” he went on. “You had better tell me instead why you came out of that room with a look upon your face I have never seen there before. You have been dazed ever since. I can’t understand what it’s all about.”

“Don’t try,” she advised him. “It is really not your concern.”

He brought the dance to an abrupt conclusion. When she reached the table, she left her place which had been by his side, and sat in a vacant chair next to the Baroness.

“There are times,” she declared almost savagely as she struck a match and lit a cigarette, “when I hate Englishmen.”

“They lack finesse,” Lydia murmured.

“They lack more than that,” Joan went on. “Fancy Lord Henry demanding, as though he had a right to, why I spent an hour and a half in the suite which your husband has lent to Rudolph! If I had spent the whole day or the whole night there it would have been no concern of his.”

The Baroness was faintly amused.

“You must remember, my dear,” she said, “that he is another of your victims. The man is jealous.”

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“I don’t mind his being jealous, but I hate his way of showing it. The one quality I expect to find in a man is restraint.”

Lydia Domiloff laughed openly. Perhaps there was a shade of bitterness in her mirth.

“You should have married my husband,” she remarked. “He is the only man I ever met who enjoys complete self-control.”

“Then I respect him even more than I did.”

The Baroness shrugged her ivory-white shoulders.

“It is a great gift,” she acknowledged, “but it is also a destructive force. The man who conquers self completely kills other things.”

Joan glanced across the table at the Baron’s worn face, the deeply graven lines of his forehead and his tired expression. He was at that moment in the act of rising to his feet. A blond young man with a thin mouth and sloping forehead, the redeeming feature of whose appearance was his correct military carriage, had crossed the room to address him.

“This might be interesting,” the Baroness whispered. “You know who that is?”

“No idea,” Joan replied.

“That is Prince Anselm of Herm, who claims to be the overlord and ruler of Herm, and he certainly has some semi-Royal powers. He asked for an interview with Paul this afternoon but Paul escaped. We were talking of self-control. How should you think that my husband was feeling just at this moment? Look at him.”

“He appears to me perfectly indifferent,” Joan confessed.

“On the other hand he is desperately angry,” the Baroness confided, dropping her voice a little. “The young man will not realize it. No one else would guess it. I hope nothing stupid will happen.”

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CHAPTER XVIII

The young man talked for a few minutes with Domiloff, who listened to what he had to say and then, with the slightest of bows, turned away, walked the length of the table, after pausing to speak to one or two of the guests, and held out his hands to Lucille. She rose at once and in a moment they had passed into the swaying throng of dancers. The intruder whom Domiloff had so abruptly deserted stood for a moment rigid and motionless, then he swung round on his heel and disappeared in the crowd. Townleyes, who had taken a chair next to Joan, looked after him with a faint smile upon his lips.

“The Baron has courage,” he remarked. “What a diplomat he would have made in the old world.”

“He seems pretty sure of himself,” Joan replied anxiously, “but it really does seem to me that he is asking for trouble in this new one.”

“You mean because in a sense he has appointed himself protector of our young host?” Townleyes asked.

“That is just what I do mean,” she admitted.

“The puzzling part of it all is,” Townleyes went on, “that no one seems to know much about the legal side of the question. The Palace is shut up. There is no one there of whom anyone could make enquiries. The Assembly of the three communes has closed its doors pending the return of their chairman from Paris, where he has gone to confer with the French Government. If any foreign country wished to legalize an action here, directed against one of their own nationality, I really do not see, myself, to what authority he could appeal. I heard rumours in London before I left. What it all amounts to I don’t know. I don’t think anyone knows. Because we saved that young man from being assassinated or abducted at Beaulieu we may find ourselves at any moment accused of having incited a new European war!”

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“Shall I save you from it?” Joan asked.

He looked at her curiously.

“How?”

She rose abruptly to her feet.

“Let’s leave international problems alone and go and dance,” she suggested. “The orchestra have to quit before midnight to make way for the great Céline. Fancy a refugee being able to afford to pay a prima donna to leave her opera and come and

sing for him!”

“The whole thing is rather like a chapter from the *Arabian Nights*, isn’t it?” he observed, as they moved on to the floor.

“It is like the *Arabian Nights*, and to me it seems just as unreal,” she confided. “You know that I have only been here about a fortnight and that I came here for the first time in my life?”

“Yes.”

“From the moment I arrived,” she went on dreamily, “everyone seems to have spoiled me. I have never met such nice people. I have never met with such kindness, and yet more and more it seems to grow unreal. It is like a fantastic but beautiful marionette show with everyone sweeping about the stage saying their little pieces then going away. At first, I was absolutely dazed. To-night I believe that I am just getting hold of the reality of it. People who seemed to me like puppets are becoming men and women.”

“Can’t everyone recognize that?” he exclaimed. “You have something in your face to-night, Miss Joan Haskell,” he added, lowering his voice, “which I have never seen there before.”

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“How intriguing! Go on, please. When did you first notice it?”

“When you passed through the foyer on your way to change for dinner this evening. I don’t know what you had been doing since Domiloff came and whisked you away from the bar, but that intelligent tourist-like expression of a young woman come into a strange world and poking about for impressions had all gone. It was as though you had had a vision of the real thing and were still shivering from the shock of it.”

“Am I improved or not?” she enquired.

“The word is not comprehensive enough,” he answered. “You are changed. I suppose a psychologist would say that you were no longer an enquirer, that you had taken your place in the world with other women. You had suffered and learnt to understand.”

“Have you been watching me as closely as all that?” she asked anxiously.

“Why not? You must know that I am interested in you.”

The music changed its rhythm and for a time she seemed absorbed in the dance.

“Please do not talk any more nonsense,” she begged lightly. “I have had rather an exciting day for a poor, lonely girl. I have come to the conclusion that I have found my way into the wrong place for a quiet month’s holiday.”

“It depends what sort of a holiday you are looking for,” he rejoined. “If you want excitement and novelty there may be plenty here before long.”

“What do you mean?”

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“Nothing,” he assured her hastily. “Don’t think for a moment that I am posing as being behind the scenes. I am not. I am completely mystified myself. The Baron shows no desire to take me or anyone else into his confidence, but one cannot help feeling that there are possibilities about the situation.”

“Such as?”

“Well, Sagastrada is, after all,” he went on, “the representative of a great European family, and in venturing to strike a blow at them his government must have something at the back of their minds which they have not yet disclosed.”

The orchestra ceased to play. The leader waved away all suggestion of an encore. There was the familiar rum-tum-tum of the drums.

“Céline is going to sing!” Joan exclaimed.

In a marvellously short time the floor was empty, the lights were lowered, a new and smaller orchestra filed into their places. The master of ceremonies stepped to the front of the stage.

“*Mesdames et Messieurs*,” he announced, “Madame Céline, our great prima donna, has consented to sing.”

There was muffled applause from all parts of the room. The lights went a little lower still. The violinist commenced to play, the bow of the ’cellist was suspended over his instrument, the fingers of the pianist hovered over the notes. Then Céline herself swept on to the stage; there came that long, passionate note which served as the prelude of her song and the room was filled with music. The magical hush was followed by a profound silence, against the background of which the music rose and fell. The Princess, who was seated next to Rudolph Sagastrada, heard the quick intake of his breath, saw his fingernails dig into the tablecloth as he leaned a little forward, his eyes dilated, his cheeks unnaturally pale, every fibre of his being drawn taut, thrilled with joyous appreciation. . . . Of Céline’s voice there had been at different times varying notes of criticism; of its magnetic, almost devouring qualities there had never been a whisper of hesitation. Someone once said of her a little cynically that there was more sex appeal in the call of her voice than in the sinuous movements of any of the most wonderful courtesans the world had ever known. Rudolph had remained standing amidst the storm of applause long after her song had finished and Céline had left the stage. Apparently the demand for an encore was to meet with no

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response. Every now and then the hubbub died away, only to flare up again in another direction. Presently the young man who acted as master of ceremonies came across the stage, jumped lightly down and made his way to where Rudolph was still standing with his eyes fastened upon that corner of the stage where Céline had disappeared. He held a scrap of paper in his hand.

“Monsieur,” he said as he reached Sagastrada, “Mademoiselle Céline desires me to remind you that a condition of her engagement was that there should be no encores. She is willing, however, to sing a few more bars of anything you might choose.”

He held out the scrap of paper he had been carrying. Rudolph glanced at it and nodded.

“Yes,” he agreed eagerly. “Yes.”

“It would appear to be the moment for flowers,” Lord Henry remarked a little sarcastically.

Flowers! Rudolph hesitated for a moment. Then he leaned over and clutched at the huge vases of roses and cyclamen which decorated the table. He stripped the vases everywhere within reach and pushed armsful of the blossoms into the embarrassed young man’s hands.

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“Take these to Madame, and these,” he went on, moving a little way down the table and removing the whole of the centrepiece. “Tell her that all the flowers which I could strip from my table lie on the ground at her feet. Tell her that we rest here with fast-beating hearts—waiting.”

The young man staggered away. Rudolph muttered something to himself. He slowly retraced his steps to his place. Joan was conscious of a curious sense of depression. She felt the colour ebbing from her cheeks, she knew that her eyes had lost their fire. All the time she watched Sagastrada. The lights which had been turned on again were once more lowered. The master of ceremonies reappeared and whispered a word to the violinist. The leader of the orchestra tapped with his baton. A few stealthy notes crept like a line of smothered fire into the room. Even the least impressionable moved uneasily in their places. Sagastrada, drawn to his full height, stood at the head of the table where everyone else was seated and when Céline suddenly appeared, she came to the corner of the stage as near to him as possible. The sleeves fell back from her bared arms. Slowly they were stretched in his direction. It was years before anyone who heard her sing those few fiery bars of flaming music ever again called them banal or even hinted at melodrama.

“Mon cœur s’ouvre à ta voix!”

Domiloff groaned as he leaned towards Joan.

“Samson once more betrayed,” he whispered cynically. “I am afraid that the *Hesperides* will blow its siren in vain. Sagastrada is booked for the Enchanted Galley!”

CHAPTER XIX

In the furore which followed Céline's wonderful triumph, and the state of exuberant emotion for which it was responsible, there were many slight incidents which passed unnoticed. At the very moment when the great singer slipped out from behind the stage, was met by Sagastrada and took her place by his side at the table, Monsieur Mollinet, making one of his unusual appearances in the restaurant, paused by Ardrossen's table and handed him a note.

"This was brought by special messenger, sir," he confided, "accompanied by an urgent request that it be delivered at once into your hand."

Ardrossen showed few signs of interest but his fingers closed upon the grey envelope which was conveyed at once to the breast pocket of his dinner jacket.

"A great night here," he remarked politely. "You are much to be congratulated, Monsieur, upon the brilliancy of your season."

The hotel manager, with a graceful little murmur of thanks, withdrew. Ardrossen sipped his wine for a moment or two in thoughtful silence, then he drew out the note from his pocket, slit open the envelope with a table knife and glanced at its brief contents. A moment or two later a hundred small pieces of scented notepaper dripped through his fingers into the bowl by his side. He glanced at his watch and summoned a passing waiter.

"I will sign my bill," he announced. "At once, if you please."

Ardrossen spoke, as usual, very quietly, but there was something in his tone and the little gesture with which it was accompanied which sent the waiter flying to the distant cashier's desk. In a very short time he was back again. Ardrossen took the slip of paper, signed it, placed a very generous *pourboire* upon the table and rose to his feet.

"Monsieur returns, perhaps?" the man asked.

"Not this evening."

Ardrossen, choosing his moment, threaded his way, an unnoticeable figure, amongst the swaying crowd indulging at that moment in the abandon of a fashionable rumba. He passed without a glance in that direction the brilliant company of guests at Sagastrada's table, the host himself talking with a sort of inspired fluency to the woman by his side, many of the others watching what seemed to be a new development in the

tragedy which overhung the young man. None of these things appeared to mean anything at all to the passer-by. He looked neither to the right nor to the left until he reached the broad stairs leading from the restaurant. These he mounted, and he pursued his way along the corridors to his own small suite of apartments. Here in his bedchamber everything was prepared for his retirement. His bed was turned down, his pyjamas neatly arranged. The chimes of the clock which rang out as he stood looking around the room told him that it was one o'clock. Mr. Ardrossen, however, made no preparations for repose. He took a dark, thin overcoat and a soft black felt hat from his wardrobe and one other object,—small, hard, sinister,—which he subjected to a minute's critical observation before he dropped it into his pocket. Then he sallied out once more, leaving the Nouvel Hôtel this time by its semi-private entrance. He walked quietly through the gardens out into the side street, crossed the road, and without remark stepped into a small saloon motor car which was waiting there. He glanced casually around him, then turned on the lights, pressed the starting button, glided down the hill and up into the old town. He drew up under the trees where he had halted his little carriage the last time he had visited the place, stopped the engine, switched out the lights, and stepped down from the car, closing the door noiselessly. Then he crossed the road, skirted the side of the *Place*, and stopped in front of the great door of the gloomy house on the far side. The handle yielded to his touch. He stepped inside, shot the latch into its place, and touched the switch in the wall. The darkened hall was suddenly flooded with light. He caught a glimpse of the descending figure, before, on the second touch of his finger, it was plunged once more into gloom. He listened to her flying footsteps descending the stairs, crossing the hall. A moment later he was submitting unresponsively to her voluptuous embrace.

“You have succeeded, Hortense?” he asked, as at last he drew away.

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“But indeed yes!” she cried breathlessly. “Come—come,” she added, throwing open the door of the salon and drawing him towards the large divan which occupied one corner of the apartment. “Sit by my side—so. Now listen.”

He yielded with restraint to her turbulent advances, seating himself, indeed, by her side, but with a firm grip upon her arm—which was not at all the kind of embrace she seemed to covet.

“Listen, I will make you astonished! Pierre has permitted me to read parts of the charter. They are to be copied and issued as a proclamation almost at once.”

“Who is to do the copy?” he asked.

“I am,” she replied.

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“Then, who has the charter now?”

Her face, radiant with happiness, answered him. He stretched out his hand. She placed a roll of parchment between his fingers.

“Read it—read it all,” she invited. “Afterwards I can give you a copy of what is to go into the proclamation.”

Already he was holding the sheets closely between his fingers. He asked her, however, one more question.

“Where is Pierre?”

“Gone to see the Baron. He dared not take the charter with him. He said that the Principality was full of spies. He takes with him in his brain, though, all that it contains.”

“Why has he gone to see Domiloff?”

“There is trouble afoot,” she answered. “A foreign country is demanding from France the extradition of some man who is hiding in Monte Carlo and who has sought Domiloff’s protection. If Domiloff does not give him up there will be murder done.”

Ardrossen asked no more questions. He edged away towards the lamp and, gripping the papers closer than ever, he read voraciously, greedily. His eyes darted from line to line. When he had finished he drew a long breath. It was the first sign of emotion he had displayed.

“You are content?” she asked.

“I am content,” he told her.

His fingers sought for his pocketbook. He drew it out—a bulky affair, the stitches strained. Packet by packet he passed its contents over to her.

“One hundred thousand francs,” he said. “They are yours, Hortense. You have earned them—and this.”

He gave her what she craved all the time: a caress, grudgingly inhuman in its stern rigidity. Her tears damped his cheeks as her lips demanded their offering. There came a time when he pushed her gently away. He rose to his feet.

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“There is no need for you to go yet,” she cried.

“There is every need,” he answered. “You must set to work and copy the charter. Work all night. You can bring the copy to Nice to-morrow at the usual place and the usual time.”

They were in the hall now. He freed himself from her, stood listening for a moment, and opened the huge door. Almost as

cautiously and noiselessly as he had opened it, he closed it again. He caught a glimpse of her white, enquiring face through the darkness. She was leaning towards the electric light switch.

“Don’t touch that!” he snapped out. “There are footsteps outside.”

“At this hour?” she gasped. “Impossible!”

“Someone is approaching,” he said.

“It is Guido, the night watchman,” she declared. “It could be no one else.”

They were still in almost complete darkness save for a glimmer of lamplight from the salon. He could just trace the outline of her figure as she stood shivering barely a couple of yards away, and catch little waves of that exotic perfume which seemed to creep out from her clothes every time she moved. He could see the gleam of her brown eyes shining out of a dead pale face, absolutely colourless save for the scarlet lips. The footsteps were more audible now—curious, indefinable footsteps which might have belonged to a woman or a man, which might have meant a stranger approaching cautiously or a casual passer-by of slovenly walk. She was shaking with terror.

“It is not Guido,” she faltered.

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“Whoever it may be, if he enters here,” Mr. Ardrossen said calmly, “he must take his chance.”

She moved towards the key—a large, old-fashioned affair curiously at variance with the modern aperture for a latchkey just above. He stopped her at once.

“If anyone wishes to enter,” he enjoined, “let him come.”

The footsteps were outside now. They paused. Ardrossen pushed his companion slowly back towards the wall. That small, deadly-looking weapon was in evidence beneath his cuff.

“If it should be Pierre,” she implored, “you must not kill him! In his own house they would call it murder.”

“It is not Pierre,” he whispered back. “Tell me this—is there anyone else who knows that the charter might be here?”

“One man,” she faltered. “He was to have come to-night. Pierre stopped him. He is one of the Nice party with whom Pierre would have no more to do. It is finished, that, but the man is obstinate. He belongs to the time when Pierre was struggling to free the Principality—”

“I think I can guess,” Ardrossen muttered.

Her eyes clung to his. What was there that he did not know, this man? She had been afraid of him since the first day of their meeting. She had been afraid of him ever since that moment. It was not the unseen person outside in the night whom she dreaded. It was the man for whom she had conceived this intolerable passion, the still cold figure by her side. . . .

Silence. The clock a few yards away went on beating out the seconds. Still silence outside. Someone must be standing there motionless—waiting. For what? The woman was crouching back against the wall, half-stupefied with fright, her terrified eyes fixed all the time upon her companion. Suddenly she saw him bend forward towards the door—watching. She followed the direction of his gaze. Very slowly she saw the large handle being turned from the outside. Nothing but Ardrossen's left hand suddenly pressed to her lips stopped the cry that would have escaped her. The handle was turned as far as it would go, the door shaken slightly. Then, just as slowly and carefully, it went back to its former place. The would-be intruder seemed to have realized that the door was locked. More silence. Then the slow movement of footsteps passing up towards the promontory. The woman drew a little sobbing breath.

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"It may have been Guido," she whispered. "He is going."

Ardrossen, who was listening intently, shook his head.

"He is waiting," he said. "Stay where you are."

She would have stopped him but her limbs were numbed. Slowly he turned the key. He looked all round behind to be sure that there was no light which would be visible from the street. Then, inch by inch, he opened the great door and leaned forward over the threshold. About twenty yards away the figure of a man looming huge amongst the shadows was dimly visible. A moment later there was a level flash of fire, a whizz and a crash as a bullet embedded itself in the doorpost a foot or so from Ardrossen. Ardrossen's right hand was thrust out. There was another softer but wicked hissing report followed quickly by a cry from the half-seen, skulking figure. A moment later there was the sound of a fall.

"Lock yourself in the house until I knock," Ardrossen ordered.

The woman was too near fainting to disobey. Ardrossen walked cautiously up towards the writhing figure on the sidewalk. Arrived within a few feet of him he stumbled against an old-fashioned revolver. He picked it up, held it by the barrel and dropped it into his pocket. Then he flashed his torch into the face of the prostrate man. So he remained for several moments—motionless, voiceless. Then, for almost the first time in his life, he permitted himself a half-stifled interjection.

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"For Christ's sake—the madman!"

Ardrossen glanced back over his shoulder. The great front door through which he had issued remained closed. There was no light to be seen from any of the windows. He stripped off his coat quickly and flung it over the still form lying at his feet. Then he retraced his steps to the house. He thrust a key into the latch and pushed open the door. The woman was there cowering at the bottom of the staircase.

“Hortense,” he said, and his voice was perfectly calm and unimpassioned. “It was one of those clumsy spies who are always at my heels. I shall remove him. You need have no fear.”

“You are sure,” she demanded, moving towards him, “that it is not Guido? It is not either of those others?”

“It is the man from Nice,” he told her. “He is better out of the way. I know exactly what to do with him. I beg of you to go back to your room, to remember that you know nothing—you have heard nothing. Is that clear?”

“It is clear.”

“You have confidence in me?”

“You have all my confidence—you have all my love,” she cried.

“You are a wise woman,” he said. “Remember that and trust me.”

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He was gone. Her fingers, seeking to detain him, clutched at the empty air. It was a long time before she moved. Then slowly she obeyed his bidding and made her way to her room. With trembling fingers she drew aside the blind and looked down into the road. The place where the man had been was vacant. There was no one within sight. A few late lights from the villas on the Corniche were dimly visible. The lights from the harbour were all burning. The Condamine was still faintly astir. Nearer at hand there was only the dribble of the rain and the slowly fluttering leaves of the elm trees. She closed the window, then crept into bed.

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Up at that famous bend in the Middle Corniche which had been called with reason “Suicide Corner” Ardrossen brought his car to a standstill. He looked behind. He looked in front. The road was empty. Very slowly, inch by inch, with unswerving hands, he steered to within a foot or so of the precipice. Then, like a cat, he crept from the driving seat, opened the door of the *coupé* and dragged out something long and dark which was lying there huddled up. He was a strong man but he set his teeth hard, for the task was no easy one and he himself was on the extreme edge of the precipice. Nevertheless, he made no slip, no fault. In less than a minute the body of the dead man was on

its way crashing through the undergrowth, gaining momentum with every movement till it reached the long strip of hard rock, slippery with age, down which it sped to obscurity. Ardrossen watched with changeless expression. Satisfied at last, he withdrew from his pocket the revolver he had picked up in the road and jerked it downwards. A moment later he was back in the car. Slowly he crawled into the middle of the road, then he swung round and headed back to Monaco.

CHAPTER XX

To his departing guests, as the night wore on, Sagastrada had but one thing to say.

“The party has only just begun. We are moving upstairs. Everything is arranged. Please do not fail me.”

A queer unanalyzable curiosity kept even the hardened gamblers from doing more than glancing at the rooms. By three o’clock nearly the whole of the dinner party were reassembling in the Night Club. Lord Henry, who seemed none the gayer for all the champagne he had drunk, had manœuvred himself into a place next to Joan.

“The thought of eating or drinking is abhorrent to me,” he declared. “Come and dance.”

“Well, I am rather like you, so far as food is concerned,” she admitted; “but do you think we ought to? There is something terribly elaborate coming round in the shape of caviar, and some vodka which I am afraid is going to be very bad for all you men.”

“Why not you, too?” he demanded.

“I never drink it. If you think we can dance without offending our host—”

“Our host is engrossed. Thank God,” Lord Henry added, “he is only a passing comet. Why is it that all you women find him so terribly attractive, I wonder?”

“Do we?”

“Well, I ask you? You know, of course, what the Baron wants him to do?”

She nodded.

“Yes, I know.”

“Why in heaven’s name he doesn’t do it I can’t imagine. He will be a marked man in Europe for years to come and if his own country gets hold of him, as I should think highly probable, he will be either stood up against a wall or spend the rest of his days in a fortress. To my mind he seems to be behaving like a peevish child. All the fault of you women, too.”

“All of us?” Joan asked quietly.

“Well, there is the Princess. She is a gay little lady always, of course, but she keeps herself well within bounds. To-night

she's got that tragic expression on and she's been making googly eyes at the young man most of the evening. If Léon were not on the spot and such a sensible chap, heaven knows what trouble she might not get into. And look at Céline. I always thought Céline was full of common sense for a French woman. She seems to have lost her head completely. They're cuddled up there together like two love birds eating out of the same plate. Then there's you. I have always thought of you as a really sensible girl and I cannot believe that you would do a fool thing like that—go off on a tourist boat simply because flight has got to be made attractive to a refugee."

"What about the Baroness?" Joan asked. "She doesn't say much but it is just the sort of gesture I should think she might be more capable of than I."

He shook his head.

"You don't know Lydia as well as I do," he said. "She is an exceedingly proud woman. She would never lose her head in the manner that some of you others have done."

Joan laughed at him quietly.

"Jealous, I believe!" she exclaimed. "It cannot be of me. I am sure it is not of the Baroness. It must be of Céline."

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"Disgusting greed I call this," Lord Henry remarked, abruptly changing the subject as he helped himself to caviar. "Never could refuse it, though, out of these little barrels, and I am not like you—I love vodka. As you were saying—it is probably Céline. I should be just the sort of figure of romance, shouldn't I, to appeal to a woman like that? Forty-two years old, inclined towards embonpoint, I eat too much, drink too much, and I know no more about music than the man in the moon. She would not stir a foot to save my life if I were in trouble—nor would any of you. It's a selfish world."

"You seem to get as much out of it as anyone I know," Joan observed, rising abruptly to her feet. "I have allowed you the caviar," she went on. "There is another course coming which looks as though it might be terribly bad for you."

"Anyway, I would rather dance," he told her.

Joan was a beautiful dancer but that night her feet moved unsteadily to the music. They had only gone once round the room when she paused. She turned and looked back at the supper table. Rudolph was leaning towards the Baroness, talking eagerly. Céline was watching him. With every nerve of her body she seemed to be listening and watching. Joan's eyes swept down the whole length of the table. There were a great many guests there whom she knew only by sight. The Baron had certainly kept his word and given Sagastrada a wonderful show.

“Shall we go on?” her partner enquired.

Joan hesitated. She was utterly unconscious of the fact that many people were interested in her. There were few who would not have declared that notwithstanding the simplicity of her *toilette* and complete absence of jewellery she was the most beautiful person in the room. She was still looking towards the supper table.

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“A wonderful grouping,” she whispered to Lord Henry. “I wish it did not somehow remind me of the greatest picture in the world.”

“What’s that?” he asked.

“Be happy in your ignorance,” she answered, with a little laugh. “Do you mind doing something for me?”

“Do I mind?” he repeated. “You ought to know.”

“Come with me for a short promenade,” she begged.

“Well, that doesn’t sound much of a feat,” he remarked. “Come along. Where do you want to go to—into the rooms?”

“Don’t ask any questions, please.”

Soon he found himself following her along the corridor to the second floor which led from the Sporting Club to the hotel. When she reached her room she stopped abruptly. The door was wide open. She lingered on the threshold and pressed her fingers upon the bell. Presently a sleepy waiter made his appearance.

“*Les bagages sont tous descendus, Mademoiselle,*” he explained.

“*Depuis combien de temps?*”

“*À l’instant, Mademoiselle.* Five minutes.”

She sped back along the corridor, motioning Lord Henry to follow. They descended to the foyer and made their way out to the entrance yard. The hotel omnibus was standing there laden with luggage. Joan hastened out into the little enclosure and addressed the *chef de bagage*.

“What are you doing with those two trunks?” she demanded.

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“*Mais Mademoiselle,*” he answered, “*ces sont pour le bateau.*”

She looked at the labels. There was her name and clearly written: *S. S. Hesperides*.

“Where is the dressing case,” she asked, “and the hat box?”

“Inside, Mademoiselle.”

“Please have them sent back to my room, and the two trunks,” she told him. “Lord Henry, have you a knife?”

He produced one—a little dazed.

“Cut off those labels,” she begged. “Tear them up.”

The head porter was looking very serious.

“But Mademoiselle,” he explained, “we have orders from the Baron that these things are to go down to a special tug in a few minutes.”

“The other things can go,” she said, “but not mine. Send those up to my room, please.”

The man hesitated.

“If Mademoiselle insists—” he began unwillingly.

“I insist!”

The two trunks were placed upon a barrow and wheeled back to the hotel.

“Lord Henry, can I ask you one more favour?” she begged, turning to him.

“Anything you like,” he assured her. “You have made me a happy man, as it is.”

“Go with the porter. Do not leave him until he has taken those trunks back to my room.”

“That’s easy. What are you going to do?”

“I am going to walk in the garden here for ten minutes only,” she said. “In ten minutes I shall be in the bar of the Sporting. From there we can make our way back to the supper party.”

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“Am I to tell them anything?” he asked. She hesitated.

“Nothing whatever,” she decided.

He turned away and followed the disappearing porter. Joan watched him out of sight, then she walked very slowly down the gardens until she reached a point from where she could see the huge steamer all ablaze with lights in the bay below. She looked at it for several minutes steadily. Then, with a little shiver, she drew her wrap closer around her throat and retraced her steps.

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CHAPTER XXI

Joan and Lord Henry drifted back to their places at the table from out of the press of dancers, and apparently no one had noticed their temporary absence from the room. Sagastrada, however, came at once to Joan. Céline had disappeared.

"I hope you agree that it is time your host had another dance," he suggested.

She laughed with a gaiety which scarcely rang true.

"I agree most certainly," she said. "I was wondering—"

"What?" he asked as they moved across the floor.

"Why you had not asked me before."

"It was the coming of Céline," he admitted frankly.

"Engaging but rather painful candour," she sighed.

"You know how I am about music," he went on a moment or two later, "or rather perhaps you do not know. All my family are the same. We subsidized two opera houses—one in Hungary and one in Austria—and I have flown many times backwards and forwards from the Continent to London during the Covent Garden season."

"Yet you never come to New York," she reproached him.

"New York is completely outside my domain," he explained.

"No one would believe that I went there only for music, even if I could spare the time, and our bank there is very jealously conducted by my uncles and cousins."

"And now," she proposed, "let us leave off this small talk. Are you going on board the *Hesperides*?"

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"Domiloff still wishes it," he told her gloomily. "He declines otherwise to answer for my safety. I have been talking to Julian Townleyes," he continued. "He and the Baron are arguing now, as you can see. Townleyes cannot understand how the State of Monaco can possibly agree to having me arrested on their territory. The French are the only people who could do that, as they still have certain rights to control Monaco in all foreign matters. I could not be classed as other than a political refugee. I am not a criminal."

"Don't be silly, please," she begged. "It is not the giving you up that is the question. I fancy that the Baron has made up his mind about that. It is assassination."

"I can take care of myself," he insisted.

"Can you?" she queried. "I wonder. If the Baron had not been a very clever man and had not a marvellous organization—the organization of the *Société* to fall back upon—where would you have been at the present moment? You see that dark, unpleasant-looking maître d'hôtel who has never moved from the back of your chair?"

"The damn' fellow haunts me," Sagastrada declared. "He is no good, either, as a maître d'hôtel."

"Naturally," she replied, "because he is not a maître d'hôtel at all but a very famous detective. He is the head man at Monaco of the secret service branch of the *Gendarmerie*. He never lets you out of his sight and his eyes search the room continually. Not a chance guest is permitted to accept your invitation even and sit down unless he nods assent. Furthermore, there are at least a score of men whose task it is to parade the rooms and watch the people amongst the guests around your table. There is a ring around you at the present moment. No one could get near enough to shoot for fear of injuring one of the famous people by whom you are surrounded. As Baron Domiloff says—such a system is good enough for twenty-four hours or even forty-eight hours, but can't go on. However anxious he may be to avoid bloodshed, he cannot devote the whole of the resources of the Casino police to protecting you for an indefinite time. He wants you safely out of the place and under the American flag."

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"I am under the French flag here."

"You are not," she told him bluntly. "At any rate, it is a matter which could always be argued, and when two countries who want to fight begin to argue, you know what happens."

They paused for a moment in a distant corner. Her fingers still rested upon his arm and her eyes as she looked into his haggard face were full of sympathy.

"Listen," she continued, "I came here for a month's real holiday. I have been here for a fortnight and if I do what Baron Domiloff wishes me to do I shall never be able to come back here again and hold up my head. You see," she went on, "what the old-fashioned world used to call morals, have still a few adherents in America. We look at things differently over there. I hesitated earlier this evening because I thought there was a chance that I might perhaps get to care for you and then I should be proud and happy to have done anything to have saved your life. I cannot pretend that I feel just the same now."

"Céline," he muttered.

Joan's other hand stole up to his shoulder.

"Shall we dance again?" she whispered.

Nina de Broussaire, the famous *danseuse*, the attraction of the season at the Sporting Club, sat with her partner and watched the two gloomily.

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"That girl," she said. "I cannot bear to watch her, Armand. I have seen them all. I have wasted ten years of my life practising, practising, practising. What does it all amount to? She is an American journalist and she dances as I could never dance in my life."

"The man—he is good," her companion pointed out.

"She is by herself," Nina protested. "She is dancing now without thinking of what she does. Every movement, every bend of the body is graceful. She makes me feel like a mere gymnast."

"It may be," the young man, who was devoted to her, remarked sadly, "because you have never danced with anyone with whom you were in love."

"Worse than that," she answered with a sudden flash of inspiration. "It may be because I have never loved anyone at all."

"Do you know who the man is?"

She shook her head indifferently.

"What does it matter?"

"A good deal, I should think. That is Rudolph Sagastrada, the young man they are all talking about here."

"I only got back from Cannes a few hours ago," she said.

"What does it matter who he is? Let us get out of this place. I shall go and gamble. I cannot bear to see that girl dance."

"I must stay," he replied sadly as he rose to his feet. "I have engagements."

"Do you know that you are dancing like an angel?" Sagastrada whispered in Joan's ear.

Her eyes, as she glanced upwards, spoke of a weariness which her movements denied.

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"I was thinking of nothing else," she confessed. "To dance and think of nothing else is wonderful sometimes."

"You seem to become," he told her, "liquid in my arms. I could feel nothing. I swear that you were floating."

“Now you have brought me down to earth,” she said. “I suppose my feet are tired. Shall we sit down?”

“One more turn,” he begged.

Nina de Broussaire looked unwillingly back from the door. She watched them for a few seconds and her face lightened. She retraced her steps to the table where her dancing companion was still seated.

“After all,” she declared as she resumed her place, “I think I must have been dreaming. The girl dances well, she has chic, she wears her clothes well, but for her movements—well, there is nothing wonderful about them. See, they have finished. Give me some champagne, Armand. My courage is fast returning. In a few minutes we will show them.”

Domiloff’s fine eyebrows were joined together in a portentous frown as he drew Joan, notwithstanding her faintly worded protest, once more out on to the dancing floor.

“I’m tired,” she complained.

“Well, we will sit down in a minute,” he promised. “I have to speak to you.”

“And I to you,” she rejoined. “What do you mean by ordering my trunks to be packed and placed on the omnibus for the *Hesperides*?”

“So you discovered that, did you?” he remarked. “I thought it might help you to make up your mind.”

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“Well, it doesn’t,” she assured him. “Those trunks are back in my room now. I rather fancy that that is where they will remain.”

“What do you mean by saying that they are back in your room?”

“I went and collected them,” she told him.

“That will not do you any good.”

“And what about Céline?”

“The opera, I fear, is finished for the season,” he replied. “I have made an enemy of her. It was necessary. I have sent her away. Sagastrada believes she is coming back. She is not. I have forbidden them to let her pass.”

“Isn’t that a trifle autocratic?”

“This place will be governed by an autocracy in a few days’ time,” he told her. “I may as well begin.”

“Why could Céline not shepherd Rudolph Sagastrada into safety as well as I?”

“She would inevitably be seasick,” he declared. “Sagastrada would have had enough of her before he got to Naples. He would probably leave the ship and be in trouble in a quarter of an hour.”

“So long as he doesn’t get into trouble in Monaco, what concern is it of any of ours?” she asked.

“That sounds a little unfeeling.”

“I never understood that you were a particularly sentimental person.”

He turned abruptly away, changed his mind and, passing his arm through hers, led her to an alcove with a couch at the farther end of the supper room.

“We must not quarrel,” he sighed as he sank wearily down. “If you are going to disappoint me you must.”

“I never should have considered what you asked me to do,” she acknowledged. “It was foolish of me. Somehow it is not like real life out here. Don’t think I am trying to pose as an *ingénue*, but there does seem to be rather a perfervid artificial sort of atmosphere which almost chokes one sometimes. It seems to me that I have been marvellously happy every moment of the time since I arrived, but I have failed in everything that I have attempted. So long as I stay here I shall go on failing.”

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“People do not take that view of you,” he assured her. “You are considered to have met with many successes during these last few weeks. Dare I ask you a question, I wonder?”

“I have never known you timid,” she answered.

“Have you changed in your feelings towards that young man during the last twenty-four hours?”

She had been toying with one of the paper fans which the Administration had sent round and she was suddenly glad of its protection. She felt the colour rising almost to her temples. It was an illuminating but very unwelcome moment of self-revelation!

“Do not think that I am a diviner,” he continued. “It was Lydia who put it into my head. After all, I cannot think of two people more unlike than you and he. You must not worry any more. You know they call me the complete philosopher. I shall prove it by accepting my defeat. I will go further. I advise you to abandon this enterprise.”

“Why?”

Domiloff had the appearance for a moment of an older man. The experience of crazy years, the lines graven into his face by the half-cynical pursuit of his fantastic life, seemed suddenly to assert themselves. He was an elderly *boulevardier*—sardonic and contemptuous—no longer the marvellously preserved *beau garçon* of the most aristocratic little circle in the world.

“Because you do not belong here,” he said. “No one who wants to live seriously belongs here. For myself, I cannot escape. I am rather glad that the hour of crisis has come. I would not unpack your trunks, if I were you, Miss Joan, but I would attach to them a different label.”

Tashoff, who had come noiselessly up behind them, touched his master on the shoulder. He whispered a single word in his ear. Domiloff rose to his feet.

“You will excuse?” he whispered to Joan as he hurried off.

Ardrossen was standing somewhat far back in the shadows of Domiloff’s reception room. He had removed his hat which he was holding in front of him and he was still wearing his motoring coat. In the fingers of one hand crushed up was a cable they had passed to him in the office below. Domiloff crossed the room towards him with that swift characteristic walk of his.

“It is only one word you wish with me? I will not ask you to sit down.”

“There is no need,” was the quiet reply. “I am here to deliver one injunction. Rudolph Sagastrada is not to leave by the *Hesperides*.”

Domiloff was silent for several moments.

“It seems to me, then,” he said at last, “that it is to be war.”

“It is for our masters to decide,” Ardrossen said. “I am the messenger of fate and you are the instrument.”

CHAPTER XXII

When the sun at last rose from behind the Alpes Maritimes that morning it brought with it the promise of a perfect day. The little Principality, slowly awakening from a somewhat disturbed night, found the soft radiance of its flawless splendour in the flower-circled streets, spreading a canopy of diamonds over the sea, lending a mellow glory even to that relic of hobgoblin architecture—the Casino. The surliest of *cochers* plucked a flower for his buttonhole and tucked another in the collar of his pet dog. As the hours passed on a little stream of people came light-footed down the hill, carrying themselves hopefully and buoyantly up the steps of the Casino and into its grey mysteries beyond. The leader of the wild Hungarian orchestra which was playing on the Terrace was all smiles and greetings. The people who sat about at the small tables taking their late *petit déjeuner* or an early *apéritif* seemed to feel the joy of the coming springtime in their blood. The men read their papers hopefully. The women chattered. The elderly tourists told grim stories of grasping croupiers and misplaced stakes with the same avidity as ever but a little less venom. Céline alone, the great Céline, an object of interest to everyone, sat at a small table with her two companions, pale and *émotionnée*. She sipped her coffee and devoured her *croissants* as usual but with less appetite. She was, as she had more than once told Adolf Zabruski, her musical director, who was seated opposite to her, distracted.

“You have no sympathy—neither of you,” she declared in a voice which, sweet though it was, had nothing in it this morning of the sorceress’s guile. “I pass through a terrible crisis. I make the great sacrifice of my life, and what do you care—either of you? You are as bad as the Baron himself, and he is a devil—implacable, stony. He is not a man at all.”

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The musical director’s lips curled very faintly in a reminiscent smile. Céline guessed at its nature and her great eyes flashed with anger.

“*Imbécile!*” she exclaimed. “In those days it was different. The Paul Domiloff of to-day is heartless. He is eaten up with ambition.”

“*Pardon, Madame,*” the second man, Riotto, the manager of the opera, observed. “You wrong the Baron. He is making the bravest fight any man ever made to preserve Monaco in the place which belongs to it and to keep it the most beautiful playground of the world.”

“Your heart, Céline,” Adolf Zabruski declared, “should at the present moment be filled with gratitude to him. It was he who

saved you from a colossal act of folly.”

Céline glanced across the empty seas to where last night the *Hesperides* had been lying.

“It would have been a *folie magnifique*,” she sighed. “The world would have applauded it.”

Riotto shrugged his shoulders.

“You know how they treat a broken contract here,” he reminded them. “What about ‘Louise’? Notwithstanding all my persuasions, for ten years they refused to give it.”

“Pooh!” she scoffed. “You think they would treat Céline like that? *Imbécile!* It was the Baron. He had another scheme. There was someone else—the American girl.”

“Did she go?” Riotto enquired.

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Céline looked across the sea. She was really, she assured herself, suffering a great deal.

“Who knows?” she exclaimed tearfully.

“I would remind you once more,” Zabruski, who never forgot that he was her business manager, said, tapping the table with his fingers and leaning forward, “that in the whole history of the opera here, broken contracts have spelled ruin to the *artistes*.”

The tears had marvellously disappeared from Céline’s eyes. She leaned back in her chair. She laughed at him.

“You know to whom you speak?” she asked. “My dear Signor—I—Céline! Do you know what I should do if they spoke of law to me? I should say: ‘Very well.’ I should fold my arms like this. I should order my automobile. I should drive to my villa above Grasse. I should say to the world: ‘Céline sings no more’—and I should keep my word—until they came and pleaded.”

“You are sure they would come?” Riotto queried.

She looked at him scornfully.

“The people would drive them there,” she answered. “Do you think the world who follow me wherever I sing would allow me to remain dumb because of a contract? Was ever a great Diva plagued with such a soulless *entourage*? One would remind me that he is my director. Bah! The other talks to me of contracts. Go away, both of you. *Je m’en fiche de vous deux!*”

“I think,” Riotto proposed, rising, “that we smoke a cigar on the Terrace, Adolf. Madame dislikes the odour and she will perhaps calm herself.”

“To me it is equal,” she said, waving her hand. “Go away, both of you.”

They passed down the Terrace arm in arm.

“Why is it that Monaco is gay with bunting this morning?”
Zabruski demanded of his companion.

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“Something to do with the State. There has been a change of government or perhaps it is just a fête day. The question I ask myself is this,” Riotto went on, pausing in the middle of the broad walk: “The banker Sagastrada—did he leave last night on that steamer or not?”

Céline, just at that moment, was asking herself the same question.

Lord Henry, immaculate in faultlessly cut tweeds, a grey Homburg hat, a Guards’ tie and a bunch of violets in his buttonhole, came down the steps of the hotel and strolled along the Terrace dispensing greetings in every direction. Céline called him to her. She gave him her fingers, which he raised devoutly to his lips.

“Madame is abroad early,” he remarked.

She waved her hand.

“It is the sunshine,” she explained. “I wake this morning and through the windows I feel the sunshine and the breeze. I could rest no more. Monsieur—Milord, I would ask you a question.”

“I am at your disposition, Madame.”

“The young banker—that glorious young man who dominated the place last night, with whom I danced—and oh! how he dances—did he leave by that steamer?”

“Madame,” Lord Henry lied, “I left the party early—early for me. It was five o’clock. Whether he went or not I do not know.”

She frowned.

“If they have done him evil, those horrible men, that policeman who calls himself a General, never again so long as I live will I sing a note in his country,” she declared.

“Diva,” Lord Henry said, bending a little lower still over the table, “have I your permission to repeat that threat?”

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She raised her fine eyes and looked at him steadily. There were times, when she spoke with men not of her own country, when she wondered. Lord Henry’s expression, however, was entirely grave.

“He is not an artist, that man,” she said. “It would probably mean nothing to him if you did. Let that be as you will. Only, Lord Henry—that wonderful young man, if he did not go away, if he stayed here because I failed him, can you not let him know that I desire him to visit me at once?”

She was smiling at her companion now, a very beautiful vision, notwithstanding the overprofuseness of her delicately perfumed cosmetics and the voluptuous unreality of her immediate surroundings—the three dogs in their elaborate collars held by the grim-looking French maid, who stood motionless in the background. Lord Henry sighed as he took off his hat with a flourish and made his *adieux*.

“It will give me pain,” he confessed, “but I will transmit your message.”

She smiled at his gallantry and threw him a kiss. Then she turned to the maid behind.

“Marie,” she announced, “I will make a little promenade. Fifi I will carry. The others watch every moment. See that they are well behaved and follow me closely.”

“*Mais oui, Madame,*” the maid answered.

It was an understood convention in the Principality that on her morning promenade it was Madame herself who signified her desire to speak to her acquaintances, otherwise she was left, save for bows and smiles, unmolested. Foxley Brent, who never kept a rule and had the skin of a rhinoceros, nevertheless placed himself in her way, holding his mastiff by the collar.

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“Madame takes the sun early,” he observed.

“A little before my usual time,” she admitted.

The world-famed cosmopolitan, the most finished exponent of sartorial extravagances, with a big red carnation in his buttonhole, moved a step nearer. His small dark eyes were full of twinkling banter.

“The *Hesperides* has sailed,” he pointed out.

“So I see, Monsieur,” she answered, waving him away. “You will excuse me, if you please. The sight of your great dog upsets my little ones.”

Céline passed on, leaving Foxley Brent disgruntled, but annoyed only that others had witnessed his rebuff. A few minutes later she came face to face with Joan. This time it was she who paused. Joan followed suit. The two women smiled at one another in different fashions. Joan herself in her chic tennis outfit was correctly attired according to Riviera traditions. Foxley Brent, who had turned to watch the meeting, wore for an instant upon his face the grin of the satyr. He saw what no

casual observer could have seen—he saw the encounter of two women each clad in her own armour: Céline in the dark maroon confection of a famous Parisian *couturière*, a turban hat of the same material, a hatpin with an old garnet, a garnet necklace and bracelets. From the tiny strip of lace about her neck—priceless lace it was indeed—to the tips of her shining patent shoes, she was the woman of one world; and Joan, in her carelessly flung-on tennis frock, a little open at her neck, her muffler drifting behind in the breeze—she, in the frank abandon of her perfectly natural gait, seemed to have brought something of the old Grecian ideals with which to confront the lascivious arts of the French workshops. An Aphrodite of the Terrace —“Fresh as the foam, new-bathed in Paphian wells.” Céline’s glorious eyes travelled over her, and the heavily beringed fingers which were stroking the head of her Pomeranian trembled a little.

“Mademoiselle is early abroad,” she said.

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“And you, too, Madame,” Joan answered. “A morning like this is enough to make one regret the misspent night.”

“You play the game of tennis?” Céline enquired.

“I have had an hour’s practice with the professional,” Joan replied carelessly. “It was a little too early to expect any of the others to play. Afterwards I had a swim.”

Céline shivered. The barbarity of exposing one’s limbs to the sting of a February morning, even though the sun was shining, seemed to her inconceivable. It was not possible that men could really worship such crudity.

“You can perhaps tell me,” she went on, “what everyone, including myself, is asking. What has become of our young host of last night?”

Involuntarily Joan’s eyes also travelled across the placid blue sea.

“I have heard nothing,” she replied. “When I left, the siren was hooting but Rudolph Sagrastrada was still in the Sporting Club.”

Céline’s smile was almost one of triumph.

“Then he is still in Monte Carlo!” she exclaimed.

“Perhaps. . . . You sang very wonderfully last night, Madame. It was a great privilege to hear you.”

Something of the tenseness passed from Céline’s attitude. Even if it was an unwilling meed of admiration, it was welcome. This girl—who was she, to be feared? She could hit a round white ball over a tennis net with amazing skill. What was that? She, Céline, could sing her way into the heart of a man. She could sing into his blood, bring the passion into his eyes. . . .

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The dream of last night floated for a moment before her.

“I am glad that you like my voice,” she said. “It is only a few times in my life that I have sung in a restaurant. I could almost say never. It was not easy but the young man himself—he has the gift of calling out the music. He himself has inspiration.”

“He is having quite an adventure,” Joan observed.

Céline laughed softly.

“They will not dare to touch him here,” she declared. “His family is one of the greatest in Europe. To be a Sagastrada is to have achieved fame.”

Joan smiled and prepared to move on.

“The fame of being a millionaire and coming of a family of millionaires does not seem to count for much in his country,” she remarked. “I wish you a pleasant promenade, Madame.”

Joan, as she passed on, found herself joined at once by Foxley Brent and Hayden Smith. They strolled on together, Joan listening a little listlessly to the former’s ceaseless flow of conversation. Suddenly she stopped. She was gazing intently at a table in a retired corner. Her two companions looked at her enquiringly.

“Someone you know?” Foxley Brent asked.

She shook her head. The person she had been watching had raised a newspaper hurriedly and disappeared behind it. Joan, however, had already recognized him. He was one of the two men who had been following Sagastrada, and even as she hesitated there she saw the other one strolling up the broad steps towards the Hôtel de Paris.

“No, no one I know,” she answered. “I am allowed, after an hour’s strenuous tennis and a swim, to plead guilty to a slight hangover from last night, am I not?” she added, pointing towards the bar.

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Foxley Brent hailed her suggestion with approbation.

“Come right along,” he enjoined. “Come on, Hayden. We won’t stand any monkeying about from that young barman. A bottle—we will open it ourselves—and let me have my own way with the orange and the Angostura.”

“And the ice,” Joan pleaded.

“My, what a drink we are going to have in a matter of five minutes!” Foxley Brent exclaimed, the light of anticipation already dancing in his eyes.

They lingered a moment or two, even then, before they crossed

the road. Joan exchanged a few words with some possible opponents of the afternoon. Foxley Brent was accosted by one of his numerous acquaintances and Hayden Smith greeted briefly one of the so-called sportsmen on his way to attend a *Pigeon Battue*. When they strolled on again, Joan noticed that the watcher, who had been sitting in the retired corner, had left his place and was entering the bar.

“Steady on for a moment,” Foxley Brent advised, looking up the broad straight thoroughfare bordering the gardens and twisting his head to see round the sharp bend in the road which led past the Turkish baths and down into the Condamine. “Nasty corner, this, and there are one or two fellows about practising for the race. Good God! What’s that?”

The conversation ended for the moment. Opposite, through the open windows of the bar, they all three heard distinctly the unmistakable report of a revolver fired twice in rapid succession. There was a hubbub of shouting and a crash of breaking glass. Suddenly a man dressed in khaki-coloured clothes, red-faced and bare-headed, appeared for a moment at the open window of the bar, laid his hand firmly upon the sill and vaulted through. On the pavement he lost his balance, struggled wildly and crashed into the road. Almost simultaneously, the swing door of the bar on the left was flung open. A second man, very similar in appearance to the first, sprang down the few steps, running bent double like a wild animal. For an infinitesimal part of a second he paused to glance up and down the road, then he seemed to make directly for the spot where his companion was making frantic efforts to rise to his feet. Before he had done more than clear the kerbstone, however, there was the sound of another shot behind him. He suddenly straightened himself, gave a little cry and leaped into the air. The tragedy which followed was almost instantaneous. The man who had jumped from the window of the bar and who was on the point of recovering his balance, was knocked flat on his back by the impact of his companion’s body just as a furiously driven automobile came dashing round the corner from the Condamine. There was a great honking of horns. The car skidded, the effect of a mighty but unsuccessful effort to avoid the two writhing figures. A moment later it had passed completely over both and crashed into the pavement. Then the crowd running from the Terrace, from the *Place*, the officials from the front of the Casino—all seemed to meet in one heterogeneous mass of shouting people bending over the two prostrate bodies lying in the road. Afterwards it appeared to everybody that a miracle happened. Louis, the barman, who had been on his knees in the dust, rose and hurried back into the bar. Apparently he already divined the finish of the affair. Half-a-dozen men, who seemed to have come from nowhere—soberly dressed, responsible-looking—and the liveried porter from outside the Casino had snatched up their burdens and shouldered their way to the Terrace entrance. They swung to the left. In a moment they had disappeared. All that was left of

the tragedy was the shattered automobile, the occupants of which were unhurt, and one or two wayfarers who had joined in the scrimmage.

“Say, what’s become of those fellows?” Foxley Brent cried, looking around him in blank amazement.

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Joan opened her lips and closed them again. Two of the *gendarmes* in their musical comedy uniforms had appeared from the *Place* and were clearing the street. The Babel of voices had ceased. *Habitués* were moving away as fast as they could. Joan felt a sudden impulse towards silence. She said nothing. None of the three, in fact, did more than glance towards that big window just in front of them. Nevertheless, they crossed the street, pushed open the door of the bar, which was now practically empty, and, closely followed by Louis brushing the dust from his trousers, took their places in armchairs around the corner table. Then Foxley Brent spoke, and his voice seemed hoarser and his transatlantic accent more definite than ever.

“Say—quick as hell, Louis! A bottle of Pommery, ice, three tumblers, an orange, Angostura and the sugar castor.”

Louis’s smile was a little vague but nevertheless it contained gleams of understanding. He disappeared behind the counter. His assistant made his appearance through the far door and brought salted almonds and biscuits to the table. He was very pale and his hands were shaking.

“What’s been going on here, Fred?” Foxley Brent asked him.

“I saw nothing, sir,” the man replied. “I just happened to be away for a moment.”

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“Humph!” his questioner grunted. “And mark my words,” he went on, turning to his two companions, “what that lad says is just about what everyone else will say—they saw nothing. But I saw—”

“Perhaps if everyone else,” Joan interrupted, “is going to decide that they saw nothing, it might be just as well for us to fall in line.”

“Guess you’re right,” Foxley Brent agreed.

“I’m sure she is,” Hayden Smith meditated. “For instance,” he continued, leaning over the table so that their three heads nearly touched, “I saw who bobbed up at this window a few seconds after that last shot had been fired.”

“And so?” Joan asked.

“I’m going to forget it right now.”

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CHAPTER XXIII

It was Foxley Brent who, notwithstanding the universal conspiracy of silence, began to question the barman.

“Say, what little hell’s game have you been up to in here this morning, Louis?” he enquired, removing the cigar for a moment from the corner of his mouth. “Didn’t I hear a gun from the other side of the sidewalk?”

Louis shook his head.

“I do not think so, sir,” he replied. “There was a man found his way in—nobody knows who he was. He asked me where Mr. Sagastrada was and before I could reply, another stranger came along and whispered something in his ear. I went to the other end of the bar to shake some cocktails and when I came back one man was making for the door and the other was jumping out of the window. Then I heard the noise outside and saw that both of them had been run over.”

“What about that last shot?” Foxley Brent asked.

“I did not hear it, sir,” Louis replied.

His questioner thrust his cigar back into his mouth.

“If I could tell them like you, Louis,” he observed admiringly, “I’d be earning more than you can make by shaking those cocktails all day long.”

“It’s no good asking any of these fellows questions,” Lord Henry, who had just joined them, observed as Louis turned away without remark. “They’re all too well trained. I was standing next a man in the ‘kitchen’ once, saw him take poison and fall on the floor writhing in agony. In twenty seconds there was not a sign of him. I asked a valet what was the matter. He simply replied that the gentleman was taken a little faint. That’s all you ever hear.”

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“People do really disappear sometimes, then?” Joan asked.

Foxley Brent laughed shortly.

“I should say so,” he agreed. “They go right off the map and there’s never a line about them in the papers and I defy anyone to find out what becomes of them. By-the-by, I wonder what has become of Sagastrada?”

“No good asking Louis,” Lord Henry said. “We shall have to wait until the Baron comes along.”

Joan, who had been gazing idly out of the window, waved her hand.

“Why, there he is!” she exclaimed. “That’s strange, though. He came out of the private entrance to the theatre in the gardens there.”

Lord Henry looked thoughtful. Hayden Smith was listening to Foxley Brent, who was laying down the law about a change in the race course at Deauville. Lord Henry whispered in Joan’s ear.

“I would forget that, Miss Haskell.”

“What do you mean?” she asked.

He motioned his head slightly towards Foxley Brent.

“Such a gossip, that fellow,” he said. “And there have been funny rumours about that State entrance to the theatre.”

She nodded. Domiloff lounged up the steps and into the bar. He came across to them with his usual rather tired smile.

“Brandy, Louis,” he ordered, sinking into a chair. “Half pale brandy and half ginger ale, a lot of lemon and a lot of ice. In a tankard, Louis—you understand? Move the champagne bottle farther away from me. I cannot stand the sight of it this morning.”

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“Where is your ward?” Foxley Brent asked him.

“Still asleep, I should think.”

“Still in your rooms?”

Domiloff was blandly deaf.

“I should think we must have drunk the cellars dry last night,” he observed. “In all my recollection I never saw more champagne flowing round the place. Good thing the young man has got the money to pay for it!”

“Sagastada!” Foxley Brent exclaimed. “My God, money is a joke to that family! I remember when his uncle in New York gave one supper party that cost fifty thousand dollars. I was there. Not unlike this young man.”

“Everything as usual this morning?” Joan asked, her eyes travelling for a moment towards that private entrance.

“Everything ticking away like a piece of clockwork,” the Baron replied. “I must just have my drink and go and see what this troublesome young man is up to.”

A *chasseur* in the quiet livery of Domiloff’s private staff put

his head in at the door, recognized his master and came swiftly over to him. He handed the latter a note, stood by while it was read and, accepting his curt little nod of dismissal, hurried off. Domiloff, with the air of a man unconscious of what he is doing, very slowly tore the half-sheet of notepaper into small pieces. He rose to his feet and held out his hand for the tankard which Louis was bringing. He looked round at the little company with a slight nod and raised it to his lips.

“Sorry I have to hurry off,” he remarked as he set it down. “I am wanted over in the Casino.”

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He rose to his feet. Joan took him by the arm and walked by his side out on to the steps leading to the *Place*.

“Baron,” she said quietly, “is this very kind of you?”

“It is very unkind,” he admitted. “I am sorry, Miss Joan, but there were just two men there to whom I did not wish to tell the whole truth. The House of Assembly came to no decision until six o’clock this morning. They decided then to leave the matter entirely in my hands. The *Hesperides* had left.”

“So Rudolph Sagastrada remains,” she murmured.

“So far as I know he is at the present moment sleeping peacefully. Just as well for him, in the circumstances.”

“You mean—”

“Those two assassins from Beaulieu chose this morning to try and fight their way up to his room. That is one spot of trouble out of the way, anyhow.”

“You think that I failed you?” she asked a little timidly.

He shook his head.

“You behaved as I should have expected, knowing and admiring you as I do,” he answered. “In any case, I have now received definite authorization from the French Cabinet. Sagastrada is to remain in Monte Carlo.”

He left her with a smile upon her lips and crossed the road towards the main entrance to the Casino, where the uniformed porters were already standing at the salute. Joan returned to her table in the bar where Léon de Hochepierre and Lucille had just arrived. They were in the midst of an eager recital of the morning’s events when Domiloff also rejoined them.

“Come right along, Baron,” Foxley Brent invited cordially.

“Young Sagastrada has not turned up yet. Is it true that you have him locked up in your new apartments?”

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“Just as well that I have, considering what has been going on this morning,” Domiloff replied. “Excuse me for a few

moments, please. I will join you later.”

He strolled across to the bar and seated himself on a high stool. Louis was preparing some cocktails exactly opposite. Domiloff watched him for a moment curiously.

“Business good this morning, Louis?”

“Plenty to do, sir,” was the respectful reply. “Can I get you anything?”

“Serve those cocktails you are shaking and come back again.”

The barman obeyed. Domiloff leaned over and helped himself to some salted almonds. He ate one or two meditatively. When Louis returned he leaned a little further across the bar and dropped his voice.

“Louis,” he enquired, “who else was in the bar when those two men dashed out of it like lunatics and were run over and killed?”

Louis’s grey eyes were troubled. He glanced down the long line of empty stools towards the door.

“It is not easy for me to say, sir,” he confided. “People pass in and out so quickly. A great many just push the door open to see if anyone is here they want to talk to and then go out again. So far as I remember the place was nearly empty.”

“There will be no enquiry into this matter,” Domiloff continued thoughtfully, “but something must have happened to have sent those men rushing across the street like madmen so that they never saw the automobile coming, and that something must have happened in this bar.”

“It did,” Louis admitted, dropping his voice until it was almost a whisper.

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“Proceed, Louis.”

“I saw the door pushed open at the hotel end,” the barman went on, “and two men entered together and made as though they were going to the round table where you and Mr. Sagastrada usually sit. One of them, in fact, stopped and asked me where Mr. Sagastrada was. Then the telephone rang and I looked away to see if Fred was answering it. Just as I looked back again, two shots were fired. One of the men rushed out of the bar by the swing door into the street, the other vaulted through the window just before him and fell down. There was a third shot and then the crash of the automobile.”

“From where did it seem that those shots were fired, Louis?” Domiloff asked quietly.

“They might have been fired from anywhere round about where

you are standing now, sir,” Louis answered.

“I see,” Domiloff murmured, crushing another of the salted almonds between his teeth. “And the men who were leaving the place were the two men who have been hanging around after Rudolph Sagastrada for several days?”

“Yes, sir. There was no mistaking them. They entered the room together as though in a great hurry and I had the idea that Mr. Sagastrada and some of the others might be behind and that they were going to conceal themselves behind the curtains near his table and wait for him.”

“I see. Then the two shots were fired and they—er—changed their minds.”

“Yes, sir.”

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“And they were fired from this end of the room?”

“Yes, sir.”

Domiloff, who was seated on the last stool nearest the hotel door, slipped down, lifted the flap of the counter and glanced at the little zinc sink and drawers.

“What do you keep in there, Louis?” he asked.

“Some of the things I need for making the cocktails, sir.”

“And in the drawers?”

Louis made no reply. He continued his task of polishing glasses. Domiloff leaned over to his side, opened one of the mahogany drawers and closed it again carefully.

“Nothing else you would like to tell me, Louis?”

“Nothing that you do not know, Baron.”

Domiloff lit a cigarette.

“Perhaps you are right, Louis,” he said. “Bring me a bottle of ginger ale and lemon peel without any brandy, over to the table.”

“Yes, Baron.”

Domiloff strolled back to his place at the round table and seated himself on the arm of Joan’s *fauteuil* whilst a chair was brought for him.

“Queer little village, this,” he observed.

“Odd that you should only have just found that out,” she smiled.

“How long have you been here now?” he asked.

"A fortnight," she told him. "It seems to me that something has happened every day."

"Keep a diary?"

She shook her head.

"I don't think I should show it to you if I did!"

He accepted the tumbler that Louis had brought him and sipped its contents thoughtfully.

"Is Lydia down?" Joan asked.

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"I rather fancy that she is in my rooms with Rudolph Sagastrada. Do you want to see him?"

"I don't know," she answered frankly.

"For a young woman of some decision of character," Domiloff observed, "you seem to find it very difficult to make up your mind about that young man."

"I do," she confessed. "I am never quite sure what my feelings are for him."

"Bad sign, that."

"I'm not so sure," she replied. "There were a few minutes last night when I was certain I cared for him more than anyone in the world."

"And this morning?"

She shook her head.

"The crisis has passed. One of the most terrifying and exciting visions of my life has faded."

"Do you want to see him?"

She made no reply. Lucille intervened.

"Is our young friend coming down to lunch?" she asked the Baron, "and if so is there any safe place where we could take him?"

Domiloff finished his drink and rose to his feet.

"I should doubt it," he answered. "We are doing the best we can but I should not say there was any place where he was perfectly safe."

"You are not leaving us?" Joan asked.

"Not without you," he replied, taking her arm and leading her towards the door.

“Is this an abduction?”

“Well,” he confided, “you have been here two weeks and no one has run away with you yet. I am going to start the fashion.”

“Let us know about lunch as soon as you have finished that ribald conversation,” Lucille called after them.

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Joan knew instinctively where she was being taken. Nevertheless, they passed along the broad corridors and up in the lift without, a word. When they reached the entrance to the suite which had been made over to Sagastrada, Joan broke the silence.

“Is he still in danger?”

He shrugged his shoulders.

“More or less. All the same, we got rid of those two gentlemen from Beaulieu this morning.”

“Who shot them?”

Domiloff’s surprise seemed perfectly natural.

“They were run over coming out of the bar. Well out of the way, I should think.”

“Is that what you are looking so pleased about this morning?”

“My dear, no. I am pleased partly because they are safely out of the way and partly because I am with you.”

The *gendarme* saluted and stood on one side as they reached their destination. Domiloff led the way into the salon. Sagastrada was sitting on a couch which he shared with Lydia. He was a little pale, otherwise he was apparently in excellent spirits.

“All is well,” Domiloff, who was standing with his finger pressed upon the bell, confided. “Your would-be assassins from Beaulieu are lying in state. At four o’clock to-morrow morning, when the curious have ceased to cumber the streets, they will be buried.”

“The men who were run over?” Rudolph demanded.

Domiloff assented.

“Who fired the shot from the bar?”

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“No one seems to have the slightest idea. There is not much of this gangster business going on in Monte Carlo and everyone seems to have taken cover directly they heard the pistol shot.”

Sagastrada shivered slightly. He was of more sensitive fibre

than the beautiful woman by his side or the Baron himself.

“We heard the shooting,” Joan confided. “We were just going to cross the street. The sight of those men has always terrified me ever since I saw one of them jump into the car at Beaulieu.”

“Well, they will not terrify you any longer,” Domiloff remarked. “The man who murdered Rothmann may have been all right but I cannot think how a man like the other ever got a job as a first-class assassin.”

“All the same,” Rudolph said earnestly, “I should like to know who fired the shot from the bar.”

“I do not think that you will ever find out,” Domiloff declared. “Reminds me of the time I was a young man out on a ranch in a pretty bad quarter of Texas,” he went on reflectively. “We rode in one day to a sort of settlement where there was a bar and some women and gambling. I remember I was just commencing my first drink after a five hours’ ride when there was the sound of a revolver shot. That bar was packed with cowboys and loungers of every description a second before. I turned round to see what was going on and it was empty!”

“And so?”

“The same thing, apparently, happened below,” Domiloff explained. “People who are here for pleasure are extraordinarily careful of their lives. Where they all hid, out of which windows they jumped or what means of exit they used, I do not know. I could find no one who saw or heard a shot fired. Apparently the bar was empty.”

“Tell me this morning’s news,” Rudolph begged after a moment’s pause. “What about the fierce ogre who wants me for a travelling companion?”

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“We are acting on the principle that attack is better than defence,” Domiloff recounted, lighting a cigarette. “We have commandeered the telephone wires and are censoring the telegraph. As for the mighty man himself, I may have to deal with him this afternoon. I have an appointment with him later on.”

Sagastrada laughed softly.

“Your husband is indeed an uncrowned king, Baroness,” he murmured.

She touched his cheek lightly.

“Are you the captured prince?” she asked smiling.

“A too willing prisoner,” he sighed.

Domiloff’s butler made his appearance with a silver tray laden

with cocktails.

“Double ones,” the host pointed out. “These are strenuous days. In some respects this week is likely to be the most eventful which Monte Carlo has ever known.”

“All the same,” Joan declared, shaking her head, “I can drink no more cocktails. I had two downstairs with Mr. Brent.”

“I have not had one at all,” Lydia said, as she stretched out her hand. “I have been wholly occupied in trying to keep my guest’s spirits up.”

“To whom you have not yet offered a single drink,” Sagastrada observed, also helping himself. “It is queer—in my own country I forget all about wines until dinnertime, and *apéritifs* only exist when one goes to a café or dines out. Here they seem to go with the atmosphere.”

“What is there peculiar about the atmosphere of Monte Carlo, I wonder?” Lydia Domiloff speculated.

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“The sun and the languor of the place,” Sagastrada pronounced, “are always working in the blood. It is like a clearinghouse for all the passions.”

“Quite good,” Domiloff observed with an appreciative smile. “The true banker’s simile.”

“Paul,” his wife asked him a little abruptly, “what are we going to do with this young man? It is impossible that he stay here much longer or I myself shall drift into danger. I am far too sympathetic.”

“Shall we send for the Diva?” Joan suggested.

“We are only like this,” Lydia sighed, “when romance is in the air, when a picturesque young man is in danger of his life—”

“Am I really picturesque?” Sagastrada interrupted. “Horrible! It is because I have tied my tie with loose ends.”

“There is a general disposition to talk nonsense this morning,” Domiloff declared, replenishing the glasses and helping himself. “I beg to suggest a more serious subject for your consideration. What about luncheon?”

“Where,” Lydia asked, “can we lunch without fear of flying bullets? Before you people came I was rather looking forward to a tête-à-tête affair. My guest is still suffering from the strain of last night. A little caviar and chicken and perhaps a pint of dry champagne is really all he ought to have.”

“Lydia,” Domiloff said sternly, “the laws of the Principality are at the present moment under revision, but I must warn you that divorce is going to be made exceedingly easy for the

wronged husband. We can all lunch here, if you like, and send for Lord Henry and the De Hochepierres.”

“Am I invited?” Joan asked.

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“Of course you are,” Lydia declared. “All the same, I am very jealous of you, Miss Haskell. I am not sure which I ought to hate the more—you or the Diva.”

“Life is getting too complicated,” Joan sighed. “I had no idea that you were seriously in the running.”

“I was not until this morning,” Lydia acknowledged. “It was seeing him so pale and realizing how near we have been to losing him that did it with me. It may pass off. I hope so. I am playing backgammon with Léon at five o’clock for high stakes.”

“Play with me and we will play for the highest of all,” Sagastrada suggested. “I am bound to win. I am the luckiest player in the world.”

“All this talk does not get us anywhere,” Domiloff remarked a little irritably. “I am always more hungry for luncheon after a late night and I am on the point of starvation.”

Lydia lifted a lazy arm and pressed a bell. The butler arrived almost immediately.

“Search in the restaurant for Monsieur Daroni,” she directed. “Tell him to send up lunch for eight or nine. We must leave it to him to see that there is melon, caviar and a dish of chicken curry. Serve it in the salon in twenty minutes.”

“And in the meantime . . .,” Domiloff suggested, looking at the empty glasses which the man was already collecting.

“Quite so, sir,” the butler interrupted quietly. “Henri will see about the cocktails. I will hurry in and see Monsieur Daroni myself. We shall serve luncheon at the hour Madame demands.”

“All very pleasant,” Joan declared. “Would you like me to go and fetch the Prince and Princess? I am going to collect the various things I left in the bar.”

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“Sweet of you, if you would,” Lydia begged. “I could not desert my charge.”

“The only class of human being to whom you could remain faithful for twenty-four hours,” Domiloff grunted.

“Bring Foxley Brent, too, if he is there,” Lydia called out. “He hates being left out of anything.”

“In fact you have *carte blanche*, my dear Miss Haskell,”

Domiloff put in. "You know what a little family party we are by this time. Outside we only look over the fence if duty demands it."

One of Domiloff's official secretaries hurried in. He drew the Baron on one side.

"It is Monsieur Regnier who has just returned from Nice," he announced. "He desires a few words with you, sir. I left him in your anteroom."

"I will be there in a moment," Domiloff promised. He turned round as the secretary left the room. "You must excuse me," he begged. "Five minutes—no longer. Perhaps I may bring Regnier in to lunch. He should interest all of you."

"Who is he?" Sagastrada asked.

"He is my fellow conspirator in this great world upheaval," Domiloff announced with a grin. "My fellow empire-maker."

"I cannot remember ever having seen the fellow in my life," Lydia reflected.

"Absurd," her husband scoffed. "Be prepared for an imposing sight, all of you—that is, if he accepts my invitation. He is tall, he has a beard,—the blackest I ever saw,—he wears the red ribbon of the *Légion d'Honneur*, he is a Deputy, and—well, what do you suppose all this firing of guns and fluttering of flags has been for? For us. For Monsieur Pierre Regnier—ex-Senator, ex-Deputy, ex-Everything but my fellow Dictator. Everybody got that clear? Very well. *Au revoir*."

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The Baron left the room.

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CHAPTER XXIV

The little party—the Prince and Princess, Lord Henry and Foxley Brent—were still occupying the corner table in the bar when Joan entered. She paused on her way towards them, stopped at the counter, mounted a stool and leaned over towards where Louis was making some memoranda in a small book. She dropped her voice.

“Louis,” she said, “you were in the bar when the trouble came this morning?”

He looked at her gravely.

“I was here, Mademoiselle,” he admitted. “I cannot say that I saw much of it. I was taken by surprise and it was all over so soon.”

“You saw the two men who ran out of the bar?”

“Yes, I saw them,” he acknowledged. “I saw them run over, too, by the automobile.”

“One of them, at any rate, was shot before he was run over,” Joan said quietly. “Who shot him, Louis?”

“Mademoiselle,” he answered, shaking his head, “it was all too sudden. I saw nothing. I looked at one place. I looked at another. It seemed to me that I was always missing the things which happened. The *gendarmes* have been here but I could tell them nothing.”

“You don’t know who the man was who crouched behind the round table in the corner there where the Prince and Princess are and fired through the open window?”

“No, it was difficult,” Louis confided. “I saw nothing of that. I make Mademoiselle a cocktail the same as the others?”

They called to her from the round table. She slipped off the stool and abandoned her questioning. She went over to the chair where she had been seated and collected her racquets and coat.

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“The Domiloffs invite you all to lunch,” she announced. “It is to be served in the apartments they have lent to Rudolph Sagastrada.”

“Gee, that’s nice of them,” Foxley Brent said. “Can’t say I have ever been up in those parts.”

“What about Sagastrada—is he all right?” Lord Henry asked.

“He seems remarkably well,” she replied.

“Curious sort of life we are living here,” Lord Henry remarked. “I have been coming to Monte Carlo for a great many years but I have never run up against anything like this. They are all saying now that the fellow who ran out—one of the two who were always hanging round here—was shot in the back before the car touched him. I thought he took a queer little spin in the road before he went over.”

“No one seems to be sure about that,” Joan replied. “What is the use of my going swimming and playing tennis,” she lamented, “if I drink three cocktails before lunch?”

“We are all doing it,” the Princess sighed. “Somehow or other they go with the place. They don’t seem so strong here as anywhere else. I have had four and in Paris or at home I never take more than one. How is that divine young man, Joan, really? Is he in good spirits?”

“The best,” she declared. “Lydia has now assumed complete possession.”

“And the Diva?” Lord Henry asked.

“Fortunately she never comes into the bar.”

Foxley Brent rose to his feet. Joan nodded and followed suit.

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“I think we had better be getting along,” she suggested. “Very likely the Baron has more wonderful disclosures to make. He was trying to make us believe that all this flag-flying and these salutes this morning were in his honour.”

They trooped across the hall towards the corridor leading to the Sporting Club. In the restaurant Madame Céline and her two companions were just taking their places for luncheon. The Diva was standing up before her chair looking eagerly around the room, her fingers resting lightly upon the shoulder of one of the men. Apparently her brief promenade had done little to bring back the colour to her cheeks.

“Looking for Sagastrada,” Lord Henry whispered in Joan’s ear. “We shall have to get rid of that young man. I thought last night was a farewell party.”

“It was meant to be,” Joan agreed. “I fancy he changed his mind at the last moment.”

“I think he is a very attractive young man,” Lucille sighed. “Myself I am very hurt. I am the only woman here upon whom he has not smiled.”

“That comes of having a celebrated duellist for a husband,” the Prince observed. “I have forgotten all my subtle passes,” he added, with a little turn of the wrist. “I must find old Monsieur

Gautard and practise for an hour one morning. I can see by Lucille's expression that the necessity will soon arise."

"It ought to have arisen long ago," Lucille said. "I am much too kind to you. I have the reputation of being a constant wife. That is why no man pays me any attention."

"You should cultivate the gifts, Princess, of Lydia Domiloff," Lord Henry observed.

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"Has she any special gifts?" Lucille asked, falling a little back with the speaker as they reached the last corridor. "Tell me."

"Lydia Domiloff," Lord Henry declared portentously, "is one of the most interesting women in the world. She ought to be plain but she is beautiful whenever she chooses. She is a mixture of the kitten and the tigress. She can talk to a man for half an hour and he will leave her believing that he has been engaged in a desperate flirtation. Next time he meets her he will have to go over all the same ground again and he will get no further. The few to whom she troubles to unbend worship her, but she never unbends sufficiently. She is," he added with a little sigh, "the only woman in Monte Carlo living her life who I would take my oath is faithful to her husband."

"There is just one thing to be said about that," Lucille remarked, as they passed the saluting guard who stood before the door of Sagastrada's apartments. "The Baron himself is the most attractive man in the world—except my own husband," she added, gripping him by the arm. "Here we all are, Lydia my dear," she went on, as they trooped into the room. "What a party, what a life and what a happy-looking prisoner!"

"More cocktails!" Lord Henry groaned.

"More cocktails!" the Prince exclaimed with a smile.

"And the best in the world," Foxley Brent declared.

There was a general flurry of greetings. Joan remained a little in the background. Lydia had suddenly assumed an air of proprietorship.

"My charge must not be too greatly disturbed," she insisted. "The sight of Lucille and Miss Haskell is quite sufficient to send his temperature up. I shall not allow him to sit down to lunch until I have tested it."

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"What a wonderful woman!" Lucille exclaimed. "A great artist—yes, I do love your water colours, Lydia—a brilliant pianist, a linguist, a woman who seems to find time to read every important book in every language—and now a quasi-serious hospital nurse!"

"Do you hear, Paul?" Lydia called out. "The Princess is explaining what a wonderful woman I am."

“My dear,” he answered with a little bow, “your husband is the last man who needs reminding of it.”

“Say, aren’t you all very bright for the morning after the party?” Joan asked, as she shook her head resolutely at the cocktail tray.

“It is the sunshine,” Lord Henry declared. “Guaranteed to thaw the foggiest of brains. Sagastrada, how much longer are you going to stay here and turn all these women’s heads?”

“I am nothing but a nuisance already,” was the apologetic rejoinder. “I may have been a little difficult about that tourist steamer. It is not my idea of a departure from paradise. For the rest, the Baron is busy making plans for me. I warn you all, though, that I shall come back again.”

“I cannot think how it is that you have avoided us so long,” Lydia complained.

“I am distracted when I think of it,” he assured her. “Four years ago I was at Cannes. We played polo every day, I had friends, there was a little golf and at the Casino the gambling was very attractive. I meant to come over to finish up with, and then I had rather unexpectedly to go to South America.”

“You will never treat us again like that, I hope,” Lucille sighed.

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“Never,” he declared vigorously. “When I leave here, if I do leave, thanks to you all, my dear friends, the place will remain in my memory as the one possible playground of life. I shall be back again before you have had time to miss me.”

The Baron, who had been called out of the room a few minutes before, returned. He brought with him a tall man of bulky figure, dressed with great care, with a short glossy black beard and thick hair. He possessed keen black eyes, a massive forehead and he carried himself with a certain dignity. He wore the coveted ribbon in his buttonhole and though his features lacked distinction, his appearance was by no means insignificant.

“I beg leave to present to you, my friends,” he said, “my *confrère* in the Administration—Monsieur Pierre Regnier—ex-Deputy, now co-President with me of the Monégasque Assembly.”

There was a little murmur of welcome. Everyone was very pleasant indeed to Monsieur Regnier.

“Between us we are going to try and make Monte Carlo what it was before the war,” Domiloff continued a few minutes later. “The family who have presided over its destinies for so long are retiring and a new constitution had been formed. Monsieur Regnier will take a cocktail, Henri.”

"I am a convert to this agreeable habit," Monsieur Regnier remarked as he sipped his Martini. "Still, at the back of it all it is wine that I prefer. Spirits have too much the taste and the effect of drugs. The Burgundies, the clarets, the champagnes of France are the wines that set the blood dancing and open the hearts of men. *Madame la Baronne, Princesse*—I drink to you all," he added, raising his glass.

Conversation flowed easily along. In a few minutes Henri made his little bow.

"*Madame la Baronne est servie*," he announced.

Lydia Domiloff rose to her feet.

"Monsieur Regnier," she said, "must sit upon my right—this is almost an occasion—but my charge must sit upon my left. Lucille the other side of Monsieur Regnier and Paul next. The rest arranges itself."

They took their places and Monsieur Regnier with delight essayed the flavour of a fine *Château Yquem* with his melon.

"You are a man after my own heart, Baron," he declared. "You are not one who will drink only the dry wines. The finest wines of France must be sweet, but mark you it is the sweetness of the grape. Monsieur Sagastrada," he said, with a little bow to Rudolph, "I drink to the representative of a famous house. My father's favourite book in life was a history of the great bankers of the world. Your house ranked next to the Rothschilds in importance and stability. It must have given the whole of the civilized world a shock when they read of the harsh treatment from which your people have been suffering at the hands of your own country."

"You are very kind," Sagastrada murmured.

"I am only just," Regnier insisted. "You should repay our common enemy in this way. You should bring your millions to Monte Carlo and double them."

Sagastrada smiled.

"I am afraid my millions might soon shrink."

Regnier's little gesture was extremely Gallic.

"But, my young friend," he declared, "I do not mean that you should be as one of these others. I mean that you should join the Administration. The person who regards the conduct of this place from the right aspect, looks upon us as bankers. That is what we are. The bankers must always win at gambling whether it is in *les affaires* or at the tables. The science of figures is ill understood but practically every great financial venture in the world has its leaven of gambling."

“You have not lived all your life in Monaco, Monsieur Regnier,” the Princess observed.

“But no, Madame,” he answered. “I passed some of my youth at the Military Academy of St. Cyr. I was at Harvard in the United States two years, at Oxford for one, at the Bank of France for five. My father was chief of the Bank of Monaco. When he died I came to take his place. I became a member of the House of Assembly, I interested myself a little in the politics of France and behold, now I devote all my energies to assisting Baron Domiloff. It is our aim to make Monte Carlo once more the paradise of the world.”

“The happy hunting ground,” Lord Henry quoted, “in which men who have finished with the toil and burden of life grow younger and women remain always beautiful.”

“I recognize the quotation,” Monsieur Regnier acknowledged. “It was one of your talented Englishmen who wrote that.”

“It sounds like an exaggeration but why should it not be true?” the Baroness murmured. “Someone else said that it is only sorrow which ages and grief which kills. There are lots of things about living we do not know. Perhaps eternal life, after all, is a possibility.”

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The service of luncheon drew towards an end. Lucille had an appointment with her dressmaker at Cannes and left before coffee was served. The Baroness led the way into her smaller salon and the men drew closer together over their cigars.

“Almost the first question,” the Baron said as soon as the brandy had been served, and the servants had left the room, “which must present itself to you and to me, my friend Regnier, is what are we going to do with our young friend here—Rudolph Sagastrada?”

“It is a difficulty,” Regnier admitted, hugging his huge glass with both hands and gently revolving it.

“This is an entirely informal discussion,” the Baron went on, motioning to Lord Henry and the Prince to remain in their places. “Monsieur Regnier has seen the Mayor of Nice, who is a very important person in French politics, only this morning. He thinks there will be no difficulty in getting the new constitution recognized and the independence of the State legalized but on the other hand, as he points out, unless we are under the protection of one of the Powers, we have no means of defence against an outside aggressor.”

“I ought to have gone on the steamer,” Sagastrada said bitterly. “I meant to go, too. I do not know even now what possessed me. I make a burden of myself upon your hospitality.”

Monsieur Regnier took a long and audible sip of his brandy.

He rose slowly to his feet.

“I suggest, my friend and host,” he said, “that you leave this matter in my hands for forty-eight hours. I am overdue at my bureau. I depart there now. I apologize that owing to the stress of weighty affairs I have up till now not been able to give this matter the attention it demands. In forty-eight hours I will come to you, Baron, with any suggestion which occurs to me. You are content, Monsieur Sagastrada?”

“Perfectly.”

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“And you, Baron?”

Domiloff shrugged his shoulders. He knew already a great deal more about the affair than Monsieur Regnier was likely to learn in many times forty-eight hours.

“May heaven guide you, my friend,” he observed.

Then he rang the bell. Monsieur Regnier shook hands with everyone. He turned and made a comprehensive salute of farewell. At the last moment, he paused and whispered in Domiloff’s ear, a whisper to which the latter inclined his head. A final smile and Monsieur Regnier followed Henri from the room.

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CHAPTER XXV

Absolutely unrecognizable in his linen coat, his disfiguring cap and his extra large-sized motoring glasses, Ardrossen drove his car that morning out through the back streets of the Principality up into the hills behind. Arrived on the Corniche, his foot pressed a little more insistently upon the accelerator. He glanced at the dial. Fifty—sixty—seventy—eighty. In twenty minutes he was in Nice. Five minutes later he turned off one of the main boulevards into a quiet tree-bordered street of well-kept and prosperous appearance. He pulled up in the shade of the lime trees, descended, locked the car, pushed back the fine oak door opposite to him, made his way to an automatic lift and mounted to the fourth floor. Here he stepped out, despatched the *ascenseur* on its downward journey, walked quietly to the end of the thickly carpeted corridor and entered a small salon in the centre of which was a table laid for luncheon. The French windows were open and the woman who had been leaning over the balcony turned round with a little exclamation at his entrance.

“I watched you come,” she cried, as she stepped swiftly back into the room. “How well you drive. Take off those horrible things and let me see you.”

He accepted her embrace very much in the way he had accepted her embrace in the dark mysterious-looking hall of the house at Monaco.

“I have had a great deal of practice in my life,” he said calmly, as he drew off his gloves, abandoned his linen coat and removed the disfiguring glasses. “I am not late?”

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Her eyebrows were slightly lifted. There was a faint note of exasperation in her tone.

“*Mon cher*,” she protested, “have you ever in your life been late for anything? Have you ever broken an appointment? Have you ever failed in anything you set out to do?”

“Not often,” he admitted.

She rang the bell. A maid, who was the picture of neatness in white cap and apron, hurried in. Her mistress ordered luncheon.

“*Tout de suite, Madame*,” the woman assented, curtsying to the newcomer. “*Monsieur va bien?*”

He nodded gravely.

“*Et vous, Marie?*”

“Toujours la même chose, Monsieur,” she replied. *“Monsieur désire l’apéritif?”*

“Comme d’habitude, Marie.”

She prepared the drinks at the sideboard—mixed vermouths, apparently, with a little curl of lemon hanging on the glass and insinuating itself downwards. She handed them on a silver salver. Madame took hers and blew a kiss to Monsieur. Monsieur gravely acknowledged the salute and drank his own. They seated themselves at the table. Almost immediately Marie reappeared. She removed the cover from a beautiful china dish and revealed the omelette below—perfect in colour and texture and with the steam curling gently upwards. Madame divided it and Marie passed the plate. She waited anxiously.

“Exquise,” Mr. Ardrossen pronounced with a grave movement of the head.

Marie was satisfied. She poured out white wine from a dust-covered bottle. There were cutlets which followed, trimly shaped and perfectly cooked with new peas and a fresh salad. Deep yellow Gruyère cheese, apples and coffee steaming hot concluded the meal. Madame rose to her feet with a smile. She stood over her guest, holding a match for his cigarette, a little full in the figure but a beautiful woman, neat from the single line of rare lace around her neck to the tips of her patent shoes. Her hands were well but not over manicured. Her brown eyes, which were fixed upon her companion, were full of worship.

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“Your cuisine, as always, is perfect, Hortense,” he said.

He raised to his lips the hand which was held out to him. She accepted his salute with a little blush of pleasure.

“I was afraid you would not be able to leave,” she remarked. *“Pierre told me that the situation in Monaco was still critical.”*

“Nothing untoward is likely to happen,” he assured her calmly. *“This morning your husband has broken through all precedent. He announced his intention of lunching to-day in his rooms with the Baron and some of the frequenters of the place.”*

She seemed indifferent.

“A year ago,” she confessed, *“that would have made me furious, that he should go there without me. Now I do not care. I ask myself sometimes about you, Stephen. Is it that you have mesmerized me? What is it that seems to have sapped away my own will—that has made me a slave? I was a woman who lived as other women, a year ago.”*

“And again, when the moment comes,” he told her, *“you will be a woman living as other women.”*

“All the time,” she confessed, sinking into an easy chair, *“I*

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ache to throw myself into your arms and I never do. It is just because I dare not. How do you hold me in such a grasp, Stephen? I have to wait and wait, and when you give sometimes it is grudgingly, but I seem to have fallen into the habit of restraint. I offer nothing—I wait. When I die, I think sometimes that I shall be found all scorched up inside or frozen—frozen perhaps would be a better word. It is you who do that.”

“I have no power that other men do not possess,” he assured her calmly. “You are imaginative, wildly imaginative, Hortense. Perhaps that is why I am the man for you, because I am the man who lives by laws.”

“What are they, these terrible laws?” she cried. “You speak of them, you hint of them, sometimes I feel their bondage. Tell me about them. Perhaps I shall suffer less.”

He smiled.

“They are the laws of nature. We are born in rebellion and we live in rebellion. If ever the time comes that we submit, then the way is clear. Life becomes a different thing. It is possible then to live hand in hand with success.”

“You play to-day?” she asked, changing the subject abruptly.

“Naturally,” he replied. “At three o’clock.”

“One would think you were superstitious,” she said, leaning over, taking his hand in hers and stroking it. “Your life is lived by the calendar, everything you do is done at a certain time in a certain way. Nothing ever goes wrong with the clockwork. How do you manage that, I wonder, *mon vieux*?”

“I wonder,” he replied. “Did you ever hear of the Rosicrucians, Hortense? There was a translation by one of the French *savants* somewhere in the seventeenth century.”

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“*Oh, la la!*” she exclaimed. “I am not one of those who read. I love life and nature.”

He glanced at his watch and rose to his feet. She took his arm and moved towards the inner door. He turned the handle for her and waved his hand.

“Not more than five minutes,” he begged. “The programme is fixed.”

She lingered on the threshold of her room.

“Tell it me.”

“At three o’clock,” he said, “we take our places at number three table in the Casino Municipal. At four o’clock I shall have won—let me see—somewhere between one hundred and

twenty-one and one hundred and twenty-eight *mille*. We shall return here. You will make me tea with your own hands. Afterwards I shall lock myself up in the secret chamber for one hour. At six o'clock I shall leave you. At eight o'clock I shall take my cocktail in the bar of the Hôtel de Paris. I shall watch the people in whom I am interested and I shall divine how things have progressed during the day. What I do not see for myself I shall be told."

"What pleasure is there left for you in life?" she demanded. "It is always the expected which happens."

"That," he told her, "means security."

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There was the usual crowd around table number three in the *Salle des Jeux* of the Nice Casino. The Robot Gambler, as they called the quietly dressed, quiet-mannered man who sat by the side of the croupier, had a great pile of *plaques* in front of him, a morocco bound notebook open, and a thin gold watch on the table, a watch with a closed face like the old-fashioned hunters but which opened also at the back and disclosed what seemed to be a compass with a strange Zodiaclike design engraven where on the other side the hours appeared. For five spins the man whom they were all watching had done nothing except make calculations in his book and glance languidly at the turning wheel. There were signs that his inaction was coming to an end. He closed the notebook with a little sigh and gathered up handfuls of his *plaques*. For a moment only he hesitated. He glanced at his watch, turned it over and studied the reverse side.

"*Sept, carrés et chevaux pour le maximum*," he announced.

"*Parfaitement, Monsieur*."

People leaned over with protruding eyes, gazing at the mammoth stake. Mr. Ardrossen handled some of the larger *plaques* and passed them to the croupier.

"*Première douzaine, première colonne et manque—le maximum*."

There was a little shiver of excitement. The stake was placed.

"*Impair—le maximum*."

"*Parfaitement, Monsieur*," was the brief reply.

Then there was a lull. Other people pushed on their ordinary stakes. A good many forgot to stake at all. They were gazing at the enormous pile of *plaques*. In due course the formal announcements were made.

"*Faites vos jeux, Messieurs. . . . Rien ne va plus!*"

There was an awed silence. Everyone was leaning forward to watch the board. There was little to be heard but the sound of the turning wheel with the faint click of the ball. The end came. The croupier stared for a moment at the table before making his announcement.

“*Sept—rouge—impair et manque.*”

The silence was broken. There was a hubbub of voices. Amongst it all Mr. Ardrossen sat unmoved. He was once more deep in the study of his book. The croupier turned towards the chef, who nodded. One of the men was despatched to the nearest *caisse* for a larger supply of ten mille *plaques*. Madame Hortense glanced upwards at the chef.

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“The bank is broken, Monsieur?”

The man smiled a little patronizingly.

“At Roulette, Madame, we do not so often use the *grands jetons*. They are for the Baccarat. We have sent for a larger supply.”

Ardrossen accepted his payments with an indifferent word of acknowledgement. He opened his book again and glanced at his watch.

“*Les mises, s’il vous plaît,*” he demanded.

The original stakes were returned to him. The table looked strangely bare with the small ten-franc and louis counters scattered here and there. Once more the wheel turned. Mr. Ardrossen was not interested. Five times the wheel spun and although his book was open before him and the numbers were clearly visible, he puzzled the spectators by taking no note of them. Suddenly, however, without any visible cause, he began on another calculation. He glanced at his watch, touched the spring which opened the reverse side of it and looked at the thin, blue line with an arrow at the end of it. Then once more he showed signs of action.

“*Maximum quatorze,*” he announced, pushing counters towards the croupier, “*carrés et chevaux. Maximum deuxième douzaine et deuxième colonne. Maximum transversale simple. Maximum transversale pleine.*”

The huge stake was placed. Again the word went round that Monsieur was playing and the crowd collected. Again there was that profound and yet disturbing silence with only the click of the ball and here and there a muffled whisper to be heard. Then there was silence. Everyone was leaning forward. The croupier’s singsong voice announced the result.

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“*Quatorze—rouge—pair et manque.*”

Monsieur gathered together his *jetons*. The chef turned his head

and beckoned. He made a sign to the valet, who promptly understood. Two of the plain clothes detectives who always promenaded the room, took up their places behind Mr. Ardrossen's chair. Again there was an interval. Mr. Ardrossen sat calm and apparently uninterested. He made one more set of calculations and without glancing at his watch filled his pockets with the *plaques*. Then he rose to his feet. With Hortense by his side and followed by the two detectives he made his way to the nearest *caisse* and cashed his winnings. As they left the room Hortense glanced at the clock. It was exactly four.

"*Mon ami*," the woman declared, as she poured out his tea in the little salon a few minutes later, "I am afraid of you."

"There is nothing to be afraid of," he assured her. "In a world where people have learnt to think properly, and that will come before long, success like this will become more common. Permit me," he went on, handing her two of the ten *mille* packets of notes. "Assure yourself that this is not phantom money! Spend it on clothes or jewellery—what you will."

Instinct was too strong for her. She handled the notes almost reverently. She pushed them into her bag and closed it with a little snap. The fingers which held the match to his cigarette trembled.

"You are very generous, *chéri*," she murmured. "*Écoute*, I may ask you one thing more?"

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"Well?"

"The man who disappeared from outside my door—you are quite sure that you know who he was?"

Ardrossen nodded gravely.

"For me," he confided, "that was a fortunate happening. By no other means could I have become aware that I was being watched by the officials of the *Cercle du Drapeau Rouge*. That man was Oscar Dring, one of their leaders. He will not trouble either of us again."

"His body was never found?"

"It will be found some day but not soon. Spies run that risk."

There was a faint trembling in her voice, a little shiver as she turned towards the clock.

"It is time that you mount to your chamber," she pointed out.

He rose to his feet. She took his arm and mounted to the next *étage*, then she drew a key from her pocket and unlocked the door of a small sitting-room. Save for a high-backed chair, a

bare table, three telephone instruments each a little differently shaped, and a strange sheet of metal upon the wall, there was no furniture. She turned on a light and drew the curtains.

“You have tested the communication?” he asked her.

“I spoke to Lyons just before you arrived,” she told him. “It took me exactly sixty seconds.”

“Good.”

“You will save me one hour?”

“Unless there is unexpected trouble on the line,” he assured her.

CHAPTER XXVI

Domiloff glanced at his engagement book and permitted himself a little grimace.

“Nicholas,” he said to his secretary, who had just made his appearance, “the General will be here in a quarter of an hour. I am afraid there will be the devil of a row.”

“He is not an easy one to handle, sir,” Nicholas Tashoff admitted. “He has just come back from Nice and he has the air of a man greatly disturbed. You have also another visitor who has been shown into the private waiting-room.” He lowered his voice rather from instinct than for any other reason, as the two men were alone. “It is Mr. Ardrossen, sir.”

Domiloff’s face darkened.

“Show him in at once,” he ordered. “If the General arrives before he has left, take him out, when I ring, by the private way.”

“Very good, sir.”

Ardrossen was ushered in. He had left Nice only an hour before but he was already wearing his dinner clothes. He did not offer his hand and he ignored the chair to which Domiloff pointed, yet there was nothing about his attitude to which one could reasonably take exception. He waited until the door was closed before he spoke.

“Baron,” he said, “you have an appointment with General Müller in a few minutes, I believe.”

“Now, how the devil did you know that?” Domiloff muttered with knitted brows.

“It does not matter. Here is an item of information for you, to be considered when he puts his demands before you, if he has demands to make. The General has been sending cables—quite a good many of them—from Nice. He has also sent one to Spain.”

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“Go on,” Domiloff invited.

“The cable was addressed to a personage on the staff of General Franco. It orders him to obey at once a mandate he will receive during the day to communicate with the Admiral on board the cruiser *Helessen*, which is to leave to-morrow morning for Monaco and to await further commands there.”

“I suppose you are human?” Domiloff queried.

“It is my one weakness,” Ardrossen confessed. “Otherwise I should be the most robotlike, the most perfect spy who ever walked the earth. Bear in mind, in your conversation with the General, Baron, that the battle cruiser will be in these waters within four days.”

“A complimentary visit, I presume?” Domiloff enquired with gentle sarcasm.

“On the contrary, a warlike gesture. There is one thing more.”

“Well?”

“Your recently granted charter deals clearly with the matter of foreign relations. Remember this in dealing with your visitor. He may threaten terrible things but it is not likely that a single shot will be fired.”

Domiloff leaned back in his chair. His hands were thrust deep in his trousers pockets. He looked at his visitor in amazement, which he took no pains to hide.

“Well, I am damned!” he exclaimed.

“I beg your pardon?”

“How, in the name of all that is miraculous, have you been able to intercept Müller’s cables? How does it come to pass that you know anything about the contents of the charter?”

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Ardrossen remained this time stonily mute. Domiloff for once refused to accept his silence. He was looking fixedly at his visitor.

“That charter,” he said, “was only completed within the last forty-eight hours. It has never been out of Regnier’s possession.”

“That may be true,” Ardrossen replied calmly. “It is also true that I have never exchanged a word with Monsieur Pierre Regnier in my life, but I know the contents of that charter—and you know that I know them. If it is any satisfaction to you to realize it, in acquiring that knowledge another man lost his life and mine was saved by a miracle. Be wise, Baron Domiloff. I have passed you on this information and paid you this visit with one object only. Rudolph Sagastrada is not to be given up without my permission. That is all you will hear from me. . . . I ask you now to excuse me.”

Domiloff touched the bell. Tashoff appeared almost immediately.

“Escort Mr. Ardrossen out of the Club by the private way,” Domiloff enjoined.

“Certainly, sir. Your next caller has arrived.”

"I am quite ready. Do I say good afternoon, do I offer you any thanks, Mr. Ardrossen, or do you disappear in a cloud with a strong smell of gunpowder?"

Ardrossen's grim smile possessed a flavour of self-congratulation. It was, however, only a passing flicker.

"I leave it to you, Baron," he replied, "to choose the treatment which best suits the circumstances."

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Müller's anger was not expressed in any ordinary blustering fashion. He accepted a chair, although no other amenities passed between the two men. His tone was cold but his temper seemed to be completely under control.

"Baron Domiloff," he began, "a young man, a fugitive from my country, entitled Rudolph Sagastrada, is living here in the Principality under your protection. I have been given to understand that Monaco is now an Independent State for the conduct of whose affairs you and Monsieur Pierre Regnier are jointly responsible."

"You appear to know a great deal, General," Domiloff observed, "considering that the charter, if it exists, has not yet been made public nor have the people of Monaco themselves been officially apprised of the change."

"Is there any need?" the General asked, leaning a little forward and tapping the edge of the desk with his clenched fist. "Is there any need, Baron, for us to waste a lot of words about this matter? I like to get at my business in a simpler fashion. I have applied to the French Government for an order of arrest which would enable me to take back Sagastrada to his own country, there to stand his trial for various misdemeanours. I have been referred to you. I am told that four hours before I made my application, Monaco became a free State."

"Your information seems to be correct, General," was the calm reply. "Monaco is now engaged in the task of framing its own laws which will govern its attitude towards foreign powers."

"I see."

"At present," Domiloff went on, "there is no statute which would justify its rulers in handing over to any country a person supposed to be guilty of political misdemeanours. I therefore cannot help you in the matter. As soon as our charter is established, our representative in your capital shall discuss the matter with you."

The General's eyes flashed.

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"Your present attitude, in plain words, is that you decline to give up Sagastrada to my custody."

"I most certainly do," Domiloff replied. "My co-President, Monsieur Regnier, is on the premises and you shall hear his voice also upon the matter if you so desire."

"It is unnecessary," General Müller pronounced. "Baron, we are men of common sense. A fortnight ago, if such a demand had been made, it would have been made to France only and the consequences of a refusal would have been serious. Tell me, why should the consequences be less serious when, instead of provoking a great war by our insistence, we are involved only in a quarrel with a small state boasting no army, no navy and very little money?"

"Do I gather," Domiloff enquired, "that presuming I refuse to give up Sagastada your government proposes to declare war against the State of Monaco?"

There was a change in Müller's expression. It was not a pleasant gesture but it was unmistakable. He smiled. From that smile came a laugh. He shook slightly in his seat. He had a large stomach and that also shook.

"The question of a declaration of war, Baron," he said, "appears to me to savour somewhat of the humorous, but if you should refuse the reasonable request of a country fifty thousand times larger and more powerful than your own, that country would, in plain words, help itself. A single one of our smaller battleships would be quite sufficient to lay your country in ashes. If you desire us to use other means, half-a-dozen squadrons of our fighting aeroplanes would produce the same result."

"I am to consider this," Domiloff demanded, "as a serious threat?"

"You can take it in any way you like so long as you give me your answer within twenty-four hours."

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"There is one point upon which I should like your opinion, General," Domiloff continued, after a moment's reflection. "Yours is announcing itself everywhere as a peace-loving country. In these days of European disturbances she has entered into undertakings with several of the Powers to preserve the *status quo*. Supposing France should decide that the new charter arranged between Monaco and herself has not yet taken root, is too recent to bear the strain which you suggest putting upon it, and decides that she, too, has battleships nearer than yours and air squadrons at a safer range, are you prepared to take the responsibility of commencing that long-threatened war for the sake of this young man you have hounded out of his country?"

"That is a question which I do not answer," was the prompt rejoinder. "I give you formal notice, Baron, as the representative of the State of Monaco, that if my demand to

hand over the person of Rudolph Sagastrada is not acceded to in twenty-four hours, I shall instruct my government of your refusal and they will take the steps they consider necessary.”

“I am to accept that, I presume, as an ultimatum,” Domiloff said. “May I ask that you deliver it to me in writing?”

The General rose to his feet.

“I have already established a small bureau here,” he said. “My secretary will attend to your request.”

Domiloff touched the bell. Tashoff immediately presented himself and in response to a gesture from his chief stood with the door open.

“I may add,” the General concluded, “that I have transferred my headquarters to the Consulate of my country in the Boulevard des Italiens at Nice. I retain my suite in this hotel if you wish to speak to me personally.”

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Domiloff nodded.

“You will not like Nice after Monte Carlo, General,” he remarked. “The food is much better here, too. We shall miss you.”

The visitor made an effort to compete with the other’s irony.

“I only trust,” he said with a little bow of farewell, “that when we return to Monaco you will be in a position to offer us a more convincing welcome.”

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CHAPTER XXVII

At eight o'clock that evening Mr. Ardrossen, almost unnoticed, slipped into his usual place in a corner of the bar of the Hôtel de Paris. He had just completed a circuitous journey from the Sporting Club and he carried an evening paper in his hand. He took his accustomed easy chair and as usual Louis emerged from behind the counter and came to take his order.

"A dry Martini to-night," his patron decided. "When I say dry, I mean one teaspoonful of Italian vermouth with the French and a squeeze of lemon rind."

"*Parfait, Monsieur,*" Louis murmured. "The biscuits or the chips?"

"Neither, thank you."

Louis took his departure as Mr. Ardrossen unfolded his paper and began to read. How dull they all sounded, these items of stale news and paragraphs of conjecture written from the outside of the world which Mr. Ardrossen knew so much better from the inside. Nevertheless, it was interesting to read how the events of daily life were presented to the general public. It was interesting, for instance, to read of a certain great man's anger because some of the chiefs of the great world against whom his latest blow had been struck had eluded him. Besides, the reading of a newspaper had other advantages. The gossipers who crowded around left alone a man who was immersed in his *journal*. He was able to evade that fragmentary conversation, the exchange of banalities with the uninteresting world whose acquaintance he desired never to make. To study the inaccuracies of the news itself gave him sometimes a queer satisfaction. For instance, he read that Rudolph Sagastrada, the great banker and industrialist who had fled from his country, had boarded an American steamer at Marseilles and was now on his way to the States. Then there was this rumour of a fresh offer on the part of the Italian Government to take over the protectorate of the Principality of Monaco. It was odd to think that such complete ignorance could reign in the editorial mind of any published journal. Mr. Ardrossen, from a neatly kept corner of his memory, could have corrected half-a-dozen misstatements in the column he had just finished reading. He could have gone further, if he had chosen. He could have told the whole truth.

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His newspaper had served him well but he was compelled at last to lower it. A chair had been deliberately drawn across to his table. Mr. Foxley Brent arranged it to suit his convenience and, spreading himself out, made cryptic but effectual signs to Louis.

“Say, you seem to like sitting by yourself,” he remarked affably.

“I do,” was the pungent reply.

It did not seem to occur to the newcomer to offer any apology for his intrusion.

“Well, you aren’t like me,” the latter went on. “I like a chat with anyone who’s around. I would sooner go without food than eat a meal alone. Say, that was a great feast the young man Sagastrada gave last night. You weren’t along, were you?”

“No, I was not there,” Mr. Ardrossen admitted.

“I have visited here a good many years,” his companion continued, “but I have never seen such prodigality. Caviar by the bucketful, champagne in magnums pouring all the time. God bless my soul! I can put champagne away with any man I ever met, but I reached my limit last night—and a bit over,” he concluded with a chuckle. “Nothing but a pint of the Widow put me straight this morning.”

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Louis brought over the champagne cocktail which was Mr. Foxley Brent’s inevitable beverage. The latter hesitated and glanced across the round table at his companion’s half-filled glass. He drew a long breath and broke the habit of a lifetime.

“Drink that up and join me in another,” he invited.

Mr. Ardrossen looked at him for a moment with non-comprehending eyes.

“Thank you,” he said. “I am a man of fixed habits—like yourself, I understand. I never take more than one cocktail before dinner.”

“Geel!” the other exclaimed. “Can’t think how you manage to stick it out in this place.”

“I have peculiar tastes, perhaps,” Mr. Ardrossen admitted, “but it interests me to indulge them.”

There followed a brief interval. Foxley Brent sipped his cocktail, eyeing his companion furtively. Mr. Ardrossen laid two ten-franc notes upon the table, finished his dry Martini and with the slightest of bows rose to his feet and left the bar by the hotel entrance. Foxley Brent looked after him blankly.

“Say, that’s a queer bird,” he remarked, turning his head to Louis.

Louis glanced towards the door through which Ardrossen had disappeared and smiled slightly.

“Not very sociable, sir,” he remarked.

“Sociable! He’s like a frozen dummy! I just thought he must be lonely sitting there by himself all the time. He’s gone off as though someone had bitten him.”

Worse was to happen. Foxley Brent stooped down to make some adjustment to the collar of his favourite mastiff. When he looked up again, Mr. Ardrossen had reentered the bar through the other doors and was establishing himself in an easy chair a little lower down! Louis took the opportunity of leaving his place behind the counter to come over and collect the twenty francs which were waiting for him.

“Did you see that?” Foxley Brent demanded.

“He is an eccentric, sir,” Louis declared. “I should not take any notice.”

Foxley Brent changed his place into the more comfortable easy chair which its late occupant had vacated. Joan Haskell, who had just entered, waved her hand to him. He rose at once to his feet and stopped her.

“Come and keep me company for a minute,” he invited. “Diana and I are feeling a trifle crushed.”

She smiled.

“I can’t stop for more than a minute,” she warned him.

“Say, I want to ask you something,” he went on. “Do you know that little man—at least he’s not so very little when you look at him—sitting down there with the newspaper—prim-looking chap?”

The smile faded from her lips.

“Yes, I—no, I don’t know him,” she replied. “He came out on the Blue Train with me but we didn’t speak.”

“Fellow’s crazy,” Foxley Brent declared. “I saw him all alone so I stopped and sat down and asked him to have a cocktail. He declined. A moment later he got up and left me. But listen, Miss Joan. Do you know what he did? He went out by one door and came in by the other and sat down again by himself! Can you beat that?”

Joan shrugged her shoulders. For the first time, her companion found her unsympathetic.

“He is really a strange person,” she said. “I shouldn’t worry about him if I were you.”

“Worry! I haven’t got to worry, but, my dear, I never met anyone like him before—that’s all. Here’s the Baron. Let’s ask him what he thinks. Baron!”

Domiloff paused.

"I was looking for you, Joan," he said.

"Just a minute," Foxley Brent interrupted. "Do you know that little man down there?"

"Very slightly," Domiloff admitted. "Why?"

Foxley Brent told his story. Domiloff was not impressed.

"I do not think he is down here with any idea of making friends," he said. "He keeps away from everybody as much as he can. I should not bother about him."

"But what does he do in life? Is he always like this, then?"

"I know very little about him," Domiloff replied, "but I do not think he is a person I should take much notice of either way. You meet them occasionally in life, you know, these men who want to walk their own path and who seem to have cut themselves adrift from their fellows. Excuse me, please. I am going to take Miss Haskell away for a minute."

He passed his hand lightly through Joan's arm and led her to the corner table at the end of the room.

"What is this Sagastrada tells me about an expedition to-night?" he asked her.

"Well, he suggested going in to the opera," Joan confided. "Do you think there is any danger?"

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"There might be."

"But why?"

Domiloff frowned and Joan suddenly felt a qualm of regret at her persistence. In his lined face there was a shadow of weary resentment.

"It is not necessary for you to understand the whole situation," he said quietly, "but the presence of Rudolph Sagastrada here imposes a great responsibility upon us. Out here we are in a state of transition. We have the laws but we have not yet the means to enforce them. We should be humiliated in the face of all Europe if that young man came to grief here."

"Of course we'll call the opera off, if it's any worry to you at all," Joan assured him. "Shall I send word up? Louis will telephone."

She rose to her feet. Domiloff drew her gently back again.

"Too late now," he said. "This young man has been playing snatches of 'Louise' for hours and singing to himself. You will

have to go—only I want you to do exactly as you are told.”

“I will,” she promised him.

“I understand that you are having sandwiches here in the bar in ten minutes,” he went on, glancing at the clock.

“That is so,” she agreed.

“Very well. Carry out your programme. When you are finished, there will be four *gendarmes* outside. You will walk with them, and I, too, will stroll with you, through that side entrance—Prince’s entrance, you know, we call it—which leads straight to his box. I will take you there myself. Later on I shall join you. You must see that Sagastrada sits back in the box and that he does not leave it until I come. Is that a promise?”

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“Absolutely,” she answered. “I am terribly sorry if I have done anything silly and I suppose I have. You have all been so kind to me here.”

He patted her hand gently.

“My dear,” he said, “you are not responsible for this situation and nothing that I can say would make you understand how serious it really is. We have done our best, too. We are censoring all telephone communications and telegrams but unfortunately we cannot help messages going to France and being re-transmitted from there. That is what I am afraid is happening.”

He was silent for a moment, tapping with his fingers upon the table. His eyes were set. There were no blinds and he seemed to be watching the lights flashing out on the distant hills which encircled the place.

“You see,” he went on quietly, “I have been through the greater part of one war. I have seen enough horrors to last me for the rest of my life. I suppose it is the struggle to keep the memory of them down in my heart and at the back of my mind which has made me the apostle of gaiety here. Just now and then, when I hear these mutterings and I know how close we are to disaster, I feel what I never felt in those days—I feel fear.”

Joan, in those few moments, was more moved than she had ever been in her life. It seemed to her, though his words came rapidly enough and his voice sounded clear, that it was the speech of a man in agony. The transition from the life of the last few weeks with its ever-unrolling panorama of gaiety and happiness seemed to have arrived like a thunderclap. Yet Domiloff himself just then had the look almost of a prophet. She seemed to feel with him some of that vague, terrible sense of apprehension. Then, without a moment’s warning, the whole atmosphere was changed. Louis had turned on the rest of the lights. The corridor outside—now the bar itself—was

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becoming crowded. There were gay voices on every side. Rudolph with the Baroness was leading the way down the room. Lord Henry was a few steps behind with the Princess. Louis threw a cloth over the table and produced dishes of sandwiches.

“It is to be a party,” Lydia declared. “Joan dear, will you ever forgive us? We are going to what I think you call in America ‘cut in.’ We are going to make a big party and fill the box. We are going to make a circle like a daisy chain around this young man for fear someone should come and try to steal him away from us.”

Rudolph turned appealingly to Joan.

“It is not my fault, *chère Mademoiselle*,” he pleaded. “I planned for this evening a dish of caviar sandwiches—a bottle of champagne, the four walls of that mouldy old box of the Prince’s—and Thou. . . . I should have preferred the green boughs and the moonlight or the sunlight—whichever was available—but, alas, the setting has failed us.”

“I think it is a lovely idea,” Joan declared. “Not that I should not have adored sitting hand in hand with you, Mr. Rudolph Sagastrada! But all these dear people—why should they not have their pleasure?”

“More sandwiches, Louis,” Domiloff begged. “I leave you for a quarter of an hour, my friends, while I change.”

“It is already quarter past eight,” Joan warned him.

“It is of no consequence,” he answered. “I shall send word to our friend Riotto. I shall tell them not to start before a quarter to nine, and then who cares about the first twenty minutes of ‘Louise,’ anyway? The glory of it comes later. What is it, Louis?” he added, as he turned to leave the place.

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Louis had appeared from behind his counter with a single glass on a silver platter.

“*Monsieur le Baron est fatigué*,” he said. “There is just one drop of absinthe in this. It will revive.”

Domiloff looked down at the man. Their eyes met. There was a sort of doglike wistfulness about Louis’s that many people before had noticed at odd times. The Baron patted him on the shoulder.

“Good man, Louis,” he murmured. “If you knew how I wanted that without knowing it!”

He drank it off and set down the glass empty. When he left the room, his own almost jaunty freedom of movement seemed to have returned. Joan’s eyes followed him to the doorway.

"The Baron is tired to-night," she murmured.

Lydia sighed.

"If he were six men, he would still be tired," she said. "They have not left him alone for a single moment. Regnier was a little troublesome, too. It will do Paul good to sit back in a corner and listen to the music. If only he could be cut off for a few hours from the telegraph and the telephone and these special messages and that dreadful wireless!"

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The fall of the curtain at the end of the first act of Charpentier's great opera was followed by a furore of applause. Céline was a favourite in Monaco and everyone agreed that she had never been in better voice. Bouquet after bouquet was passed up. Again and again she bowed her acknowledgement and every time her last gaze, her last smile, was for Sagastrada, who was standing in front of the box clapping enthusiastically.

"I am becoming very jealous," Joan announced, as at last the lights went up and the curtain was finally lowered.

"And what about me?" Lydia Domiloff complained. "All day long I have waited upon that young man, I have read to him, I have sung to him, I have even held his hand and all to find him now shouting himself hoarse with admiration for another woman!"

"I am afraid he is inconstant," Joan sighed.

He smiled as he turned away from the front of the box.

"It is the voice I salute," he explained. "The voice, the music, the atmosphere which the two create. I am proud to feel. It is gratitude which overpowers me."

"You are too glib with your tongue, young sir," Lydia declared. "You should have been a diplomat and not a banker. Paul," she added, "I absolutely forbid you to take our friend to Céline's dressing room."

Domiloff shook his head.

"That would not be possible," he said. "For what reason do you suppose I have two *gendarmes* guarding the door? Why were we escorted even those few yards across the road from the Paris? Why are we the first since Royalty faded away to occupy this gloomy mausoleum of a box? All for our young friend's safety. Do you think that I would risk those dark passages—"

"To say nothing of the danger arising from the enchantress herself!" Lucille intervened. "Mr. Sagastrada is much too susceptible."

"You like to make fun at my expense," he grimaced. "Well, I do not know that it matters. All those bouquets, or nearly all of them, were from me. She must accept my homage then in that fashion."

"Worse and worse," Lydia sighed. "He has never offered me even a rose. Has he sent you any flowers, Joan, or you, Princess?"

"Not a blossom," the latter replied.

"You do not make music, either of you," he pointed out. "In my country one sends flowers to an *artiste* just as one leaves cards upon a lady of society."

"I never regretted not being an *artiste* so much," Joan lamented. "Those pink and mauve orchids were wonderful."

"There are more to be had," Sagastrada declared hopefully.

There was a knock at the door. Domiloff stepped swiftly past the others and opened it. The *gendarme* outside saluted.

"There is a gentleman here," he announced, "who desires to speak with Mr. Sagastrada."

"Where is he?" Domiloff enquired, stepping outside and closing the door of the box behind him.

A young man advanced from the shadows, the young man who had approached Domiloff on the night of the party.

"It is *Monsieur le Baron Domiloff*, is it not?" he said. "I am a friend of Rudolph Sagastrada's and I should like to shake hands with him."

"Unfortunately," the Baron observed, "Mr. Rudolph Sagastrada is in rather a peculiar position just now. You are aware, no doubt, of the circumstances under which he arrived here?"

"I know everything," the other replied. "I would nevertheless be glad of a few words with my old comrade. Permit me to remind you of myself, Baron. I am Anselm of Herm."

He handed over his card. Domiloff glanced at it and nodded.

"I do not doubt your *bona fides*, sir," he said, "but the fact remains that your friend is at present in a very difficult position. The last visitors he received from your country have not come in a particularly friendly spirit."

The young man smiled.

"I can assure you," he persisted, "that my errand with Rudolph is entirely a personal and not a political one. He will admit it himself if you will be so kind as to let him know that I am

here.”

He advanced a step forward. Domiloff, however, still barred the way.

“I must ask you to wait, sir,” he begged, “until I have spoken to Mr. Sagastrada.”

The visitor frowned.

“As you wish,” he declared brusquely. “I might add, however, that my business with him is of some importance. I shall not leave here until I have seen him.”

Domiloff smiled.

“If that is to be your attitude, Prince,” he said, “I may as well tell you at once that Mr. Sagastrada is my guest for the evening and is now engaged with my friends. You can make your call at a more opportune time.”

The young man showed signs of losing his temper. He pointed to the *gendarmes*.

“If the presence of these fellows and the fact that you are in the Royal box indicates that any member of the reigning house is here, you will be so good as to stand on one side and let me address myself to him. The family is well known to me.”

“Unfortunately,” Domiloff answered, “the members of the family you speak of are not at present taking any interest in the affairs of Monaco. The *gendarmes* are present by my direction and to ensure that my guest is not interfered with by unwanted callers.”

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The door of the box was suddenly thrown open. Lord Henry made his appearance with the Princess by his side. Sagastrada was just behind them.

“You don’t mind our going out for a stroll, Baron?” Lord Henry asked.

There was a moment’s silence. Sagastrada moved forward impulsively. It was too late to check him. Domiloff, however, held his place.

“There is a young man here, Sagastrada,” he said, “who announces himself as a friend of yours. You recognize him, of course. He is Prince Anselm of Herm.”

“Yes, I know the Prince,” Sagastrada replied doubtfully. “You really wish to see me, Anselm?”

“Only to make a short announcement,” the visitor replied, “which is not in the least of a private nature. At the request of our Chancellor, whose authority we all now acknowledge, the

Colonel of my regiment has withdrawn his embargo upon the little meeting we had arranged. It can, I hope, take place here. I have brought Hebbisturm with me. He will wait upon anyone you choose, to-morrow morning, or better still, to-night."

Of the two men, Sagastrada was the cooler. He drew himself up and would have moved a step nearer but Domiloff barred the way.

"Unfortunately," he announced, "I have changed my mind. You refused to fight me in our own country because of my connections. It is I, now, who refuse for other reasons."

"You will permit me then," Prince Anselm said, raising his voice a little, "to proclaim you a coward."

"If it amuses you," was the indifferent reply.

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The visitor snatched the glove from his hand and sprang forward. Domiloff, however, still impeded his progress. The *gendarmes* obeyed his gesture. They seized Prince Anselm on either side. For a moment he seemed to swell in size. He appeared to have sufficient strength to throw them both away. Their uniform, however, and long generations of disciplinary training were in his blood. He became passive.

"Put this young man outside," the Baron directed.

"They may take me where they like," Prince Anselm scoffed, looking across fixedly at Sagastrada and throwing the glove which he had been holding so that it struck him on the cheek. "I shall send Hebbisturm to you in the morning, Sagastrada, and if you are not prepared you will take the consequences."

He fell into step, unconsciously as it seemed, with the *gendarmes*, who marched him down the corridor. The curious little group of people who had gathered round melted away. Only one remained—a small, still-looking man standing back in the shadows. None of them noticed him in the excitement of the moment. It was a way Mr. Ardrossen had in life. He seemed always to escape being noticed.

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CHAPTER XXVIII

Townleyes, who had thrown himself exhausted into an easy chair facing the entrance to the Sporting Club bar, nevertheless found energy to sit up and watch Joan Haskell's leisurely progress as she passed through the rooms. She was wearing a black gown to-night and many in the crowd turned their heads to admire her. In a way, she had established a sort of vogue in the place. With her graceful, athletic figure, her pleasant manners, her complete ease and naturalness, she represented a certain reversion to the past, a reincarnation of the old Gibson type of femininity. She was the natural reaction to the tyranny of fashion—the Boadicea who watched the passing of the slim boyish type of half-starved bodies and flat chests. Townleyes' eyes followed her all the time with increasing admiration. On the threshold of the bar she paused and threw up her hands with a little exclamation.

"So you are really back again! We were all getting rather worried about you. In fact," she went on, looking at him more closely, "I am worried now. What have you been doing? You look tired out. Sit down again at once, please."

He obeyed and she took a chair by his side.

"It is two or three nights since I went to bed," he confessed. "To wind up with I left Paris at four o'clock this afternoon. I have just dined and I am trying to summon up energy enough to get down to my boat."

"What on earth do you want to go there for to-night?" she asked.

He evaded the question.

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"Domiloff's been telling me all the news," he said. "Things seem to be pretty well disturbed here. Domiloff and Regnier have their charter but they hesitate to proclaim it. In London there's a regular war fever and Paris is in a state of nerves with a special committee of war experts sitting day and night."

"I understand no more about your English politics," she declared, "than I do about what is going on in Monaco."

"Our politics are really very simple," he assured her. "The only trouble is that there are too many of us in the game. The old Roman idea of a Triumvirate was a more logical form of government. Our system is bad because when our statesmen realize that a thing ought to be done, instead of doing it they set up a committee to do it for them. Prompt action is impossible with us. If ever we come to a bad end as a nation, it will be the 'wait and see' policy that has done it."

A valet came in bearing a note in his hand. He recognized Joan and made his way towards her.

“From *Madame la Baronne*, Mademoiselle,” he announced.

“You excuse?” Joan murmured to her companion as she broke the seal.

She read the few lines hastily.

My dear—Come and make your bob. We have to give our august visitors supper and you must join us. We shall be at the usual table.

LYDIA.

The man stood waiting. Joan fingered the note irresolutely.

“Another supper party,” she confided. “I don’t think I feel like it.”

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“Don’t go,” Townleyes begged. “I tell you what—we’ll have a little carriage, drive down to the quay, and I’ll give you a sandwich on board. The carriage can wait and bring you back if I decide to stay and sleep there. You’ll get some fresh air, anyway.”

She smiled.

“Quite an adventure!” she murmured. “I feel like getting away from this atmosphere. I’ll come. Will you please tell *Madame la Baronne*,” she went on, turning to the valet, “that I am *fatiguée* and am going to bed early. I thank her very much but I beg to be excused.”

The man bowed and took his leave. Townleyes rose immediately.

“Come along,” he invited. “We’ll go at once. I know what will happen. They’ll send Henry or someone to fetch you. I’m going to carry you off before you change your mind.”

She laughed as she rose to her feet.

“That is a thing,” she told him, “which I very seldom do.”

The air, during that brief drive, seemed to possess an unbelievable freshness. The clank of their horses’ hoofs on the hard roads sounded to Joan like music. The very slowness of their progress was soothing.

“I think I was beginning to feel what they call the hysteria of Monte Carlo,” she declared. “This was a divine idea of yours.”

The *cocher* cracked his whip, the little dog by his side sat up in ever-increasing animation; two or three big cars passed them on their way up the hill to the Sporting Club, but the streets were becoming deserted. The night was brilliantly fine except for dark intervals when a roll of black clouds coming up from eastward blotted out the moonlight. They swung round and skirted the dark waters of the port. There was a flavour of salt now in the air. At the corner Townleyes leaned forward.

“*Le quatrième bateau à droite*,” he told the *cocher*.

The man touched his hat. One of the horses, however, was restive and plunged.

“*Elle n’aime pas la petite route, Monsieur*,” the *cocher* apologized.

“All right,” Townleyes replied. “It’s only a few yards, Miss Haskell. You don’t mind walking?”

“Love it,” she answered, stepping down on to the cobbles.

“Wait here,” Townleyes enjoined. “We may be half-an-hour to an hour.”

The *cocher* removed his hat with a smile. A waiting job was always welcome.

“*Comme vous voulez, Monsieur*.”

They picked their way along to where the yacht was tied up and he handed her down the gangway. Below, all looked dark and impenetrable except for the single light hanging from the mast. Joan stepped to the rail and looked across landwards at the glittering line of lamps and the fainter lights twinkling away on the hills. Every breath of the air seemed inspiring.

“Couldn’t we sit here for a few minutes instead of going below?” she suggested.

He found her a wicker chair.

“I’ll have to go down myself to see about the sandwiches,” he said. “I won’t be long.”

“Don’t hurry,” she begged. “It’s perfect here. I’m enjoying every minute of it.”

She lit a cigarette and lay back in her chair. The quietness of it all was immensely soothing. The dwindling lights and the looming clouds seemed to be enveloping the whole place in a mysterious garb of solitude. The lights on the Condamine still remained, and a reflected blaze from the Casino. Someone in the Port Café was strumming on a guitar and there was the occasional honk of a horn as a car rushed by on the road above. Otherwise, the soft night atmosphere was one of complete

peace. She closed her eyes. The cigarette fell from her fingers. In a few minutes she was asleep. . . .

One by one the lights on the Condamine went out. The Casino itself became merely a grey and ghostly structure in the light of the dawn. The silence of the place seemed still unbroken, but the easterly breeze stealing across the foam-flecked surface of the sea was chilly and dank. Joan, as she sat up with a start, mechanically pulled her wrap around her throat. She looked about her in amazement, unable for the moment to realize where she was. Then suddenly, with a little exclamation, she sprang to her feet. To her astonishment Townleyes was nowhere in evidence, there were no signs of drinks or sandwiches and yet even as she stood there the chimes of the Cathedral clock struck the hour: four o'clock. She must have been asleep there alone on deck for more than two hours! Townleyes—of course, he must have been up and finding her asleep had returned to the saloon. She hurried to the hatch and called down into the dimly lit space.

“Sir Julian!”

There was no response. She descended a couple of steps.

“Sir Julian!” she cried. “Where are you?”

There was still no reply. The silence struck her as having some awesome quality about it. For a moment she lost her nerve. She stepped back on deck. The light hanging from the side of the mast was still burning palely. In the distance she heard the jingling of the harness as the horses shook their heads. She even fancied she could detect the figure of the *cocher* sitting asleep on the box. The sight gave her courage. She turned round and boldly descended into the saloon. It was empty and there were no signs of recent occupancy. Fear had come back to her now. The depression of the evening seemed suddenly magnified a thousandfold. A sense of some impending and terrible disaster made her catch at her breath. She opened the door leading into the galley and cried out wildly.

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“Sir Julian! Sir Julian! Is anyone there?”

There was still silence, a sinister, incomprehensible silence. She found the switch of another electric light and turned it on. Again she ventured to look around her. The door of a Frigidaire stood open. Upon a bench by its side was a loaf of bread from which some slices had been cut, a tongue, and a ham, both upon dishes. Upon a plate were several sandwiches already prepared. On the floor a glitter of steel where a knife was lying. . . . With trembling fingers she pushed open the hatch. One of the bunks in the galley had apparently been slept in, and the bedclothes lay in disorder partly upon the floor. She turned on another switch just inside. There was nothing further to be seen. A gleam of coming daylight was visible stealing through the hatch. She looked back at the bench. The tongue

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was half off the dish, and a carving fork was still sticking in the ham. The whole place had somehow the appearance of having been abandoned in a hurry. All the time, a queer sensation which she had felt from the first moment of her descent below, asserted itself with numbing intensity. She felt that she was being watched! There was complete silence on the boat. Nothing but the lapping of the sea against its sides, the ticking of a clock in the saloon, but she turned her head only in fear and trembling. She even listened for breathing. The time came when she could bear it no longer. Helping herself by clutching at the wall and table as she went, she staggered into the saloon. She crossed it in one brief rush, pulled herself on to the deck, staggered to the gangway. Over her head the single lamp was still burning. Once more she turned round, looked below and listened. No sign of any human being, no sign of any movement. She looked at the gangplank and her knees began to tremble. Nevertheless, she pulled herself together, held tightly to the cord, and stumbled down it on to the quay. Barely twenty yards away was the carriage still waiting. She gave one backward glance at the boat swaying ever so slightly with the incoming tide, then, shivering as she went, she made her way towards the *voiture*. The horses turned their heads at her coming. There was a slight jingling of the harness, the little dog curled up by his master's side awoke, stood up on his long spindly legs, shook himself and barked. The *cocher* opened his eyes, sat quite still for a moment, then staggered to his feet.

"Ah, Madame," he exclaimed, "*vous êtes restée longtemps sur le bateau!*"

She was incapable of speech, incapable of responding to the friendly but suggestive grin on the man's face. She sank back on to the cushions and drew over her knees the frowzy rug.

"The Sporting Club," she directed.

Still there was delay. The *cocher* removed the blankets from his horses, gave them each a smack of encouragement, clambered back again and cracked his whip.

"The Sporting Club," Joan faltered, shivering all the time.

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"*Parfait, Madame. Tout de suite,*" the man replied.

The clip-clop of the horses' hoofs sounded once more upon the stone pavement of the quay. Through the gleaming dawn Joan gazed fixedly at the silent yacht. There was still no sign of life there—or death.

It was the only hour of silence which Monte Carlo knows, the hour before the dawn. The Casino itself, grim and empty, looked like a forgotten palace of the dead. The tables of the Café de Paris had been gathered in or turned on end. The gardens were deserted and silent. Even the hotel showed

scarcely a gleam of light anywhere. The Sporting Club was even more forbidding. The polite commissionaires had taken their leave. The doors were closed and barred. The *cocher* turned around.

“*C’est fini, Madame,*” he pointed out with his whip. “*Fermé.* Closed for the night.”

“Go to the hotel,” she directed.

He turned his horses round, passed the plate glass windows with their closely drawn blinds and funereal aspect and pulled up before the hotel. There was a dim light burning in the lounge but no night porter. Joan handed a hundred francs to the driver.

“*C’est assez?*” she asked.

“*Mais oui, Madame,*” the man replied with a little wave of the hat. “*Merci bien.*”

Joan mounted the steps and entering the drear-looking foyer, followed a shadowy way between the chairs and lounges to the desk. There was no one on duty, but a sleepy-looking night clerk came from the inner office at the sound of her summons. He glanced at her in surprise, produced her key from its hook and laid it down in front of her.

“Isn’t the club closed early to-night?” she asked.

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“To-night, Mademoiselle?” he repeated. “It is nearly five o’clock.”

“I forgot,” she murmured. “Tell me—do you know if Sir Julian Townleyes . . .”

“Sir Julian was sleeping on his boat,” the man informed her. “He left word last night.”

“And he has not been up—since?”

The young man looked surprised.

“Sir Julian flew down from Paris last night, Mademoiselle,” he said. “He had dinner in the restaurant and I understood he was going down to his boat. Since then we have seen nothing of him.”

“I wonder,” she asked, “would it be possible to speak to Baron Domiloff?”

This time the clerk was very positive indeed. He shook his head firmly.

“Quite impossible, Mademoiselle,” he said. “The Baron has one or two very strict rules. He disconnects the telephone between three o’clock in the morning and nine o’clock and if

anyone ventured to disturb him there would be trouble. If the hotel was on fire, perhaps, but nothing else. Is there anything I can do for Mademoiselle?"

She looked helplessly at the sleepy young man who was doing his best to be polite. It seemed hopeless to try and impress him with any of her own apprehensions. She turned reluctantly away and stumbled down the unlit corridor to her room.

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There were people who had called Joan Haskell phlegmatic. No one would have said so if they could have caught a glimpse of her when she drove down to the harbour that morning at half-past nine with Domiloff by her side. When they turned the corner and she heard the same clip-clop of the horses' hoofs on the hard road, every speck of colour seemed to be drawn from her cheeks. She gripped her companion's arm.

"My God!" she exclaimed.

"What is it?" he demanded.

She pointed to the vacant space between two of the adjacent yachts.

"The *Silver Shadow*!"

"Well?"

The finger which pointed to the vacant space was trembling.

"It's gone!" she cried. "Can't you see? It's gone!"

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CHAPTER XXIX

"If ever the communists should win in this great cataclysmic struggle which you brood about so often, my friend," Lucille said, "you have another profession in which I should think you are as accomplished as in juggling with the moneys of the world."

"Too complicated," Rudolph complained.

"I mean that you could at least always make a living as a golf professional."

"It would be very tedious," he admitted, watching his ball soar over an intervening bunker some two hundred yards away and draw inwards over a stretch of flattened country, ending upon the green. "The worst of it is that I have not really the love of games in my blood. The futility of them all becomes so apparent after a time."

"It may seem nothing to you," Joan, who was walking a few yards away, remarked, "but to us it is a miracle. Here you are playing on the most beautiful but the most difficult course in the world, you have driven on to the last green, and have three for a sixty-nine the first time round!"

"I have something better than that," he declared happily, as he sauntered along with his club under his arm. "I have a thirst which is going to astonish that melancholy-looking barman in a few minutes and I have an appetite which should gratify the maître d'hôtel."

"Considering the life you lead and make us lead," Lord Henry grumbled, "you must have a marvellous constitution."

He played his second still short of the green. So far, he was in the position of having lost every hole to his younger opponent.

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"I suffer from very little except nerves," Rudolph confessed. "I am afraid of too many things in life. I was afraid, or very nearly afraid, when we came curling up this road at forty miles an hour and, glorious though it is, I cannot really enjoy looking down these precipices."

Lord Henry chipped on to the middle of the green still at some distance from the hole. Rudolph approached dead and holed out with the back of his putter.

"Perfectly marvellous," his opponent declared, as they returned towards the Club House. "I call myself a pretty good four at Sunningdale, but you must owe something wherever you go, Sagastrada."

“It is not always,” the young man replied, “that you can play in an atmosphere like this. The whole environment is marvellously stimulating. It is, I should think, as near paradise as an ordinary mortal can get.”

They paused and looked for a moment down a clustering array of pines to where Monaco stretched out like a box of child’s toys arranged on the brink of the sea. There were floating wisps of white mist in places but where they were standing the air was dry and clear and the snow mountains, which seemed almost on a level with them, rolled away in a long unbroken line to where they disappeared in a sea of cloud. Between them and the melting distance were gaunt valleys and rocky hillsides, but higher still and in the near woods the undergrowth was sprinkled everywhere with wild flowers. Sagastrada, notwithstanding his thirst, found it difficult to move.

“Some of the Swiss courses are beautiful,” he remarked, “but I should not have thought anyone would have had the courage to build up here.”

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“It is as though one were playing on the floor of heaven,” the Princess murmured.

“Come on, you people,” Lord Henry, who was at least a dozen yards ahead, cried. “This tingling air is giving me a wicked appetite.”

“No soul, you know, that man,” Lucille observed. “Never mind, he has common sense. Order luncheon, Henry, will you?” she called out. “And send cocktails outside. We can sit and watch the sun on the snows.”

“Life in these parts,” Joan declared, “is certainly full of contrasts. I had no idea there was such a beautiful place in the world.”

“I feel like the man in the Bible,” Rudolph remarked, “who was always crying aloud ‘It is good to be here,’ and always building tabernacles.”

“Some enterprising fellow did build a bungalow here,” Lord Henry said, “but it pretty well got blown away. Sometimes the place is cut off from La Turbie for a week.”

They drank their cocktails in the glowing sunshine but with a tingling of the snow-chilled breeze upon their cheeks. Afterwards they entered the restaurant and divided their attention between the changeless panorama and the very excellent luncheon.

“The simple life for me,” Lucille declared. “Rudolph, you must go away from Monte Carlo, please. It is you who are setting the example of this night life here and all this terrible gambling.

You are corrupting us.”

“But where am I to go to?” the young man demanded. “I am an exile, a fugitive, anything of that sort you like to call me. I was born in the same country as my father and my grandfather, yet I have no country. One of these puppet emperors has crawled up from the bowels of the earth and we people who have worked for generations and triumphed over many difficulties are counted as nothing in the land of our birth. Am I getting serious?” he went on, changing his tone. “That was foolish. I complain at nothing. I have no word against a fate that has brought me into such company, set me down in such a paradise and offered me wine as mellow and food as good as this.”

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“The philosophical spirit is what one needs in these days,” Lucille reflected.

“All very well for you women,” Lord Henry complained. “You haven’t got to hold your own against these Goliaths who spring up from the underworld.”

“We might find them easier to deal with than you seem to,” Lucille smiled. “Unfortunately the modern type of Napoleon does not seem to hanker after our sex.”

“As a matter of fact, I think that our sex is passing through a period of neglect,” Joan declared. “Take the case of our dear friend here, Rudolph Sagastrada. He plays marvellous golf, he has his music, his painting and his moneybags. He has no time for us.”

“I have plenty of time on my hands,” Lord Henry confided, filling his glass from a cobwebbed bottle of Burgundy, “and I am in love with both of you.”

“Do you want us to hate one another?” Lucille sighed.

“You have not enough to think about, you people,” Sagastrada told them suddenly. “It is the only fault one can find with this life. You pursue pleasure with too much zest.”

“We are like the chap that Italian wrote about,” Lord Henry put in. “The plague spreads all over the world and we take refuge in a walled garden.”

Sagastrada, who had been gazing at the snows, suddenly smiled.

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“But the time will come,” he prophesied, “when we shall go out and fight that plague and the sun will shine once more upon the world. We become hysterical here. We are too happy and too depressed. These are joyous holiday hours that we spend in this atmosphere but we all know that we are going back. My own time may be very soon indeed. That marvellous fellow, Domiloff, has some scheme in his mind. I do not want to lurk about in foreign countries. I want to go back to work.”

“I shouldn’t, old chap,” Lord Henry advised him. “You should read the words of that prophet of woe who writes the articles about your country in the *Times* the last few mornings.”

Rudolph, whose eyes had once more been fixed dreamily upon the snow mountains, turned round in his place. Something firmer seemed to have crept into his voice. He had almost the expression of a prophet.

“I should like to go back,” he said, “and speak to every one of those sixty million of my country people direct, so that they heard every word I said as from the top of a mountain. I would like to tell them the truth. It could be done so easily. It could be shorter than even the shortest chapter in the Bible. If every man and woman in the world carried the truth in their hearts and went forward without swerving, the nations would find it so easy. Life could become beautiful once more so naturally. It is choked now with weeds. There are words that could be said which would wither them.”

There was a moment’s silence. Lord Henry was puzzled. The two women were both in their way impressed. Rudolph rose suddenly to his feet. He called the maître d’hôtel and asked for the bill.

“I am excused for five minutes?” he begged. “I make it a rule always to go and pay my respects to the professional. I have enjoyed playing on his course. I must talk about it. You excuse—yes?”

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“Of course,” they assented.

Lord Henry watched him depart with a curious light in his eyes.

“When a fellow gets talking like that,” he remarked, “I’m up a tree.”

“He is an unusual type, perhaps,” Joan said, “but he is sincere.”

“I admire him very much,” Lucille declared. “I wish that all men would take life as seriously.”

“I have nothing to say against him,” Lord Henry went on meditatively. “A chap who can play a round of golf like that—my hat! He has the most beautiful swing I have ever seen in my life. You can’t help but hand it to him. He’s a sportsman all right but when he mounts up into the clouds I can’t keep pace.”

“You are a low fellow, Henry,” Lucille told him with a compensating gleam of affection in her eyes. “Let’s go down before the afternoon mists arrive.”

They trooped out and found Rudolph Sagastrada the centre of

an admiring little group. The professional with beaming face followed him out to the car, his arms full of newly purchased golf clubs and two or three boxes of balls.

“We will have a game before I go back,” Rudolph promised him.

“I will be little use to you from what I have heard of your play, sir,” the man replied respectfully, “but it will be a great pleasure.”

They started off, Lord Henry driving Lucille in his two-seater Lancia and Rudolph and Joan in a hired car. The Lancia shot past them at the first bend and disappeared in a cloud of dust. Rudolph half-rose from his place as they swung by but resumed it again with a little shrug of the shoulders. He let down the window and leaned out, gazing at the twisted way below them. The Lancia soon became almost a speck in the distance.

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“Anything wrong?” Joan asked.

He shook his head.

“Nothing at all,” he answered. “The only thing was—”

He hesitated.

“Go on,” she begged.

“May have been stupid of me,” he continued, “but did you see two men lunching alone in the restaurant and a third man with his back to us just round the corner? They left almost as soon as we entered.”

“I didn’t notice them,” she admitted. “The luncheon and that marvellous view were too engrossing. I could not have told you whether there was a soul in the place or not.”

“I do not blame you.”

“But those men?”

“Well, perhaps you will think that I am losing my nerve,” he said smiling, “but the one alone, his shoulders somehow reminded me of Prince Anselm, and those two others were certainly not our idea of golfers. They looked as much like a gangster’s bodyguard as anything I have ever seen.”

“You don’t think they followed us up to the golf?” she asked anxiously.

“I should not think so,” he replied. “Still, they started off just before us in a large car and I meant to suggest to Lord Henry, to tell you the truth, that he accepted me as a passenger and let you two women drive off together.”

“You don’t think they would try to stop us on the road?” she asked.

“If they do, nothing shall happen to you,” he promised.

A slowly mounting flush burned in her cheeks.

“Why do you imagine I am thinking about myself?” she protested indignantly. “I am not such a coward as all that.”

“And I am not quite such a coward,” he rejoined, “as to wish to have a couple of women who have nothing to do with my troubles become involved in them. However, I do not suppose anything will happen. You see, we are almost at La Turbie now.”

They were descending the last steep drop into the Italian end of the hill town. At the bottom, the turn back is so acute that it is necessary for almost any car to stop and reverse if on the way to Monte Carlo. Their driver was already slackening up when Joan, who was leaning out of the window, gave a little exclamation.

“Look!” she pointed out. “Rudolph, what does that mean?”

A large grey car came stealing up from the approach to the hotel in La Turbie, shot out into the main road and turned towards Menton, passing in front of them. The men—there were four or five of them—were all wearing thick overcoats but there was no mistaking Prince Anselm, who was sitting in front by the chauffeur.

“A tough-looking lot,” Rudolph observed. “I suppose we are in for it. I wonder what they mean to do.”

He soon found out. About a hundred yards down the road and just before the bend for Monte Carlo, the car was brought to a standstill. A moment later it crawled in reverse right across the road, blocking the passage, and remained stationary. The driver of the hired car shouted as he drew near. Nothing happened. They were compelled to draw up. Rudolph held Joan for a moment by the arm.

“Do as I tell you, please,” he begged. “It is the only way that you can help. Sit still.”

“But what are you going to do?”

“Sit still,” he repeated. “Please!”

“I will—but where are you going?”

He sprang out of the car and stood in the middle of the road, a clear and easy mark for anything in the nature of assassination. The young man who had visited the opera box also descended and came to meet him.

“Prince,” Rudolph said, “there is a lady in my car. If you and your friends there are thinking about shooting me, will you see that they are careful?”

“Yes, yes,” the other answered gruffly. “Very gallant, as usual, Mr. Banker. We have no quarrel with your friend except that she keeps bad company.”

“Why are you stopping us?” Rudolph asked.

A triumphant smile parted the lips of Prince Anselm. His small eyes seemed almost to disappear into his head.

“Can you not guess?” he rejoined.

He was carrying what appeared to be a flat dispatch box in his hand. He opened it out.

“It is against my creed to shoot even the most dangerous of enemies at sight,” he went on. “The little affair we spoke of can now take place. You will walk with me into that wood—yes?”

“Do the gentlemen in the car act as our seconds?” Rudolph enquired.

“You could have chosen your own second if you had accepted my challenge last night,” was the stiff reply. “As it is, Hebbisturm is not with me and these men are not qualified for such a position. They are members of a small corps we have established in Nice for other purposes. They are of the lower orders. They are here for my protection, and if the worst comes to the worst, Sagastrada, they are here to shoot you down if you run away from my pistol.”

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Rudolph laughed with a note of real gaiety in his tone. He looked very far from being afraid as he stood there bareheaded, as tall as the other man, perfectly at his ease and infinitely better-looking.

“One moment,” he begged, stepping back towards the car. “Do not move from where you are,” he instructed the chauffeur. “Do not allow Mademoiselle to descend.”

He put his head in at the open window of the limousine.

“Joan,” he confided, “the Prince has a message for me. I must hear it. He has us in rather a tight corner, you see, but he is not unreasonable.”

Her mind jumped to the one conclusion.

“You are going to fight him!” she exclaimed.

“We may exchange a shot in the wood there,” he pointed out. “You must please, my dear Joan, be reasonable. There are five

men in that car—all armed. There is no escaping them. If I decline this stupid melodramatic walk with Anselm into the wood, they will assassinate me. It comes to the same thing. You stay where you are. Promise?”

“No,” she answered rebelliously. “I want to get out. I want to talk to that young man. Someone may be coming along at any moment.”

He barred her progress from the car.

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“Please do not be foolish,” he implored her. “You can do no good, Joan. If you do as I ask, I shall be perfectly calm and perfectly happy. There is no logical action you could take which would help us. Please remember that. It is an old-fashioned stunt, this,” he went on after a moment’s pause, “but at any rate it is better than a dagger in one’s back. Please help me, Joan. Promise to stay where you are.”

“I promise,” she answered dully.

She gave him her hand. He bent and kissed it. As he turned back to where Anselm was waiting, she sat fiercely thinking, ready at a second’s inspiration to break her promise, wondering what could be done. She looked up and down the road. It was still empty both ways.

“What do you propose?” Rudolph asked the young man who was waiting in the road.

The other pressed a knob and opened the case which he was carrying. Two beautifully inlaid duelling pistols lay side by side on a satin foundation.

“They are both loaded,” he said. “They are perfect weapons and exactly a pair. You can choose which you like. I shall take the other. We step over that ditch and walk into the wood. I shall leave you with your back to the first convenient tree and walk parallel with the road twenty paces down. Then I shall turn round and we can both move so that there is nothing intervening. You see this little silver whistle? I shall start with it in my mouth. When I blow it we both fire. Is that clear?”

“Perfectly,” Rudolph assented. “You are not afraid that I shall shoot you in the back as you walk away?”

The young man looked at him disdainfully.

“No, I have no fear of that,” he said. “I do not like the men of your class but you have always had the name, Sagastrada, of being a good sportsman. I am not afraid of that. When I stop, do not fire until I have turned round, though, and blown the whistle. It may take me a second or two to find a clear space.”

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“I will restrain my eagerness,” Rudolph promised him.

They crossed the road. Rudolph took the nearest weapon into his hand. His antagonist helped himself and threw the empty case towards one of the men in the car who sprang to the ground and came hastily up for it.

“Take that back,” the Prince instructed him. “I shall return in two minutes.”

“What are they to do about me if it happens that it is I who return?” Rudolph asked.

His companion smiled at him—an uncomfortable, venomous looking smile, but still a smile.

“There is no possibility of that,” he declared. “You remember my reputation at twenty paces. I have never yet missed my mark.”

Rudolph followed him up the rough path. Arrived at a certain point the Prince turned round.

“I shall now strike to the right,” he said. “You see the way is quite clear, almost an avenue, in fact. You will choose a clear space in the middle of it with your back to that tree. Anyone in the road now is safe. You understand? When I stop, that is not the moment when you fire. You wait until I have turned facing you, looked at you for a few seconds and then blown my whistle. At the sound of the whistle I shall fire. So will you.”

“Understood,” Rudolph observed, opening the breech of his pistol and closing it again. “Supposing when we have had a shot each we are both standing up?” he asked.

“That would not be possible,” was the brief reply. “Still, you see how the pistol works. They are repeaters. Compose yourself. It will take a minute or perhaps two to walk that distance and give the signal.”

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Rudolph nodded, took up his position and looked about him. A feeling of utter unreality seemed to have crept over his senses. His pulse was beating quite steadily. He watched the retreating figure of Prince Anselm almost unconsciously. Nevertheless, everything he should have done he did. He tested the weight of the pistol, brought it to the level, held it steadily towards the distant mark and dropped it a little. Everywhere was silence except for the scream of birds who seemed to be flying around them at times almost in clouds. Then Sagastrada felt his muscles grow tense. Anselm, some twenty yards away, had come to a standstill. He was looking around him. He turned slowly to face his opponent. Sagastrada watched his arm go up, and carefully raised his own at the same moment. There was a second's pause. Then the whistle shrilled through the wood. Almost as one came the two reports.

Rudolph felt a sudden darkness, a blinding crash in the face, a

smothering thud of dark soft feathers. One of the magpies which had been circling round his head fell, a bleeding mass, at his feet. He stared at it like a man in a dream. Then he became conscious that he was breathing normally though his heart had given a great leap in those first few seconds. He looked down the avenue. Anselm was lying on his side, the pistol fallen from his hand, a groan sobbing from his lips, a strange sound against the background of the whole disturbed colony of squawking birds. Rudolph, still gripping his weapon, walked over to where his antagonist was lying. Even as he approached him, the groan died away upon his lips.

“Are you hurt?” Rudolph asked. “Whereabouts?”

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The young man touched his chest.

“The bird,” he muttered. “You would have been dead.”

Sagastrada nodded. He was looking down at the little hole in the other’s tunic. Around them they heard the crashing of twigs under the footsteps of eager men. Prince Anselm’s bodyguard of ruffians had surrounded them. One had fallen on his knees by the side of the prostrate man. The Prince raised himself a little and spoke very distinctly.

“I have a slight wound,” he said. “Carry me to the car. We return—to Nice.”

“It is possible that you missed!” the man who was stooping over him gasped.

Anselm shook his head with a painful effort.

“One of those damn’ birds flew down in the line—the whistle,” he said. “As for the man—there—Sagastrada—”

“Yes?”

“He must go. I wish I had left you to assassinate him. I took it on myself. It was a fair fight. He must go. The others must come—and take over my task—not you—not anyone here—”

He closed his eyes. One whose voice was unexpectedly educated turned to Rudolph and pointed to the road.

“You hear?” he said. “Go!”

Rudolph turned and walked through the dark piney wood, the birds still shrieking and calling above, out into the sunlight. Joan was there clinging to the side of the car. She held out her arms as he drew near.

“You are safe?” she cried.

The warm wind was playing against the moisture upon his face. He felt it and drew his fingers away. There was blood there.

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“You are wounded!” she exclaimed.

He shook his head as he staggered into the car and threw the pistol which he was still carrying over the wall. Then, probably because many strange things had happened in a very short space of time, he lay back with his head against Joan’s arm and fainted.

CHAPTER XXX

Domiloff was seated at his very handsome Provençal writing desk in a corner of the large room of Assembly which had recently been opened up on the top floor of the Sporting Club. The centre of the apartment was occupied by a long table at which four chairs were placed on either side and two high-backed ones at the top and bottom. Domiloff's desk was in the far corner of the chamber facing the door and with a fine view of the sea and the distant mountains. He touched one of the bells in front of him and Tashoff, who sat alone in a private bureau outside, presented himself.

"Any further news of those golfers?" Domiloff asked anxiously.

"They left Mont Agel three quarters of an hour ago," Tashoff replied, glancing at his watch. "They should have been here before now, sir."

"Were they all in one car?"

"Lord Henry Lancaster was driving the Princess de Hochepierre in his two-seater. They started first. Mr. Sagastrada and Miss Haskell were in the car which was hired for them from the hotel garage this morning."

Domiloff stood by the window and gazed out towards Beausoleil and the zigzag road which led down from the mountains.

"Three quarters of an hour," he reflected. "One should be hearing something of them. Lord Henry should be here, at any rate. How are the enrolments going on?"

"Marvellously, sir," was the enthusiastic reply. "There has not been a single hesitation. We have over seven hundred *gardes d'honneur*, as Monsieur Regnier wishes to call them, already enrolled, and the others are coming to the bureau as quickly as their places can be taken in the Casino. Everything has gone like clockwork. Soon there will not be a single able-bodied person over seventeen who has not joined up."

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"Capital!" Domiloff exclaimed. "Good for Regnier, too. I believe it was the only feature of our new Administration about which he felt anxious. No need. I always told him that. They are good fellows at heart, these Monégasques. Any news from the Harbour Master?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Sir Julian Townleyes has not been heard of in any other

direction?”

“Not to my knowledge, sir.”

Domiloff, who seemed to be suffering from a curious fit of disquietude, leaned back in his chair. His fingers strayed towards an open box of cigarettes. He lit one and smoked—obviously a mechanical gesture. His eyes wandered downwards. He watched the people passing into the Casino and the thinner stream coming out. He could just catch the strains of the orchestra at the Café de Paris and he could see the moving forms of the dancers. Every table in the enclosed space was taken. Waiters with their well laden trays were hurrying about in every direction. Notwithstanding the waning sunlight, an air of lightheartedness seemed to pervade the whole place. From his point of vantage, he could even watch the flannel-clad players on the tennis courts. Monte Carlo was busy amusing itself, happily oblivious to all those grim phases of life which for the first time in history seemed to be threatening its gaiety. . . . There was a tap on the door. Tashoff, who had been waiting for his dismissal, moved across the room and opened it. He conversed for a few minutes with an unseen person. Afterwards, he closed the door firmly and returned to his place by the side of Domiloff’s desk.

“A telephone message has arrived from the *Gendarmerie* at La Turbie, sir,” he announced gravely. “There has been some sort of a hold-up in the road near the turning from the Corniche down into Monte Carlo. The Commissaire has gone down himself to seek for particulars. In the meantime, they report that a large car with at least five occupants and the blinds on one side closely drawn has passed through towards Nice driven at a furious pace. The Commissaire will make a personal report as soon as he discovers what has happened.”

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Domiloff’s face was very white and stern. He sat for a moment speechless and without moving.

“I am afraid there is no doubt as to what has happened,” he said at last with a gesture of despair. “If only that young fool could have waited until this afternoon, we should have had an organized escort always on hand. Tashoff!”

“Yes, sir.”

“Staying in this hotel on the ground floor of the Nouvel is a man who has already visited me. His name is Ardrossen.”

“I remember him perfectly, sir.”

“Will you go personally and see if he is in his rooms. If so, bring him here.”

“Certainly, sir.”

Domiloff spent his brief period of solitude in unaccustomed

restlessness. He walked up and down the long apartment with his hands behind his back. Once or twice he stopped to look out of the window by the side of which his desk had been placed, but his eyes seemed to be focussed on vacancy. A rare fit of indecision appeared to have distracted him. When Tashoff returned alone, he indulged in something which was very much like a gesture of relief.

“Mr. Ardrossen is not in his apartment for the moment, sir,” the secretary announced. “I have left a note asking him to communicate by telephone with this room when he returns.”

Even as he finished speaking, the telephone bell rang. He moved towards it and took off the receiver.

“It is *Madame la Baronne*,” he confided. “Will you speak?”

Domiloff took the receiver. Lydia’s voice, for her, was almost emotional.

“Can you come down, Paul?” she asked.

“At once,” was the brief reply.

Domiloff’s entrance into his wife’s salon was something in the nature of a shock. For long afterwards he remembered the deep sense of relief he felt after that first start. Rudolph, apparently recovered from his nervous attack, was standing with his back to the window, a cup of tea in one hand and a piece of toast in the other. He was still wearing his golf clothes. He had rather the air of an *enfant terrible* who had committed an indiscretion.

“Hello, Baron!” he cried. “You were quite right. It is a glorious spot and I had a short putt for sixty-eight, but I had no right to go up to Mont Agel. They were waiting for me on the way down at La Turbie.”

“And then?”

“That terrible fellow Anselm was there with a car-load of desperadoes, by the look of them. I had to follow him into a wood and stand and be fired at.”

“You mean to tell me that he did not kill you?” Domiloff exclaimed.

“On the contrary—I killed him. At least they carried him away with a bullet in his chest.”

“Prince Anselm of Herm,” Domiloff groaned.

“That is the chap. Chief of the Chancellor’s bodyguard. I cannot help it,” Rudolph went on, setting down his cup. “I am the first man who has got away alive since the days of the

student corps and he would have killed me but for a squawking magpie.”

“A what?”

“A magpie,” Rudolph repeated. “The wood was full of them. They were flying about in all directions. We played the game all right—back to back, twenty paces, we turned round, arms up. Anselm blew a whistle. We both fired. My shot carried through. His went through a skimming bird, was deflected a few inches and took the bark off the tree behind me. Ergo—I live and he dies. I cannot feel as sorry as I ought to. The fellow went out of his way to try and kill me and anyway I did not like him.”

Domiloff laid his hand for a moment on the young man’s shoulder.

“I congratulate you, Rudolph,” he said. “All the same, I can tell you this. You are the luckiest man I know. What induced you to go into the wood and fight a ridiculous duel?”

“Because,” Joan intervened from the background, “if he had not fought the duel, they would have opened fire upon our car and very likely killed both of us. We had to stop because they blocked the way and they kept us covered all the time Rudolph was talking to Prince Anselm. They played the game, though, after it was all over. The Prince declared that it was a properly fought duel and they were to leave us alone. Then they bolted for Nice, or at any rate along the Route de Nice.”

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“And let you come away?”

“Never even looked at us again.”

“You have courage, young man,” Domiloff observed.

“Not a scrap,” Rudolph declared. “I was terrified to death. The only person who had real courage was Miss Haskell here.”

“It is not true,” she cried out indignantly. “I was shivering with fear all the time and I should have been worse if Rudolph had not kept so calm. He went and stood out in the road where any one of them could have shot him easily. He insisted upon it that they did not shoot at the car because I was inside. It was more than courage. It was heroism.”

“*Le preux chevalier*,” Lydia murmured.

“It was the bravest thing I ever saw,” Joan declared with a sob in her throat. “I have not dared to tell him so yet but I shall never forget it as long as I live.”

“You have not had an opportunity,” Rudolph reminded her. “I fainted off like a girl as soon as it was all over.”

“For five minutes,” she protested, “and that was when you found your face bathed in blood and filth from that beastly bird.”

He laughed—this time quite gaily and freely.

“Joan, my dear,” he insisted, “that is the most unfair speech I have ever heard. Do you not realize that that bird—a single magpie, too—saved my life? I shall never be superstitious again!”

Tashoff presented himself with a discreet bow of apology towards Lydia. He glanced meaningly at Domiloff, who nodded.

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“I will congratulate you all in due form presently,” the latter said, “and I shall have a special word to say to you, Miss Joan Haskell,” he added, smiling. “You will have to excuse me for some time. I have a rather important caller and I have not yet the least idea what I am going to say to him.”

“Mr. Ardrossen is waiting for you, sir,” Tashoff announced as soon as they reached the corridor.

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CHAPTER XXXI

Ardrossen, looking more than ever like a middle-aged bachelor of precise habits and almost Quaker-like simplicity of attire, sat in a high-backed chair with his arms folded, his eyes indifferently fixed upon the man who had invited his presence. Domiloff, who had muttered a word of apology upon his entrance, scribbled his signature to a dozen letters and documents which Tashoff had laid before him, then waved the latter away, leaned back in his chair and looked thoughtfully across at his visitor.

“How goes the gentle art of espionage, my friend?” he asked.

“Uneventfully,” Ardrossen admitted. “Things happen and I discover them. It is well for some people that I do. It is not so well for the others. You have changed your quarters, I see, or was it by accident, may I ask, that I was shown into this room for my audience with you?”

“Why do you ask that question?” Domiloff enquired.

Ardrossen pointed to the chairs and counted them.

“Eight places around the long table. Seven for the Councillors of State, one for the State secretary. One at each end—one for *Monsieur le Baron* Domiloff, the other for Monsieur Pierre Regnier, the newly elected rulers of Monaco. Am I right?”

“Right but not so impressive this afternoon,” Domiloff observed. “The appointments are all in this morning’s paper.”

“I offer you my congratulations,” Ardrossen continued calmly, “upon your very ingenious idea of making every Monégasque citizen over the age of seventeen into what we call in England ‘Special Constables.’ You have christened them, I believe, *gardes d’honneur*. Very good idea. Between seven and eight hundred of them, I think, up to date.”

“Truly a magician,” Domiloff remarked, with a flutter of the eyelids. “Tell me some more.”

“Did you send for me here that I should disclose to you the fruit of my day-by-day work?” Ardrossen asked.

“Not at all,” Domiloff replied. “I sent to tell you that I have, about an hour ago, received by the hand of a special messenger a formal request from his government to hand over Rudolph Sagastrada to an escort who are now on their way here. Considering its origin, the request is almost courteously worded. It is nevertheless intended to be an ultimatum.”

Ardrossen was mildly but only mildly interested.

“The matter of yielding up the young man has already been discussed between us,” he said. “You do not, I am sure, need any assistance in drafting your reply.”

“Since this demand was made,” Domiloff confided, tapping the topmost file of papers on his desk, “the situation has become very complicated. Rudolph Sagastrada has fought a duel this afternoon with Prince Anselm of Herm and either killed or mortally wounded him.”

“I do not agree with you,” Ardrossen said, “that the situation is in any way complicated. There is nothing prohibiting duelling in the new charter and encounters of that description have taken place here within the last fifty or sixty years. Furthermore, Prince Anselm’s wound is not likely to be fatal. The latest news from the Nursing Home to which he was taken is favourable.”

Domiloff for a moment was speechless. He leaned a little across the table.

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“You must forgive a curious enquirer, Mr. Ardrossen,” he said. “I have already complimented you upon your sources of information but this duel was fought less than two hours ago and not a word concerning it has been breathed in the Principality.”

“I am always pleased,” Ardrossen said, “to elucidate my methods to those with whom I have friendly relations. One of the five men who accompanied Prince Anselm this morning to La Turbie is in my pay. He rang up on a private wire which I have installed at Nice, and the information which I have just given you came to me even before your message.”

“It will make negotiations with regard to the young man a little more difficult,” Domiloff observed.

“There will be no negotiations,” Ardrossen said calmly. “That is already understood between us.”

“But under the altered conditions,” Domiloff persisted, “it is necessary for the State of Monaco to reconsider the situation. Supposing the government of Sagastrada’s country is prepared to go to extremes, they have three or four warships that one knows of in the Mediterranean at the present moment.”

“No warship of that country will pass Toulon,” Ardrossen declared. “I find you a difficult man to deal with, Baron, because you obviously do not trust me, even though I have shown you my credentials. You have seven days to reply to that request which you choose to consider an ultimatum. Within that time I will, if it is any satisfaction to you, obtain a signed declaration from the French Admiralty. This should put your

mind entirely at ease. If that is not enough, here is a further undertaking for you. There has been some question within the last few weeks of the visit to the Port of Monaco of a British warship with a squadron of destroyers. Send your invitation to-night to Admiral Hayes. I give you my word that it will be accepted."

The light suddenly broke in upon Domiloff. His face grew sterner.

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"Do you mean then," he exclaimed, "that there is to be war?"

Ardrossen picked up his hat and stood for a moment in thoughtful silence.

"There must be war before long," he said. "Why not now? I shall wish you good-day now, Baron. The guarantee you have asked for, signed by the French Naval Minister, should be in your hands in four days."

Domiloff also rose to his feet. He refrained from pressing the bell which signalled to his secretary the departure of a guest.

"One moment, Mr. Ardrossen," he said. "Since you are here I should like to ask you a question upon a different matter."

"Well?"

"Sir Julian Townleyes was one of the people in the Principality in whose doings you were interested?"

"To a certain extent."

"You know that Townleyes has disappeared?"

"I have heard so."

"Perhaps you have also heard what I have been told within the last half-hour, that his body has been discovered in the harbour and is now lying in the Morgue?"

"No, I had not heard that," Ardrossen admitted, "and if I had been told it, I should not have been interested."

"Why not?"

"Simply because it is not true."

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"You believe that Townleyes is alive?"

"I am sure that he is."

"Then whose body is it that lies in the Morgue now?"

"Not having seen it," Mr. Ardrossen protested gently, "it is hard for me to say, but I should think that it might very likely be the body of Denkin, the captain of the *Silver Shadow*."

“Any reason for thinking so?”

“The best.”

“You mean that you murdered him?”

“Not at all. Townleyes was bound to kill him as soon as he found him out.”

“Then where the devil is Townleyes?”

“Now, alas, I begin to fail you,” the other regretted. “To tell you the truth, I should like to know myself. He is somewhere out on the high seas but where he is making for I do not know.”

“What, out alone in that boat?” Domiloff asked incredulously.

“Sir Julian Townleyes is a skilled navigator,” Mr. Ardrossen explained. “In smooth weather he would not have the slightest difficulty in handling the *Silver Shadow*, which, by-the-by, is completely controlled from the wheel-house. By this time, for instance, he might be halfway to Toulon. There are a great many places which sound a long distance off which he might easily reach.”

The telephone purred. Domiloff took off the receiver. He listened to what was said and hung up the instrument.

“It appears,” he said to Ardrossen, “that you have been telling me the truth. The café proprietor down at the port has visited the Morgue and although he is unable to positively identify the drowned man, he is willing to swear that it is not Sir Julian Townleyes.”

“The worst crime possible in my profession,” the other remonstrated gently, “is to tell a falsehood. I never indulge in misstatements.”

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Domiloff smiled slightly. He was beginning to enjoy the tense atmosphere which seemed somehow to have been created. More than ever he was curious about his visitor.

“I will give you an opportunity to prove your words,” he said. “What was Townleyes doing down here?”

“We have reached the inevitable cul-de-sac,” Ardrossen said. “It would be better if you put that question to Townleyes himself.”

“But we neither of us know where he is,” Domiloff pointed out.

Ardrossen smiled.

“I should think that he might be heard from at any moment. In the meantime, please allow me to take my leave.”

Domiloff pointed to the door on the left-hand side of the room.

“That door only opens from this side,” he said. “You can pass out, turn to the left in the narrow passage and you will be close to the passport office.”

“I thank you,” Ardrossen said, moving deliberately in the direction indicated.

With his fingers clasping the handle of the door, he turned round. He did not raise his voice, yet with the length of the room between the two men, every syllable he uttered seemed charged with a clear-cut crystal distinctness.

“Beyond all things, Baron Domiloff,” he said, “it is necessary that I emphasize once more our clear understanding. You are guaranteed protection by the French and British navies if your reply to that ultimatum we spoke of should lead to reprisals on the part of the country of which Rudolph Sagastrada is a citizen. The escort which will arrive here for him are not to be received. The young man is to remain your guest. It is understood?”

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“It is understood,” Domiloff repeated.

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CHAPTER XXXII

The entrance of Domiloff into the bar a few mornings later produced something like a commotion.

“Why, here’s the Lord and Ruler of the Principality come to life again!” Lucille cried, waving her hand gaily.

“The Last of the Dictators, or I’m a Dutchman!” Foxley Brent exclaimed.

“It is the Lord and President of the State who has returned to his loyal citizens,” Prince Léon de Hochepierre declared. “What a wonderful hour he has chosen for his return! He must have heard the ice clinking in the glasses.”

Everyone stood up to add to their greetings as Domiloff approached the table. Joan rose with the rest. She was the only one who had not spoken.

“You are all very kind,” Domiloff acknowledged easily. “I really think that such a welcome, on such an occasion, too, deserves recognition. Louis, will you see to it on my account?” he added to the barman. “Honestly, I am flattered. I scarcely thought that my absence for a few days from you all would have been noticed.”

“False modesty!” Dolly Parker observed languidly.

“Let us salute the latest and most human of all the Dictators,” the Prince proposed, bowing to Domiloff. “Remember, we are citizens of a new State, all of you. There only remains for us to institute and join the Foreign Legion of Monaco, for Sagastrada here to make the State a present of a navy, and the whole thing will be complete. I shall become a naturalized Monégasque,” he concluded. “There are no taxes to pay.”

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“There are infinite possibilities about the place,” Foxley Brent pointed out. “Why should not the Baron institute an order of nobility, give away for a suitable recompense titles of every degree? A title of some sort is what I have always craved. It would stop this constant flow of the youth and beauty of America into the arms of English dukes and earls. Don’t you agree, Miss Haskell?”

“You are all very bright this morning,” Joan observed. “I think I should like to be a duchess.”

“No good to Sagastrada, I am afraid, even if he produced a navy,” Domiloff remarked. “His family are always being offered titles in every country of Europe. Why have you never accepted one, Rudolph?”

"I have waited," the young man replied, "to be the first Earl of Monaco."

"H'm, that might be a little difficult," Domiloff pointed out. "You cannot all take your titles from the name of the place. What about Beausoleil? Anyway, I am very glad to see you all again," he concluded, raising his glass.

"There is only one toast this morning, of course. To the new State of Monaco," the Prince put in quickly, "and its first Presidents—Baron Domiloff and Monsieur Regnier. Good luck to them! And may they go on skinning the civilized world so long as we have a franc in the bank!"

The conversation continued in the same vein of frivolity. Sagastrada, who had been a late arrival, drew Joan a little on one side.

"Joan," he asked, "will you come for a drive with me—now, at once?"

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"I will do anything you ask," she answered quietly, "but have you not had enough of expeditions just for the present?"

"I have placed myself in the hands of the great Baron Domiloff," he confided. "Six of the new *gardes d'honneur* will accompany us, three in front and three behind. I have had them all the morning. I hope you understand that I consent, on this special occasion, just to please him."

"Well, I should hope it is not going on all the time," she laughed. "Tell me, where do you want to go?"

"Not far away," he answered.

"Does the Baron know?"

Rudolph's little grimace was illuminating.

"He knows and he is not altogether pleased about it, but I think he will be content later on. I wonder, could you be very kind and come at once? Will you fetch your cloak or anything you want for motoring a short distance and meet me in the baggage court in ten minutes?"

She rose to her feet at once.

"I shall be there," she promised. . . .

In a quarter of an hour they were driving up towards the middle Corniche. The little party they left behind all watched the car as it disappeared.

"I don't know whether it has occurred to anyone else," Lord Henry whispered to the Princess, "but I think Sagastrada is a

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pretty selfish fellow. Domiloff's as brave as a lion, of course, but this business is giving him a devil of a twist. He has got it coming and going, as it were. If anything happens to the young man here, it will be a terrible blow to the Principality, and if he remains obstinate and won't give him up that might mean a European war."

"Oh, don't be such a prophet of woe!" the Princess exclaimed. "It is the wrong atmosphere for this place. If anyone talks to me I want to be made to feel happy."

"Sorry," Lord Henry grunted. "I am afraid I don't feel like obliging, just now. I think things look damn' bad."

Lucille changed her place and passed her arm through Domiloff's. They were a little apart from the others and with her divine shape, her pleading eyes and her perfect face, she seemed a miniature Circe who had found a Rue de la Paix *couturière*.

"You are going to keep Rudolph Sagastrada here, are you not?" she asked eagerly. "You will not give him up?"

"No," Domiloff replied gravely. "I have given my word and I shall keep it. But I think, my dear Lucille, you might remember, when you indulge in these fantastic dreams of your Fairy Prince, that my keeping my word may mean the destruction of this Principality for which I have toiled unceasingly during the last twelve years. Alternately, it might mean what is far worse, the greatest calamity that could fall upon the world—another European war."

He rose to his feet abruptly. Lucille's melting eyes and pleading voice, the chatter of everyone around, had suddenly become obnoxious. He muttered an apology.

"You will excuse me," he begged with a glance at the clock. "A State meeting is imminent."

CHAPTER XXXIII

Somehow or other, for two young people so ready with their tongues, conversation during that brief expedition seemed a little difficult. Joan was tongue-tied simply because from the moment her companion had jumped lightly from the car and stood in the middle of the road, unarmed and obviously in danger of his life on the Corniche, she had become a changed woman. Life itself was a different experience. Every fibre in her body was responding to a new and marvellous sensation. From a healthy, intelligent, agreeable and pleasantly disposed young woman with no marked romantic tendencies, she had become a woman in love. There was more pain than joy about it. The old pleasant relationship had gone and there was nothing to take its place. Rudolph himself did nothing to inspire her. His manner was grave and he seemed to have drawn aloof. They drove along the main road to Nice, passed the race course, then turned to the right when they reached the old-fashioned town of Cagnes. They mounted a little way into the hills and Joan felt a real and natural impulse of enthusiasm as they entered St. Paul.

“This is where we lunch,” he told her. “Out there on the terrace. I hope you will love the place as I do. I hope you will find the trout and the chickens and the omelette and the white wine as excellent as I have always done, because it is the only lunch they offer. And I hope, too,” he added, as the waiter in a picturesque costume with red trousers and a blue shirt came hurrying out to them with two glasses upon a salver, “that you will be able to drink these rather indifferent cocktails, because, to let you into a secret, I hope that you and I may lunch here many times in the future.”

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A rush of feeling swept through her. It seemed to be the first natural word he had spoken. She looked at him with almost fiercely eager eyes.

“Do you mean it?” she demanded.

“Indeed I do, my dear,” he assured her, taking her gently by the arm and leading her to a little table sheltered from onlookers by an orange tree which seemed to grow out of the very courtyard. “I mean it, Joan dear.”

He kissed her for the first time, lingeringly, lovingly, but with just a touch of restraint which seemed to have its own peculiar quality. Then they suddenly seemed to be back again on the terms of a few days ago, eating hungrily, praising the wine, Joan leaning often over the terrace to gaze at the peaceful vineyards and pasture-lands below.

“It is a wonderful country, this,” she murmured, “and this is a

wonderful day.”

“It is an eventful one,” he agreed. “Will you drink with me, Joan, to our next lunch?”

She raised her glass.

“Of course I will,” she answered. “Will it be so far in the future?”

He had turned round to order more wine. Her question remained unanswered. They drank coffee and smoked cigarettes. Then he glanced at his watch.

“There are a million things I should like to say to you,” he confided, “but to-day is a day of events. The car is outside. We have one more call to make.”

He paid his bill and was followed to the gate by the stupefied and joyous waiter, who dreamed that night of a café of his own and a fortune like the fortune of the patron. They threaded their way further into the hills and drew up outside one of those perfectly converted Provençal farmhouses set in the midst of wonderful gardens. She gave a little cry of delight as they drove up to the front door. Jasmine was hanging from the porch and great clumps of climbing roses filled the air with fragrance.

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“But what a marvellous place, Rudolph!” she exclaimed. “Why are we stopping here? Do you know the people?”

He seemed to have developed the gift of silence. The door was open. A man and woman, very obviously the French butler and Madame his wife, stood on the threshold.

“I want you to please me, Joan,” he begged, “by just looking over the house quickly. Do not forget the patio the other side and you may look at the Italian garden, but you must not stay to explore it. Carry my watch in your hand,” he added, passing it over to her. “Ten minutes is all I can allow you.”

“But—but why?”

“Ten minutes,” he repeated.

She shook her head at herself as she followed the gesticulating, garrulous people. They passed from room to room. They explored the spacious upstairs chambers. She followed them along the cool passages out into the stone courtyard and caught a glimpse of the Italian garden and the glittering waters of the swimming pool.

“*C’est dommage que Madame est si pressée,*” the old lady regretted as they followed her out to the front door. “*Les jardins sont magnifiques.*”

Rudolph was standing outside by the car. He pressed something into the hands of the man and woman which still further unlocked their tongues. He shook hands with both of them, jumped into the car, called out a direction to the chauffeur and they were off again on their pilgrimage.

“But Rudolph,” Joan exclaimed, “why this strange expedition? Why did you make me rush through that little paradise of a house? I never saw anything more beautiful.”

“You are pleased with it?”

“I have never seen any place in the world so beautiful. But tell me why—what it means?” she begged falteringly.

“It means,” he told her, “that at the present moment the Clos Fleuri is mine. But wait!”

They drove into Cannes, Joan simply sitting with her hand drawn through her companion’s arm, serene and happy. This time he accompanied her into what was obviously the office of a notary. The man seated at his desk rose with profuse greetings and shook hands with both of them. Rudolph drew a deed from his pocket and laid it on the table. The notary produced another.

“Our friend here,” Rudolph explained to Joan, “understands the reason for my haste. Will you sign your name at the place he points out?”

“But why?” she asked.

“I exercise my authority,” he told her with a smile. “Please sign.”

She obeyed without further argument. The notary, in response to a rapidly spoken request from Rudolph, thrust both documents into an envelope. Further amenities were exchanged. In a moment or two they were out of the place. Again Rudolph called out an address to the chauffeur.

“A quarter of an hour ago, Joan,” he confided, as they started off again, “the Clos Fleuri—the little house we have just seen together—was mine. It is now yours.”

“Mine?” she gasped.

“Certainly. I am in the happy position of being entitled to make you presents and that is my first. It has everything that seems necessary in the way of furnishings—but that will be for later on. I thought that if you were agreeable we might spend our honeymoon there.”

“But Rudolph,” she exclaimed, “dear Rudolph—you have not even asked me to marry you!”

He smiled. They had arrived at a straight piece of narrow road bordered with high hedges and he took her into his arms and kissed her once more.

“My dear,” he reminded her, “that first kiss was quite enough, was it not? Now, hold my fingers tightly and listen.”

“I am listening,” she whispered.

“Joan dear—I love you. You are the first woman I have ever wanted to marry and we are going to be married, but there is something I must go through first. You must be brave, dear, and think of it as I do. This morning,” he confided, “I received a summons from Julian Townleyes.”

“Julian Townleyes—back in Monaco?” she cried.

He nodded.

“The message simply said to come in haste to the Port. I kept my promise to Domiloff. I summoned my bodyguard and down we went.”

“This morning?”

“This morning at eight o’clock. You will hear the whole story from him some day, I expect. He explained to me rapidly what happened the other night, when you were left alone on the boat.”

“But what has this to do with us?” she asked wonderingly.

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“Let me go on,” he begged. “When he left you to cut some sandwiches he heard a noise below. He made his way to the captain’s quarters, which were in the remotest corner of the ship. The captain was there surrounded by papers, engaged in decoding some messages. Directly he saw Townleyes, who was supposed to be in England, he jumped at his throat like a wildcat. Townleyes was taken by surprise. He received a stab in the arm before he could pull himself together. They then had what he described as a life-and-death struggle. I spare you the details. Just as he was exhausted and nearly unconscious, Denkin—that was the name of the captain—slipped, and Townleyes was able to reach his revolver. He shot Denkin through the heart—stone dead.”

“What an amazing story!” Joan cried breathlessly. “But tell me
—”

“Wait please. Townleyes glanced at some of the papers as soon as he was a little recovered. He was horrified. The man whose life he had saved, whom he had taken on to the boat, clothed and looked after, was not only a dangerous anarchist but, in common with many other members of the most dangerous club in France, the Cercle Rouge, he was engaged in a dastardly conspiracy.”

“But—”

“Joan—forgive me—we have only a few minutes. As it is, I must leave out much that would make it more intelligible to you. Townleyes dragged Denkin into the dinghy, rowed him out to the deepest spot in the harbour and pushed him overboard. Then he rowed back to the yacht. He suddenly remembered you but you had gone. He went through more of Denkin’s papers and letters, sealed everything up, started the engine and took the boat by himself over to Cannes, where for several months he has had a marvellous aeroplane lying hidden. He went straight to London and came back last night. This morning he sent for me.”

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It was dawning upon her even at that moment. She felt a sudden sinking of her heart.

“They say,” he went on, “that when you love anyone you forget what it is to be selfish. Well, I have been abominably selfish the last few weeks. That is past. It is impossible for me to remain in Monaco. Domiloff, who is one of the finest fellows I ever met, gave me his word that I should be safe and that he would fight to the end to see that I was—but it is not fair that I should take advantage of such a promise. He could only secure my safety by accepting the aid of France, and unfortunately there has been a secret agent—that little man Ardrossen whom we all wondered about so often—here in the place whose mission it was to bring about an immediate war between France and my country. You see, France, whether rightly or wrongly, has made up her mind that war is inevitable and she asks herself why should she wait and let my country choose the moment to strike. She has completed the most wonderful system of fortifications which has ever been planned or constructed and the military commission which has been sitting day and night for three weeks have pronounced them absolutely and entirely invulnerable. Very well. The trouble about my flight into Monaco came just at that time and an official demand was made that I should be handed over. France seized upon this as a *casus belli* and in order to absolve herself as far as possible and to bring in England, she instructed Domiloff, through her agent Ardrossen, to refuse to give me up, and the new charter granted to Monaco pledged France to come to her military assistance if ever she was threatened by any outside power.”

“Very well, then,” Joan cried, “it is France’s own decision. She thinks it is best for her that the war should come now, she has sent her agent here to make it a certainty—why not let it come?”

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He took her hands in his.

“Joan dear, France is being deceived by her own people. She is being betrayed by the Reds, by Denkin and his crowd. Eleven divisions which guard one section of those wonderful

fortifications on which they are relying have pledged their word to let the enemy through! Not only is that European war an absolute certainty if Domiloff refuses to give me up but it is going to culminate in the worst series of disasters civilization has ever known. France would be compelled to sue for peace and the country would pass into the hands of anarchists.”

“You are going back of your own accord?” she gasped.

For the last few moments they had been driving slowly along the road. In front of them a uniformed man was throwing open some gates. From behind them came the sinister throb of a powerful engine. A huge plane was drawn up inside, half-emerged already from the hangar. The pilot and two mechanics were standing by the side of it waiting. They saluted as the car drove up.

“You are going back of your own accord?” she repeated with sinking heart.

“I must,” he acknowledged, “simply because Townleyes’ discovery comes too late to hold up war in any other way. The ultimatum has been given and accepted. Even Ardrossen, who, to give him credit, has been watching those Reds night and day, had no idea of Denkin’s scheme. But listen, Joan, on the day of my freedom, and that day will come, I am returning here. Wait for me, Joan, happily and cheerfully, and remember, as you must, that I have the virtual right to provide for you. You will find that the little man at the top of the hill in that funny building entitled Barclays Bank is now your guardian, and has the power to order the practical side of existence for you until I return. Do not break the bank at the Casino but there will be enough for you to gamble with until I get back!”

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There were no signs of tears in her eyes but there was a glow there which seemed to Rudolph the most marvellous thing he had ever seen, and a passionate music in her voice—music which never passed from his memory.

“Rudolph,” she cried, “I love you—I am proud of you! I part with you—see—without a tear and I shall long only for one thing—for your return. God bless you, Rudolph.”

She kissed him happily, tenderly, joyfully. She waved her hand as he ran lightly up the ladder. She even waved a courteous acknowledgement to the pilot’s salute. She stood there—tall, splendid in her new happiness, thrilled with the glamorous realization of the supreme moment of her life, past or future. She stood there until the roar of the plane was faint in her ears and the plane itself a speck in the skies.

There was nothing in Ardrossen’s attitude, when he seated himself for the last time in that high-backed chair and faced the man whom he had come to visit, to denote the fact that still,

cold and emotionless as he seemed, he was suffering from the bitterest humiliation of his life. Domiloff was restless and haggard. He glanced up from the half-sheet of notepaper which lay before him.

“What does this mean?” Domiloff asked. “Townleyes begs me to give you an immediate interview. He is lying ill upon his yacht, too ill, he says, to leave.”

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Ardrossen raised his head. His voice sounded very much as usual.

“Owing to a change of conditions of which you were formally apprised,” he said, “I am instructed by those for whom I am working to withdraw my request to you with regard to the young man Sagastrada. No reply will be necessary to the ultimatum which you have received. Sagastrada is on his way back to his country.”

Domiloff had passed through a great deal during the last few days but there had come a time when he was no longer wholly master of himself.

“Will you repeat that, please?” he asked.

“Rudolph Sagastrada is returning to his country of his own accord,” he said. “It has been revealed to him by Townleyes that a war between France and his country at the present moment could only have a disastrous termination. In the strictest confidence, you will receive full particulars of the decision come to by the French military authorities within the next few days. I am only to acquaint you with the fact that you need not reply to the ultimatum and that Rudolph Sagastrada is no longer in the Principality.”

Ardrossen picked up his hat and turned towards the door. Domiloff would have detained him but his visitor stretched out his hand.

“Baron Domiloff,” he said, “I am brought face to face with the first great failure I have ever encountered in a life of many adventures and many exploits. I have said enough to make matters clear to you. What I have left unsaid will reach you in the form of a communication from official quarters. I beg that you will not detain me.”

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There was a curious mist before Domiloff’s eyes. A dream, of course, he fancied. If so, it was a dream that passed but when he could see clearly he was alone in the room.

They drank the health of Rudolph Sagastrada at the window table in the bar that night, after Joan, standing in their midst with something in her face and tone reminiscent of her world-famous predecessor, told them in a few simple words what had happened. There had been a thrilled, almost an awed silence.

Everyone was thinking of the same thing. Domiloff lifted his glass. There was an emotion in his tone for which few people would have given him credit.

“To the greatest gentleman I have ever met!”

Everyone drank and then Joan summoned them back from the queer hysterical depression into which they had seemed to be drifting.

“He will come back,” she declared joyfully. “Because I am certain that he will come back I will tell you something, I hope, which will sound more cheerful. He will come back because —” she stretched out her hands. “Well, how does one say it?”

The Princess indulged in one of those exquisite little grimaces, half of protest yet wholly sympathetic.

“One need not,” she sighed gently. “Only, dear Joan, some days when the tables are stupid and the people are boring and the Mistral comes, you will permit that we flirt with him just a little?”

“A very little indeed,” Lydia also pleaded, “because, you see, we all love him.”

CHAPTER XXXIV

Creaking and groaning with the imposition of the brakes upon its slowly turning wheels, yet bringing with it around the curve and into the station itself something of the drama of its nine-hundred-mile progress, the Blue Train, still to the casual traveller the portent of romance, slowed down in ponderous majesty to a halt in Monte Carlo station. The history of every day, as on that February morning a year ago, repeated itself. There were people leaning from the windows clamouring for porters, there were others leaving everything to the train attendant, stepping out on to the platform and hastening towards the exit. Almost the first to pass the barrier, and certainly the most eager arrival, was Joan Haskell. In one hand she carried her ticket and the yellow registration paper for her baggage, in the other her small handbag. It was all she had dreamed and imagined. François, the *concierge*, was there hat in hand waiting for her yellow ticket, the omnibus was drawn up to the kerb, the row of little carriages was there in the background. The sun was shining. There was scarcely a human being without a smile upon his face. She paused for one second to draw a long breath of happiness, to bestow one sweet lingering thought upon that morning twelve months ago when, full of the spirit of adventure, she had done this same thing. Then she held out her *billet*.

“You will collect these things, François,” she directed. “I shall take a carriage.”

A *voiture* rattled up. The little dog, approving of its prospective passenger, gave a bark of welcome. The *cocher* took off his hat. Joan was duly installed. François, the smile still upon his face, leaned towards her.

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“Everyone at the hotel is expecting you, Mademoiselle,” he told her. “It is a great pleasure to see you again.”

The words seemed to stick a little in her throat but her smile was enough.

“The Hôtel de Paris,” François called out.

“Stop at the bar entrance,” Joan found herself able to say.

“*Parfaitement, Madame.*”

The little dog took its place solemnly, the *cocher* cracked his whip, up the hill they went, round the corner. There before her was the *Place*. It was all so much like twelve months ago, and yet so different. There were scattered groups seated at the small tables outside the Café de Paris. The music of Franchesa faintly reached her ears. The gardens of the *Place* were aglow

with flowers. People came and went from the Casino. Everyone, it seemed to her, was smiling. There were a few fleecy clouds passing across the blue sky, but the sun was warm and the breeze wonderful upon her parched cheeks after the night's restless travelling. The great white front of the Hôtel de Paris was there. Everything was exactly the same. She felt her breath coming quickly as they neared the bar. The window seemed thronged with people. Upon the steps alone—they had permitted him that—stood Rudolph. It was true—not a dream at all, nor a mirage. It had all happened. It had all come to pass. Ridiculous, this aching at her heart strings—and yet what happiness! Rudolph took her frankly into his arms, making not the slightest attempt to conceal his joy. Somehow or other, he remembered to push money into the palm of the *cocher*, somehow or other, she trod on air into the bar, waved at Louis's beaming face and turned to the round table where a little forest of hands seemed to be extended. Lydia, Lucille—they were all there, pressing forward. Last of all, as it seemed to her, Domiloff. He took her hands and held them tightly before he raised them to his lips.

"This is happiness!" he exclaimed. "It is to this, dear Joan, that we have looked forward day by day. It was a sweet idea of yours. Not one of us is missing but there is not one whose heart is lighter than mine to welcome you back."

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"I am so happy," she faltered breathlessly.

She sat down in the midst of them, Rudolph on one side, Lucille on the other. Everyone talked at the same time. Everyone, it seemed to her, was a little hysterical. They all drank to her and Rudolph held her hand, and in the midst of it all something that was almost like peace came to her. Her voice, very soft still, became firm and her heart had stopped its wild beating. Joy was passing into happiness. Perhaps it was the constant pressure of his fingers.

"Twelve months ago yesterday I came here for the first time," she murmured. "Five weeks I stayed here—yes, just five weeks."

"And to-day you have come for the rest of your life, my dear," Rudolph said, "although, as you are marrying a man of affairs, you will not be able to spend all your time at play. Your servants are installed at the Clos Fleuri, but I hope I have done right. I have told them that to-night we must dine with all our friends. Then to-morrow we lunch at St. Paul on our way home and afterwards we must see whether we approve of what the people I sent down from Paris have done. And amongst all these other minor details," he concluded, "please do not forget that you have a little engagement at three o'clock at the Church here with His Reverence the Bishop, and at four o'clock at the *Mairie*."

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"We are all witnesses," Domiloff told her. "We are aching to

show you how civilized marriages are in Monaco.”

“It is to be to-day, really?” she asked with a wondering glance at Rudolph.

“Of course,” he answered joyfully. “There were difficulties but they exist no longer.”

“Do you not think that our dear refugee looks wonderful?” Lydia asked. “I am afraid, though, that they starved him at the fortress.”

“It was only the first two months that were bad,” he told them. “Afterwards, the real trial was perfectly fair and, according to the laws, I think I pretty well deserved what I got, for I did lose my head now and then with Rothmann and he had all the money he wanted at any time. I was sentenced to ten months’ detention in the fortress and the two months I had spent there already were knocked off. Is it not wonderful to be back here with you all? Do you know that one short month ago I was what you call in England a ‘jailbird’?”

“And to-day you have blossomed into a bird of paradise,” Lucille laughed. “Joan dear, you are going to make us all so jealous. He has wonderful cars, aeroplanes, a yacht which has made Léon mad with envy and everyone says that from the outside the Clos Fleuri is marvellous. Not one of us has been allowed yet to cross the threshold.”

Louis came up with a fresh tray of cocktails. Joan insisted upon shaking hands with him. He wiped the tears from his eyes. She looked meaningfully across at Domiloff.

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“You have been looking after him, Louis,” she said.

“I have done my best, Mademoiselle,” the man declared. “Since all this anxiety passed away and the money came streaming once more into the place he has grown younger every day. Twelve months ago it was nothing but courage that kept him alive. To-day he is good for another twenty years. And your young gentleman, Mademoiselle, all I can say is what we all say—no one has brought so much happiness into Monte Carlo.”

“There are only two faces I miss here,” Joan said looking along the crowded bar. “Sir Julian Townleyes, of course, I know about. He is back in the Cabinet with a peerage.”

“A well deserved one,” Rudolph murmured. “I doubt whether England will ever realize what she owes to him.”

“His rooms here are booked for the day Parliament rises,” Domiloff confided.

“And the little grey man?” she asked.

Domiloff leaned a little farther forward.

“He was to have had a million pounds if war had been declared,” Domiloff told her. “He came very near earning it, too. The only flaw was Rudolph. Somehow, I fancy that we shall hear of Mr. Ardrossen again in some other quarter of the world.”

Joan reflected for a moment. The Café at Geneva had floated into her memory.

“I think that it will be in Russia,” she said.

Presently Rudolph insisted on taking her away. He pointed to Mollinet, who had been for a long time lingering in the background.

“Come and let me show you your rooms, dear,” he begged. “There is Monsieur Mollinet waiting.”

Joan had forgotten all her independence. She took his arm as they walked down the bar. Monsieur Mollinet beamed as he bowed again and again in welcome.

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“You remember, Monsieur Mollinet,” she said, “twelve months ago when I thought my room was too expensive and you told me you were sure I should have a happy time here?”

“I remember every word you spoke, Mademoiselle. I remember the way you went out on to the balcony and looked at it all. Everyone is so happy to have you back—and there is a surprise.”

He led them to the second floor. Joan laughed.

“I know what it is,” she cried. “It is my old room.”

“Your old room,” Monsieur Mollinet declared, throwing open the door. “But see—the chambers of a palace! There are six rooms in this suite now,” he went on proudly as he led them from one to the other. “No one has occupied them yet. They will be at your disposal whenever you choose. When you are away they will be the Royal Suite for the most distinguished visitors I have.”

“And this for twenty-four hours!” she exclaimed, looking around her in amazement.

“Monsieur Sagastrada,” Mollinet confided, “sent to Fauvelle’s in Paris with orders to turn this into a suite worthy of your occupation. And Mademoiselle,” he concluded, “if this time your stay is short, Monte Carlo will always be here and Monsieur has promised that four months of every year you will be near us.”

“Your Majesty’s beggarmaid is overwhelmed,” she declared

clinging to her lover's arm as they left the room.

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They drank their last cocktail before luncheon and all trooped into the restaurant. The round table in the centre of the room, the decorations for which had been designed and chosen by Lydia herself, was a blaze of colour—red roses, scarlet poinsettia and rich clusters of bougainvillæa mingled with masses of white lilies. The great cake, not to be cut until later in the day, had been brought down from Vienna by two chefs, one of the offerings from Leopold, head of the Sagastradas. As they sat down—Joan between Domiloff, who was to give her away, and Rudolph—the bells of the Cathedral commenced to chime. Foxley Brent, even before they had all taken their places, sprang up with his glass in his hand.

“I know very well,” he said, “that I shall have no chance afterwards. I am a small man and I was crowded out in the bar; but here I stand, my glass in my hand, every drop of which I intend to drink in a matter of a few seconds to the long life and happiness of two of the most delightful visitors who ever found their way into this strange bewitching corner of the earth which so many of us have learnt to love. Not another word, I promise you. I raise my glass and I ask you to drink the health of Joan Haskell and Rudolph Sagastrada.”

“Apt,” the Baron murmured as the little man sat down and the service of luncheon commenced. “A well-chosen moment, too.”

“Joan, my dear, enjoy your luncheon in peace,” Lydia begged her. “We have not had a word together yet, but my own maid has got your keys from François and everything is being prepared for you.”

“You dear people think of everything,” Joan replied gratefully. “My last anxiety is removed.”

Rudolph looked around him with a glad and happy smile upon his lips. There was a flash of humour, too, in his eyes.

“What I love almost more than anything,” he declared, “is our ultra-modernity. We have revived Victorianism, we have proved that it is possible to bring the greatest romance to the most exquisite maturity by the old-fashioned device of marriage.”

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An answering flash came from Domiloff.

“And in Monte Carlo!” he murmured.

THE END

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[The end of *The Colossus of Arcadia* by E. Phillips
Oppenheim]