UP THE LADDER OF GOLD

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UP THE LADDER OF GOLD

By
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To
My Friend
"PLUM" WODEHOUSE

Who tells me what I can scarcely believe,
that he enjoys my stories as much as I do his.

Up the Ladder of Gold

CHAPTER I

The two men—Warren Rand, the human riddle of two hemispheres, and John Glynde, his scarcely less famous secretary—leaned across the green baize-covered table until their heads almost met. They both wore the new headpieces and receivers designed to lessen the roar of the great engine which drove the plane. The sheet of paper in front of the latter was covered with figures and calculations, which he had apparently just brought to an end. He thrust a drawing pin through it for security and steadied himself by gripping at the side of the table as the powerful machine ploughed its way through an unexpected air pocket. He peered steadily into his companion's face, and, notwithstanding his own insignificant appearance and thin, reedy voice, there was something curiously impressive in his solemnly spoken words.

"You are the richest man in the world, Warren Rand," he announced.

"I always expected to be," was the cool reply. "The only question is whether I am rich enough for my purpose."

"With your holdings of newspapers, you practically control the Press of the world," John Glynde continued.

Warren Rand, the man with the roughly hewn, brooding face of an intellectual satyr, frowned gloomily.

"Not yet," he grunted. "You don't know as much about newspapers, John, as you do about money. That will come, though—it must come."

"What do you expect to get out of it all?" the smaller man asked curiously, taking off his thin, gold-rimmed spectacles and wiping them with meticulous care. "So far, you don't seem to get as much from life as other men. You are probably the most hated individual in the world. Every one with whom you permit yourself to exchange a word fawns upon you, and no one tells you the truth if they can help it. You haven't a single friend, it costs us a small fortune every year to save you from being assassinated. Where does your pull come?"

Warren Rand made no immediate reply, but steadying himself carefully, leaned back in his chair. Obliquely through the window, he could see in front a dull, red haze, which might have been the rolling torrent of some huge conflagration. The glow of it mounted upwards, gaining in clarity and substance at every moment. Opposite

to him, John Glynde gathered his papers together with the mechanical exactitude of a trained man of affairs.

"Power!" the latter muttered, half soliloquising, half addressing his vis-à-vis. "What's the use of that except to pander to your vanity, to breed hate? Which of your senses can you gratify by knowing that you could drive your crowbar into the flywheel of the world if it pleased you? What's it all about, Warren Rand—the urge and the sweat, and the clamorous strain of it all?"

Warren Rand turned away from the window and looked at his secretary. The latter, diminutive alike in physique and features, met his employer's fierce but passive scrutiny without flinching. He was a man of insignificant appearance, with flaxen hair streaked with grey, shrewd eyes rather deeply set, a negligible chin, and a mouth whose lips were generally a little thrust outwards.

"I wonder," Warren Rand speculated, "whether any employer in the world ever permitted himself the luxury of such a secretary as you?"

John Glynde ignored the satire and elected to take the question seriously.

"Not many men could afford one," he observed. "You are paying me a hundred thousand dollars a year, at which price I am extraordinarily cheap. If you had left me alone where I was, I should have been president of my bank before now, chairman of the Country Club, and commodore of the West Bay Sailing Club. Instead of serving a corporation, I chose to serve you. You may dispute it as often as you like, but the task I set myself out to accomplish I have accomplished. I have put you in the most dangerous position any human being could occupy. You are the richest man in the world."

The mighty machine throbbed and rushed onwards into the darkness—onward toward the wall of misty fire. Once again they were caught in an air pocket, and the whole structure shook with convulsions, whilst it seemed that the mahogany panels of the saloon were being torn asunder. Filmy wisps of the cloud through which they mounted stole mysteriously into the interior. They were enveloped in it as though in a fog.

"I made only one condition when I gave up my own career to boost yours," John Glynde continued. "You know what it was. I insisted that when the time came for me to ask you the question, towards what goal we were driving, what was behind all this huge, dynamic force, you should answer me as man to man. Already you can neither use your money nor wield your power; yet the piston rods are still beating."

"Wait for a few more months before you ask your question," the other demanded. "All that I can tell you at this moment is that we are not beating the air.

The organisation which you have helped me to build up has its purpose and its future. Both will be clear enough to you when the time comes to strike the first blow."

The door of the saloon was suddenly opened and closed. A young man entered with a despatch.

"In Number Three code, sir, from London," he announced.

Warren Rand waved it towards his companion, who opened a despatch box by his side and drew out a long, Morocco-bound volume. In something under a minute, he wrote out a transcription of the message in a clear, clerkly hand and passed it across the table:

> Our agent, occupying responsible position in premier London newspaper, Daily Sun, reports editorial by Harold Nickols now going into type disapproving transference Disarmament Conference to Geneva and adopting hostile tone towards discussion of Peace Pact stop article further supports reception of Postinoff and Vitznow if discussions prove of practical value.

Warren Rand waved the messenger away. He pointed to a small locked ledger which lay upon the table.

"This man Harold Nickols?"

"I can tell you from memory," Glynde replied. "Fifty-three years old, club man, widower, opinionated, inaccessible."

His Chief glanced at his watch.

"What time shall we be in Croydon?" he enquired of an official who was passing through.

"Half-past-seven, sir," the latter answered. "Barely twenty minutes, that is."

Warren Rand gazed for a moment or two thoughtfully at the great carpet of lights which seemed moving upwards. Then he drew a cigar from his pocket and, regardless of the strenuous rules of every airship line in the world, lit it. His action was arbitrary, but usual. The plane was his; the two pilots, the mechanics, and very much John Glynde were the bondsmen of his will.

CHAPTER II

Shop was very seldom talked at the Sheridan Club, but on the evening when Warren Rand's great plane sloped downwards from the clouds and left him at Croydon, Harold Nickols, who was dining there with three or four of his intimate friends and associates, departed from the usual custom. Over his second glass of port he leaned forward in his chair at the end of the table—a place which he usually occupied by reason of his constant attendance and seniority—and addressed his friend Andrews, the editor of a famous monthly.

"So the Sphinx of New York is on his way over, I hear," he remarked. "Coming to set Europe right about something or other, I suppose."

"Who is the Sphinx of New York?" Herbert Dring, the playwright, enquired, moving from a lower place at the table into the charmed circle.

"Who is he? What is he driving at? How have we deserved him?" Harold Nickols rejoined. "There are a hundred questions one could ask about Warren Rand—which is his name in real life, if you want to know it."

"To begin with, then," Dring continued, "why 'Sphinx'?"

"Well, I'll tell you," Nickols went on. "He is one of the richest men in the world. He owns more newspaper interests than any one else. He could do almost more mischief than any other breathing man, and yet I'll wager there isn't a soul in this room who's ever seen his photograph or could tell you what he looks like. Why, you don't even read about him! He seems to use his tremendous Press influence to avoid publicity instead of courting it."

"That sounds like the Sphinx, all right," Dring agreed. "What's the idea of all this super-modesty? I never associated it with the giants of your profession."

"You are without the powers of observation, my dear Herbert."

"Which is why you write such damned good plays," the man on Harold Nickol's right remarked.

"What's he coming to Europe for?" one of the others queried.

"No idea," Nickols confessed carelessly. "He owns some shares in our show, but I've never seen him in my life and don't expect to this time. He launches his thunderbolts from the clouds or sends up his poison gases from the caverns of the world. No one ever sees him. He never attends any public meeting, never signs an article, never allows his movements to be chronicled. The compositor who sets up in type the name of 'Warren Rand' knows about it afterwards, I can promise you, or rather his employers do."

"How does he manage all that?" Dring persisted.

"He controls more newspapers than you've ever written plays," Harold Nickols explained. "He travels with a staff who go about bullying the world. That sort of thing's all very well in America, where multimillionaires rule the roost, but even over here there's scarcely a paper issued that doesn't somehow or other understand his wishes and which isn't damned sorry for it afterwards if they don't respect them. The man's a sphinx, all right. He's after something in life, and something definite, but there's no one I know of who's been clever enough yet to find out what it is."

"Sounds interesting. Any chance of meeting the fellow?"

"Not the slightest," was the uncompromising reply.

"What about sending him a card for the Club?"

"His secretary would throw it into the waste-paper basket. I don't believe he's ever crossed the threshold of a club in his life."

"Rather an inhuman person," Dring observed, dealing lightly with the port.

"He is inhuman," Nickols agreed—"to judge by his actions, that is to say. No one knows anything about him personally. We used to call that fellow who lived down in Monte Carlo 'The Mystery Man of Finance and Politics.' Warren Rand is the 'Mystery Man' of our profession."

"And you mean to say," Andrews demanded, leaning across the table, "that, although he owns a share of the *Sun*, you have never met him and aren't likely to meet him?"

"Perfectly certain I sha'n't. If, at any time, he has anything to say to me, it will come through a third person. I don't suppose Harrison himself will see him. He'll sit behind those great windows of his enormous flat over the offices in Kingsway, which Teddy Gage called the 'Spider Eyes of London,' and he'll just look out, and what he wants to see he'll see, and what he wants to do he'll do, curse the fellow! I always hate talking about him. Think I must have a complex that way. What about a rubber of bridge?"

The little party broke up and, after a brief delay at the cashier's desk, they made scattered procession for the card room. The porter, however, detained Nickols in the hall.

"There's a gentleman enquiring for you, sir," he announced.

"A gentleman? Who is he? What name?" Nickols asked, pausing to light a cigar.

"He wouldn't give his name, sir—said he wouldn't detain you more than a minute. He's in the strangers' room."

"Sha'n't be long, you fellows. Cut me in," Nickols enjoined, swinging round to the right. "I must just see who this chap is and what he wants. Some one from the office, I suppose, only I should have thought they would have telephoned."

He opened the door of the strangers' room and found, to his surprise, that the apartment was almost in darkness. A man was standing by the electric switches, dimly visible in the light from the single lamp left burning. Nevertheless, from the first moment, Nickols felt that there was something sinister in the solid, motionless figure with which he was confronted. He leaned forward to get a better view of the stranger's features. Without further light, however, this was impossible.

"I was told you wished to speak to me," he began. "My name is Harold Nickols. Who are you and what do you want? Do you mind turning on another light?"

The stranger ignored the request.

"I want you," he said, "to go back at once to the offices of your newspaper and substitute some other editorial, on whatever subject you choose, in place of the leader you have written for to-morrow's issue."

Nickols was for a moment dumbfounded. The colossal impertinence of the unknown visitor's request, and the crisp, unhesitating speech, nearly took his breath away. Besides, so far as he knew, no one's eyes save his own and the proof reader's had even glanced at his production.

"Who the devil are you and what do you know about anything I have written?" he demanded, advancing a little farther into the room. "Turn that light up and let's have a look at you."

"The lights will do very well as they are," was the impatient response. "My name is Warren Rand, and however impossible you may think it, I have seen a proof of your article on the situation in Geneva, advocating the reception of those murderous swine Postinoff and Vitznow. That article must not appear in the *Sun*."

In later days, when men discussed the real greatness of Warren Rand, there were critics who, amongst other so-called weaknesses, found fault with his lack of tact. There were others who argued that this was a deliberately acquired gesture, a proof of the man's real genius; that he struck at the root of all vital matters, regardless of his victim's feelings or prejudices, and that, by this method, he achieved success more quickly. Certainly, in the present instance, he shortened discussion by bringing matters to a crisis. Harold Nickols had Irish blood in his veins and he lost his temper completely and irrevocably.

"I don't care whether you're God Almighty," he shouted. "You're not going to interfere with the *Sun* so long as I'm editor. My leader is in type by this time and by five o'clock a hundred thousand copies of the newspaper will be on their way north."

"That is your considered reply to my injunction then?" Warren Rand asked

coldly.

"That is my considered and my only reply," was the swift retort. "You may be the greatest newspaper man in the world, Warren Rand, on your side of the ocean, but you don't own the *Sun* yet."

The room was suddenly in complete darkness.

"What the devil are you meddling with those switches for?" Harold Nickols exclaimed angrily.

There was no reply. The somewhat squat, yet not undignified figure of this unexpected visitor was already near the door. Nickols stumbled across to the switches and flooded the room with light. The place was empty. He stepped quickly out into the hall.

"What's become of that gentleman who came to see me and who was here a minute ago?" he asked the hall porter.

The man looked up from his desk in surprise.

"The gentleman has just driven off in a motor car, sir."

Harold Nickols stood at the top of the steps, indulging in a few moments of brief but confused reflection. He could scarcely realise that he had actually been in conversation with the man who had been the subject of their discussion at dinner time—the Sphinx of New York. Perhaps he ought to have been a little more tactful. The man had irritated him, though, with his melodramatic desire for obscurity and his absurd request. He turned away and relit his cigar. Some curious impulse prompted him, when he reached the card room, to keep this visitation to himself. The whole episode, he decided, had better pass out of his mind as a thing that had never happened. Nevertheless, although a careful player, he revoked twice in the first rubber he played.

As the hours wore on, Harold Nickols became more and more oppressed with the consciousness that there was something wrong about the atmosphere of the Club that night. He failed entirely to concentrate upon his bridge. His whisky and soda tasted flat. The friendly chaff of his pals lacked savour. He left earlier than usual, and instead of taking a taxi at once to his modest little home in Ebury Street, he strolled down the Strand and turned eastward. In about ten minutes he reached a fine stone building, from the roof of which a great sky sign announced in the best Broadway manner the morning rising of the *Sun*. He was not, under ordinary circumstances, an emotional man, but his heart beat a little faster as he listened to the roar of the machinery. Lights flared from nearly every window. The shutters in front of the low plate-glass windows were purposely lifted to display to the passer-by a section of the marvellous plant—great wheels roaring their way through space; iron arms

reaching out in every direction; news, the happenings of the world, flung on to that endless roll of virgin paper, happenings from the far corners of the universe, the written and spoken thoughts of men in their studies, advice to the world, deliberate, profound advice. He thought of those suites of private rooms upstairs, each presided over by a master in his own line of thought, men whose names were household words, giving of their best to their fellow citizens. His own—as he honestly believed—inspired message, which had taken him many hours to clothe in living, vital words, proclaiming to the world the studied and deliberate policy of a great newspaper, lingered still in his memory. To-morrow, the whole world would know what the *Sun* thought of this tangled and over-elaborate scheme of bringing peace into a world where there was no peace.

He crossed the road and looked with a great pride at the immense building. There were lights burning in most of the editors' offices. His sub, whose duty it was to see the paper through, would be there until daybreak. He felt a curious disinclination to cross the portals, but he could see it all, the panting energy, the pulsating waves of thought and mental vigour, driving into concrete form all that his brain had brought together—his brain and the brain of others. Then, in those sensitive moments, he seemed suddenly to realise what had brought him here, the nature of that vague disquietude that had haunted him all the evening. There was a traitor in that organisation somewhere if Warren Rand spoke the truth, and, curiously enough, he never disbelieved him for a single moment. He thought over the names of his immediate assistants one by one. To steal and disclose the policy of a great newspaper at this time of momentous crisis was akin to the theft of a secret treaty or the suborning of an ambassador in the diplomatic world. This thing had happened. Warren Rand knew twelve hours before any human being should have known the jealously guarded secret of his editorial room. With his hands thrust deep into his overcoat pockets he gazed almost savagely up at the flaming windows. It was as though a great, defacing fissure had sprung like a streak of lightning from basement to attic of that magnificent edifice, tearing its way through brick and masonry, leaving a hideous scar. He even fancied that the music of the machinery was failing, that there was something lacking in its solemn and portentous rhythm. . . .

A man passed him and turned round in the act of entering the building. He was one of the night reporters on his way back from a profitless commission.

"Anything I can do for you, Mr. Nickols?" he asked, a little curiously.

The editor came down to earth with an effort.

"Nothing at all, thank you, Jackson," he answered. "I just paused to have a look at the old shop from outside. Great show, isn't it?"

"Marvellous, sir," the man assented. "Sure there's nothing I can do for you?"

"Nothing whatever, thanks," Nickols replied. "I was just hanging around for a taxi. Here it comes. Good night!"

"A lot of talk in the Press Club, sir," the young man confided, as he hailed the vehicle, "as to what your pronouncement about Geneva will be in the *Sun* to-morrow morning."

Nickols smiled as he stepped into the taxi.

"And a lot of abuse waiting for me when they know, I expect. . . . Good night!"

"Where shall I tell the driver, sir?"

Nickols hesitated. If he went back to the Club, he was in the humour to drink.

"I'm for an early night," he decided. "Number seven, Ebury Street."

The reporter transmitted the address, slammed the door, and went off. Harold Nickols was driven away westward, with the thunder and storm of his disquieting evening still hanging over him like a cloud of depression.

CHAPTER III

Harold Nickols, in the very comfortable bedroom of his flat in Ebury Street, permitted himself the not unusual luxury of a telephone by his side. He had just dropped off to sleep for the first time, at about a quarter past three, when the bell rang. He sat up with a shock. His movement towards the receiver was purely mechanical.

"Hullo," he exclaimed, "who's that?"

"Is that Mr. Nickols speaking?" a familiar voice asked.

"Yes, this is Nickols," was the startled reply, for, sleepy though he was, he had already recognised the voice of his sub. "What's wrong, Scriven?"

"I can't exactly tell you, sir," was the cautious answer. "I am telephoning from the basement. I think you had better come down, though, as quick as you can. . . . Yes. Do you hear me, sir? . . . Come down?"

"What, to the offices?" Nickols demanded.

"Yes, sir. There's something queer going on. You ought to be here. I've sent a taxi. It will be outside your door by the time you've got into some clothes. I'd rather not answer any questions over the 'phone. I'm a little confused myself."

Harold Nickols sprang out of bed, dressed with amazing swiftness, made one or two ineffectual passes with the brush at his tousled hair, dashed some cold water into his eyes, stuffed his pipe and tobacco pouch into his pocket, and let himself down by the small, automatic lift. There was a queer, ghostly darkness about the place and about the street outside, but even as he opened the front door, a taxicab, with brightly burning lights, came round the corner. The driver pulled up and touched his hat.

"Are you the gentleman I was told to fetch, sir?" he enquired. "I come from the *Sun* office in Fleet Street."

"That's right," Nickols acknowledged. "Nothing wrong there, I hope—no fire, or anything?"

"Nothing that I could see, sir. Seemed to be a good many people going in and out for this time of the morning. That was all I noticed."

"Get there as quickly as you can then," Nickols enjoined.

They drove swiftly off through the half-empty streets. Something wrong at the office! He knew now, as though by inspiration, whence had come his fit of depression. He saw one face, and one face only, as he sped on his way—the face of the man who had stood in the purposely darkened room only an hour or so ago. He realised in those few minutes the source of all the uneasiness of the evening, the

restlessness which had driven him into the streets. He was afraid—afraid as many others had been before him—of that strange, portentous figure of a man, afraid because he had crossed his will, afraid of what retaliation he might be planning. He filled his pipe and smoked savagely, until he was obliged to let the windows down to get rid of the smoke. What could this sphinx of the great world, what could God or the devil do, to throw out of gear at a second's notice the immense energy of the world's greatest newspaper? In time—yes, he might work mischief in time—but in those few hours what was there that was possible? Then he suddenly remembered that this man whom he dreaded must have spies inside the place. Perhaps they had throttled the machinery. What was the use of that? Warren Rand might be a terrible man to deal with, but human effort must have its limitations. He, Harold Nickols, had absolute and unquestioned power at the *Sun* buildings. At a word from him, all would be well again. . . .

Everything seemed normal as they turned the corner of the street, except that there was a little more commotion than usual about the entrance to the building. Then, during that last hundred yards, came a hideous shock. A strange impression of unaccustomed silence thrust its sinister way into Nickols' consciousness. He leaned halfway out of the window, listening with strained senses. It was a startling realisation, but an undeniable one: there was silence in the street! The mighty machinery, which should have been flinging out in its thousands copies of London's great newspaper, was motionless. A fury seized upon the man. He sprang from the taxi before it had reached the pavement, sprinted into the marble hall, and ran up the stairs. People whom he met gave way to him. There were one or two little exclamations; one person tried to stop him. He went straight on. His private office was on the first floor and in a room leading from that Scriven, his sub-editor, would be at work. He flung open the door of his private entrance and stared in, amazed. Everything was incredible. The world was upside down. His own particular chair, behind his own much-photographed table, was occupied, and occupied by the man who had paid him that strange visit at the Sheridan Club an hour or so before. By his side sat a small person with flaxen grey hair, insignificant features and snub nose—a stranger to him. In an easy-chair, wan and scared, and showing signs of having been dragged from his bed, was Gervoise Harrison, the proprietor of the paper. Seated at the next desk, sometimes used by his secretary, were two men of professional appearance, also strangers. There was a tense atmosphere about the place, but a sense also of action. Harold Nickols looked around him with amazed apprehension. His hair seemed to be more tousled than ever. There was a wicked light in his eye. When at last he found words, it seemed to him that his voice, which he controlled

with difficulty, was reedy. It left every one unimpressed.

"What the hell's the meaning of this?" he demanded. "What are you all doing in my room? What's happened to the machinery?"

Warren Rand looked across at him—a level, direct stare.

"Nickols," he said, "you had your chance a few hours ago. You refused to take it. You are no longer editor of the paper. You no longer have a position here. The lawyers in charge will decide as to the compensation to which you are entitled. You will receive that—nothing else. Get out, please. We are busy."

"What the hell have you got to do with it?" Nickols cried fiercely.

"I am the owner of the *Sun* newspaper, as I should have thought you would have gathered by this time," Warren Rand announced. "I exercised an option which I have held for some time, at five minutes before midnight."

There came upon Harold Nickols a terrible premonition. The old simile of the Sphinx flashed into his mind. He felt that he was listening to a man who seldom spoke, but who spoke nothing but the truth. He looked helplessly across towards Harrison and read his doom.

"Warren Rand is quite right," the latter admitted, "although of course I never expected anything of this sort. I sold him an option on the whole of my shares months ago, after the last slump on the Stock Exchange."

Harold Nickols was dazed. One of the two strangers stood up. He was so obviously a man of law that he had no need to introduce himself.

"Perhaps a word from me might save time," he suggested. "I am one of the attorneys who look after Mr. Rand's affairs. What he has just said is perfectly true. He has owned for more than a year fifty per cent of the shares in the Sun Newspaper Trust. Lately, he has purchased from Mr. Gervoise Harrison here an option on the remaining shares, and he paid a specially high price on the understanding that the shares should be transferred, and his control established, at any time he chose, with half an hour's notice. On arriving in England this evening, my client seems to have become aware of the fact that an editorial was being issued from this paper to-morrow morning with regard to the present Geneva Conference which was diametrically opposed to his own views. He therefore put into force his option, and the *Sun* newspaper belongs no longer to a company but to one man, my client."

"And," Warren Rand remarked, in expressionless voice and without the slightest sign of any interest in the discussion, "the editorial which I have written myself, and which is now being put into type will outline the policy of the *Sun* on this and all future occasions."

A singular clarity of mind seemed to come to Harold Nickols. There was something behind, a raging storm driving the heart's blood through his veins, playing strange tricks with his swelling muscles. For those few minutes, however, the mind triumphed. He saw the path Warren Rand was treading, the grim inevitability of the man's progress. He kept back the other things. He spoke distinctly and without haste.

"So the *Sun*," he said, "is to be added to the chain of Warren Rand's peace-prating newspapers."

"It is already added," was the grim amendment. "By to-morrow morning the million of your readers will have had the boundary of their mental horizon rolled back. They will see the things which lie beyond as the whole world will see them, when you and I are dead and gone, Harold Nickols. You are one of those who have cumbered the way. That is why it is my will to sweep you and your type of thinker into the dust heap. In your blatant jingoism you would make a term of opprobrium of the greatest word in the Saxon vocabulary. You are right. The *Sun* has joined the chain of my pacifist papers, and however loudly you may blow your little tin trumpets in other quarters and preach the prehistoric doctrine of force as the final appeal between differing men, the things I have written and the doctrine I preach will live in the days when the Punch-and-Judy show remains the sole theatre for your antics."

Nickols had the air of listening to every word and weighing it carefully. His brow was furrowed, his tousled hair seemed rougher than ever. Those thick lips of his protruded. The eyes behind his spectacles were half closed.

"Does this great message of yours to the readers of the *Sun*, Warren Rand," he asked, "tell them how you propose to bring together into common accord all those heterogeneous atoms of humanity of which the Conference is composed?"

"The expenditure of one small copper coin will enable you to answer that question for yourself in a few hours' time," was the icy retort.

Harold Nickols ignored the sarcastic reply. The passion in his voice grew thicker.

"Does it tell them," he demanded, "how you propose to prevent war, how you can justify yourself in encouraging them to believe that you, or any other person, is capable of building a new world, and filling it with a race of human beings devoid of passion, devoid of martial instinct, devoid of every natural competitive impulse? Does your leader tell them that?"

"It avoids all artificial rhetoric," Warren Rand declared. "Common sense—basic common sense—is all that is necessary to impress upon mankind the truth. You and your fellows, Harold Nickols, are my enemies, and the enemies of the great change

which I am seeking to bring into the world. Crow yourselves hoarse on your dung hills if you like. You will fail and I will win."

There was a curious change in the atmosphere of the room. Every one seemed to be aware of a growing tension. Suddenly they realised what it was. The soft hum of the machinery from below had recommenced. The sound swelled, gained depth and volume, until that unholy silence existed no longer. The heart of the great building was beating once again. The increasing roar seemed to madden Nickols. Warren Rand listened, and the faint parting of his lips at any rate resembled a smile.

"You hear, Nickols," he said. "There goes the tearing to pieces of all your false jingoism. We're letting the light in. We are preaching the new doctrine."

"Are you preaching it for your own country, or are you trying to shove it down our throats?" Nickols demanded savagely.

"I have no country," was the cold reply, "nor any nationality, except for my passport. Get rid of the idea of boundaries and frontiers, Nickols. Tear your atlas into pieces if you ever want to think like a free man."

The storm burst, when it came, without warning. A fire of fierce hatred blazed up in the dispossessed man. The thought that every turn of the mighty wheels below was hammering into type these alien views on his beloved pages, worked like madness in his brain. He sprang forward and literally flung himself across the desk. A figure who had been sitting in the shadows, having the air of a guardian over Warren Rand, leaped to his feet, and the lights above glittered upon the automatic grasped in his hand. Every one shrunk back, expecting the roar and the flash. A different thing happened, however. Nickols' spring seemed to have brought him into contact with no human being, to have met instead the dynamic force of a piston rod. Warren Rand never left his seat. His long arm shot out in front of him, and Nickols came no nearer to his enemy than the end of the fist crashing into his jaw. He swayed for a moment and crumpled up on the floor. There was a little murmur among the bystanders. Gervoise Harrison staggered to his feet. One of the lawyers poured out a glass of water from the table in front of him and approached the prostrate figure, over which the young man with the automatic in his hand was already bending. Warren Rand looked coolly over the edge of the desk. Harold Nickols heard no longer the thunder of the machinery which had maddened him.

CHAPTER IV

It was very seldom that Mr. John Glynde smiled. When he did, it was usually in connection with some twist in the affairs of his patron reflecting, if only indirectly, upon himself. There was, however, what seemed to be almost an imbecile grin on his face late in the afternoon of the next day, when he ushered a young lady into Warren Rand's somewhat unique reception room, situated on the top floor of Kingsway Buildings.

"This is Miss Stanley Erdish," he announced. "You sent for her to see you at four o'clock."

Warren Rand pushed his easy-chair away from the window out of which he had been gazing, and swung around. He frowned at the slim, very attractive-looking young woman who was making her way composedly across the room towards him, and he remained seated in his easy-chair, with the stump of an extinct cigar between his fingers.

"I don't want to see Miss Stanley Erdish," he said. "I want to see her father, or her brother, or whoever it is."

She smiled at him disarmingly.

"You don't," she assured him. "You want to see me."

He looked her up and down. She would have found favour in the sight of most men, for her hair and eyes were of a pleasant shade of brown, her complexion of a creamy pallor, which made cosmetics seem a futile aid to beauty, and her mouth had that pleasant curve which in a man means humour and in a woman tenderness. She apparently failed, however, to please Warren Rand. He threw his cigar end into the fireplace, but he still remained seated, and his tone was morose.

"I don't do business with women," he said harshly. "My secretary here knows that well enough. I'm afraid he's only wasted your time bringing you up."

"The trouble of it is," Glynde pointed out apologetically, "that we have been doing business with a woman without knowing it. This undoubtedly is the 'Stanley Erdish' who has been our publicity agent in this country for over six months, and who obtained the post, if you remember, by very pertinent letters, and kept it through excellent service."

"Nice little man," the girl murmured. "It's the truth too."

"My God!" Warren Rand groaned. "So my affairs have been in the hands of a woman all this time! I wish I had read the correspondence myself."

"I'd like you to know that it wouldn't have made any difference," Glynde assured him. "I was completely deceived, and I am more acute in such matters of

detail than you are."

"You flatter yourself," Warren Rand rejoined. "I can smell a woman out from the first three words in her letter. She's humbugged you, Glynde. Why don't you sit down, young lady? Now that you're here, I expect that I shall have to talk to you."

"I was waiting," she replied, smiling sweetly, "to see if you stood up."

Something happened to the muscles of Warren Rand's face, but it would have taken a very clever physiognomist to have decided whether or not it was a smile.

"No need to tire yourself out waiting for manners from me," he warned her bluntly. "I haven't got any. Besides, women have knocked all that sort of thing on the head by insisting upon the equality of the sexes. I wouldn't have employed you for a thousand pounds if I'd known you were a woman—especially a young and apparently a good-looking one—but since you've tumbled into the thing, you've done your work well. I sent for you to tell you so, and to give you instructions for the next few months. As it is, you had better give Miss Stanley Erdish a cheque for what we owe her, Glynde, and wish her good afternoon."

"Does that mean that my engagement is ended?" the young woman asked.

"That's just what it does mean," was the curt reply. "My scheme of life doesn't include employing women in confidential positions."

"What a pity you didn't know about my sex," she sighed. "You see, it's too late now."

Very many men in assured positions of life had quailed before such a look and such a frown. Miss Stanley Erdish suffered them gladly.

"What do you mean by 'too late'?" he demanded.

"You see," she explained, selecting the most comfortable chair within reach, "you employed me as a press agent in an entirely new and unique capacity. It almost took my breath away when I really had mastered your secretary's letter. Every other commission I have ever had in my life has been to keep my client in the limelight. Yours, as I accepted it from Mr. Glynde, was to keep your name out of every newspaper, to see, in fact, that the name of 'Warren Rand' never appeared in print; to let the world think, whenever a financial deal was successfully accomplished, a newspaper bought, or control of it acquired, that some one else was concerned, but never Warren Rand. I'll admit the commission intrigued me. I never had anything like it before. I have never enjoyed work so much in my life."

"That's lucky," was Warren Rand's dry comment, "because you're through with it."

"Not at all," she protested; "I'm only just beginning."

"Don't you understand that you're fired?"

She shook her head gently.

"Oh, no," she objected, "you couldn't do that. That wouldn't be possible, Mr. Rand."

"Take her into the cashier's office and give her a cheque for what's owing to her," the latter enjoined.

John Glynde rose to his feet, but she caught him by the wrist and detained him.

"Don't trouble about that," she begged. "I am in no need of money for the moment. Now, with regard to that question of being fired. You simply couldn't do it. You perhaps don't know that when I took up this publicity profession, I very nearly went in for blackmailing instead—even more lucrative, I believe, but difficult as regards one's subjects. There are not many people like you in the world, you know, Mr. Rand."

"Blackmailing?" he repeated. "What have you got against me, young lady? It's been tried on before. There's one man in Holy Cross Cemetery, another at the bottom of the Hudson, and two others doing fourteen years each. No one has succeeded yet."

Miss Stanley Erdish was unmoved.

"They didn't go the right way about it," she confided, "and they didn't know as much as I know. Now, just think, Mr. Rand, think of the things I've kept secret on your behalf during the last twelve months. Who knows that you are the mysterious syndicate who bought the *Daily Clarion*? Who has the slightest idea that you are the unknown financier who lent six million pounds to Turkey just when Greece was going to declare war against her? Who knows that St. Clair Dent, who owns that great northern syndicate of newspapers, is receiving a matter of ten thousand a year from you in return for permission to edit his weekly notes? Who knows the name of the secret buyer of gold during the last few weeks—"

"Stop!" Warren Rand interrupted. "Well?"

"It is I who have thrown dust in the eyes of the world upon all these points," she reminded him. "It is I who might supply the eye lotion."

Warren Rand sat quite still, looking at his very charming visitor. She returned his scrutiny, an engaging light in her eyes. John Glynde, who was afraid because he knew that his Chief was angry, intervened after his own fashion.

"The young lady is quite right," he insisted. "She has worked well for us. To send her away just because of this matter of sex would be foolish. Anything else," he concluded, blinking into his Chief's steely eyes, "would be worse than foolish."

"Such an intelligent little man I have always said that you were, Mr. Glynde," she sighed. "Besides, there's last night's affair, you know. I am probably the only person

who could succeed in keeping the whole world from knowing that Mr. Warren Rand has bought out Gervoise Harrison and is the sole owner of the *Daily Sun*, or the truth about that article on the Peace Conference in Geneva in this morning's paper. I am sure you are too sensible to try to do without me. The only thing is," she concluded reflectively, "that now you're in England, the work is going to be very much harder for me, and I think you ought to consider the matter of a rise in salary."

"Are you married?" Warren Rand enquired.

She held up her ringless hand.

"Not yet. I am hoping to be some day, of course, but just the right man hasn't come along yet. I should like an American, if possible. Every one says they make such good husbands."

"Any brothers?"

"No brothers or sisters."

"So you are the only one of the family?" Warren Rand meditated.

"The only one," she acknowledged. "Why? Did you think you might find places for my relatives if I had any?"

"What salary is the young woman getting?" he asked abruptly.

"Fifteen hundred a year," John Glynde replied, "and a moderate expense account."

"It sounds a great deal," she reflected, "but everything is so dear nowadays. Shoes and stockings alone," she went on, looking down at her own beautifully shaped little patent shoes and silk stockings of the latest shade, "cost a small fortune."

"How much are you going to stick me for?" he demanded.

"I have an aged mother to support," she sighed, "who has a penchant for night clubs, and week-end visits to Paris. I have always wished that I could gratify her taste for travel."

"Send her round the world," Warren Rand grunted. "Give the girl three thousand a year, Glynde."

"Such a pleasant sum," she murmured. "I shall do quite nicely on that."

Warren Rand fixed her with that negative glance of his.

"In case you should become conceited," he confided, "let me tell you this. You have done quite well, but there have always been powerful influences behind you. There is scarcely an editor of a respectable newspaper in this country who doesn't know my weakness and isn't prepared to subscribe to it. You could see my name pencilled out of dozens of paragraphs every day by men who have never heard from me, whom I have never met in my life. They know, though."

She nodded and, stooping down, opened her little brown despatch case, took out a sheaf of papers, and selected a proof. She crossed the room and, leaning over his chair, held it out for his inspection. He was angrily conscious of a very unfamiliar thing—a faintly sweet, unrecognisable perfume as though from unseen flowers.

"You wouldn't have liked that to appear," she observed. "You see, it got as far as type."

He read out the first few lines:

> "One of the most singular innovations in modern politics is the intrusion of wealthy and influential newspaper proprietors into the counsels of the leading statesmen of the day. It is rumoured that, although his name appears on no shipping list, Warren Rand, the multi-millionaire, and, as he is popularly called, 'The Newspaper Sphinx of New York,' is now on his way to Europe, and is expected to take part in the councils at Geneva.
>
> "Warren Rand, whose newspapers must have interviewed many thousands of less famous men, has never himself been interviewed or photographed, nor has he, more than three or four times in his life, signed the articles which are reputed to have come from his pen. He is a man of strong character, and curiously secretive habits, but the power he wields is unbounded, and if, at any time, he should choose to take a vigorous part in contemporary European history, he would be a force gravely to be reckoned with. His present mission is said to be due to a desire to intervene in the disarmament question, and it is no secret that certain powerful influences which have done so much to retard progress at Geneva are awaiting his visit with apprehension."

Warren Rand returned the slip and eyed the girl coldly.

"Where did you get that from?" he asked. "Your own little printing press?"

"From the *Hemisphere* office," she replied, disregarding his sneer. "It would have appeared in the *Hemisphere* but for me. One of my best efforts," she went on. "It cost me a great deal."

"Are you telling the truth?" he demanded.

"It is quite a habit of mine," she assured him.

"You wish me to believe that George Soames, the editor of the *Hemisphere*, was bribed by you, with your paltry means, to prevent the appearance of this paragraph?"

"Not with money," she admitted. "Certainly not with money. The personal effort was amazingly strenuous. I had to let him take me out to dinner three times, to the theatre twice, and I don't know how many times to luncheon. I don't dislike Mr. Soames," she went on, "but he dances very badly and he's a little troublesome as a companion. However, there's the proof of my influence. The paragraph never appeared. And yet you thought of firing me!"

"I am still considering it," he muttered.

John Glynde shook his head.

"Oh, no, you're not," he expostulated. "You shall have your cheque for the first quarter on the new basis before you leave the building if you like, Miss Erdish."

"I always thought you were nice," she confessed, flashing a smile at him. "At first I didn't think you were at all the sort of man to be secretary to Warren Rand, but I've changed my mind. I am wondering," she went on, fastening up her despatch case, "whether it would not be a good plan to take me with you when you go to France, Mr. Rand. It isn't the French papers who are so inquisitive, but nowadays there are so many English paragraph writers hanging round the Riviera and aching for news, against whom I think you ought to be protected."

"How the hell do you know I'm going to France?" he demanded.

"Of course you're going there," she rejoined. "They're breaking up at Geneva almost at once. I shouldn't be surprised if it were the rumour of your coming which scared them. I don't know where the others are going, of course, but there are one or two of them bound for the Riviera whom I am sure you will want to see. Of course," she continued amiably, "I don't wish to embarrass you when I suggest going with you to France. I could travel with your suite, or alone. I am sure Mr. Glynde here would look after me if I needed any help, or you have a very charming man, whom I've seen about once or twice—a Colonel Tellsom—Chief of your Bodyguard, I think. He and I might work together."

"Speak French?"

"Like a native, and Italian."

"Well, you can put any idea of foreign travel out of your head for the present," he told her. "I'm not going to France."

She smiled.

"I needn't even be on the same train," she persisted, "although I am sure I should be useful, if there were any newspaper men about."

"But I tell you that I'm not going to France," he repeated.

"Then may I use the motor boat you have sent to Cannes?" she begged innocently.

He glared at her.

"How the devil did you know I had a motor boat at Cannes?"

She was on her way to the door. She looked back over her shoulder.

"I am a publicity agent, as well as a secrecy agent," she confided.

Warren Rand bit savagely into a cigar and lit it.

"A most unpleasant young woman, that, Glynde," he pronounced.

The secretary stroked his narrow chin thoughtfully.

"She knows her business," he remarked.

The buzzer of the telephone marked "Private" on Warren Rand's desk sounded. John Glynde conversed with an unseen interlocutor for several moments. Then he laid down the receiver and spoke softly to his Chief.

"The Prime Minister wants to know if you'll dine at the House of Commons at eight o'clock?"

"Silly old ass!" Warren Rand scowled. "What's the good of my doing that?"

"No good at all in your doing it," John Glynde agreed, "but a great deal of harm in your refusing. Besides, you may just as well satisfy yourself what his attitude is likely to be."

"Say you can't find me, and you'll ring up in five minutes."

John Glynde obeyed orders. Warren Rand sat with his hands in his trousers pockets, his thick lips protruding.

"How the devil do you suppose he got to know that I was in England?" he grumbled. "My name wasn't on the passenger list and we know the Marconigram people were square."

"You can't expect impossibilities," John Glynde told him coolly. "We kept your departure from New York, and your arrival here, out of the newspapers. That was difficult enough. You mustn't forget, though, that England has still a secret service, and you're a marked man."

"I'll dine with him, hang it!" Warren Rand decided. "He'll get nothing out of me, and he hasn't brains enough in his head to say anything worth my hearing. Never mind! I'll dine with him. My compliments, and I'll be there at eight o'clock."

CHAPTER V

At six o'clock that evening, Miss Stanley Erdish closed down her desk, touched a bell, and handed to the uniformed boy who answered it a pile of fifteen to twenty letters. With a little wave of her hand, she dismissed her secretary, and a few minutes later she pushed the button of one of the general lifts and, entering it upon its arrival, had descended to the famous rotunda hall before she realised the identity of her solitary companion.

"A word with you, if you please, Miss Erdish," John Glynde begged.

She nodded indifferently and followed him towards one of the reception rooms. It happened that there was a late rush of news from the East, and it was filled with people waiting to see the Syndicate Editor. They tried another with the same result. The round hall, almost as big as a church, was still more impossible. There were little crowds gathered before the finely displayed news announcements, and every chair was occupied. The headquarters of over a hundred newspapers, even though its administration was perfect, collected at all hours of the day a stream of polyglot humanity. Mr. John Glynde coughed.

"If I felt I knew you well enough, Miss Erdish," he said, "I would suggest a cocktail at some neighbouring restaurant."

"For heaven's sake, don't let that trouble you," she begged. "We're in the same ship, aren't we? I'll take you to Cramp's, round the corner."

They left the place together, crossed the street, threaded another narrow thoroughfare, and turned in at a brown-stone building of rather foreign appearance, with boxes of flowers in the windows. In a large room on the ground floor was a curved bar and a semicircle of comfortable armchairs and tables; in the distance beyond, a grillroom.

"You ought to feel at home," Miss Erdish remarked, as they selected places. "American barman, Canadian Rye whisky, if you like Manhattans, and all that sort of thing. Most of the American journalists in London come here."

"Great little place!" Mr. Glynde agreed.

They gave an order and asked for sandwiches.

"I'm going to pay for the cocktails," she announced. "You've been rather a dear to me, Mr. Glynde. I meant to keep my post, but without you it might have been more difficult."

"Yes," he admitted, "it would have been more difficult. I asked to have a few words with you privately, Miss Erdish, because I wanted to reassure myself. An American business man's conscience isn't much to brag about, but you've been a

little on mine the last few hours."

She took off her hat and threw it upon a divan. Then she leaned back in her chair and took a huge bite out of her sandwich. John Glynde was quite sure that he had never seen such beautiful brown hair in his life or such flawless white teeth.

"Now just what do you mean by that, Mr. Glynde?" she asked. "Be frank with me."

"I will," he answered. "I know more about you than I told the Chief."

"No harm, I hope."

"No harm," he acknowledged, "but I fancy that if the Chief had known what I know, he wouldn't have been so easy to deal with."

"What is it that you know?" she demanded.

"That Stanley Erdish is the name which you took when you went on the stage for a year or so," he replied. "Your real name is Stanley Nickols. You are the daughter of Harold Nickols, the late editor of the *Sun*."

She finished her sandwich in silence, brushed away a few crumbs, and disposed of her cocktail.

"Now I wonder how you found that out?" she reflected, answering with a nod the barman's interrogative gesture. "I am going to have another cocktail to get over the shock of the disclosure. Do you mind?"

"Not in the least. I'll have one myself."

"Tell me how you made this great discovery? I thought I'd covered up my traces pretty well when I left home."

There was a shade almost of pity in John Glynde's weakly blue eyes as he looked towards her.

"Miss Erdish," he said, "have you realised that in the Kingsway Building there are six hundred and seventy-two people, all employed by our Chief?"

"I had no idea there were quite so many," she admitted. "What on earth does he find for them all to do?"

"Just at present," he continued, "let us concern ourselves only with rooms numbered twenty-seven, twenty-eight and twenty-nine, which are directly below yours. They are occupied by a little company of enquiry agents and detectives, I suppose you would call them over here, all selected by and controlled by one of the cleverest men who ever left Scotland Yard to treble his salary. Every one who enters the Chief's service is passed through the sieve. The reports are brought to me, and if there is anything the Chief should know, I put it up to him. This is the first time in my life I have not been entirely honest. The Chief is a man of prejudices. A hint at your parentage, and he not only would have refused to listen to anything you had to say,

but if you had ventured upon those same threats, something would assuredly have happened to you."

She looked at him incredulously.

"Do you mean—?"

"Do not let us waste more words upon this than are necessary," he begged. "We are an organisation—nearly a perfect one—controlled by the Chief, brought together, and working under his directions mostly, for the attainment of one particular end. To gain that end, the organisation is conscienceless and unscrupulous. The Chief would have considered your suggestions as an attempt at blackmail. Blackmail is a crime. He would have met crime by crime. Nothing could have saved you, and whatever was done—I can assure you of this—would have been done in such a manner that no one attached to the Kingsway Building would ever have been connected with it in the slightest degree."

Miss Stanley Erdish lit a cigarette. She was terribly attractive as she leaned back in her chair, full of animation and interest.

"This is too exciting!" she exclaimed. "You mean, in plain words, that I should have been done away with?"

"Something of the sort," John Glynde agreed calmly. "The affair would not have troubled the Chief for a single second. You committed what was in his eyes a crime by threatening him with blackmail. He would have equalised the matter by removing you. I don't say he would have done so by extreme measures, but you would have been rendered harmless. By to-morrow, he would have forgotten your very existence."

"A nice crowd I seem to have got mixed up with," Miss Stanley Erdish remarked, with a little gleam in her eyes.

"We are such a crowd," John Glynde affirmed, "as has never been known before in the history of the world, or, at any rate, since the days of the Inquisition. Millions have gone to the riveting of every link. We are a perfect piece of human machinery, working towards one guarded and definite aim, and protected on every possible side from interference."

"Very terrifying," she murmured. "It all sounds most intriguing, though. Are you going to tell your Chief of my parentage and plod after my lonely hearse to the cemetery?"

"That depends," John Glynde replied, sitting a little more erect in his chair. "Will you give me your attention for a moment?"

She looked at him in some surprise. John Glynde, during the last few minutes, seemed to have become more of a man. His shoulders had stiffened, his voice was

deeper.

"Miss Stanley Erdish," he said, "I am a judge of men and women and I hope I am not going to be disappointed in you. I have credited you with three important qualities—courage, probity, and common sense. I hope I shall find that I have not been mistaken. Let me put you through the first test. Do you believe what I have told you?"

"Well," she admitted, withdrawing the cigarette from her lips, "I regret to say that I do. I am never afraid to face the unusual. I believe you."

John Glynde smiled.

"I was right," he congratulated himself. "We come to this, then. You realise that you are in danger?"

"Yes, I suppose I am."

"It is my great desire," he continued, and his tone was almost solemn, "to keep you in your present position, to have you one of our organisation—a small part of it, perhaps, but still one of the links. There have been times in my life when I have preferred to trust the word of one man to the bond of another. I, a banker, admit that, Miss Erdish. I shall trust your word if you give it to me."

"What have I to promise?" she asked.

"That, regardless of your parentage, or of any real or fancied wrong suffered by your father, you will remain a faithful member of the organisation. You see, I make it easy for you. I make evasion, perhaps, easy. That I waive. I ask for your simple word, Miss Stanley Erdish, and when you have passed me that word, you are safe."

She looked at him intently. She was an epicure in life and its sensations, but she had never dreamed of a situation quite so enthralling as this. From forty yards away came the roar of Fleet Street; from more immediately outside, the wailing of a street organ; from close at hand, Charles, the barman, greeting his customers with his habitual smile, his usual friendly gesture to his intimates. Fragments of chaffing conversation broke now and then upon the tense atmosphere which this little man by her side seemed to have created. It was all very wonderful, and Miss Stanley Erdish began to feel that she was going to enjoy life. Her tone when she spoke was very unlike her usual one.

"I give you my promise, John Glynde," she said. "As a matter of fact, you need have no fear. I understand your point of view, but my father and I are entirely out of sympathy. It is more than six years since I left home, and we rarely see each other."

He smiled happily, bit for the first time into his own sandwich, and sipped his cocktail.

"You take a great weight off my mind," he acknowledged. "A gesture from me,

when we leave this place, and you will be as free as the air to go where you like, unfollowed and unsuspected."

"Were we followed here then?" she asked.

"Certainly. You have been followed all day. You left your rooms in Coburg Crescent at a quarter past nine, I think it was. You summoned a taxi, disputed with the man about something, and called another. You stopped for a moment at a club in Hay Hill and asked the porter for letters. From there you came to the Kingsway Building. I forget what time you left for lunch, but anyway, it's down in the records. You went to the Berkeley Grill and you lunched with a young man named Childers, who has, apparently, no significance."

"Poor dear!" she murmured. "He's very nice but he has no brains. Jack Childers, the cricketer, you know."

"You returned to the Kingsway Building in good time," John Glynde went on. "With your work there, I have nothing to do. You left the Building at a quarter after six with an elderly idiot who has a perfectly ridiculous admiration for you, and you have just concluded a very satisfactory conversation with him."

"I always said you were nice," she declared. "You know I have. It is terribly uncanny, though, to feel that one has been watched like this."

"It's finished now," he assured her. "You belong."

She drew a little closer to him.

"Since I belong, my dear Sub-Chief, or whatever you think I ought to call you, can't I be given at least just an idea as to what it all means, what new hemisphere we are going to crash into, what new world within a world we are to discover?"

He sighed, and there was genuine wistfulness in his sigh.

"My dear," he said, "there are many things I scarcely know myself. A time will come, I think, when the whole machinery will stop, when we shall turn either to the right or to the left, which way only one man knows. For myself, I have but one duty, and that, in a sense, is already accomplished. My duty is to make our Chief the richest man in the world. That I have done. I have given him such control over the money markets in both hemispheres that I can sit at the end of the cable morning by morning and force the markets to rise or fall as I choose, and at the close of banking hours each day I can make just as much as I think well to make."

John Glynde had come into his own, temporarily at any rate. The girl's eyes were distended. He talked as one of the masters of the world.

"And for yourself?" she gasped.

"Money is nothing," he replied equably. "A good many people have said that, but few have meant it. I mean it. I left the finest bank in New York to come here at

twice the salary and a bonus. The bonus alone has made me a millionaire. I have simple tastes; in a sense I am like the Chief himself. Money has lost its allure. Figures attract because they appeal to the imagination, but money has no longer any significance."

"I should like to marry some one like you," Miss Stanley Erdish confided.

"My dear," he replied, "with your sense of humour, your finely poised brain, and your delightful personality, you might marry a prince, and if I wasn't number two in the greatest organisation in the world," he sighed, as he beckoned for his bill, "I rather think I should like to be a prince."

CHAPTER VI

Two men dined alone that night in a private room of the House of Commons and talked of the future of Europe. They had scarcely an idea in common or a subject upon which they were agreed. Warren Rand, before the first course was removed, was speculating as to how a man with so little personality and such a limited field of ideas could possibly have become the premier of a great country, whilst the Right Honourable Oliver Trowse who, for the last two years, had filled that somewhat thankless position, was asking himself in almost bewildered fashion why his private secretary, whom he trusted implicitly, should have spoken of this blunt-mannered, unattractive man as one of the vital forces of the universe. Anyhow, whilst he was at it, Trowse made up his mind to solve the riddle of his visitor's reputation so far as he could.

"They tell me, Mr. Rand," he said, "that during the last eighteen months, you have become the largest newspaper owner of this or any other generation."

"It is probably true," Rand acknowledged.

"One asks oneself," the Premier went on, sipping his first glass of champagne, "whether your activities in that direction have been entirely financial, or whether, as I have heard it once or twice vaguely suggested, you have some great purpose in your mind which you have not yet fully explained to the world."

"There is no need for me to have any other purpose," Warren Rand declared, with that crudeness of which his host had already taken note. "I only buy money-making newspapers, because if a paper isn't a money-maker it isn't getting its circulation, and circulation is the one thing I insist upon. I figure there are some fifty million people in the United States and England, and scattered over the Continent, to say nothing of the British colonies, who every day read what we have to say to them."

The Prime Minister nodded thoughtfully.

"Very interesting," he murmured—"very interesting indeed. As a purely academic question, let me ask you this? How do you suppose the power of the Press compares with, say, the spoken word, or the broadcasting, or any of these other means of attracting public attention?"

Warren Rand had rather the air of a head master from a great public school asked to lecture to a kindergarten.

"I will tell you, Mr. Trowse," he expounded, "why the Press possesses a power which is inevitable, unbounded, and undefeatable. It gains that power from one quality—repetition. The laws of the physical world would, any one of them, afford

the best simile: the falling drops of water which wear their way through the stone; the avalanche crushing the earth underneath, inch by inch, till the final movement comes; the force of gravitation, drawing to itself, year by year, the buildings men have erected upon earth's surface. . . . You follow me, I hope? You can inculcate a doctrine with the living voice to any man you can get to listen to you, and he'll go away and forget it. You can preach the same doctrine at him day by day, week by week, and year by year, until it becomes part of his life, until he believes it because he has to believe it. He has to read his newspaper more or less conscientiously. He can't spend all his time with the serial, the money market, and the sporting news. Before he throws it away, he has to read the leader, and he has to read of the world's affairs from the point of view of the man or group of men who wrote that leader. You form a man's mind through his newspaper, just as you form a boy's in school. Nothing else has the same quality of inevitability. That is why the man who owns the Press of the world rules the world."

"No one," the Premier acknowledged, "owes more to the Press than I do, or has a greater appreciation of it as a force in life, but I think you're exaggerating. Quite natural, too, considering the position you occupy in the newspaper world."

Warren Rand did not trouble to argue the matter. He emptied his glass and watched it being refilled. He still had the air of one who is talking without much hope of being understood.

"It might seem so," he admitted tolerantly; "yes, it might certainly seem so."

Oliver Trowse ventured down one of the byways of thought suggested by his companion's speech.

"Do you believe," he asked him, "that if you bought a Republican newspaper you could turn its readers into Democrats?"

"Of course you could, in time," Warren Rand assented. "I have done it more than once. You have to find an editor with a subtle brain, but it's really easily accomplished. You begin on the familiar lines along which the paper has always been conducted. Then one day you hesitate. The Republican government which you are pledged to support is introducing legislation which you venture to criticise. It is the beginning of the rift in the lute. You keep on impressing upon your readers the fact that your principles are sound, that your republican instincts are invulnerable, and by slow degrees you sap away your individual reader's confidence in his own party by your own apparent difficulty in remaining loyal to it. You are mentioning an extreme case, but it can be done. If you don't reach one generation, you reach the next. . . . The minds of all men of brains, if left to themselves, move in the same direction. Show them the same path logically, illuminate it brilliantly, if you like, and they will all

tread it. As a matter of fact, there shouldn't be diversity of thought or opinions at any time in the elementary principles of government. That was the secret Mussolini discovered, by which he redeemed his country."

The Premier was impressed, but remained a little patronising.

"Aren't you a trifle sweeping, Mr. Rand?" he objected. "Brains, even of the same calibre, can scarcely all develop along the same lines."

"They should, so far as regards the broad thoroughfares," Warren Rand insisted.

"Why don't they, then?" his host demanded.

"Bad education," was the swift reply. "Education should be universal and its principles—its basic principles—should be fixed upon the same foundation. What the world wants—"

He broke off. His companion waited expectantly.

"Please go on, Mr. Rand," he invited. "Of course you're exploiting the principles of socialism, but I have an idea that what you were going to say would be your own apologia."

"But I am not ready to say it," Warren Rand declared bluntly. "There are other more interesting things which I prefer to discuss with you."

The Premier remembered who he was, sipped the wine of self-confidence, and pressed his point.

"But, Mr. Rand," he continued, "I beg of you to be frank with me. It might be worth our while to show our minds to each other."

"I doubt it," Warren Rand muttered.

"Very few people in the world," the Premier went on, "know anything about you. Those who do have the idea that you are a sort of self-appointed prophet, with a great cause living in your brain and heart, which, when the proper time comes, you are prepared to expound. In the meantime—owing to your command of the Press—you have certainly acquired an immense power, even if I cannot give it quite the place in life which you claim for it. Incidentally, you have also, they tell me, by a series of very brilliant financial coups, become one of the richest of living men."

"That is quite possible," Warren Rand admitted. "What of it?"

The Premier was inclined to resent the curtness of his guest's tone, but he did his best to conceal the fact.

"You must acquit me," he begged, "of any personal curiosity. Your position becomes interesting to me solely from a patriotic point of view. With the various recognised governments of the world we are in touch through our ambassadors and through our commercial agents. In you we have to appreciate a concentrated force, with the potentialities of a nation, but without its self-expression. They tell me strange

things about you, Mr. Rand."

"I break no laws to which I subscribe," Warren Rand observed. "I go my own way."

"Precisely; but what is it?" the Premier demanded, tapping upon the table with his spectacles, a favourite gesture of his when addressing a larger audience. "How do we stand to be affected by any movement you might make? Is it part of your scheme to attempt to force upon the world a new doctrine of politics or sociology? Which way are we to look for the thunderbolt?"

"If you remain in office long enough," Warren Rand said coldly, "you will probably be the first to understand fully what I am working for. I am afraid, however, that your government has scarcely enough stability to look far enough into the future."

The Prime Minister flushed. Only a few weeks before a vote of censure had been defeated by the narrowest of majorities, and, day by day, his heterogeneous group of supporters was becoming more restless.

"We have passed through troublesome times during the last few years, Mr. Rand," he admitted. "Things ahead, though, are shaping more clearly."

"Your party, as a party, scarcely exists," was the dry reply. "You have had to call in all sorts of outsiders to keep you in office at all. You govern because no one else wants to govern for the moment. That is to say, you govern not through the will of the people but through their lack of will. The last election was simply a stalemate. Any suggestion of another Conservative Government, after their calamitous record of the last seven years, would have meant a revolution. You, with your halting declaration of policy, and the wreck of the Liberal Party, were all that remained. You can't last, though."

The Prime Minister stared at his visitor for a moment, bit his lip, and laughed a little nervously.

"One scarcely expects quite so much frankness, Mr. Rand," he remarked.

"Nothing in the world is worth considering except the truth. I hate humbug. That's why my Press is feared and respected throughout the world. I hope you will understand," the visitor went on, with a belated regard for the amenities, "that nothing I have said is in the slightest degree personal."

A servant brought in coffee and cigars. Warren Rand helped himself to both and accepted a generous glass of brandy. He waited until the man had left the room before he continued.

"I trust that you will not consider that I have been too frank," he said. "I should repay your hospitality badly if I talked otherwise than truthfully to you. Politically, we

both know that your country is in a hopeless muddle for the present. You haven't a party or the makings of a party strong enough to rule with dignity or with self-respect. When the time arrives, however, for another election, the Conservatives will naturally have become disintegrated, and I imagine that the few able men of your party will join them. As soon as that happens, you will find me in Downing Street. At present, England is politically moribund. Whatever world changes I might be planning, the support of your country, as it exists at present, is scarcely worth asking for."

The Prime Minister's secretary made apologetic entrance. He handed a slip of paper to his Chief, who glanced at it and nodded briefly.

"Tell Mr. Fogge to come round at once," he directed. "Have you ever met the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Rand?" he asked, turning to his guest.

"Never," was the colourless reply.

"I want you just to shake hands with him, if you will. We sha'n't keep you, because I must be in the House in ten minutes."

Warren Rand acquiesced without enthusiasm. At his companion's gestured invitation, he snipped another cigar and lit it.

"I should think you would be glad to be rid of me," he observed.

The Premier made a little grimace.

"You have told me some home truths," he admitted, "but you're too honest about the affair, and also too ignorant," he added, with the smile of a man getting a little of his own back again, "for me to take offence. *À propos* of a portion of your conversation, did you see the leading article this morning in the *Sun*?"

"I wrote it."

Trowse was momentarily bewildered.

"I mean our principal newspaper," he explained. "It belongs to Gervoise Harrison. Harold Nickols is the editor."

"Ancient history," Warren Rand confided. "I bought the paper at midnight yesterday, when I found out what their Geneva policy was. I wrote the article in the office—kept the machinery waiting—had to destroy a few thousand copies with Harold Nickols' stuff in."

The Premier stared at his visitor, open-mouthed.

"You're not in earnest, Mr. Rand? You don't mean to tell me that you have bought the *Sun*?"

"I certainly have," Warren Rand affirmed. "You will have an opportunity of seeing how I can transform a newspaper. I know the tricks, you see."

He rose to his feet. There was a knock at the door and, in response to Trowse's

invitation, a tall, scholarly-looking man entered. He was untidily dressed, thin, with ascetic features, tired eyes, but a wonderfully pleasant smile.

"Mr. Rand," the Premier said, "this is Mr. Fogge, our Chancellor of the Exchequer."

The two men shook hands; Warren Rand in somewhat puppet-like fashion and with only a muttered reply to the other's courteous speech.

"I see that you are on the point of departure, Mr. Rand," the Chancellor observed. "I shall not detain you for a moment. There is just one question I have been longing to put to a financial expert such as yourself, because our people here in London merely contradict one another. Can you tell me who is this secret buyer of gold in every market in the world?"

"Perhaps I could," was the blunt reply, "but it isn't my business to at the present moment."

Mr. Fogge, who was renowned for his courtier-like manners, was a little taken aback.

"Your reply would scarcely involve any breach of confidence, would it?" he ventured.

"Perhaps not. My reply, however, might lead to a discussion into which I am not prepared to enter just yet. Thank you very much for your hospitality, Mr. Trowse," he added. "You will excuse me if I hurry away now."

The two men walked with him to the door.

"What are your plans?" the Premier asked. "Where can I find you?"

"Don't bother about me for a week or so," the departing guest begged. "I hate purposeless conversations. We're no use to each other at the moment. The time may come later on in the year when I can talk to you in another language. I may even be able to answer Mr. Fogge's question."

"Well, I'm sorry you think so little of us, Mr. Rand. Perhaps we may gain more of your confidence soon," was the Premier's farewell speech. "Carstairs, take Mr. Rand to the south entrance," he added, as the secretary appeared once more.

"If you'll follow me, sir," the latter invited.

Warren Rand traversed the corridor and bade his guide a brief good night. He declined the offer of a taxicab or car and passed through the main gates, crossing the road towards the Embankment. The man who had been waiting for him for the last hour and a half followed.

CHAPTER VII

Warren Rand passed on his way along the Embankment, after a brief interlude climbed Norfolk Street into the Strand, and finally reached the great block of buildings on the upper floors of which were established his palatial flat—and safety. The man who had waited for him outside the House of Commons recovered consciousness the next morning, in the accident ward of a well-known London hospital. Tellesom—Colonel Charles Tellesom, D.S.O. until 1918, and chief of one of the branches of his Majesty's Secret Service after then, now Chief of the Private Bodyguard who watched over the safety of Warren Rand—discussed the affair with the latter half an hour after its occurrence.

"I think we ought to charge this fellow, sir," he advised. "Of course, we didn't let him come near enough for you to run any real risk, but he was carrying a nasty little weapon—one of those new, almost silent automatics, with a needle bullet. We left it in his pocket, and I am certain he'd get it in the neck from Scotland Yard."

Warren Rand shook his head.

"The police courts over here are awkward places," he declared. "They want to know too much about everybody's business. You let him off too lightly. Why not give him another chance and then beat him up for good?"

Tellesom looked a little doubtful. He was a typical, well-bred young Englishman, fair of complexion, almost florid, with keen grey eyes and sunburnt skin. The remains of a scar on the left-hand side of his face was a slight disfigurement, and there were times when the lines around his mouth made him seem older than he really was. Otherwise, he was one of the fortunate survivors of three and a half years of desperate fighting. He owed his present position as head of Warren Rand's bodyguard to his friendship with an American general and his own love of adventure.

"This is a queer country for that sort of thing, sir," he remarked. "You can get away with anything in the States, and pretty well anything in most of the countries of Southern Europe, but the law here is a most inhuman machine."

"A German, of course?"

"Not a doubt about it."

"They're the only people who've really got it in for me just now," Warren Rand reflected. "They'll do their best to get me, I suppose."

"I'll see that they don't, sir," was the confident assertion.

Warren Rand reflected for a moment. Then he rang one of the bells upon his desk. John Glynde, wearing a black alpaca coat and smoking a large cigar, made prompt entrance.

"Working late to-night, John," his Chief remarked.

"I've just finished. There are only four letters which you need sign yourself. Here they are."

"Money market interesting?"

John Glynde smiled faintly.

"We gave them a scare in New York," he confided, "but rushed things up to top after hours—cleaned up half a million or so. Very little doing in Brussels or Berlin, but heavy business with Montreal. Here are the figures, if you care to look at them. Just under a million to the good on the day."

Warren Rand read the four letters through like lightning and signed his name. The sheaf of figures he scarcely glanced at.

"What about Behrling?" he asked.

"He's busy. Got half a dozen of his best men over, too. I was talking to the Colonel about him this evening. They tried to get a man in here and did all they could to get one of their lady typists in the place—a very dangerous young woman, from all I could hear of her."

Warren Rand smiled.

"German psychology," he observed. "The same methods for every one. They won't give any one credit for brains except themselves. Where's Behrling to be found?"

"I can tell you," Tellesom intervened. "At any one of the night clubs in town."

"So he's at the old game," Warren Rand reflected, with a hard smile. "I wonder how much of it is bluff."

"Only a part of it, I think, sir," Tellesom remarked. "I was up against him during the latter part of the War once or twice. He was just the same then. I remember the last words he spoke to me. It was in Bucharest before the fun began there. 'I am a Secret Service agent,' he said, 'and I might as well carry my name and address and profession on my hat, for every one knows it, and they're welcome to know it. All the same,' he went on, wagging his pudgy forefinger at me, 'I never fail.'"

"Conceited ass!" Warren Rand observed calmly. "We must teach him a lesson. One of his men is in the hospital, anyway. Come along, Tellesom."

John Glynde looked at his Chief in surprise.

"You're not going out again to-night?" he protested, blinking.

"Of course I'm going out again," was the prompt reply. "A weakling like you, John, may go to bed at ten minutes past eleven. I can't. Two o'clock's my hour."

"Where are we going?" Tellesom enquired.

"We're going to find Behrling," Warren Rand confided. "You know the ropes, I

suppose. I'm ready."

At ten minutes past two, Warren Rand had had enough of it. He lingered for a moment on the pavement outside a famous night haunt near Oxford Street. Tellesom, as usual, stood close to his side, wary and watchful. There were two other men in the background, inconspicuous but alert pillars of security. The automobile was drawn up to the curb.

"Very interesting, Tellesom," his charge admitted. "The English temperament is, I should imagine, unchangeable. A street café in Bucharest would be more amusing if less ponderously respectable. It's pretty well my time for turning in. I'm for home."

"Just this one more place," Tellesom begged. "Mostly foreigners here, I promise you, and a pretty good chance of finding our man."

Warren Rand suffered himself to be led away, and the next place they visited—it was a little more than a glorified cellar—brought them to the end of their quest. While his foot was still on the last of the stairs and retreat remained possible, he saw Felix Behrling. Their mutual recognition was instantaneous and the flash from their eyes was like the crossing of rapiers. Warren Rand drew a sharp breath. Every unsuspected nerve in his body was tingling. He knew now that the evening had been well spent and that those dim suspicions at the back of his mind had something in them of the nature of inspiration. He drew off his gloves and handed them, with his coat and hat, to the *vestiaire*. Tellesom had secured one of the best tables in a neighbouring corner, but Warren Rand whispered to the *maître d'hôtel* who was waiting to escort them, and chose one near the dancing floor, with several people in the background.

"You like this better?" Tellesom protested.

"It suits me quite well," was the indifferent reply. "Besides, a bullet through my head would probably be more dangerous to other people here."

Tellesom flashed a swift glance around the room and felt like kicking himself for not having recognised Felix Behrling before. His hand stole underneath the tails of his coat, but Warren Rand took his seat with a careless gesture.

"Too high a price here for even my life," he remarked confidently. "My friend amuses himself."

The person whom they were discussing seemed indeed to be finding amusement in a fashion which was scarcely English. He was a big man, ruddy of complexion, with a bristling fair moustache and much hair of the same colour. His eyes were blue, his smile was cherubic, and not a soul in the room seemed less likely to be carrying a messenger of death in his hip pocket. He had apparently dined well, but in case there

should be any doubt about the matter, he had supped well also. On each side of him was seated a young woman, both of prepossessing appearance; his arms were extended amorously around the backs of their chairs. So he faced Warren Rand, across those few yards of empty space, and showed all his white teeth as he laughed.

"Welcome, my enemy," he cried softly. "Have you come to rob me of my treasures here, as you have emptied my pockets and the pockets of my country-people?"

Warren Rand smiled imperturbably.

"I will leave you the most precious part of your possessions," he reassured him. "As for your pockets, it is for you to decide whether you like them full or empty."

Felix Behrling, a Baron of Saxony and Count of the Holy Roman Empire, at times a very great personage in his own peculiar way, indulged in a grimace.

"Not the price of a bottle of wine has he left me to assuage the thirst of these dear ladies," he declared. "Chloe and Lucie, mark him well, your *vis-à-vis*, my children. It is through him that I am poverty-stricken. That man beckons with his finger and calls to him all the money in the world! Bank notes take to themselves feet and run to him. Million-dollar bonds rise up from the gratings of Wall Street and nest in his pockets. As for gold, he is more greedy of gold than anything else. The last wheelbarrowful in Europe was emptied into his cellars yesterday. My friend and enemy, we thirst, and you alone can afford to pay the prices of this den of robbers."

Warren Rand summoned a waiter.

"Serve that gentleman opposite with a magnum of your best champagne," he ordered.

Felix Behrling chuckled and drew his companions a little nearer to him—a gesture which they seemed in no way to resent, although their smiles were equally directed towards their prospective host.

"The man has a thread of gold concealed in him somewhere," Felix Behrling acknowledged. "He has neither heart nor conscience, but some hidden sense tells him when the gracious gesture must be made. We will drink with you, disturber of our peace. You must know my lady friends. On my right is Chloe. You might have met her years ago at the Folies Bergères if your footsteps had ever wandered into so plebeian a place. On my left is Lucie. Lucie is English, and I believe of gentle birth. She has met with misfortunes. So have we all. That is her story, but we who have loved her and lived with her suspect that she is Austrian. More chic than these English, but not so popular here where money is to be gained."

Chloe laughed across at Warren Rand.

"*Monsieur est drôle*," she said apologetically. "He makes the fun all the time. He is never serious."

"He likes to enjoy himself," Lucie interposed. "And why not? So, also, do we. Of Austria, though, I am not. I am of Warsaw, as the world here knows."

"I would ask you to join us," Felix Behrling went on—"you and your personal bodyguard—but the whale does not swim in the same water as the stickleback. One question I shall ask you, however, now that we have met face to face, surrounded by, shall we call them, the amenities of life. This much I shall ask you, however much I shall have to discount your answer. I know why you have come to England. I can guess what you said at Westminster this evening. I know why you will be leaving England during the next few days, but when you have brought this episode to an end, turned to another, and completed that, imposed your will upon a few weak-kneed diplomatists and debt-burdened bankers, what then? What do you live for? What do you work for? What is the end of it?"

He raised a full glass of wine to his lips and drained its contents. No one plunged into the silence which ensued. The girls clung to him on each side. Warren Rand listened with impassive face.

"You all know me," his opposite neighbour continued. "Drunk or sober, in the arms of Chloe, or with the clips falling into my automatic, I am Felix Behrling, a German and proud of it, a schemer when scheming is necessary, in the byways and underground passages of life, a diplomatist when the higher places need me. You know what I want. You know very well the ambition of my life, but your desire—what the devil you're aiming at, what particular corner of the skies towards which you climb, you wish to pull down and explore, who can tell? Not one of us. You've hit us all, my friend and enemy. But why? You don't dally by the way as I do, like this, and seek pleasure. When will you don the smile of accomplishment?"

"When you and the rest of the world learn common sense," was the faintly contemptuous reply. "You regard me as an enemy, yet, if you were asked, you could never expound the reason of your hatred for me. What you work for you will never gain, even though one of your hired cutthroats should be more fortunate than the one who loitered upon the Embankment a little too long for his health this evening."

"Hear him!" Felix Behrling exclaimed, turning round as though to appeal to the waiters and a few other belated guests, who, by this time, were firmly convinced that they were listening to two madmen. "As though I would bring harm upon him! A man who has stood us a magnum of champagne in the hour of our distress! Tell us about that corner of the sky and we might even form an alliance. No, keep silence, rather," he added, as the waiter served a fresh bottle of wine. "Let us fill our glasses and

drink before the oracle has time to change his mind."

"You talk a great deal," Warren Rand remarked.

"Not for the next few moments," Felix Behrling promised. "For the next few moments I shall drink. Still, you were right when you said that I talked much. Ask yourself this, though. Which gives away the secrets of the world most completely—the brainless jackass to whom no one listens, or the stern, silent man, in whose whisperings are all the germs of what the world wants to know? I wonder!"

He drained another glass of wine and stood up—an enormous figure of a man. Chloe wreathed herself around him, and they danced, Behrling with amazing lightness of step and in faultless time.

"Astonishing!" Tellesom murmured, with a gleam of admiration in his steely grey eyes. "Where does he learn all that he knows, I wonder?"

"The man is a genius," Warren Rand admitted. "That is why I wish he would remain in Saxony."

Lucie, from opposite, came over and stood by their table. She looked wistfully at the two men.

"You would care to dance, perhaps?" she suggested.

Warren Rand shook his head, but Tellesom leaned across the table.

"How long have you known our friend there?" he asked.

"We met to-night for the first time," the girl lied glibly. "He is very amusing, but he gets very drunk, and nobody ever knows what he is talking about."

"You see," Warren Rand pointed out, turning to his companion. "He has his own way of doing it. I don't suppose he even told her to lie to us. They know. Accept this, Mademoiselle Lucie, for the pleasure of the dance which I hope some day to watch, and perhaps, all things considered, it would be better if you returned to your place."

The girl looked at the bank note in her hand, flashed a little glance of amazed gratitude at its donor, and faded away. She reached the table just as Behrling and his companion returned from dancing. The former was out of breath, drops of perspiration upon his forehead, his great stomach heaving. Tellesom watched him like a lynx. The quieter days had come, but he had seen Felix Behrling kill a man with as scant notice as he was giving now of hostile intent.

"My enemy," Behrling said, across those few feet of space, "you will notice that I have not once mentioned your name. I know your weakness, you see. Have you come over here to fight?"

Warren Rand seemed to be listening to the music—the jazz music which he hated.

"I may have come over here to see that you don't," was his somewhat delayed answer.

Felix Behrling rocked in his place and wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

"It would be easier," he declared bombastically, "to stop the sequence of the days than to destroy in man's heart the love of fighting. They tell me that you can reap the news of the world in half an hour. Why not? You were born and bred on newspapers—printers' ink in your veins, I think sometimes, instead of good red blood. I'll tell you something. You're responsible for Geneva. You've kept it going. I tell you there's been more treachery and falsehoods, more poison and lying, in those stuccoed halls than was ever let loose in the trenches. You are trying to do the impossible, my squat Napoleon of the Press. You are trying to alter the balance of the world. You may get the weights into your hand, but you'll never be allowed to juggle with them. The world's against you, enemy of mine, and you, after all, are only one man."

The music started again. Chloe sprang up and dragged him away.

"I want to dance," she cried. "You waste too much time talking."

Behrling paused only long enough to drink a glass of wine. Then he took her into his arms.

"Even these children," he called down, as he passed the opposite table, "have learned some wisdom."

CHAPTER VIII

Warren Rand spent the next eight days in the manner he loved. He scarcely moved from his palatial suite of apartments, which contained, indeed, everything necessary for a man's daily welfare, from gymnasium and swimming bath to an open-air promenade upon the roof. Most of the time he was closeted with John Glynde, or with Tellesom, or with Philip Reich, the head of his foreign newspaper department, and during these long series of conferences, the telephone and cable wires hummed with vital and impressive words. On the ninth day, Warren Rand was ready for the next move in the game. He received by appointment no less a person than Herr Anselm Loeb, a Cabinet Minister of the German Republic, president of the Berliner-Dusseldorf Bank, and representative of Germany at the Geneva Conference.

Loeb was a small, puppet-like man, perfectly dressed, with flaxen hair which was obviously a wig, false teeth, and the manners and gestures of a performing doll. Warren Rand affected not to see his outstretched hand and received him indeed with the barest show of civility. He waved him to a chair and for welcome contented himself with a brusque little nod.

"This is a great pleasure for me," Herr Loeb declared, unabashed by his cold reception. "I have for a long time looked forward to making the acquaintance of one so famous in the world of finance and journalism."

"Thank you, Herr Loeb," Warren Rand replied. "I think you would rather have attended my funeral than come to hear what I have to say to you. Please understand, to commence with, that I am no diplomat. You are up against certain interests of mine, and I have come over to Europe to see that those interests are preserved and respected. I have sent for you to visit me here, not to argue with you or to plead with you, but to show you that you had better change your line of action and change it quickly. I consider that you, more than any of the other representatives, are responsible for the spirit of unrest which exists among many of the members of the Conference at Geneva."

The pink and white amiability faded from Herr Loeb's face. With the disappearance of his perpetual smile, his mouth hardened, but became more like the feature of a human being.

"Don't trouble to deny anything," Warren Rand went on. "It wouldn't make any difference, and I only speak of the things I know. The first is this. You, in league with Felix Behrling, are the secret director of a band of ruffians whom you make use of to terrify people who are in your way and in the way of your policy. One of them was

out after me last Monday week. He is in Westminster Hospital at the present moment, and still unconscious. The next one who comes, you'll have to look for in the mortuary. My men on the other side learned this game before you thought of it."

Herr Loeb, when he chose, was a very eloquent man. He had learned a greater gift, however—the gift of silence. He continued to look across at his companion with expressionless face and tightly closed lips.

"The second thing I have against you," Warren Rand continued, "is that it was entirely owing to the advice given by you to your Government that the Disarmament Treaty remains unsigned at Geneva."

"That is not true," Herr Loeb pronounced. "Italy was opposed to it; even England is still hesitating."

"You were the first dissentient," Warren Rand declared. "When you reopen, it will be your first talk to announce that you and Russia are prepared to sign the Disarmament Treaty."

"And what about England?" Herr Loeb demanded.

"That is my affair," was the cold reply. "You see, there's no subtlety about my methods. Before you leave this apartment, I require your undertaking to sign. I also require an undertaking that I shall not be further molested in this capital, and that Felix Behrling and his myrmidons shall remove their activities elsewhere."

Anselm Loeb's face relaxed. The grimness with which he had been listening passed. He laughed quietly but heartily. There was a vein of sarcasm in his mirth, but he was distinctly more himself.

"You ask a good deal for a man who offers nothing," he remarked.

"My offer is coming, but as a threat, not a bribe," Warren Rand rejoined. "You know, I presume, the names of your principal newspapers—the *Times*, for instance, the *Tablet*, and the *Star*."

"The world knows them. They are of our best."

"They belong to me," Warren Rand announced.

Herr Loeb's reëstablished self-control momentarily deserted him. He sat with his mouth wide open, staring across at his companion.

"That is not possible," he muttered.

Warren Rand touched one of the coloured bells upon his desk.

"I scarcely expected you to believe my word," he observed. "Proof, however, is easy. I want the signed agreements and receipts from the German newspapers, also a copy of yesterday's articles which have been written by members of the staff here for the Sunday edition of the *Tablet*," he went on, turning to John Glynde, who had made due appearance, a roll of papers in his hand.

The latter nodded.

"I thought that might have been what you rang for," he said. "You'll find everything here."

"Hand over the papers to Herr Loeb."

John Glynde did as he was bidden and left the room. Warren Rand waited patiently whilst his *vis-à-vis* examined the documents. The latter was of slow and precise habits. When at last he had finished his examination, which was interspersed with many guttural exclamations of amazement, the fingers which gripped the papers were trembling.

"I am compelled to believe you," he acknowledged at last. "Well?"

"Through the medium of the Press," Warren Rand pointed out, "I am now in a position at any moment to let the German public know of your activities carried out through Felix Behrling, to let your Cabinet know the real reason for your refusal to sign the Disarmament Treaty, and the probable consequences which you may have to face, and also to acquaint the financial world with the fact that the bank of which you are president is, notwithstanding its position on paper, a thoroughly unsound institution."

Loeb was stung at last. He almost leaped from his chair.

"You lie!" he shouted. "You know nothing of what you speak. Seventy million of marks we have of surplus. We have made huge profits for three years."

"On paper," was Warren Rand's cool comment. "Now I will show you a few further documents. You see, I make no statements without proofs, and I have evidence here which might alter even your opinion of your own bank. You are its president, and you will admit that it has certain attachments to the State and certain responsibilities. You are not allowed, for instance, to accept loans from foreign countries or invest capital in commercial undertakings outside Germany, without the consent of the governors of the bank."

"What of it?"

Warren Rand glanced at the slip of paper which he held in his hand.

"You are at the present moment," he continued, "owing the Federal Bank of New York twenty-one million dollars. You owe the Merchants Bank of Boston thirteen million dollars. You owe a smaller Western bank something between four and five million dollars. These loans have all been arranged without the knowledge of your fellow governors."

A dull, brick-red tinge marred the smoothness of Herr Loeb's pink and white complexion. He was showing his false teeth and he was a very ugly man.

"There were special reasons for those loans," he insisted. "They are not your

business, anyway. They can be wiped off at any moment."

"You bought stocks and shares with them," Warren Rand observed, "in which you had no right to deal. As for the possibility of wiping off the loans at any moment, you can only do so by selling those stocks. Have you seen to-day's New York market?"

"It would not be possible," Loeb replied. "It has not been open for more than an hour English time."

Warren Rand touched one of the bells on his desk. A clerk from the banking department made his appearance.

"The connection with New York is open?" Warren Rand asked.

"It will not be disturbed until midday, sir," the young man replied.

"How are the markets?"

"An utterly unexpected slump," was the prompt answer. "Nearly every one of the public utilities are down fifteen to twenty points. Every one is rushing about for money. Rates have gone up from eight per cent, to fourteen."

Warren Rand nodded.

"Keep in touch," he directed. "Mr. Glynde will have some orders to put in directly."

The German banker had lost alike his dignity and his poise. He was shivering in his chair.

"What can be the meaning of a slump like this?" he demanded. "I don't understand."

"The American market is at all times very sensitive," the other observed, "but the immediate cause is without a doubt the fact that I opened a ten-million bear account this morning. Now, you say you can pay off your borrowings, Mr. Loeb. Well, come along with it. We need the money."

"Who do you mean by 'we'?" Loeb faltered.

"I am a director of the two banks from which you borrowed these sums for repayment on demand, and we have decided to call in our loans," was the suave reply.

"I am beaten," Loeb acknowledged bitterly. "Let me hear your terms, Mr. Rand."

"They are better than you deserve. You will withdraw your opposition to the Disarmament Treaty and use your influence in Berlin in its favour. This country I will deal with myself. You will send Felix Behrling about his business and see that I am not further molested whilst I am in England. I, on the other hand, will undertake to bring the market normal again before closing time to-day, and your loans can run for

a reasonable extension."

"I agree," Anselm Loeb gasped.

"Bear this in mind too. I have a private secretary, John Glynde, who is empowered to act on my behalf after my death, and if anything should happen to me within the next few days he will act exactly as I should have done."

"I will keep my word," Anselm Loeb promised, as he rose to his feet. "You need have no fear of that. I only wish—"

"Well, what is it that you wish?" Warren Rand asked, as the other stood, drawing on his gloves.

"That you were a German. America doesn't need men like you. We do."

Tellesom duly presented himself in response to Warren Rand's summons.

"I have come to an understanding with Anselm Loeb," the latter announced. "Felix Behrling will have to suspend operations for the moment. I think you need a holiday."

"Just as you like," Tellesom replied understandingly. "Any particular neighbourhood?"

"Antibes. Hotel du Cap d'Antibes. There's probably something doing around there we might be interested in. I have only scattered threads at present, but they are coming together. I am off to Geneva in a few days and may finish there. All I can tell you for the present is that Poynton, one of the British representatives at the Conference, is meeting an Italian down on that coast, and Behrling is there already."

Tellesom sent for a continental A.B.C., and the next morning he left for the South of France by the Blue Train.

CHAPTER IX

Warren Rand's next visitor was a very different affair. She entered joyously, with a waft of many perfumes, and the trill of her laughter was ringing through the room from the moment of her appearance. She stood on the other side of Warren Rand's desk and looked at him provocatively. He motioned her sternly to a chair.

"Young lady," he said, "you were told not to come here in Colonel Tellesom's absence except in cases of emergency."

"The emergency is here," she replied. "I have quarrelled with Felix Behrling. I knew him first at Berlin and Vienna, but he neglects me all the time now for Chloe. It is no longer possible to make a *partie à trois*."

"You were very foolish to quarrel with him," Warren Rand declared. "That means, I suppose, that you can bring us no more information. No information, no pay, you know."

"Oh, la, la!" the young lady exclaimed, crossing her legs and inspecting with entire lack of concern the rib of a green silk garter. "Money is not so difficult. All men are not so hard with us as you, Mr. Warren Rand."

She laughed at him, with all the invitation of her wicked little soul shining in her eyes, found him unbending, and made a grimace.

"Ah, well," she sighed, opening her vanity case and gazing into a mirror, "I must be getting ugly, I suppose."

"May I enquire," he ventured, "whether your coming here was for the purpose of completing your toilette?"

"What a man!" she exclaimed. "I bring great information. I shall surprise you."

"Perhaps you will; perhaps not."

"Felix Behrling has left London," she announced.

"For the South of France," Warren Rand added. "He arrived there the day before yesterday. He is staying at the Hotel du Cap d'Antibes."

She closed her vanity case with a snap. An unbecoming frown seemed to take the sparkle from her face.

"Why do you employ me at all?" she demanded irritably. "Why did you send your *beau garçon* Charles Tellesom out to dine with me, and dance with me, and whisper nonsense in my ear? Of what use am I to you? You appear to know most things already."

"One always hopes," he remarked, looking across at her keenly, "that you may bring some information really worth having. The few hundreds you have earned already are only trifles. Felix Behrling has evidently forsaken you for Chloe,

especially as I hear that he has taken her with him. I wonder that you don't seriously try to earn the diamonds which I understand are your favourite stone."

She fidgeted a little in her chair. A graver expression had crept into her baby face. Warren Rand, watching her closely, recognised the unmistakable light of fear in the depths of her beringed eyes. Her chair was close to the desk, but she leaned forward.

"There is something I could tell you," she confessed, "but I am afraid."

"Afraid of what?"

"Felix Behrling."

"How is he likely to find out? Words that are spoken in this room are spoken as though in the grave."

"One never satisfies oneself entirely about Felix," she said uneasily. "There are many times when he seems as he was the other night—a great, overgrown schoolboy, loving the wine and the girls and the gay life—and there are other times, just once or twice when I have seen a cruel look in his eyes. When we quarrelled finally, when I told him that I would go no more out with him and Chloe to be neglected, he was terrible, and he didn't know, he didn't know the secret I am carrying with me."

"A strange person," Warren Rand murmured.

She dabbed at her eyes.

"Something like hysteria came to me," she went on. "I walked up and down the room and I shouted at him. If I had had a knife in my hand—still, what can one do against a man like that? Monsieur Rand, I confess it, the tears were streaming down my cheeks. I was shrieking abuse at him, and then, quite suddenly, it all went. I found myself growing cold inside. He was no longer Felix Behrling of the gay life. He was sitting quite still. He was as still, even as you—simply looking at me. I felt him asking questions of himself—asking himself, 'how much does she know? Is it safe to allow her to live?' I swear, Monsieur Rand, that it was an inspired moment. I read those thoughts in his brain. Perhaps he's still asking himself the same question. 'How much does she know?' And I know more than he would believe."

"Very well," Warren Rand said. "Tell me what you know. You have never found Tellesom, or any of my people, lacking in generosity. You will be paid according to the value of what you tell me. For certain information, I should pay very high indeed."

The girl was agitated. She had worked herself up to this, but she was afraid. A little wisp of hair had stolen out from underneath her hat. The make-up upon her face was losing its pristine effectiveness. What did it matter? The man before her was

hopeless. Studying her closely, Warren Rand decided that what he was about to hear would be the truth.

"Tell me," he asked, "how do you know what sort of information I am in need of?"

"I know it from him," she confided. "Before Chloe was his favourite, he talked more freely to me, and besides—this is where I learnt most—when he dozes, he talks. You will know if I speak the truth. I commence then. It is war he wants—war within five years. And peace, you. Am I right?"

"You are right," Warren Rand acknowledged.

"He has a great new scheme," she went on—"a new alliance. The face of Europe is to be changed once more and Germany is to regain everything she has lost —Why do I talk like this, I wonder?—You may succeed in forcing them to sign the Treaty—how do you call it?—of Disarmament. They sign it with the tongue in the cheek. The Peace Pact is to follow. The Peace Pact which is to make the nations a flock of lambs. Oh, la, la! How I talk—and I do not even know yet for what recompense I run this terrible risk."

"If you tell me what I am hoping you will tell me," he said softly, scribbling on a cheque form which he had taken from his drawer, "I shall give you this cheque. You see. It is for ten thousand pounds. They will cash it for you in the bank below at any moment. It is a million and a quarter francs."

"You are a prince!" she gasped—a flood of joy suddenly dissipating all her fears. "With money like that, one can live. I shall tell you my own story—the story of Clara von Trugner—whom you know only as Lucie. When I have told it, you shall judge whether it is worth while. Come nearer. Every one of these words would mean a knife in the heart if those others were here."

Warren Rand leaned across his desk and listened. When she had finished her little torrent of hoarse, breathless words, and had passed over to him the little scented pocketbook which she drew from a portion of her clothing, he handed her the cheque for ten thousand pounds.

CHAPTER X

Tellesom lay flat upon the rocks, the upper portion of his bathing costume, as was the custom at Antibes, removed, his long, brown body still glistening with the sea shine. His arms were outstretched, his eyes closed, his whole state one of luxurious repose, indicating to all appearance a torpor mental as well as physical. Appearances, however, lied. Half the time he was listening for a familiar sound entering the bay; the other half his eyes were travelling down the winding path which led to the little cluster of hut bungalows built among the pine trees. Sarah Hincks, the spoilt, precocious darling of the hotel, clad in outrageous pyjamas, and with her deep yellow hair blowing in the breeze, stopped to speak to him.

"Colonel Tellesom," she remarked, "who is this charming, overwhelming fat giant, who seems to have taken all the young women by storm? Rather a nice little thing of his own he seems to have too—Mademoiselle Chloe, I think they call her. I saw her wave her hand to you the other day."

Tellesom raised his head.

"Don't know the gentleman," he replied.

"They say he's a German," she went on. "Can't be helped. I think he's most amusing."

"A trifle noisy," Tellesom ventured.

"Better than being thoroughly unsociable, anyhow," she rejoined, with a friendly grimace, as she passed on.

Into the smiling bay with its thronged rafts, its sprinkling of motor boats, its crowd of young people swimming and aquaplaning, came commotion. A small, racing motor boat, her nose well in the air, leaving behind a long trail of churned water, flashed round the bend from Cannes and headed for the landing place. The motley gathering of pyjama-clad loungers leaned over the terrace to watch its approach. The man at the wheel sat motionless, and unbending at his task. His single companion—a mechanic—sprawling on his stomach in front, was almost invisible through the spray. A ripple of curiosity ran through the onlookers. It was a cliquey little place, yet an unknown motor boat had found its way into its jealously guarded waters.

"American engines," one expert declared.

"Faster than anything here—faster than my boat," Merton Joyce, a cotton millionaire, sighed. "Wonder where he got her."

The throb in the air suddenly ceased. The boat swung round in a graceful semicircle and glided to the landing stage.

Every one watched Warren Rand's disembarkation and approach as he climbed the steps. He wore the customary double-breasted, blue serge coat and a pair of white flannel trousers, but if one had figured him as a sailor, it would have been as mate, and not captain. He faced the curious regard of the little assembly at the top of the steps, however, without self-consciousness, and threaded his way among them with indifference. Merton Joyce addressed him pleasantly.

"A fast boat, that of yours, sir," he remarked.

Warren Rand paused. He hesitated almost to the point of incivility before replying. When he did so, however, his voice created, as it often did, a curious impression. Not absolutely agreeable, it possessed still in indifference the cool and cultural diction of a person of breeding.

"She is speedy," he admitted. "Could you tell me if Colonel Tellesom is here?"

A dozen fingers pointed to the rock below, now deserted.

"Colonel Tellesom—he was there a moment ago. He generally has a little corner of his own."

"Here he comes, up the steps," some one else volunteered.

Tellesom, who had donned a thin silk dressing-gown over his bathing suit, came swiftly on to the terrace to meet his visitor. The two men moved to one side together.

"I got your telephone message at Geneva and started at once," Warren Rand began.

Tellesom nodded.

"The Italian is here," he confided. "He and Behrling have gone down to one of those huts together. Poynton hasn't arrived yet. I have two men watching. What do you wish to do?"

Warren Rand spoke without hesitation.

"I wish to wait until they are all together," he decided. "Go about your business until that time comes. I shall sit over there," he went on, indicating an umbrella-shaded seat close at hand. "Fetch me when you get word."

Tellesom turned away into the dressing room, his acquiescence the slightest and most British of gestures. When he reappeared a few minutes later, the loiterers had returned to their places. Warren Rand was seated upon the extreme outskirts of the little gathering, gazing seawards. Sarah Hincks, who had been lounging on the top of the steps leading to the bathing pool, came over and seated herself by Tellesom's side.

"Say, you needn't look as though some one had stung you," she expostulated, swinging a brown leg with lazy insouciance. "I suppose you are human, even though you don't want to talk to any one. You are one of the few men here who haven't

asked me to have a cocktail this morning. What are you going to do about that?"

He summoned a waiter grudgingly and transmitted an order. Sarah Hincks was practically the only person who had not respected his closely drawn mantle of reserve, his obvious, double-dyed British desire to be left alone himself, precisely as he left every one else alone.

"You ought to be playing with your dolls, instead of smoking cigarettes," he said, with just that underlying note of humour in his tone, and twinkle in his eyes, which saved his remark from being offensive.

She indulged in a gesture of derision—a gesture with which was associated the extreme tip of a pink and shapely tongue.

"Listen to grandpa!" she scoffed. "Don't keep on looking into the woods, please, when I am here."

Tellesom removed his eyes from the closed door of the distant bungalow. Notwithstanding her undoubted charm, and the envy he was exciting from the crowd of young men gathered round the bar, he could have picked her up in her scanty pyjamas and thrown her into the piscina with pleasure. All the time, the same chorus of questions was throbbing in his brain. Exactly what was happening in the hut? Had he been wise in keeping Warren Rand away until the arrival of the Italian? Exactly what was to be the next move? The cocktails were brought and served. Sarah leaned forward in her chair.

"I am going to put you through it now, Colonel Tellesom," she threatened, "so it's no use looking like a thundercloud. I have found you out, and I'll tell every one if you get fierce with me."

Tellesom's spasm of impatient irritation had passed. He was apprehensive but polite.

"So you have found me out, have you, young lady? Tell me exactly what that means?"

She sipped her cocktail, and the most attractive hazel eyes in the world laughed into his. She laid her little hand, still moist from the sea, upon his own, with an almost affectionate gesture.

"Don't get so scared," she begged. "Listen to me, please. A week ago I spoke to you. They all bet me that I wouldn't, but I did. How fierce you were!"

"Are these reminiscences essential?" he asked, his eyes fixed hopefully upon the diminishing contents of her glass.

"That sort of talk won't put me off my stroke," she assured him, swinging once more her thin but shapely brown leg. "Listen! I asked you why you didn't come swimming and jollying around with us. You snapped out that you didn't swim and

didn't play tennis. You followed that up with a sort of muttered growl that the young people of to-day talked a jargon that you didn't understand."

"Well?"

"Two mornings following," she went on impressively, "I looked out of my window at six o'clock and saw you take the high dive and swim out to the raft. At seven you were playing tennis with the pro, and yet this morning is the first time you have even put bathing clothes on at a civilised hour, and no one but me has ever seen you with a racquet."

Tellesom made no reply. He had fancied that he had seen some one moving amongst the trees, and his eyes were once more fixed upon the hut.

"I am not through yet," the girl continued, with unabated cheerfulness. "I asked you to dance with me the night before last and you said that you didn't dance. What about Maxim's the other evening?"

He looked at her, frowning.

"Were you there?"

"I certainly was, and I saw you with that beautiful little Austrian blonde. There didn't seem to be much you didn't know about the tango. Why do you hide all your accomplishments and keep away from us? We are rather noisy sometimes, but we aren't a bad crowd. Too much shouting and gramophone about us, I know, but we'd tone down if it was worth while."

"I think you're all very charming," he assured her, "but, to tell you the honest truth, I don't like crowds, and you're all of an earlier generation than mine. I'm here for a rest and I really want to be left alone."

The mischievous light left her face and she was silent for a moment.

"All right," she sighed reluctantly, "I'll go."

"I suppose," he observed, "that you've told all your friends that I swim early in the morning, play tennis with the pro, and dance at Maxim's?"

"I haven't told them a thing," she rejoined indignantly—"not one single thing."

He was eyeing her keenly enough now.

"Why not?"

"It was a silly idea of mine," she admitted. "I just felt that you had some reason for keeping apart from us all and keeping your accomplishments to yourself, and I thought I wouldn't give you away."

Then, for a moment, Tellesom looked at Sarah Hincks as she had very much hoped from the first that he might some day look at her. She almost blushed with pleasure.

"I thank you very much," he said gravely.

"Who is that?" she demanded. "The man who came in the motor boat? The man who is looking at us so strangely now?"

His eyes followed her gesture. Warren Rand had risen to his feet and was looking across towards them. There was something in the fixed intentness of his observation which almost startled Tellesom.

"I can't tell you anything about him," Tellesom replied.

"Why can't you?" she persisted, with a curious note of eagerness in her tone. "He asked for you. You must know who he is."

He could feel her cold fingers gripping his flesh. Opposite to them, Warren Rand was standing like a figure of stone.

"I will tell you this much," Tellesom confided. "He comes from your country, but he is not any one whom you would be likely to know. You see, I treat you with every confidence. He is my employer, and if I told any one his name, without his permission, it would cost me my place."

"Your employer!"

He nodded. Her fingers relaxed. She waved her hand to the vociferous group of her friends who were hailing her from the bar.

"I must go," she said.

She left him without further questioning or word of farewell. He watched her cross the sunlit little space with a frown upon his forehead. She had lost all her easy grace of joyous movement. Once she paused, gripping an umbrella post, as though to steady herself. Her light-hearted crowd of companions had sallied out from the pavilion bar and half carried her in. The man who had torn down the broad road from the hotel upon a motor bicycle, with a cloud of dust behind him, touched Tellesom upon the shoulder.

"The Englishman has arrived, sir," he announced. "He is on his way to the hut."

CHAPTER XI

The door of the little bungalow in the woods, to which Tellesom led his Chief, was closed, but from the opened windows came the soft murmur of voices. At Tellesom's summons, the voices ceased. He tapped again and, after a brief delay, the door was swung open, casually enough, to all appearance, although Felix Behrling's bulky figure blocked all ingress. His sunny smile, which had endeared him to so many of the holiday makers at Antibes on his frequent visits there, was gone. There was suspicion and consternation in his eyes, as he looked out and recognised his visitors—a scowl upon his forehead. He was no longer the woman lover and the wine drinker, the demigod of the pleasure haunts of the world.

"What in God's name do you two want here?" he demanded, without any form of greeting or without even an effort at civility.

"We wanted to join in the discussion, if we might," Tellesom confided. "My Chief has certain propositions to make."

"What discussion?"

"The discussion between you, Signor Cantani, and the Right Honorable Frederick Poynton," Warren Rand answered drily.

"You are talking rubbish," was Felix Behrling's brusque comment. "I am here to meet a friend in my private bungalow, to talk over a purely personal matter."

"There are times, Felix Behrling," Warren Rand said, "when a bluff may come off. This is not one of them. You are here for the purpose of holding a discussion with Signor Cantani, the Italian Minister of War, and Poynton, who is an English Cabinet Minister. You all three represent countries who made peculiar difficulties about the Disarmament Treaty, and who have suddenly adopted an entirely evasive attitude with regard to the Peace Pact. What are you here to discuss? Why this hesitation about agreeing to sign the Peace Pact, which would seem to be the natural corollary to the Disarmament Treaty?"

"What the devil business is it of yours?" Felix Behrling demanded. "You don't represent anybody. You have not the slightest right to break in upon a private conference."

"If you will ask Mr. Poynton and Signor Cantani to present themselves," Warren Rand promised, "I will explain to you exactly what part I am likely to have in the Conference, and how important that part is."

There was a little movement from behind the partition. His two guests were evidently waiting to take their cue from Behrling. He, seeming larger and grosser than ever in the narrow confines of the room, remained for a few moments speechless, his

eyes fixed upon the intruders. It was a silence pregnant with unseen forces. Outside was the soft gurgle of the sea; from the far distance came the faint strains of the orchestra playing for the lunchers at the Eden Roc. Warren Rand's immobility of feature remained undisturbed. Behrling's expression, on the other hand, was dour and threatening.

"You can come in if you must," he conceded, in a tone which literally shook with anger. "At your own risk, mind, as soon as the door is shut."

"We both have courage enough for that," Warren Rand remarked, as he stepped inside. "Now, then, if you two gentlemen behind the partition will come along, we can perhaps get on with the business."

They made undignified entrance—Poynton, a sturdily built man of sandy complexion, rather coarse features, and a slight tendency to a cast in one of his eyes; Cantani, the typical Italian, with black hair, sallow complexion, moustache and imperial streaked with grey. Both were a little anxious. Both were thoroughly out of temper with their host.

"What are these fellows doing, butting in?" Poynton demanded.

"We came for a private discussion," Cantani added. "I object to meeting strangers. Who is this young man who knows my name?"

"Compared to his companion, he is insignificant," Behrling confided. "He held a position in the British Intelligence Department during the War."

"You don't hold a British Government post now," Poynton asserted. "I am sure of that, anyway."

"I do not," Tellesom acknowledged.

"Then what are you? An independent spy?" Poynton sneered. "I will have your antecedents traced when I get back to England. My people aren't standing for any more of this secret diplomacy business."

Tellesom smiled.

"Then what, might one ask, are you doing here?" he ventured.

"What the devil do you suggest I'm doing?" was the angry rejoinder. "I am out here for a holiday and to meet a few of my friends. As for you, sir, I still don't know what you mean by forcing your way in here with your taciturn companion."

Tellesom smiled again, and to all three men there was something menacing in the level and mirthless parting of his lips.

"I have at the present moment another activity in life," he admitted, "which is, perhaps, of even greater importance than any post I ever held under His Majesty's Government. I am Chief of the Staff, if I may call myself so, to my friend here, who plays some part in international affairs."

"And who, in the name of the devil, is your friend?" the Italian exclaimed.

"My friend's name is Warren Rand," Tellesom confided. "Behrling knows him, all right."

The announcement came like a bombshell. The Italian and the Englishman exchanged swift glances of apprehension.

"Does that mean that our meeting here will be reported in all the newspapers?" Poynton asked nervously.

"Not of necessity," Tellesom replied. "It depends on how our conference ends."

"This is the position, gentlemen," Warren Rand intervened. "I have a representative at Geneva, whose reports I study carefully, and I do not understand the eagerness on the part of certain of the Powers to sign the Disarmament Treaty, whilst at the same time they preserve a vague attitude toward the Peace Pact. Furthermore, my agents in Europe have reported a continual stream of correspondence between Berlin, Rome and Downing Street, and a number of secret meetings such as this one between representatives of the three countries. I am inclined to believe that there is something afoot of which the Press has not been informed."

"Why this continual drivel about the Press?" Behrling demanded. "We are bullied enough by them, but we are not yet the slaves of the newspapers. Supposing negotiations have been going on between the three countries for a change of policy in certain directions, why the mischief should we give away the whole thing to the Press before we have come to a definite understanding ourselves?"

"In other words," Warren Rand remarked coldly, "why should the League of Nations exist at all; why should you not make whatever sort of alliance you like outside, and then spring it on the world exactly when you choose?"

"Our conversations, such as they are," Poynton declared, "are entirely in the cause of peace, I assure you."

"With Felix Behrling taking part in them!" Warren Rand scoffed.

"Blast!"

The air outside was suddenly filled with the music of feminine laughter. They came flooding in, without waiting for an invitation—girls in all manner of bathing négligés and pyjamas, blandly oblivious to the fact that they were unwelcome guests. They demanded cocktails and pounced upon the cigarettes. Leaning through the window, one of their escorts addressed Behrling.

"Say, Felix, these girls won't settle down to lunch without you. They say you kept them laughing until four o'clock yesterday afternoon. Miss Chloe has finished her swimming lesson and swears that she is ravenous. Come right along back with

us, there's a sport!"

Lucille, the beauty of the party, thrust her arm through Behrling's, and a general exodus began. As they neared the terrace, Warren Rand turned around to his late companions.

"If I weren't afraid that you'd throw me overboard, I might ask you to return and lunch with me at Cannes," he suggested tentatively. "We could have this matter out between ourselves. Behrling's had his say. Mine's worth listening to, anyhow."

"Nothing would please me better," Poynton assented. "You'd have nothing to fear from me, even if I had any sentiments of enmity toward you. I'm frightened to death in a motor boat."

"And I, I have too much respect for my host to lay a finger upon him," Cantani declared.

"Then we will leave it to fate," Warren Rand proposed, with a dry chuckle, "whether we eat together the very excellent *sôle Mediterranée* I have ordered at the Majestic, or whether the fishes eat us."

CHAPTER XII

Luncheon was served in Warren Rand's sitting room, and was the best the hotel could offer. Conversation during its progress was a little difficult. The host himself made scant contribution to it and apparently ignored any responsibility he should have felt in the matter. As soon as the meal had been brought to a conclusion, and the coffee and liqueurs served, Tellesom locked the door. Warren Rand, with one of his big black cigars between his fingers, then plunged at once into speech.

"Signor Cantani," he began, "and you, Mr. Poynton, I should like you both to listen to me carefully. I am going to brag, but I am going to tell you the truth."

"It is plain speech which is excellent," Cantani declared, helping himself to a cigarette.

"I own sixty-eight newspapers in the United States," Warren Rand went on —"twenty of them with over half a million circulation. I own secretly the most popular English morning newspaper and twenty-two others in various parts of the United Kingdom. I own ten newspapers in Germany, seven in Italy, eight in France. I direct the policy of every newspaper I own. Do you realise what this means?"

"One can only form an idea," Cantani murmured.

"It is prodigious," Poynton acknowledged.

"It means that I have my place in the ruling of the world," Warren Rand proclaimed, in a moment of impersonal grandiloquence. "I can sow the seeds for war, if my desires run in that direction, or I can scatter them to the winds. I can glorify or I can damn. Governments cannot stand against the power I wield. We believe in the policy of the eternal drip. My editors are my own men and we never leave off. We badger any Government which pursues a policy of which I don't approve, as a hound does a muzzled bear. He can never reply. We score every time. The American presidential election, you will tell me, is decided by the voice of the people. It is decided by the newspapers which tell the people for whom to vote. Your present hotchpotch Government, Poynton, I could send shivering into obscurity if I snapped my fingers."

Poynton knocked the ash from his cigar.

"I am quite willing to admit the comparative truth of what you have said," he agreed. "I, for one, have never underrated the power of the Press—especially when backed with the colossal fortune which you are said to possess. Since we are to have the cards upon the table, I shall ask you this question: What is this present move of yours which brings you down to a remote French watering place to interfere in a friendly conversation between an English Cabinet Minister, an Italian statesman,

and a German banker?"

"Call him by his proper name," Warren Rand enjoined curtly—"a German underground politician. I am here to prevent the forming of any more unnatural alliances."

"Do you think that we are mad enough to dream of another European war?" Cantani asked, with a thrust of shrewdness.

Warren Rand remained unmoved. There was something Napoleonic in his unflinching coldness.

"There must never be another war," he pronounced. "The last one was fought upon false principles and with a false grouping. England and France were never natural allies and the English statesmen who made it necessary for England to enter the War at all were fools. Consider the state of your country, Poynton, which was certainly the winning factor in the struggle. She has never been so badly off in her life. She is the most heavily taxed nation in the world, her scale of living is the lowest, her reserve of gold has vanished. She has lost her place amongst the great powers, and with it all her ally, with whom she fought, hates her. France will always hate the Anglo-Saxons. The Americans especially have robbed England of her national life. They have destroyed the glamour of the country, overridden her cities and beauty spots, and made a Coney Island of her capital."

"And therefore?"

"Therefore, Felix Behrling, who has been working for this thing for years, has brought you here with a twofold purpose. Logically, of course he is right. The only possible European alliance is between Russia, Germany, England and Italy. The general principles of such an alliance I presume you have already discussed. Your meeting down here is probably to draw the threads together."

There was a profound silence. Warren Rand took a gulp of his brandy.

"The idea is, I suppose," he continued, "when the Peace Pact comes on the table in Geneva, you will delay the proceedings as long as possible, and in the meantime you will sign the treaty, a copy of which Felix Behrling has in his strong box at the Provençal Hotel."

Poynton intervened angrily. His show of temper was unconvincing, for his voice was shrill and anxious. His cigar was burning unheeded in the ash tray by his side. He had the air of a man mentally disturbed.

"You are talking like a sensational newsmonger, Warren Rand," he declared. "Neither Cantani nor I are empowered to sign any treaty."

"You can sign the draft, though," Warren Rand pointed out, "and you can pledge yourselves on behalf of your governments to support the principles upon which the

treaty is based. That's good enough for a start, I should imagine. You intend the final treaty to follow. I am here to tell you that it will not. I am here to tell you that this carefully arranged meeting will come to nothing. This new treaty of alliance will end in smoke. The peace of Europe will remain undisturbed for a time at any rate. That I promise you."

"On what authority do you proclaim this good news?" Cantani demanded.

"My own, if you will. Believe me, I am no idle sentimentalist. I am a hater of warfare, it is true, but mine is a logical and definitely evolved frame of mind which, before long, will be shared by the whole world. This scheme of yours is damnable. It is only one of a dozen others of which my secret service—from which, mark you, you are never free, and which is better than the secret service of any government in Europe—sent me word. I came to Europe to set my heel upon this whole epidemic of plot and counterplot. I shall do it."

There was a sudden blaze of passion in the Italian's white face. His eyes flashed.

"You exaggerate your power, my friend with many newspapers," he cried. "The provisional pact, of which your spies seem to have brought you word, will be signed to-night at the Provençal Hotel. Upon whom are you relying to stop it? The myrmidons of the Quai d'Orsay? The Geneva pacifists? Let them come. They shall be dealt with. I can promise you that."

Warren Rand reflected for a moment. The silence which ensued was one which possessed peculiar qualities. The conversation had lost its smoothness. The spectre of drama had arisen. The Italian, with his teeth showing and his white face strained, was nervously pinching his cigar to pieces. Poynton was sprawling across the table, with the air of one anxious to speak, but whose tongue had become paralysed. Warren Rand's personality, suddenly a flaming thing, dominated the two.

"There are reasons," he said at last, "which make the postponement for a few hours of the final phase of this conversation advantageous to all of us. A plain statement from me might not be sufficiently convincing. To-night, at twelve o'clock, in the Baccarat Rooms of Juan-les-Pins Casino, I will show you why the draft of your treaty had better be destroyed before mischief comes of it. Felix Behrling can be present, if he chooses."

"Why not tell us now?" Poynton demanded.

"You probably would not believe me," was the cold reply. "There is no reason why you should. To-night I can produce the proof."

At five minutes to twelve that evening, in the Baccarat Rooms at Juan Casino, Tellesom stood behind Lucie's chair—Lucie, whom the world saw as a small, fair

young woman, personable, very beautifully dressed and plentifully bejewelled. She was the centre of a great deal of observation, for piles of *mille* notes and counters were built up in front of her, and she was running the best bank of the evening. A familiar voice sounded in Tellesom's ear. He turned round to find his Chief by his side.

"They are waiting in the bar," the latter announced.

Tellesom nodded and pointed to the table.

"As soon as Madame has finished her bank."

Warren Rand, with his feet planted firmly upon the carpet, and his customary, almost Oriental lack of expression, watched the game. Just then the banco, a trifling affair considering the immense *bénéfice*, was called and won. The blonde lady, with a little laugh, pushed back her chair and rose to her feet.

"*La moitié pour monsieur*," she instructed the croupier, indicating Tellesom. "Now, my friends, I am ready for you. We smoke a cigarette and drink a glass of wine, yes?"

"If you will be so gracious," Tellesom assented, leading the way.

"I shall walk with my dear, generous friend, Mr. Warren Rand," Lucie declared, linking her arm through his. "Perhaps he will discover that he has more millions for the deserving poor, yes?"

"For the same value, Madame," Warren Rand rejoined, "my check book is always at your disposal."

They entered the bar and found the corner where Poynton, Cantani and Felix Behrling were already established. Tellesom held an easy-chair for the girl, who sank back into it with a gracious little gesture of thanks. Her freakishly manicured fingers, ablaze with diamonds, toyed with her vanity case. Her arms, from the wrist to the elbow, were covered with bracelets, in the fashion of the moment. Behrling, alone, eyed her as though she were a ghost; the other two with admiration.

"May not these three gentlemen be told my name?" she asked, speaking in English, but with a slight and not unpleasant Viennese accent. "So, we shall be able to drink together more pleasantly."

Tellesom stretched out his hand.

"Let me present Mr. Poynton—the Right Honorable Frederick Poynton—Signor Cantani of the Italian Senate, and an old friend, Baron Felix Behrling—to Lucie of London—to Madame von Trugner, to be more precise."

The three men rose and bowed. They were equally disconcerted—Cantani dumb with the shock of that so familiar name. Behrling, however, asked a question.

"The wife of Professor von Trugner?"

She looked across at him and a strange light shot from her eyes—a light which faded almost as she spoke.

"His widow."

Upon Behrling the blow had already fallen. He looked meditatively across at Warren Rand as he resumed his seat. This was indeed one of the great men of the earth!

"I told them all it was a mistake," he groaned. "Again we must pay for the stupid, purposeless ferocity of these blasted Prussians."

"You must pay indeed," Madame von Trugner assented, glancing at the mirror in her vanity case. "You lost the last war through that very ugly characteristic. You have now lost your chance of the next. My wonderful friend here will tell you all about it."

Warren Rand drew forward his chair and resumed the conversation which had been broken off in the sitting room of the Majestic Hotel at luncheon time.

"Some seven years ago," he began, "you may remember, although the fact was not made generally public, that a certain German general, highly popular in his native land, who had never been able to accept philosophically the defeat of his country, offered a great prize to any one—scientist or layman—who could invent an entirely new weapon of war which would place the country using it in a dominant position. The prize was won by Professor von Trugner. He invented a bomb to be transported in a new type of exceedingly small aeroplane, which bomb, upon being released, exploded automatically at a certain distance from the earth and released a score or more smaller but deadly infernal machines filled with a new and most devastating explosive. These spread out in fanlike fashion, and the result was that a single bomb was sufficient to destroy practically the whole of any ordinary-sized town. A flight of twenty or thirty planes could put Paris or London off the map in a few minutes. Very few particulars leaked out in the Press. The secret on the whole has been marvellously well kept, although for some years there has been considerable uneasiness in the Intelligence Department of both England and France. No definite information, however, concerning the new discovery was ever available. Both aeroplanes and bombs were manufactured in a jealously guarded corner of Russia, where no one was allowed to penetrate. Four of my own staff, as a matter of fact, who received some inkling of the affair, entered Russia at different times in search of information and have never since been heard of."

Behrling took a long gulp of champagne but remained gloomily silent. Why had this man not been born a German?

"Germany was now," Warren Rand continued, "in a marvellous position. She had discovered a means of re-establishing herself; she could still become the mistress

of Europe. How was she to proceed? On the whole, her plans were sound enough, especially as Russia had to be recompensed. She had only one enemy—France—and France was rich enough to pay the greatest indemnity the world had ever heard of. She had learned the lesson of the last war and knew perfectly well that there was no sense in the destruction of her neighbours. She was a commercial country and she must preserve her customers. America was, with perfect reason, entirely ignored. Any country against whom this new engine of war was launched would be on her knees long before the power of America could make itself felt. The preliminary draft of this new pact was to have been signed somewhere about midnight to-night, at the Provençal Hotel."

"Was to have been?" Cantani repeated harshly.

Warren Rand looked at him with thoughtful eyes, in the depths of which lurked a gleam of dominant scorn.

"I do not think that it will be signed," he declared. "Germany is, without a doubt, a country of intellectual men, but she is the one nation in the history of the world capable of making the most colossal blunders. She lost the Great War, not through any lack of military or naval skill, but by her brutal folly in sinking the *Lusitania* and murdering Nurse Cavell. Now, in this present case—Madame von Trugner will bear me out when I tell you that she made practically a prisoner of the professor, showered money and lands upon him—for his 'future enjoyment,' they said—but surrounded him with spies who watched him and his work hour by hour. When they felt sure of themselves, they calmly accused him of attempting to communicate with some foreign country and shot him. Trugner was a martyr, if ever there was one, but again Germany suffers for her asinine and short-sighted cruelty."

Lucie set down her vanity case and leaned suddenly forward—a real woman.

"They forgot me, the stupid swine!" she exclaimed. "In Vienna, from school I went to the University, where I studied chemistry. I had degrees. I won honours. It was so I met and married Carl, and I travelled with him to Germany and to Russia, where every one thought me a frivolous little doll. One night Carl was afraid. He wrote me the formula for the manufacture of the bombs, he gave me a tracing of the secret part of the aeroplane. He sealed both up in an oilskin bag, which I wore inside my chemise. When they murdered him, I, the sobbing widow, was given a miserable pension and sent away. I drifted to London. Oh, la, la! Mr. Warren Rand, he finds me out. He pays me like a prince and the secret of Germany is a secret no longer. It is a present to Whitehall, without the necessity of signing any treaty, a present to Washington, a present to the Quai d'Orsay."

A valet bowed at their table.

"It is the hand of Madame," he announced.

She rose swiftly to her feet and moved gracefully away with a backward wave of the hand, Viennese in every movement, chic and well-mannered, a creature of perfumes and jewellery, gaiety and kindness. Warren Rand leaned back in his chair and lit a cigar.

"Have I kept my word, gentlemen?" he asked.

"Damnably!" was Behrling's bitter reply.

Poynton coughed nervously.

"I admit," he said, "that these disclosures are not without their effect upon the situation, but it should, I think, be understood that the pact which was to be submitted to us was merely a draft for future consideration. Neither Signor Cantani nor I were inclined to consider it too seriously."

"My own convictions were against signing it," Cantani interposed.

"Bunk!" Warren Rand declared, with purposeful brutality.

He rose to his feet without any pretence of farewell civilities and made his way through the Rooms to the outside door. Tellesom followed him. They stood on the steps of the Casino together. Warren Rand's car appeared as though by magic.

"And you?" the latter asked.

"I shall drive with you to the Majestic at Cannes," Tellesom suggested. "Afterwards I have an engagement at the little dancing place across the way."

"Keep it at once," Warren Rand enjoined, stepping into the car. "To-night I have a fancy to be alone."

CHAPTER XIII

In the little night restaurant across the road from the Casino, Tellesom found Sarah Hincks waiting without her usual air of joyous vitality. She drew him down to her side upon a divan and shook her head at his little gesture towards the dancing floor. He appreciated the fact that she humoured his weakness and made no effort to introduce him to her high-spirited and somewhat noisy little *coterie*.

"I can't stand this atmosphere," she confided. "Let's go and find two chairs in the garden."

He agreed with alacrity. They found seats in a comparatively quiet corner, and the waiter brought them a cool drink. She slipped down in her place a little with an air of luxurious content. Her face was upturned towards the sky and, seeing it for the first time in repose, during the brief period of silence which followed, he realised with an emotion of peculiar pleasure the fine delicacy of her profile, the womanly softness of her tender mouth. She was like a long slim wisp of curiously feminine humanity as she turned her suddenly serious eyes upon him.

"I want to ask you something, Colonel Tellesom," she said. "Never mind about his being your employer. Will you tell me, please, the name of the man who came over from Cannes in the racing motor boat?"

He turned towards her with upraised eyebrows and an apologetic smile upon his lips.

"My dear Miss Sarah," he regretted, "you ask me just the one thing which, as I attempted to explain before, I cannot do. He is a man of very peculiar temperament and it is one of the conditions of my service with him that I never mention his name. He has almost a passion for secrecy in all his movements and undertakings. Very difficult sometimes, but he's as firm as a rock about it."

"He would be," she half whispered.

"You know him?"

"I think so. It is years since I saw him, but I think that he is Warren Rand, my father."

Tellesom looked at her incredulously.

"Your father!"

Momentarily bereft of words, she nodded. From inside the heated, crowded little building came the banging and pounding of drum and saxophone, and a vision through the window of a phalanx of swaying humanity in all manner of costumes. Overhead, the leaves of the tree beneath which they were seated rustled faintly.

"Forgive my being so surprised," he begged. "I had no idea that Warren Rand

had ever married."

"In his younger days," the girl reflected, "he used to devote every energy towards keeping his life secret, just as, from what you say, I should imagine that he does now. My mother divorced him the day after war broke out, or rather she commenced proceedings on that day. Her people came from Washington and they were very pro-English. She couldn't bear my father's attitude towards the War. He spent millions trying to prevent it. Many people think that he kept America from coming in immediately after the *Lusitania* was sunk. I don't know anything about that, but he loathed the whole idea of it. When the divorce was arranged, we children were given our choice as to whom we would live with. I chose mother; the boys chose dad."

"You have brothers?"

"I had. Two. They were both killed in the War."

Again Tellesom was silent for a few moments. The revelations to which he was listening seemed to him increasingly amazing.

"Do you know, I am intensely intrigued," he confided at last. "Your father has been a most interesting study to me and I have often failed to understand him. Shall I seem impertinent if I ask you one or two more questions?"

"Not in the least," she assured him. "Now that this has really come, it is rather a relief to talk about it."

She took a cigarette from her case and he lit it from his *briquet*.

"Your brothers," he enquired, "did they enlist with your father's consent?"

She shook her head.

"He was passionately opposed to it. In the end he gave them a million dollars each on condition that they change their names before they joined up—he arranged that with the Secretary of War—and on condition, too, that they never communicate with him or speak to him again so long as they lived. Well, they didn't live, so that was that!"

Her eyes were very soft and he saw the fingers which were holding her handkerchief twitch.

"I'm a brute to question you like this!" he exclaimed.

"Nothing of the sort," she assured him. "It does me good. Ask me some more."

"Your mother?"

"She is rather a gay lady. She married the Prince de Montmercy years ago. You must see her name in the papers sometimes. She is up at Aix just now and I am here with some friends. Hincks was my mother's name before she was married."

"Yes, your mother is a very well-known woman," he reflected. "One sees her

name in all the society papers."

"She likes that sort of thing," Sarah confided. "I don't. That's why I came here with the Maitlands. I don't think I should have come if I'd known."

She waited for a moment and then went on.

"That seems silly to you, of course. I can't help it. I have always felt like that about father. I scarcely ever saw him—sometimes not for a year together. He has always been generous. My mother is very extravagant, but she can never spend the income he settled upon her. He treated me in just the same way—generous with parchment and pen and ink and dollars, and a terrible miser so far as a single word or look of kindness went. Tell me about him now," she went on, almost eagerly. "What sort of a man is he to speak to, to be with? Does he ever smile, or pity any one, or be fond of anybody?"

"I don't think that he does," Tellesom admitted, "but, on the other hand, he must have feeling, for he is devoting his life and his immense fortune, his brain, every impulse of his being towards one hobby, which I must say I can't altogether understand, because it seems to me too Utopian for a practical man, but there is no doubt whatever that it is not a selfish one. He has nothing to gain for himself in any of the schemes with which I am connected, at any rate."

"Except more money," she murmured.

"But he couldn't use any more," Tellesom pointed out. "I know a little of his affairs although I never talk about them. He must have been the richest man in the world five years ago. Since then, his wealth has been accumulating all the time. It's like a living force. I don't think he could stop it if he would. The other day, I heard that marvellous secretary of his tell him that they had made a million pounds on the exchanges that day, and he just nodded and went on with a letter he was writing."

"And what have you to do with it all?" she asked.

"I am practically the head of your father's personal secret service," Tellesom confided, glancing around, although they were well apart from the rest of the world, and lowering his voice a little. "I have to make the plans to protect him from assassination. I have to have spies from my bureau working always to discover and forestall schemes of all sorts against him. I don't feel altogether comfortable in having left him alone to-night. He insisted upon it, though, so there's nothing for me to do."

"Is he very much hated?"

"Not for himself. Very few people know him. He is hated sometimes financially and a great deal more politically. He plays a great game in life, Miss Sarah. I confess to you that I have never seen him show a moment's weakness or behave in any way like a lovable human being. All the same, he rides in the clouds. He wields a power

so tremendous that he is bound to have enemies on every side of him. There isn't a Chancellor of the Exchequer in any country in Europe who isn't a little afraid of him, or a banking institution that doesn't hate to hear that he is operating in the markets."

"And what is to be the end of it all?" she demanded, a little note of passion in her tone. "He never accepts honours or decorations. He must have passed beyond ambition, beyond avarice. There must be something driving him on. He must have some goal."

"He has, however imperfectly we may understand it," Tellesom acknowledged. "The fact of it is, he is a living paradox. You wouldn't think it possible for any man to work as he does for so many ends which seem to me amiable and philanthropic, and not be an idealist himself of the finest type. There he is, though, Warren Rand, as you know him and I know him—loveless, tyrannical, even to all appearance devoid of friendliness. Yet he has but one end and aim in life—he wants to make war impossible. Day by day, week by week, our work goes on. We are always clearing the way, plotting and scheming to upset new alliances which might lead to trouble, cracking the whip to drive in the laggards to Geneva. He'll stand over them like some Jove wielding a new power from the skies, until the great pact of nations is signed. When that is done—"

He broke off. She waited for a moment. Then, finding him still silent, she urged him on.

"Well, when that is done?" she queried.

"When all the nations have signed, and the jury of conciliation has been chosen, how can one be sure that it will work? How can one be sure that when the time comes the Powers that have signed will keep their word? Supposing they form themselves into groups again, and one combination is far stronger than any other, don't you think that some excuse will be created for tearing up the pact? You can make laws all right, but where are the policemen coming from?"

She sipped her drink for a moment meditatively.

"Don't you think, perhaps," she asked, "that he has even some further scheme at the back of his mind, something to clinch the whole affair?"

"He may have," Tellesom admitted. "As a matter of fact, I am perfectly certain that he still has unformed ideas upon which he broods, but no mention of which has passed his lips to any human being."

One or two of the young men of the party found their way out into the garden. They were not troubled with shyness and they made prompt approach. There was a little chorus of reproaches.

"Say, Sarah, you promised to tango with me!"

"You can't do this with us, Sarah! Bill and Jo Maitland have found their way into the kitchen and they're sending up the finest Welsh rabbit you ever tasted."

The ringleader, a tall, pleasant-looking young Harvard man addressed Tellesom apologetically.

"Sorry to butt in, sir, but we want the young lady. Our party's going kind of dumpy without her."

She rose reluctantly to her feet.

"Come in and join us, won't you?" she asked Tellesom, a little timidly.

"Can't mix the generations to that extent," he murmured, shaking his head. "Besides, I can't stand the atmosphere."

Sarah turned to her cavaliers.

"Run away, you children," she directed. "I'm coming right in. Colonel Tellesom will bring me to the door."

"Five minutes before we try the bandits' rush," one of the young men threatened, as they made their retreat.

Sarah, and Tellesom were left alone. With the memory of his last words in her mind, perhaps for the first time she realised the depths of the lines in his face, the maturity of expression in his deep-set grey eyes.

"It is very troublesome of you not to come and dance," she complained. "I am tired of these sit-around parties and playing the fool for a crowd of boys. I think I shall go up to Aix."

"We may be leaving ourselves to-morrow," he remarked.

"What on earth brought my father here at all?" she asked.

He became suddenly blank and she was swift to apologise.

"I quite forgot my promise for a moment," she assured him. "I won't ask you a single question. Thank you for coming in and don't dare to go away without saying good-bye to me."

Tellesom walked with her to the entrance of the packed dancing hall, stayed until her little crowd, rushing forward in a body, carried her away, and himself made leisurely progress towards the gate. A large, florid man, bare-headed, with his arm around a girl's waist—a fragment of chiffon and gossamer, she appeared, in the light from the newly risen moon—was crossing the road from the Casino. As they approached, Behrling recognised the tall spare figure standing in the gateway. He broke off in the song he was singing lustily and waved his hand.

"Welcome, my enemy!" he cried. "You remember Chloe. This is little Chloe who sat opposite to you at the night club in London. Join us. We are gay to-night. Chloe has won a *mille* at baccarat. I have lost another trick in the great game, but the

moon is rising, and I have courage. Come and join us, Tellesom. You live too much in the shadows. I shall not let Chloe flirt with you, but we can find others."

She laughed gaily. She was very happy to be back once more in her beloved France, with her stalwart, noisy protector. She smiled up into Tellesom's face.

"I think that Monsieur can find all the companions he desires, for himself," she cried, "and if he seems sad—ah, who can tell how an Englishman feels?—perhaps he is gay inside."

"Pooh, pooh!" Behrling scoffed. "What is the good of that? Gaiety of the spirit should make a froth of words, like the bubbles in a glass of champagne. Join us, Tellesom."

The latter waved his hand and summoned a waiting automobile.

"Some day, if you ask me again," he promised, "I will spend an evening with you and learn something about life."

With his foot upon the step of the automobile, he chanced to look backward. Felix Behrling was standing underneath the arched lamp of the narrow entrance. The trees drooped low about it, and in the tangle of lights and shadows it seemed to Tellesom, never an over-imaginative person—that the real Behrling was suddenly revealed. The laugh remained, the parted lips, the head thrown back, but it was the laugh of a satyr, the mocking, leering gibe of one conscious of the near approach of evil things. Larger and grosser than ever the man seemed to loom there, with the little fragment of artificial womanhood clinging seductively to his arm—a powerful, threatening figure, the embers of whose gaiety were fanned by that flicker of malignant triumph. Tellesom was never sure whether or no Behrling spoke, or whether he fancied the words which seemed to come from the thick, sensual lips.

"We may teach you something, too, of death."

They disappeared, Chloe singing gaily, her huge companion humming a bass refrain. Tellesom withdrew his foot from the step of the automobile and listened for a moment to a word or two whispered into his ear by a man who had slipped from the shadows, and who, his message delivered, drifted away out of sight.

"You can return to the hotel," Tellesom directed the chauffeur. "I am going back to the Casino for an hour or two."

But after he had passed through the portals of the Casino and loitered about long enough to be seen within its precincts, he left the place by another exit and, calling a taxi, was driven to Cannes.

CHAPTER XIV

The entrance hall of the Majestic presented the bare appearance of a *hôtel de luxe* kept open out of season against its will. The show cases were all closed and very few of the electric lights were burning. A single reception clerk occupied the office and only the concierge was to be seen in the hall. Tellesom addressed himself to the latter.

"I should like to see Mr. Warner," he said, giving the name his Chief always used when staying at a hotel. "Number 274, I think."

"I'll telephone the room, sir," the concierge suggested. "Mr. Warner does not allow any one up without an announcement."

"Quite right," Tellesom acquiesced. "As quickly as you can, please."

The man stepped into his inner office. It was several minutes before he reappeared.

"I can't get any reply from Mr. Warner, sir," he regretted. "I've rung up the sitting room several times. He came in a short time ago. I know, because I took him up in the lift. Is he perhaps a heavy sleeper?"

Tellesom was for the first time genuinely uneasy. He remembered the sinister gleam on the face of the man disappearing into the dancing place, and he shivered.

"Come along upstairs and' bring your pass-key with you, if you have one," he enjoined.

The concierge hesitated.

"I'm all alone on duty here, sir," he pointed out. "Besides, the gentleman may be asleep and not want to be disturbed."

Tellesom wasted no more words but made his way towards the lift. The concierge reluctantly followed him and they mounted to the second floor. At the door of Number 274 Tellesom knocked, at first gently, then more loudly.

"Has Mr. Warner received any visitors since he returned this evening?" he enquired.

"None that I've seen or heard of, sir."

"Open the door with your pass-key."

The concierge inserted the pass-key in the lock, with some reluctance.

"He looks quite a queer-tempered gentleman, Mr. Warner," he observed dubiously.

"I am one of his secretaries," Tellesom confided. "I will see that you don't get into trouble."

"One of his secretaries" was impressive. The man demurred no longer but turned

the key in the door. His companion pressed forward and they entered the sitting room.

Tellesom's first little start of surprise was rather for the things he failed to see than for those which he saw. For a man whose nerves had carried him successfully through every sort of crisis and had never failed him, he realised, both at that moment and afterwards, that his poise had been curiously and abnormally affected by his brief meeting with Felix Behrling. The self-revelation of those few seconds when Behrling had looked back from the dance gardens, his momentary dropping of the mask, his malignant yet mysterious air of triumph, had filled Tellesom with a queer and illogical sense of apprehension. It had brought him to the Majestic. It ran riot now as he gazed eagerly into the room. His first impression was one of half-ashamed relief. Warren Rand was seated at the handsome mahogany desk writing, with his back to them. A small electric lamp drawn close beside him was the only illumination in the room and it seemed at first as though everything were as usual. Then a little exclamation from the concierge startled Tellesom and he saw strange things. The severed cord of the telephone instrument was upon the floor, side by side with the smashed bell top, a chair lay on its side, a vase of flowers had fallen, and a thin stream of water had trickled across the carpet. More alarming than anything, however, was the sight of the huddled-up body of a man lying face downwards upon the carpet by the side of the desk. Warren Rand sealed the envelope of the letter which he had just written and swung round without haste, at the sound of the concierge's exclamation. So far as he ever allowed any expression at all to disturb the granite-like immobility of his features, he betrayed a faint satisfaction at recognising Tellesom.

"What brought you here?" he demanded.

"I don't know, sir," was the frank avowal. "I just came to be sure that you were all right. I had a word to delay my own departure, and I thought I'd just run over here."

"I'm all right," Warren Rand declared. "I'm afraid that poor fellow isn't, though," he went on, pointing contemptuously downward. "Have the body taken away, Tellesom, and deliver this letter yourself at the house of the Préfet."

Tellesom accepted the letter mechanically. His eyes were fixed upon the crumpled-up figure upon the floor. The concierge was stooping down to examine it.

"*Mais, c'est Monsieur Louis, le nouveau maître d'hôtel!*" he exclaimed.

"I thought it must be some one connected with the place," Warren Rand remarked indifferently. "He has a pass-key, and all that sort of thing."

"*Mais, il est mort!*" the concierge cried.

"Yes, he's dead," Warren Rand agreed. "Seems an odd thing," he continued, half to himself, "that I, who will probably be immortalised in history as the greatest pacificator in the world, should occasionally have to take human life."

"But it is an affair for the police, this!" the man announced, rising to his feet.

"Naturally. You had better send for them at once, and a doctor, and have the body removed. At the same time, Tellesom, I shall have to trouble you to place that letter in the hands of the Préfet himself, and to put a call through on the telephone to Mériot, the Minister of Justice. He lives at Number 17, Avenue du Bois de Boulogne, and you can easily find his telephone number. It is very absurd of our friend Behrling to put us to all this trouble with his clumsy assassins."

"You weren't hurt, sir?"

"Not a scratch. I saw the fellow hanging about on the landing when I returned. I ordered some coffee. There it is on the table. I didn't like the look of the fellow, and after he had brought it I applied a very simple test. I think if it is analysed it will be found to contain enough poison to kill half a dozen men. Considering the value of my life," Warren Rand went on thoughtfully, "I was then, perhaps, a little foolish. Instead of going downstairs myself, I telephoned to the manager's office. Just as I was preparing to speak, the lights were extinguished, the telephone wire behind me was cut, and that most unpleasant person on the floor there made a rather blundering attempt to stab me between the shoulders. You will find the knife on the floor. I got him by the throat and it really seems as though I had squeezed the life out of him."

"There is no doubt about that," Tellesom said, rising from a brief examination of the body and feeling a little sick.

The conversation between the two men had been carried on in English, which the concierge only partially understood.

"It is an affair for the police, this," he repeated. "I must go to the bureau and report."

"The sooner the better," Warren Rand agreed. "And you, Tellesom, I'm afraid you'll have to knock the Préfet up. I have a plane coming to Antibes the first thing in the morning and I don't wish for any delay over a trifle like this."

Tellesom was a little doubtful.

"This is a funny country, sir, where the police are concerned," he confided. "I'm afraid you'll have to attend at least one examination."

His Chief smiled.

"Present my letter to the Préfet," he directed, "and bring back the enclosure which is only for his inspection. Get the call through to the Minister of Justice too. A pity to have to disturb these people in the middle of the night, but it must be done.

What's that?"

The telephone bell was ringing in the bedroom. In obedience to a gesture from his companion, Tellesom entered that apartment and answered it. When he returned a few minutes later, he poured himself out a whisky and soda from the sideboard, without waiting for an invitation, and took a long drink.

"The Hotel du Cap was ringing, sir," he announced. "The car which I had ordered to take me home and which seems to have taken another passenger instead, was smashed to pieces at one of those sharp turns."

"An accident?"

Tellesom shook his head gravely.

"I don't think so, sir. No one seems to understand the affair exactly, but there must have been some sort of obstruction in the road. The driver escaped, but the passenger was killed."

"What made them ring you up?"

"It seems that the poor fellow was so badly knocked about," Tellesom explained, "that they couldn't identify him at all, so they've been ringing up to see if they could find me. They tried the Casino of Juan first, and then here. I had a hint from one of my men to leave the car alone and take a taxicab, or I should certainly have been in it."

Warren Rand rose to his feet, pushed the window a little farther open, and looked out across the Croisette and the harbour to the thin line of the Estérels, grey and delicate against the moonlit sky. For several moments he said nothing. Then, with the air of one who has finally dismissed from his mind a subject of no vital importance, he shrugged his shoulders, lit one of his black cigars, and threw himself into an easy-chair.

"Well, Tellesom," he acknowledged, "I am glad you had the idea to look me up. This seems to have been Behrling's busy night. Get away with that letter to the Préfet, there's a good fellow."

Tellesom picked up his hat.

"You realise that the police will be here very shortly," he reminded his Chief.

The latter nodded.

"There won't be any more trouble with the police as soon as the Préfet has had my letter," he declared.

CHAPTER XV

Charles Tellesom and Sarah, still in their bathing clothes, were enjoying the best cocktail of the day, the one immediately after their morning swim, about a week later. They were seated on the terrace of the bar at the Eden Roc, from which very fashionable rendezvous the crowds were beginning to disappear with the passing of the season.

"I think," Tellesom pronounced deliberately, "that your father is the most wonderful man I ever knew in my life."

She looked at him with a little grimace—a gesture which he fancied was meant to conceal some unexpressed feeling.

"He is the most unusual, at any rate," she admitted, "and I suppose that's the same thing. Why abandon that amazing reticence of yours, and drag in such a stormy petrel as my parent, on a peaceful morning like this?"

"I can't help thinking about him," Tellesom confessed. "He broke the law over there in Cannes a few nights ago in a manner for which any other man I know of would have been in prison at this moment, or would, at any rate, have had to appear before the magistrate and be allowed out only on heavy bail, yet he sits down and writes a letter, sends a telephone message to Paris, and the whole affair is wiped out. Not a word in the papers, not even any gossip in the hotel."

"What did he do?" she enquired. "Remember, this time *you* started talking about him."

"Don't ask me exactly what he did," Tellesom begged. "He was justified, all right, but in the case of an ordinary man it would have been a very serious affair. As it was, he left the next afternoon for Geneva, after what seemed to be a mere visit of courtesy from the Mayor."

"You had a narrow escape that evening yourself, didn't you?" she asked.

He nodded. "I am sorry for the poor fellow who rode in my car," he said gravely.

"So am I," she agreed, "but I'm glad that it wasn't you. Can I have one more cocktail, please? That was my first."

"Of course," he assented, giving the order to a passing waiter. "I suppose—you wouldn't stop and have lunch with me?"

"I'd love to," she accepted promptly. "I have a suit of pyjamas in my locker, as it happens. Since you have begun to speak about him, tell me some more about my father. Why does he seem so extraordinary to you?"

"Is there another man in the world," he asked, "who moves about with the

retinue he does? Do you know that on his behalf I have a bodyguard of at least a dozen men who are with us wherever we go, and although I've been used to disguise and make-ups during the last year of the War, when I had to go in for that sort of stunt, I honestly can't recognise some of them. All the time I feel that I am being watched as well as protected. I was warned not to come home in that car the other night, and I know perfectly well, for instance, that your father will be informed before to-morrow morning that I have lunched with his daughter."

She laughed.

"Well, that isn't a very risky episode."

"Perhaps not for an ancient person like myself," he admitted. "I shall be the most hated man in the hotel, though, when your crowd come along to their usual table."

"Are you saying this to flatter me?"

He looked at her and from his grey-blue eyes the steely light had gone. His mouth, she decided, could soften at times, could even become tender.

"Am I? I suppose it has occasionally occurred to you that you are—well, rather attractive."

"It took you some time to find it out," she reminded him.

"When I first came down here," he explained, "I had to keep out of the way altogether. We had to try and round up some men who had a rendezvous here, to find out what they were after and to stop it if possible. I didn't want to be in evidence and your father didn't come until the last moment."

"Well, tell me some more?" she begged. "As you know, one never sees his name in the newspapers, and neither mother nor I ever hear a word about him. It seems as though he lived in a steel chamber somewhere."

"So far as any interest in the outside world is concerned, he practically does. As a matter of fact, he is the nearest approach to an absolutely robot man I have ever come across. His manner of life is amazing. Nothing gives him any pleasure except to work out his schemes—either his financial ones through John Glynde, or his political ones, which he takes care of himself. Neither of these are exactly a human pleasure."

She indulged in a little grimace.

"I should think not," she admitted. "Doesn't he ever do anything reasonable?"

Tellesom shook his head.

"I have never seen him smile. I have never seen him take any interest in any one's society. The sight of a woman is one of the few things which annoy him. He eats and drinks when he's told to, without taking the slightest notice of his food or his wine. The most uncanny thing of all, he never makes a mistake. If he tells you that you will find a certain man in a certain place on a certain day, that man will be there.

He has the journalist's intuition too. He seems to know what is going to happen, how certain events will influence the great people of the world. He spends half his time, when he is in Europe, at Geneva, but he never attended one of the official meetings, although every word that is spoken there he knows, and a good deal that is spoken there is practically dictated by him."

"Is he there now?"

Tellesom hesitated. "Yes, he's there now," he confessed.

"Why did he leave you here?"

"I can't imagine, except that one of the most dangerous men we have ever worked against is still here, and so long as he remains, your father thinks that something must be going on. As soon as he leaves, I shall have to report either in Geneva or London, wherever your father may chance to be."

She rose to her feet and tossed away the remains of her cigarette. She looked after it thoughtfully for a moment.

"I'll go and change into my pyjamas," she announced, a little abruptly.

Tellesom's eyes followed her as she threaded her way among crowds of more or less grotesquely attired men and women, *en route* to or from the sea. A curious fancy seized him. The Sarah Hincks who had been the spoilt darling of the hotel, when he had first come down a fortnight ago, seemed to have disappeared, or to have developed in some strange fashion into a more sedate and subdued person. The charm was there still, and at odd times the gaiety, but the boisterousness and purely animal spirits of youth clashing against youth, a little excited by the new-found appetite for life, had gone. He stared at the corner round which she had disappeared. His brain was befogged by a strange, insinuating thought—a ridiculous, absurd but fantastically disturbing reflection. He surrendered to its intoxication for a moment. Then he swung around and sauntered along the terrace to select his table.

Sarah realised the change in him five minutes after they had settled down at a table looking over the sea.

"My quixotic friend back again!" she laughed, with that little crinkle at the corners of her eyes which he, in common with every one else, found so alluring. "Now, please, what has happened to drag you back to prehistoric days?"

"Why prehistoric?" he fenced.

She helped herself deliberately to omelette before she answered him.

"Oughtn't history to have commenced with you when I first found out how nice you were?"

"You seem determined to goad me on to saying foolish things."

"Well, saying them is the next best thing to doing them. I'm a creature of action

—and if that man doesn't open that wine at once, I shall do it myself."

He summoned a *sommelier*. She smiled as she recognised the label on the bottle.

"My favourite!" she murmured. "What a dear creature you are to remember things."

"You never give one a chance to forget anything about you."

The very faintest of blushes showed underneath her tan. If he was not exactly eloquent, there was at times a very subtle vibration in his tone.

"Very neat, if a little artificial," she laughed. "I wish bathing didn't make me so thirsty. Can I have some water as well, please? And tell me why you looked so glum when I arrived? Don't you like my pyjamas? They're supposed to be marvellous. Mother sent them to me from that new place in Paris. By-the-by, mother's coming here. I wonder whether you'll like her?"

"Coming here?"

"Motoring. May arrive any minute. That is, if she can pass Avignon. Avignon has a fascination for her. Every time she comes south, she gets lost there."

"How do you get on with her yourself?" he asked, a little bluntly.

"Wonderfully. Perhaps because we so seldom see anything of each other. She loves entertaining—does it very well too. I like having a good time with a crowd for a week or so, but after that I get terribly bored. You have been my salvation here."

"You relieve me," he confided. "I felt rather guilty at having taken you away from your younger friends now and then."

"You have taken me away from them a great deal oftener than 'now and then,'" she reminded him coolly. "If mother had been here, she'd have asked you your intentions before now. American mothers are that way. By-the-by, for anything I know, you're married. Are you?"

"No," he assured her hastily. "Nothing like that."

"Why so emphatic? You don't seem keen on women, but you don't dislike them, do you?"

"Not at all. I am poor, though. Except for my pension, I have a very small income. Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine earning such a salary as your father's paying me."

"Seems to me you earn it all right," she observed drily. "Why has my father so many enemies?"

"They aren't exactly personal enemies," he told her. "They are the representatives of causes which would be ruined if your father's schemes came off. Life, even to-day, isn't quite so civilised as it seems," he went on. "There is always

an undercurrent of ferocity among men who see the chance of having their lives or careers shattered, and your father is entirely ruthless. So far as I can judge, he is working towards a magnificent if impossible goal, and to reach it many people must suffer."

"Same old peace business, I suppose?" she commented. "I was ashamed to look any one in the face during the War."

Tellesom sipped his wine meditatively.

"I have been a soldier," he said, "but I am not sure that your father is not right. At any rate, he is not a sentimentalist. Only the other night I was trying to see with his eyes, to put myself in his place. He remains all the time perfectly logical. That's why he might seem to have a chance where all the sentimentalists have failed."

"Does he take you into his confidence at all?" she asked.

"Neither me nor any other human soul. He never utters one unnecessary word. If he has orders to give, he vouchsafes just sufficient explanation to enable one to comprehend them intelligently. Apart from that, there isn't a single man living—not even that wonderful secretary of his, John Glynde—who knows what is at the back of his mind."

"What is the difference between your position and John Glynde's?"

"John Glynde is his financial right-hand man," Tellesom explained. "I should be more properly described, perhaps, as his Chief of the Staff. I organise his marauding and defensive enterprises and keep a little corps of men employed for his protection. They were most of them engaged before I came along, and one or two of them I scarcely recognise even now, but I have an instinct for danger when it's about, which is sometimes useful. I picked it up, I suppose, during that last year of the War."

"It sounds terribly romantic," she remarked. "Do you have meetings every morning and plan out a campaign?"

"Nothing of the sort," he assured her. "We have a bureau in London, in the Kingsway Buildings, and as soon as we have found out what your father is going to do, we tell off the necessary men to look after him. Then, when he goes abroad, we have men for each country, and correspondents in that country. We aren't infallible, of course. Last week they let your father down at Cannes, but they saved me from being smashed up."

"Sounds like a modern Arabian Nights," she murmured.

"There is a very true though very trite saying," he reminded her, "that half the world hasn't the faintest idea how the other half lives. There is a German here at the present moment who has almost as extensive a system of espionage as we have, and an even more desperate class of man connected with it. He's attacking all the time

too. We exist only for defence."

"Tell me about John Glynde?" she begged.

"John Glynde is a financial wizard," he confided. "He could have been president of one of the first banks in America if your father hadn't collared him. I believe he could tell you from memory your father's holdings in all the great stock companies of the world, and each morning, after he has gone through the prices and had his report on the New York market, he knows exactly how to make an odd million or two before lunch—and generally does it too."

"What a life my father's must be!" the girl reflected, pausing to wave her hand to some gaily though scantily clad acquaintances. "You very seldom hear him talked about. It's amazing how he seems to be able to keep his name out of the papers, with his enormous wealth too."

"Yet," Tellesom ruminated, "in one of his few moments of partial confidence, he told me that he expected to die poor."

"The lawyer who made over our money to us," she told him, "was specially definite in saying that we need never expect any more. I don't know what we should do with it if we had it. Neither mother nor I have ever spent the interest on our capital, and she's extravagant enough."

A speed boat below, with one of the notabilities of the place aquaplaning, attracted their attention, and, as though by mutual consent, they abandoned their more serious conversation. As they reached the end of the meal, one of the chasseurs came hurriedly into the room and made his way to the table where a short, consequential-looking man, more formally dressed than the rest of the crowd, was lunching. A few moments later, the latter, with a regretful backward glance at his plate, was hurrying across the threshold. Sarah followed the direction of her companion's gaze and smiled.

"Who's the funny little man?" she asked. "And what do you suppose he's been fetched away in such a hurry for?"

"I can tell you who he is," Tellesom replied. "I had an interview with him the other day. He is the Chef de la Sûreté for the place, but what his trouble is I don't know. Something serious, I should think, or, being a Frenchman, he wouldn't have left his lunch."

The *maître d'hôtel* bustled up with the pleased air of one who has information of importance. He leaned over their table confidentially.

"Terrible murder in Juan last night, sir," he confided. "A foreign lady—Austrian, they say—who has been playing very high lately, found in her room at the Hotel Provençal this morning, with all her jewels gone—strangled."

Tellesom only half suppressed a little exclamation which had in it as much of anger as of shocked surprise. He looked across the close array of tables towards the opposite side of the room and met Felix Behrling's eye. Solemnly, and without any attempt at concealment, the latter raised his glass and winked.

CHAPTER XVI

Once more Warren Rand rode the clouds. This time he sat at a table alone, deep in thought. A little distance away, Glynde was dictating to a secretary. The wireless operator was on the other side. An assistant pilot, with a map in his hand, stood gazing downward at the great carpet of blackness. The light for which he was seeking suddenly twinkled out—a faint light like the gleam of a glowworm, thousands of feet below. He turned to his employer.

"It will be impossible to reach Le Bourget before three o'clock, sir," he announced. "We're doing a hundred and twenty kilometres an hour against a head wind and we've only just passed the lights of Lafaye."

Warren Rand made no protest. If he felt disappointment, he failed to show it. He summoned Glynde to his side.

"Get in touch with Paris," he directed. "Let them know that my appointments must be postponed until the morning. Ask the earliest hour at which Monsieur Foucquailles can receive me."

"Sorry we can't do better, sir," the pilot apologised, turning away. "I'm taking over outside in half an hour, but there's no getting more than this out of her."

"How long is your stretch?" Warren Rand enquired.

"I shall drive until daylight," the man replied—"probably take her into Le Bourget. Andrew had a rough enough time getting over the mountains."

Warren Rand leaned back in his chair. He drew a long, leather case from his pocket, selected a black cigar, and broke every rule of the air by lighting it. John Glynde looked round from his place.

"You would do better to sleep," he suggested, "especially if you want to cross to England this afternoon. Your bunk is made up."

"I have slept," was the terse reply.

There was silence in the compartment, presently disturbed by the crisp sparking of the receiver. The Marconi operator wrote down a message and brought it to Glynde, who glanced it through and passed it across to Warren Rand. The latter read it carefully, word by word. It had been handed in at Antibes two hours previously:

> "Madame von Trugner robbed and murdered last night at the Hotel Provençal."

Warren Rand twisted the message between his fingers. Glynde rose to his feet

and, hanging on to the rail, approached the table. The plane had struck a bad pocket of air and was quivering like a blown leaf.

"Madame von Trugner conveys nothing to me," he confided. "I have never heard of such a person."

Warren Rand looked out into the darkness.

"She was the woman," he explained—"Tellesom tracked her down—to whom I gave ten thousand pounds for her husband's formula, and subsequently another twenty. Professor von Trugner was the man who invented the miniature aeroplanes and what he called the 'Repeating' bombs. If she hadn't sold us that formula, I doubt whether the pact would ever have been signed in this generation."

"They don't seem to have given her long to spend it in," Glynde remarked. "Was it Behrling's people who got after her?"

"Without a doubt. Behrling himself was at Antibes when I left."

John Glynde stroked his weak little chin. There was something to feel there, for he needed shaving badly.

"My impressions of Behrling," he volunteered, "are that he's dangerous. I dislike his geniality. In one of the reports our people sent in about him lately, it was remarked that he was occasionally impetuous, left loose ends through his agents when working, and that he lacked the finish of our own men; left his flanks open, if you know what I mean. I was wondering whether a word—even an anonymous word—to the French police—might not be of service."

His Chief shook his head.

"Not our line, John," he pronounced. "The French police would take the matter too far back. We can't guarantee our outside tools. When they betray their own people, they must take their risks. Madame von Trugner is no loss. She may have had another copy of the formula."

Glynde took the seat to which his Chief had pointed. He touched a bell and a bottle of Scotch whisky and a siphon of soda were placed upon the table.

"Can't understand your never wanting to drink yourself," he remarked, blinking behind his spectacles, as he poured out some whisky. "Good stuff too! Not a headache in a bottle of it. Bucks you up for work."

Warren Rand smiled tolerantly.

"I drink with others if it is necessary," he said. "As you know, it means nothing to me. What did you think of the impasse to-day? I heard every word, of course, in my rooms, but I couldn't see the expressions of the men when they were speaking—the Frenchman in particular."

"It was amusing in a way," John Glynde confided, "but not altogether satisfactory

to us. The Frenchman gave me the impression always of shuffling, as though he had something up his sleeve, and the Englishman was disposed to call his bluff. They were the two who broke the whole thing up."

"They shall be taught their lesson," Warren Rand decided grimly.

John Glynde took a long draught from his tumbler and leaned forward.

"Why worry about this disarmament business?" he asked. "I have nearly finished working out the gold deposits of the world. You were practically right in your calculations. Two thirds of the bullion that comes into the market comes from South Africa and Australia. The other third is scattered all over the place. The Russian mines must always remain something of a mystery, but this much is certain—they cannot be worked at anything like productive capacity for another ten years. I begin to believe that your first theory—fantastic though it seemed to me at the time—is possible."

There was a flash in Warren Rand's hard eyes, a slight contraction of the lips.

"I knew you'd come to it in time," he declared. "All the same, for certain reasons, I prefer the disarmament clauses maintained and the scheme carried through on its original basis."

Glynde produced a Virginian cigarette, carefully lit it, and smoked for a moment or two in silence.

"I don't believe you'll be able to convince Foucquailles," he predicted. "I think you'd better leave disarmament alone. It doesn't matter."

"I disagree with you," was the prompt rejoinder. "I intend to convince Foucquailles. If words fail this time, then deeds must succeed. Why do you imagine, John Glynde, that I shall find it so difficult?"

"These two new cruisers of his," Glynde answered. "It may or may not be the truth, of course, but Foucquailles thinks that they'd lick anything afloat. Isn't there some talk about one of them carrying a couple of submarines and the other a bomb-carrying seaplane of terrible design?"

Warren Rand nodded.

"That's all perfectly true," he admitted. "If Foucquailles keeps those cruisers, he'll have to give up a hundred and fifty thousand tons of shipping in other directions."

Glynde shook his head slowly.

"I once had an argument with Foucquailles," he recalled—"the year he was Minister of Finance. You'll find him uncommonly difficult to convince."

"Then it must be done with deeds not words," was the dry rejoinder.

John Glynde was uneasy. He finished his whisky and soda and replenished his

glass.

"My Chief," he said, "if I were to venture a criticism of this meteoric career of yours, which has dragged me from the safe places in Wall Street and set me trailing across continents and through the skies in this most disturbing fashion, I should say that you took too great a risk with your deeds. You've been lucky, so far, but they'll surely let you down sometime."

"Explain yourself."

"You trust to too long a chain. The links *seem* all right—every one, I know, is tested—yet one has to remember that a single flaw, a single link that fails to do its duty, and crash to the ground comes the whole business. All men are not so callous as you, Warren Rand. That is where trouble might come. You have no conscience and no regrets, because when you started out you counted the cost. There are many men in the world more human than you. That is why I sometimes feel nervous when you take a weakling and give him a high place among your forces. Tellesom, for instance, is no weakling—I admit that—but he is a sentimentalist."

"I take account of the temperaments and dispositions of the men I make use of," Warren Rand declared. "Tellesom is of the type who might refuse to obey my orders, but he would leave me with tight lips. You have spoken your word now, Glynde. Let the subject pass. What of the weather?"

The little man with the gold-rimmed spectacles peered out of the window.

"Clearing," he announced.

"Good!" his Chief grunted. "Tell them to get London again. I want to finish there, if possible, and start back for Geneva at midnight to-morrow."

The plane, gliding over Paris in the grey morning, made, as usual, a faultless landing, and Warren Rand was whisked away in a waiting limousine to the small residence which was kept always in readiness for him in one of the retired streets leading off the Champs Elysées—an abode which was frequently the subject of curious comment from passers-by. It was surrounded by a high spiked railing. The lock on the gate was the latest triumph of an American mechanician. The concierge was one of Warren Rand's own men, as were his two assistants, one of whom sat in the courtyard on duty night and day. In an hour's time, Warren Rand had bathed, changed his clothes, drunk his coffee, and was studying the various reports which had arrived for his inspection from all quarters of the world. Afterwards he read the morning papers, smoked a cigar, and at nine o'clock he was ushered into the presence of the man whom he had flown from Geneva to see. The latter, grey-bearded, suave, sturdy, yet dignified of appearance, shook hands with his visitor and

waved him to a chair. No interpreter was necessary. Warren Rand could scarcely have answered a single question concerning the arts or the classics, but there were few foreign languages which he did not speak with ease.

"You have great enterprise, my friend," his host declared. "Yesterday in Geneva; this morning with us. A poor day in Geneva, I fear. One advanced little."

"Thanks chiefly to the lukewarmness of your representative," was Warren Rand's blunt comment.

Monsieur Foucquailles coughed.

"Scarcely that," he protested. "It is simply that my Cabinet, and Downing Street too, if it comes to that, feel that we are safest in these volcanic times if we carry through this great peace scheme with discretion. Disarmament is purely a question of detail. That will arrive."

"Perhaps."

"Your interest in this business is a strange one," Foucquailles continued curiously. "You are, they tell me, the largest newspaper owner in the world. It is a great power, that. You are also one of the richest men living. That is, at least, of equal significance."

"I wonder," Warren Rand reflected. "Do you assert that as your deliberate opinion? The views of great men are always interesting. Which, should you say in plain words, wielded the greater power—the man with the Press of the world behind him, or the man who controls the money markets?"

"The man with the Press behind him, I think," Monsieur Foucquailles decided. "We are all so easily impressed by what we read. Money? Well, no man could collect sufficient of the world's wealth, for instance, to unsettle the Bourses for more than a day or so."

Not even one of his occasional mirthless smiles disturbed the passivity of Warren Rand's expression. His air had become speculative. This man must have other gifts than those he displayed in conversation. France, too, must possess some sort of a secret service? Was it likely that he knew as little as he pretended to know?

"Let us return to the subject concerning which I wish to confer with you," Warren Rand suggested—"the subject concerning which a certain impasse was reached at Geneva yesterday. I and many others believe, now that an agreement concerning disarmament is so nearly arrived at, that the question should be finally settled before passing on to the signing of the Peace Pact. Your representative at Geneva yesterday was dubious. So was the representative of Great Britain. What are your own views, sir?"

Monsieur Foucquailles toyed for a moment with an elegant box of cigarettes

which stood upon his table and lit one. His visitor shook his head.

"How about your own country?" the minister queried. "You are not, I suppose, entitled to speak for her?"

"Perhaps not. On the other hand—I confess it frankly—American diplomacy is noted for its philanthropy. One would never expect, for instance, to find Washington giving orders for disarmament while France and Great Britain were still hesitating. Personally, however, I do not consider—I have never considered—my country a great factor in the situation. Such wars as she might become involved in would be petty affairs, scarcely worthy of serious consideration. Europe and Asia are the continents chiefly to be dealt with, and, with due regard to her own necessities, I have not the least doubt that Washington would fall in with any disarmament scheme adopted on this side. Her point of view is the common sense point of view of the world—that the signing of the Peace Pact before the agreement was reached upon the disarmament clauses would be a farce."

"My trouble with you, Mr. Warren Rand," Foucquailles remarked, with a certain bluntness, "is that I do not know who or what you represent."

Warren Rand sat and brooded. To disclose himself further, at this stage of the proceedings, was too dangerous.

"The disarmament committee is at its work," Monsieur Foucquailles continued. "Japan, Germany, Italy, have all announced themselves satisfied. There is simply the question of our own naval tonnage to be considered. It is unfortunate, of course, that we have just concluded the building of two first-class battle cruisers—the *Fréjus* and the *Toulon*. They have cost us an enormous amount of money and to scrap them would be out of the question. We might consider the sacrifice of some of our smaller craft, if we can agree upon a minimum. At present, your own country stands a little in the way."

"My own country has been perfectly logical," Warren Rand contended. "We need no navy for the Mediterranean and our cruising there during the last few years has been merely swank. As a nation, we have no desire to cross the Atlantic. As a highway to enterprise on our part, in fact, the Atlantic may be wiped out. On the other hand, we have the greatest seaboard in the world. We are willing to adapt our craft to vessels considered capable of guarding it. As regards the Asiatic seas, even there we need only to protect our commercial interests against the awakening forces of Orientalism. We wish to do that entirely on a parity with other nations."

"Perfectly plausible, Mr. Rand," his host conceded. "America, however, has hesitated to put her figures on paper."

"The United States have made known their proposals to your Government and

to Downing Street at different times," was the cold reply. "Italy is acquiescent and Japan is satisfied. The smaller nations are all content. Belgium, Holland and the Scandinavians are in the same position; so is Germany. Very well then, Monsieur Foucquailles, I'm going to put it to you plainly. I, representing a great portion of the Press of the world, tell you that it is you and, associated with you, Great Britain, who stand in the way of a complete disarmament agreement, which is the natural prelude to the signing of the Peace Pact. The plain A.B.C. of my visit to you, sir, is this. I come to ask you to cable or telephone to Geneva, after you have consulted the members of your Cabinet and your naval board, and to give your representatives there power to sign the disarmament agreement on the basis which omits altogether the two new cruisers which have been sprung upon us, the *Toulon* and the *Fréjus*."

"You are a little hasty, Mr. Rand," the minister complained.

"How can I be called hasty when the conference is even at this moment sitting?" was the curt rejoinder. "Your men went there, knowing very well that your two new cruisers would upset the whole balance unless a compensating amount of inferior tonnage were proffered in exchange. Were they instructed from the first not to sign the Disarmament Treaty, or has your Government since changed its decisions?"

Monsieur Foucquailles, with his back to the wall, became more reserved.

"Mr. Warren Rand," he said, "this is my first meeting with you, but I have always heard you spoken of as a great underground force in international history. I must remind you, however, that you represent nobody. The Press are not, and have no right to be, represented at the conference, except as journalists. Individual multimillionaires are in the same position. Only the nations have their places at the table. I have dealt with you as an interested person of great influence, but when it comes to accepting conditions laid down by you, to treating with you as I might do with representatives of a friendly nation, why, the thing is impossible."

"In plain words," Warren Rand persisted, "you can give me no assurance that your representatives will now or presently receive instructions from you to sign the Disarmament Agreement upon the basis I have quoted."

"I can give you no such assurance, Mr. Rand," the minister acknowledged. "Of my own free will, however, I will tell you that they are at liberty, whenever the time comes, to sign the Peace Pact."

Warren Rand rose deliberately to his feet. His host accepted the hint and rang the bell for the secretary.

"I thank you, nevertheless, for your visit," he said, holding out his hand with a courteous gesture.

"You are welcome to my visit," were Warren Rand's parting words. "I regret its

failure. So may you, before many days have passed."

CHAPTER XVII

From Le Bourget to Croydon, the wireless on the airship flashed and snapped out its messages without ceasing. Cipher books had been dragged from the steel-lined safe, the saloon cleared of steward and assistant pilot. Strange words and sentences confused a listening continent. At five o'clock Warren Rand descended at Croydon to find, awaiting him, a familiar but most unexpected figure. Trim, comely, and deliberate in her speech and manner, Miss Stanley Erdish, without any sign of embarrassment, stepped forward to greet him.

"I thought it best to come down myself," she explained, producing a despatch case. "There have been several cables to-day which probably need attention, and no one at Kingsway Buildings has keys to the cipher books. Furthermore, there have been other slight happenings, which you ought to know about."

"Where the devil is Hammond?" Warren Rand demanded. "He should be here to meet me. I gave him two days' holiday, but he was to be back this morning."

"Hammond was drowned, bathing at Cromer yesterday," was the calm reply. "The message only reached us half an hour ago. It is probably on your latest wireless."

"Drowned?" Warren Rand repeated. "Do you know what you're talking about, young woman?"

"He was drowned in shallow water and a calm sea," she continued. "It seems that he had hired a bathing machine in which he had left his clothes locked up. Afterwards it was found that all his pockets were empty and his keys gone. Under the circumstances, I thought it better to bring you these despatches myself."

"But how the mischief did you come into all this?" Warren Rand asked.

"I left Miss Erdish in charge of the confidential department," John Glynde intervened. "In fact, at the present moment, she is occupying my room. There was no one else likely to have the least success in conducting your negative propaganda and she can do the work better from headquarters than anywhere else."

"I might add to that," the young lady observed, "that since your departure, your name has not once appeared in the papers and there is not a soul—unless they have their own secret agents—who could have traced you to Geneva."

"Step into the car," Warren Rand growled. "Come in too, Glynde. You have your portfolio there, I see. You brought the 'Z' cipher, of course?"

"I should say so."

They drove off, and one by one John Glynde opened and deciphered the despatches, passing them on to his Chief, who made pencilled notes upon each.

Afterwards, the latter leaned back in his place and, during the remainder of the journey, spoke not another word. For different reasons, both the girl and Glynde glanced at him more than once with a certain covert curiosity, but whatever the schemes forming in his brain might have been, his lips never moved.

Half-past six sounded from Big Ben as they crossed Waterloo Bridge. Warren Rand awoke from his reverie.

"At what hour is my appointment with the Prime Minister?" he asked.

"At 7.30," John Glynde replied. "You will just have time to get to Kingsway Buildings and change."

They rolled on into the heart of London, until at last they drew up outside the world-famous headquarters of the United Newspapers. It was apparently a busy night. Every window on every storey, from the corner of one street to the corner of another, was flaming with light. People were crowding in and out of the broad entrance the whole of the time. Warren Rand turned to his two companions.

"Go and rest, John Glynde," he enjoined. "You need it; I don't. If you've taken that young woman into your confidence so far, I suppose you'd better give her a room. See that she keeps out of my way as much as possible, though."

He strode across the pavement and, with a key which he drew from his pocket, opened the door of his private entrance and disappeared. Miss Stanley Erdish laughed softly to herself.

"Isn't he sweet!" she murmured. "Such an affectionate and encouraging Chief to work for!"

"Warren Rand's all right," John Glynde assured her. "Any more work to-night?" he added, as they crossed the threshold of the great entrance hall. "Are you coming upstairs?"

"I shall just see whether there are any messages," she decided.

"And afterwards?"

"Dine at my club, unless you're polite enough to ask me to dine with you."

He coughed a little nervously.

"It will give me great pleasure," he acknowledged.

They entered the great central lift together.

"At eight o'clock at Lugano's," he suggested.

"I'm afraid I'm spoiling you," she sighed, "but I'll be there."

The English Premier himself—the Right Honourable Oliver Trowse—received his visitor in the private study of his official residence. He showed every disposition to be amiable, for there was a feeling in his Cabinet that, notwithstanding the little

that was known of him publicly, Warren Rand was a force to be reckoned with.

"So you've come straight from Geneva," the Premier observed, after they had settled themselves comfortably in their chairs. "Very interesting you must have found it. I should very much have liked to hear to-day's debate."

"I was not present myself," Warren Rand admitted. "I happen to know, however, the general tenor of the discussion."

Mr. Trowse raised his eyebrows.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed. "When I heard that you were in Geneva, I naturally took your presence at the Palace for granted. If any special card of admission would be of service to you, my people there would, I am sure, be glad to procure it."

Warren Rand, who had a private microphone, a telephone, and an instrument which was not yet patented, installed in his apartments in the Geneva hotel, through which he had been in constant communication with the Palace, besides London, Paris and New York, smiled slightly.

"Thank you, Mr. Trowse," he said, "I have heard about as much of the debates as I wanted to. The usual difficulties are always cropping up. There is always some one making trouble to prevent progress. To-day it was your man and the Frenchman."

Mr. Trowse shook his head deprecatingly.

"My dear sir," he begged, "do not get that idea into your head. There is no one who is more anxious to clear the way towards the signing of the Peace Pact than we are. France, too, is naturally of the same mind. What have we to gain by war? Nothing. What has France to gain? Less."

"I do not agree with you in the least," was the brusque response. "I should say that, having gained experience, you might, after a new war, be able to put statesmen in power, instead of maniacs, who would be able to make such terms that you were not crippled for half a century. I should say, too, that France, when she had got over her sentimental period, found the last war so much to her benefit that before very long, if the Geneva Conference breaks up without coming to an arrangement, she will be looking for an excuse for another. I have interested myself in this matter, Mr. Trowse, and I have come to the conclusion that there is more real humbug talked about war than any other subject."

"Are you speaking seriously?" the Premier enquired, a little taken aback.

"Good God, what time have I ever found in life to talk in any other way?" was the almost harsh rejoinder. "I don't deal with idle words. I have at least fifty million intelligent readers waiting for my news of what happens at Geneva, and not only waiting for the news itself, but for my translation of it. Do you wish them to be told

that the Conference itself is drifting towards failure because of the secret opposition of England and France?"

The Premier was thoroughly angry now. His hand wandered towards the bell. In the face of the other's imperturbability, however, he withdrew it.

"Any other person, Mr. Rand, who dared to make such a statement in my presence," he said, with an ominous chill in his tone, "would have left this room at once and have been refused admittance to my house forever after. Our representative in Geneva has full powers to do everything possible to expedite the signing of the Peace Pact. The French representative, as I happen to know, is there with the same instructions."

"That's the bluff of it," Warren Rand insisted curtly.

"You are ready to sign the Peace Pact. You are ready in words to abjure war as a means of settling disputes, yet all the time you fence and hedge over the disarmament question."

Mr. Trowse's anger was unabated.

"Your language, Mr. Rand," he said, "is not the language which I am accustomed to hear from visitors who obtain admission here."

"You shall have plainer words if you like," Warren Rand declared. "I have come here for the purpose of arriving at an understanding and we may as well get there at all costs. I accuse you, sir, and your ally on the Quai d'Orsay, of having a secret understanding with regard to the disarmament question. You are willing to sign the Peace Pact and you are not willing to sign the Disarmament Agreement. You want to have the cart before the horse. What's the use of promising you won't make war when you won't promise to destroy the apparatus with which war is made?"

The Premier controlled himself with an admirable effort. There must be no quarrel between himself and this man.

"You are entirely in error, Mr. Rand," he assured him. "The Disarmament Agreement will be signed very shortly. It is only waiting over because of certain technical details upon which we have not been able to agree and which, you must forgive my saying, are outside the comprehension of people not directly concerned."

"Precisely," Warren Rand acquiesced. "These technical details, if you have your own way, will be worked out so as to give you and France a naval supremacy over any other two powers."

"You are entirely misled," Trowse insisted. "France, as well as ourselves, must keep pace with your very progressive country and with the others. In doing so, we have had no ulterior ideas. The moment parity is reached, I will sign, and so, I am sure, will France."

"Naval parity is an elusive term," Warren Rand observed drily. "I am not altogether an ignoramus in the matter. I have a staff of highly trained naval experts, who have served in your own, in the Italian, and in the French Navy, who have supplied me with every possible detail, especially as regards your newer ships."

"That means that you have a body of spies," the Premier asserted with temper. "What right have you, a newspaper man, a private person, to embark upon a course of espionage?"

"Whether I have the right or not," Warren Rand rejoined, "I shall continue to make use of my spies and continue to make use of the information they bring me. I provide the truth for my fifty million readers and I intend them to have the truth, whatever we pay, whatever means we employ. I will make you an offer. I will bring a representative of my own to discuss this matter with your naval board. You can have a representative from France here if you like, and I will prove to you that both you and France are seeking to keep an advantage over other nations beyond that to which the conditions entitle you."

Mr. Trowse leaned back in his chair. This man, he was convinced, was mounting too far into the clouds. He was not to be taken seriously.

"I think you ought to see for yourself," he pointed out, "that your suggestion is ridiculous. The Press has always been greatly considered. We have treated you with every confidence and we should naturally prefer to have your good opinion—but there are limitations."

"Fixed by yourself."

The Prime Minister waved his hand.

"The proposal which you make is absurd," he persisted. "If you would like to have a conversation with one or two of our head men at the Admiralty, no doubt it can be arranged, and it will probably help you to see where you have fallen into error, but a formal discussion, such as you have suggested, is ridiculous."

"You refuse it?"

"Absolutely."

"I am not sure," Warren Rand went on thoughtfully, "that you are wise. I venture to make the presumption," he added, after a moment's pause, "that the proceedings at Geneva will now come to an end, unless all the Powers concerned consent to sign the Peace Pact first and lay the Disarmament Treaty upon the table."

The Premier frowned.

"I hope," he said, "that they will be better advised."

"They will not," his visitor assured him. "If your representative and the Frenchman continue to talk as they have done to-day and argue that the Peace Pact

may be signed before the Disarmament Treaty is insisted upon, the proceedings will not only come to an end, but the blame will rest with you and your ally across the Channel."

"How do you know what turn the discussions took to-day if you were not present?" the Premier demanded.

"It is my business to know. You're in telephonic communication with Geneva, I suppose. Let your secretary bring you the latest news."

The Premier touched a bell. Richard Carstairs, his private secretary, appeared from an inner room and nodded to his Chief's caller in friendly fashion.

"How have things gone at the conference this afternoon?" the Premier asked. "You can speak out. Mr. Warren Rand has just come from there."

"Very badly, I am afraid, sir," the young man admitted. "Italy remains doubtful, but America and Germany are both arguing that the disarmament question had better be finally settled before the Peace Pact is signed. The German was the last to speak and one gathered that he had the sympathy of the meeting."

The young man, in obedience to a gesture from his Chief, prepared to depart. Warren Rand checked him.

"One moment, Mr. Trowse," he begged. "Would you ask your secretary here to do something, the reason for which I will explain later. Tell him to ring up your Treasury representative, or the representative of the Bank of England upon the Stock Exchange, and ask them the trend of affairs to-day. I presume he will be able to procure their private addresses."

"What on earth has that got to do with the matter?" the Prime Minister demanded.

"I will explain later."

"I can answer the question without going to the telephone, if you wish, sir," the young man intervened. "The Stock Exchange has had a terrible day. All the home gilt-edged shares are falling, also industrials. The withdrawals of gold have been larger even than at any time this week and are causing something of a panic. I was only waiting for this gentleman to leave to give you a message from Mr. Cranston."

"I can even tell you what that is, if you want to know," Warren Rand observed. "The bank rate will be raised to seven and a half per cent."

Carstairs looked across at him in surprise. Then he turned to his Chief and nodded.

"I'm afraid that's the gist of the message, sir," he admitted. "Heaven knows what it will go to unless the drain of gold stops."

"The result will be," Warren Rand pronounced, "a fair number of failures, a loss

of a hundred millions in values of your industrial undertakings, a depression of the pound all over the world, and a very awkward financial position generally in your country."

There was a brief and embarrassed silence. The secretary took his leave. Trowse turned at once towards his visitor.

"How does it happen that you are so well posted in these matters, Mr. Rand?" he enquired. "These withdrawals of gold are causing us a great deal of anxiety and we frankly don't understand them, but they surely don't come within the scope of your activities?"

The muscles of Warren Rand's hard face twisted into something which resembled a mirthless smile.

"The withdrawals of gold, which several times during the last few weeks have affected business upon your Stock Exchange and which account for the fall in your pound sterling," he declared, "are entirely owing to my activities and influence."

The Prime Minister rose slowly to his feet. For the first few moments he had the air of a man upon whom an unexpected blow has fallen, but who still fails to realise its nature. He looked across the few feet of space between him and his visitor, his hands resting upon the desk. Involuntarily, he had fallen into the attitude which he generally favoured in public speaking, but his hands were moist, and there was a curious feeling of uneasiness in his mind. It was as though he had come into contact with a new and only partially understood force.

"Are you trying to make me believe," he asked incredulously, "that you, even though you have formed the most powerful syndicate in the world, even though you have half the Press of America at your back, are in a position to tamper with the national credit of this country?"

Warren Rand shook his head.

"I am afraid that you are a very ignorant man in some ways, sir," he pronounced. "You know me as a phenomenally large newspaper proprietor. You still do not realise the other power I wield. I need no syndicate at my back. I can myself control any money market you oppose to me."

The Premier laughed scornfully.

"If I were asked my opinion about you," he confided, "I should say that you were mad."

"That is because, as I remarked a few moments ago," Warren Rand pointed out patiently, "you are a very ignorant person. I have withdrawn gold to such an extent from France that they are obliged to fall back upon you. Now it is your turn, and I am withdrawing gold from you every time it comes into the hands of the bullion

brokers here. My methods you wouldn't understand if I tried to explain them to you, because they were evolved by a financial genius who is in my employ, and your country doesn't possess such a person, but I can assure you of this, that if, in six months' time, either you or France attempted to go to war, you would find yourselves in a curious position."

"Who wants to go to war?" the Right Honourable Oliver Trowse demanded furiously. "You dare to suggest such a thing as that to a minister representing an independent party, the majority of which is composed of socialists, to a man who stands for the people, not for imperialism."

"I don't care what you stand for or what your politics are," was Warren Rand's blunt assertion. "I say you are one of the Powers who are blocking the way at Geneva."

"That in itself is an absurd statement," the Premier protested. "How are we blocking the way? We have already expressed our willingness to sign the Peace Pact the moment it is drawn up."

"What about the Disarmament Treaty?"

There was the slightest possible hesitation, a certain lack of decision in the answer when it came.

"The Disarmament Treaty is more a matter to be dealt with by the technical advisers of each country," he explained. "We are all agreed upon the principle. The fact that it is not completed need not interfere with the signing of the Peace Pact."

"I differ from you entirely," Warren Rand declared. "All the more so because I suspect the reason for your attitude. For that reason you are having your fangs drawn. You know what your fangs are? Money, the right-hand one; credit, the left-hand one. Try to make war without these two things. You would be the laughing stock of history."

"It appears to me," the Premier said slowly, "that the nearest lunatic asylum should be your destination. Never in my life have I heard a man with any pretence to an important position in the world talk such drivel."

Warren Rand rose to his feet.

"And never in my life," he concluded, looking backwards in his progress towards the door, "have I known a man able to call himself the Premier of a great country who isn't fit to occupy the Chair of a Parish Council Meeting."

CHAPTER XVIII

That evening, the Prime Minister, who was feeling far too upset for any festivities of the sort, was the unwilling dinner guest of Mr. Philip Hawkeson, the governor of the Bank of England, himself a very wealthy man, the husband of a beautiful woman, and the occupant of one of the finest houses in Grosvenor Square. During the three or four minutes before dinner, a period spent in a magnificent gallery hung with famous pictures, where cocktails were served and light conversation indulged in, Trowse buttonholed his host.

"Hawkeson," he asked, "do you, by any chance, know a man named Warren Rand?"

The bank governor made a wry face.

"I can't say that I know him," he admitted; "very few people do. There's no man at present, however, whom we poor little financiers in London hate more cordially."

"Why?"

Hawkeson shrugged his shoulders.

"It's rather a technical matter, and I know you're not keen on finance," he explained, "but Warren Rand is a man with enormous interests in many of the great banking institutions, both in America and all over Europe. Just now, for some reason which no one seems to understand, every one of the banks where he has influence is pressing for gold. Furthermore, for every shipment which arrives from Australia or South Africa and comes into the market here, there is always a mysterious buyer whose identity the agents refuse to divulge and who upsets all our calculations. Frankly, I can't understand it, but there is one name which is beginning to be whispered around, and that is the name of Warren Rand."

"But what does he want to buy gold for?" Trowse asked impatiently. "I don't know much about finance, but gold doesn't breed money."

"Not directly, but the withdrawal of gold unexpectedly from different countries depresses that country's markets and enables any one to buy sound shares at a much lower price than their value. A swindling game, finance, really, you know."

"Talk to me about it after dinner," the Premier begged. "We shall be forced to have a consultation at the Treasury within the next few days. . . . That's a very beautiful woman talking to your wife."

"The Princess de Montmercy. Let me present you."

Trowse was half inclined to draw back.

"Only when it is necessary," he begged. "I'm a terrible French scholar, I'm ashamed to say."

Hawkeson smiled.

"The Princess is an American," he confided, "as more than half the women with foreign titles are nowadays."

"In that case," the Premier assented, "I shall be delighted."

Hawkeson laid his hand upon the arm of his august guest and the two men were halfway across the room when he suddenly paused.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "I quite forgot. Do you know who the Princess was before she married the Prince de Montmercy? Of course you don't. She was the divorced wife of Warren Rand."

"He has better taste in women than in most other ways then," Trowse muttered. "Present me all the same, if you don't mind."

The Princess, like a great many women of her race, was gay and entertaining. She was evidently gratified at the introduction, but frankly avowed her entire ignorance of English politics.

"Or even those of my own country, or my adopted one," she went on. "Life is so full and interesting."

"What is your chief absorption, then?" Trowse asked her, as they stood for a moment alone.

"Life," she declared.

"And what does life mean for you?"

"I see you're going to drive me to declare myself a frivolous woman," she complained. "Well, life to me means a box at Covent Garden, a box at the Opera in Paris, an apartment in the Bois de Boulogne, a villa down in the South—Cannes, for choice—and a suite for the season at my favourite hotel at Le Touquet, unlimited credit with my dressmaker and my other tradespeople, a ride almost every morning in the spring and autumn, and a good deal of bathing in really warm weather in the summer."

"It doesn't sound too frivolous," Trowse pronounced.

"You, of course," she ventured, "have no other thought but politics?"

"Politics just now," he admitted ruefully, "give one little time to develop other thoughts. I sometimes wonder whether I wasn't happier as managing director of my boot factory."

"But you must have been very ambitious," she observed, "to climb so far away from local affairs."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"My position is largely an accident," he assured her. "I have always stood halfway between the two parties who have a scratch majority just now. This time I

really think they chose me to avoid having to decide between two others."

"You are a very modest man," she remarked.

"I have had all the conceit taken out of me," he acknowledged.

Their hostess crossed the room towards them.

"My dear Princess," she explained, "we have all sorts of queer people dining to-night—the dear old Marchioness of Gorham and wife of our premier Marquis, who is terribly touchy, and the Princess de Brenoda, who expects to be treated as semi-royalty. Philip was distracted when I told him that he couldn't have you, but so it has to be. I am going to put you next to Mr. Trowse, who will be, of course, on my right."

The Princess expressed her pleasure, Trowse his gratification. Soon they made their way along the gallery into the beautiful dining room. Trowse, who was not wholly deficient in a sense of humour, smiled as he settled himself down in his high-backed Jacobean chair. He glanced along the brilliantly decorated table and then back again at the woman by his side.

"I never dreamed," she remarked, "that I should sit next a Coalition Prime Minister of England. I thought the Conservatives—they are the aristocratic party, aren't they?—had the country in their keeping for all time."

"They let it slip," he confided. "I don't mind saying, so long as I am at a private dinner party, that I wish they hadn't. They left every political department—foreign, financial and domestic—in such a hopeless condition that we should need a Gladstone or a Disraeli to restore our prestige."

"They tell me that a Trowse is doing it very well," she murmured, with a gracious smile.

He sighed.

"One can't perform impossibilities," he regretted. "No country could have a definite standard of living, or be what I should call a happy and contented country, with an income tax like ours."

"Why not reduce it?" she suggested brightly.

"Come and see my Chancellor of the Exchequer and talk to him," he invited.

"If he's as nice-looking as his pictures, I should love to," she assented. "I couldn't absolutely promise, though," she went on, laughing up at him, "that I could offer him any practical advice."

She turned to her right-hand neighbour and Trowse spoke a few words to his hostess. Dinner was an epic of light and colour and sound, concealed music playing softly in the background. The wine was marvellous. Under its influence, Trowse regained a little of his spirits and courage.

"May I ask you a somewhat personal question, Princess?" he begged, when she was free again.

"So long as it isn't my age or the name of my coiffeur," she warned him.

"Worse than that," he confessed. "Weren't you once married to Warren Rand?"

Her manner changed abruptly. She was no longer the suave and very beautiful woman to whom words were playthings.

"Yes," she admitted. "I started life as Mrs. Warren Rand. I divorced him by arrangement—we Americans do that sometimes, you know—years ago."

"You couldn't tell me anything about him, I suppose?" he asked a little wistfully.

"Not a word. I don't wish to talk about him and I am under a solemn promise not to. All that I can say is that we parted by mutual consent and that he treated me, even for an American, with magnificent generosity. His views are not my views, nor his world my world."

"I can quite understand that," Trowse murmured.

She shrugged her white shoulders.

"They tell me that he is an enigma to a great many people," she went on cautiously. "He happens to be an enigma to me also, but if he were not, if I could help you to understand him, I still should not do it. *Voilà!* . . . Now, let us investigate this delicious *mousse*."

"It is a very amazing circumstance," Trowse remarked, as he took up his fork and followed her example, "that nearly every one who does know anything about him replies very much as you do. He seems to have the world under his thumb."

"He is the sort of man," she said, "who, if he lives long enough, probably will. Tell me what your private tastes are, Mr. Trowse, when you aren't governing this stricken country? You're fond of music?"

"Absolutely ignorant of it," he confessed. "I have few tastes outside my work, because I have never had time to develop any. I read memoirs and play golf."

"And you have very few holidays. What I know about the life of a politician always cures me of any regret I may have that I was not born a man. In a few days I am going to Antibes. You stay here, of course, until the recess."

"Compulsorily," he sighed.

"You know France?"

"As a tourist. . . . Does it interest you at all, I wonder, to be told that I saw your former husband this afternoon?"

"Dear me!" the Princess exclaimed. "What's he up to now? Does he want to buy England? . . . No, it doesn't really interest me, Mr. Trowse. You see, I have been married again since—quite happily, I am glad to say, although my husband

neglects me shamefully."

The conversation drifted away on a lighter note and the service of dinner drew towards an end. Trowse, with the privilege of a favoured guest, led his host to one side as they passed out towards the gallery.

"I must be in the House in half an hour," he confided. "This man, Warren Rand, Hawkeson? It seems to me he's trying to take a hand in international politics. Tell me, is he dangerous?"

"He could be—horribly," Hawkeson admitted frankly.

The Prime Minister frowned. Like most men new to a great position, he hated alien influences which he failed to understand.

"But how?" he demanded.

"In a dozen different ways. For one thing, he could starve any country he had a feud with, of gold."

"But surely he couldn't control more than a certain amount, could he?"

"No one can form the slightest idea as to what his means are. He has already proved himself to be what I should consider fabulously wealthy."

"What about our own reserve?"

"It is perilously low," Hawkeson acknowledged. "I don't mind telling you, sir, that a few years ago I should have scoffed at the idea of any one man wielding the power Warren Rand does, but when one considers the matter calmly, when one looks through the list of banks where he undoubtedly has control, and is faced with the amount of his holdings in nearly every one of the great commercial companies of the world—well, it gives one nerves. Of course, any actual interference of his in politics is more or less incredible, and yet—if I might advise you—study his wishes if you can. They say he is almost fiercely anxious, for instance, for this disarmament question to be absolutely settled. What about that?"

"It will be settled, all right, in due course," Trowse affirmed, "but our friends in France and our people here are both of the same mind—that we can sign the Peace Pact without waiting for the details of the disarmament question to be finally settled. The whole thing is so technical, you see, that it might take another year."

Mr. Hawkeson stroked his grey imperial and looked his distinguished visitor in the eyes.

"I am aware that everything that happens at Geneva isn't made known," he said, dropping his voice a little, "but there's an impression about that practically every country represented there has come to an arrangement except France and ourselves."

"Entirely a wrong impression," Trowse contradicted, almost angrily.

"Well, it isn't in my line, anyway," the bank governor observed. "Try one of those cigars, sir, and just a sip of brandy. You needn't go back. I'll make your excuses. The Prime Minister doesn't need any."

Arrived at the House of Commons, Trowse, although he was anxiously expected, sent first for his secretary.

"Carstairs," he directed, "I want to get in touch with the Chief Commissioner of Police—Sir William Crutcheley. Try him at Scotland Yard, in case he's late there. I forget where he lives. You can find out. His club's the Reform, I think. How are things going in the House?"

"Wobbly, sir," the young man reported. "Bendon is demanding a clear statement as to the progress of affairs in Geneva."

"I hope he gets it," the Prime Minister chuckled, as, with a little grimace, he made his way towards the corridor.

CHAPTER XIX

Sir William Crutcheley was dining at the Reform Club and would very much have preferred to stay there. The message which he received, however, left him no alternative, and he made his way at once to Westminster. After a few minutes' waiting in the official chamber, the Prime Minister made his appearance. The latter was looking a little harassed, for the Opposition had been treating him with less than their usual consideration. He himself was a fluent and by no means a bad speaker, but the quiet sarcasm, the more scholarly periods indulged in by certain of his opponents, never failed to irritate him.

"Good of you to come, Sir William," he said, taking his own chair. "I won't keep you longer that I can help. Tell me, does Scotland Yard know anything about Warren Rand?"

Sir William in his younger days had been associated with the detective force and had attained a very complete control over his expression. Nevertheless, he was forced to raise his eyebrows.

"Scotland Yard knows a little about Warren Rand," he admitted guardedly, "and would like to know a great deal more."

"They tell me," the Premier went on, "that in that mammoth establishment of his at Kingsway Buildings, among other extravagances, he has a complete espionage system."

"Well, that isn't altogether unusual," the Chief Commissioner confided. "I could tell you of half a dozen of our great financiers and two or three of our newspaper magnates who go in for the same thing, only not on such a large scale. Warren Rand's establishment is the world's wonder. He has several branches, for his American Press, his continental Press, and his English Press, a financial section where they say gigantic enterprises are carried out, a bank of his own, as you know, on the premises, constant cable communication all over the world, the most powerful wireless in the country, and long-distance telephones wherever they have extended. He talks to America, for instance, all day long, and he has a private wire to Geneva. Not only that, but I believe that he has similar establishments, on smaller scales, in Paris, Berlin, Brussels, New York, Boston and Chicago."

"What's the fellow after?" Trowse asked bluntly.

"News and finance, he would tell you," was the cautious reply.

"He can't use all that enormous staff for press work and stock dealing."

"He can't and doesn't. He's trying to pull longer strings in the world. I can tell you that, sir. The head of your own secret service system, which you have tried so

hard to abolish altogether, could probably tell you more than I can, but, incidentally, a great deal of information has come our way. Warren Rand is deeply interested in Geneva. He has men who are practically spies posted in all the navy yards of the world. I believe he knows as much as your own Intelligence Department about the military and naval conditions of all the Powers and where details are to be obtained. His men bribe more lavishly than any one else in the world."

"This is all very well," Trowse expostulated irritably, "but I ask you, Sir William, can a foreigner come and set up an organisation of this sort in our very midst and get away with it? He is assuming the province of a government. He is taking his place—a single individual, representing apparently only himself—among the Powers of the world."

"We can't interfere," the Chief Commissioner pointed out, "unless he breaks the law. We have several cases of suspicion against his emissaries at the present moment, but they're so damned clever, and so infernally dumb, that we haven't been able to get anywhere, so far."

The Prime Minister looked towards the door.

"This is in the most complete confidence, Sir William," he said.

"Naturally, sir."

"He is daring, this man Warren Rand, to put pressure upon my Government. He is trying to influence us in our foreign policy. You don't understand anything about finance, I suppose?"

"Not a damned thing, sir," Sir William acknowledged, "except that I should like my screw raised."

"Well, I won't go into particulars, but I'll tell you this," Trowse went on, ignoring the other's flippancy. "Warren Rand has the impertinence to disapprove of the attitude we and our ally the French are adopting towards the Disarmament Treaty and the Peace Pact. He is actually working the money markets of the world against us, trying to keep us from replenishing our gold reserve—he, a private individual, and an American too. It's damnable!"

"All Greek to me," Sir William regretted.

"Very well, I won't say anything more about that," Trowse promised. "The details don't matter, anyhow, but look here, Sir William, this you can take over yourself. Put your best men on to Warren Rand and his establishment. If anything illegal happens in connection with this staff of his, try to connect him up with it. Give us a hold over him if you can. We sha'n't forget it if you do. I needn't say more. We're not ungrateful. Get a line on Warren Rand and, my God, it will be a good day's work for you."

"I'll do my best," the Chief Commissioner promised. "We don't like the man, I can tell you that, and we don't like his organisation. I've had some of my people in it on my own account, but there's nothing on the surface. The place is full of journalists apparently, all collecting matter for his papers. We've tried to get some of them to talk, but it isn't a bit of use."

"Any women?"

Sir William made a little grimace.

"There's only one in any position of authority and she's tighter lipped than the rest of them."

The buzzer sounded and Trowse sprang up.

"I'm wanted in the House," he explained hurriedly. "See what you can do, Sir William. That Kingsway Buildings establishment is there for mischief. I'm seeing the Home Secretary about it to-morrow. The three of us ought to be able to do something."

"I'll start my end going this very night, sir," the Chief Commissioner assured him.

Sir William, who had come down from the Reform Club in a taxicab, crossed the road from the House of Commons on to the Embankment and strolled slowly along eastward. He paused for some time to look at his own headquarters and nodded to himself approvingly as he saw the lights flaming from the windows which should be occupied and, moving a little nearer, noticed the alert air of the police in charge. A great organisation, his, even if at times they were faced with problems which were almost insoluble. In this matter of Warren Rand, he reflected, as he strolled on, however anxious his department might be to assist the Prime Minister, they were confronted from the first with grave difficulties. Neither the man himself nor his employees, whom Sir William shrewdly suspected of being, for the most part, ex-Scotland Yard men, had ever committed any definite infraction of the law. So long as the staff were maintained for purposes of defence and information only, their existence was perfectly and entirely legal. He tried to think of any similar case with which he had been faced. There was Rosenfelt, who had come back from South Africa with a great fortune, leaving half his friends in prison for attempting to smuggle diamonds. It was perfectly well known that a considerable portion of his household were either amateur detectives or retired prize fighters, all prepared to guard their master against any possible trouble. And then there was Morse, the great money king, who kept men about him merely to discover with whom some of the great banks did business, when foreign financiers arrived in Europe,—whether they came as lenders or borrowers? Looking at the matter from the broad point of view,

privately employed detectives had other functions, or might have, he decided, besides interfering with the law and the business of crime. There was nothing to prevent a man from keeping half a dozen spies and employing them in any manner he wished, if he was of a curious disposition, or if there was information worth the expense of getting. Therefore, there was nothing necessarily culpable about Warren Rand, he concluded, unless by any chance he should change his methods. . . .

He mounted one of the short streets towards the Strand, crossed the road, and gazed up at the windows of Kingsway Buildings. It was easy to see that lights were burning in more than a hundred rooms behind the closely drawn blinds. On the roof was a perfect maze of telephone wires and a great wireless receiver forked its way up to the skies. Sir William paused to light his pipe, and even as he loitered there, a young man, leaving one of the side doors of the place, came abruptly across the flagged walk and bumped into him as he swung around. The Chief Commissioner recovered his balance and checked the expletive upon his lips.

"By Jove, it's Roddy!" he exclaimed. "What the mischief—what on earth are you doing here?"

The young man—he was not so very young, after all—regained his breath and composure. He was neatly dressed in blue serge of rather nautical cut and his sunburnt cheeks and clear eyes gave his profession away.

"Fancy bumping into you, Sir William!" he said. "What's the penalty for jostling a Chief Commissioner, I wonder? Will I be handed over to the police?"

"I'm not sure that you don't deserve to be," was the dry rejoinder. "What were you doing coming out of that door in such a hurry?"

"You know whose show this is?"

"Of course I do," his uncle assented. "To tell you the truth, I'm rather curious about it."

The young man seemed to become vague.

"Well, I'm only a discharged employee, so I've nothing to tell you," he remarked. "Are you coming back west, sir? If not, I think I'll get a taxi."

Sir William summoned a vehicle.

"Yes, I am going back," he admitted. "I'll drive you anywhere you like near the Reform. What do you mean by saying you're a discharged employee of Warren Rand's?"

"Because it's the honest truth. I've had a job for six months, and jolly interesting it's been. That's neither here nor there, though. I'm through now."

"What's wrong?" Sir William enquired.

His nephew grinned.

"No good trying to pump me, sir," he warned him. "Besides, there's no secret about my leaving, particularly. I was asked to take on a job that went against the grain. That was all there was about it."

"Who asked you?"

"We'll cut that out, if you don't mind, sir. If you're going to the Reform Club, drop me there. It will be near enough for me."

"Listen, Roddy," his uncle expostulated. "You're still in his Majesty's Service, remember, even if you're not on the Active List. Is there anything about that place I ought to know?"

"Not from me, at any rate. I've nothing to tell you, sir. It's no use coming the Service over me. What espionage work I've done hasn't been concerned with this country at all. I've got a clean slate, all right. What was required of me to-night would have made things different, maybe, but I wasn't taking it on. Five minutes' notice, and a month's salary! That's how they deal with you there."

Sir William laid his hand upon his young relative's arm persuasively.

"You couldn't just give me a hint," he began—

"No, I couldn't, and that's a fact," the other interrupted. "I've had a good job and I've lost it—worse luck! I can't tell you a thing about Warren Rand. I don't know him, even, but I should think he's mad. And if you'll put me down at this corner, the sooner I'm outside a whisky and soda the better pleased I shall be."

"Get out, you ungrateful young devil, then," Sir William enjoined, signalling to the man to stop. "Don't expect me to stand bail for you next time you get into trouble."

His nephew grinned.

"Wish you'd take me on as a detective. I love the work."

"I'll think about it if you'll tell me why you got the chuck from Warren Rand."

The young man, who was already on the pavement, thrust his head through the window.

"Scruples, sir," he confided mysteriously.

CHAPTER XX

Some change seemed to have come over Warren Rand. John Glynde was all the time either blinking behind his spectacles or taking them off and glancing surreptitiously at his revered Chief. Miss Stanley Erdish, with the tact of her sex, after her first swift glance of apprehension, had kept her eyes fixed upon her notebook, but both she and Glynde had seen what probably no other person in the world had ever seen—the hard light in Warren Rand's eyes thaw, a look of compassion, almost of sympathy, soften his face for a moment as he realised his visitor's condition. The mood, if it was a mood, or visitation, passed. He was himself again before long. Neither of them, however, forgot. . . . The gaunt figure in the chair, bearded and unshaven, with flat, tangled masses of hair reaching over his collar, in worn clothes and abominable linen, stirred restlessly in his place. He had the deep-set eyes and prominent cheek bones of a consumptive. His complexion, however, lacked any sort of hectic flush. He might well have been simply the victim of terrible exhaustion.

"A five years' assignment, Mr. Rand"; he groaned—"seems like a lifetime. Forgive if I miss words and talk strange. I don't suppose I've spoken a word of English to any one since the first twelve months. It's the one forbidden language. Sometimes, when I was under suspicion, they listened to me at night, hoping I'd talk. They turned some Americans loose on me at Moscow—tried hard to break me, but they couldn't. To pretty well the lot of them I'm still Nicholas Gostein, the Czechoslovakian from Belgrade."

"You've sent me wonderful information," Warren Rand acknowledged. "You've been the most useful of the men who've ever worked for me. The time for your reward has come. You need never do another stroke unless you like. Glynde, has Phillipson an account here?"

"Certainly. We've paid in his salary every quarter."

"To-morrow," Warren Rand directed, "you will pay in to his account a hundred thousand pounds."

There was barely a flicker of interest in the man's face. He found it hard work to get the gratitude into his tone.

"It's princely, Mr. Rand," he admitted, "but you were always that way. If I'm ever a man again, I shall know how to spend it, and it won't be visiting foreign cities."

His hands were trembling. For the first time in his life, in that room of reception, Warren Rand, touching a bell, ordered wine. It was served with incredible swiftness.

The man drank slowly but none of the life stole back into his cheeks.

"Some of my despatches went wrong, I know," he continued. "When I got out of the plane, the steward wanted to take me to a hospital, but I came to you first. I'm nearly done unless they can patch me up. There are some things you must know."

There were a great many things which Warren Rand wanted very much to know, but he touched another bell and whispered a message to the servant who answered it.

"Drink your wine slowly and compose yourself, Phillipson," he enjoined. "If you feel too ill to talk, leave it. I have sent for a doctor. He shall tell us whether you may speak or not. Lie back till he comes. Drink slowly. Glynde, I will take a glass of wine myself."

The man in the easy-chair gave in. He leaned back among the cushions, but his fingers still gripped the glass. Every now and then he raised it to his lips. Once or twice he muttered a word. They left him alone. Warren Rand pointed towards the girl and his eyes were as cold as ever.

"What is Miss Erdish doing here, Glynde?" he enquired.

"I thought her presence most necessary," was the earnest reply. "This is not her usual work, of course, but she is the most wonderful stenographer I have ever known in my life. She took Madame de Riga's telephone message from Paris—a woman who speaks like a hurricane—without a mistake. She also listened in to the Prime Minister's conversation the last time you were with him and transcribed it faultlessly. We must be served, Warren Rand. Our work demands the finest service in the world. Miss Erdish gives it to us."

"You are aware of my prejudice, John," Warren Rand said coldly.

"Perfectly, and I have seldom failed to humour it. In this case, you must give me a little latitude. There is no one else in this building at the present moment in whom I can place such absolute trust. For you, she is doing marvellous work. Nearly every one in the city believes that you are now in New York."

"Her work is good," Warren Rand acknowledged. "Have your own way, Glynde. See that she doesn't miss a word of what Phillipson says, if the doctor allows him to talk. Some of his last despatches, as you know, were indecipherable, and one or two I am sure have been lost. Even if he is dying, there are things I must know."

The man in the chair opened his eyes and stared around him for a moment, as though in surprise. Then he drained the contents of his glass.

"Soon," he promised, "I shall talk."

A buzzer sounded. John Glynde spoke a brief word down the telephone. The servant reappeared, ushering in a doctor. Warren Rand wasted no time. He pointed to the figure on the chair.

"This gentleman," he explained, "has just returned from a long journey and has had a very hard time. He brings me important news, which I am most anxious to receive. Please examine him and tell me whether he is in a fit state to talk for half an hour."

The doctor seemed to understand the type of man with whom he had to deal and set to work at once. He unfastened Phillipson's coat, bent over him with his stethescope, and felt his pulse. Then he opened the black bag he had been carrying, brought out a tiny glass phial and, baring the man's arm, gave him an injection. Afterwards he rearranged his clothing and came over to the front of Warren Rand's desk.

"What has he been drinking?" he asked.

"Champagne."

"Give him some more—as much as he can drink," the doctor directed. "If it makes him sleepy, so much the better. Is money any object?"

"It is of no consequence whatever," was the emphatic reply.

"Ask him your questions, then. Let him tell his story. He will be perfectly all right for half an hour. At the end of that time, he will be exhausted, and if you want to give him a good chance of complete recovery, you will let me take him away with me in my car direct to a nursing home."

Warren Rand laid his watch upon the table.

"Show the doctor into a waiting room, Glynde," he enjoined. "Pay him his fee. Let him understand that the man's life is to be saved at any cost."

Phillipson smiled at them from his chair.

"I can hear," he said. "Thank you, sir. I am just resting so as to be able to talk."

Stanley Erdish filled his glass. He looked up at her gratefully. Glynde and the doctor left the room. The man raised himself a little in his chair. The girl moved into the background, her pencil resting upon her notebook.

"Urgency first," he said. "Those devils, as I shall tell you presently, are starving. On every one of their frontiers, they are seeking to make trouble, to draw in food and gold to themselves. Afghanistan—is their present effort. There is only one man whom the tribespeople will accept for king. They know that. They've got him over here in Europe. He's to sign a Treaty. As soon as he has signed it, they'll send him soldiers enough to swamp the country. He's waiting at Monaco now for the Russian emissaries. Zachary, a tennis professional, is the Russian agent there. He's got

Omdurfà in charge. Keep the Russians away. Don't let him sign the Treaty. It might mean great trouble. England may rule India badly, but after all she is a country of human beings. The Russians will be there if Omdurfà signs the Treaty."

Phillipson paused for a rest. John Glynde looked at his Chief with one of those rare glances of almost doglike admiration.

"You had an idea," he whispered. "That's why you've kept Tellesom down there."

Warren Rand nodded.

"It isn't quite Tellesom's job, though," he admitted. "Some one will have to take it over—after this week."

"I'll go on, anyhow," Phillipson declared. "No use trying to remember dates. You were right about the mines at Orbursk—the gold mines, that is. They've been two years installing machinery. It's all American, but how it got into the country I don't know. I had to live there and work in the mines, but I did it. I was a year waiting for the completion of the machinery. I was another year waiting for the explosives, although they were using them for blasting within a dozen miles. I got them at last. There isn't a wheel of machinery left. It was blown to the skies, not two months ago."

"Any trouble?" Warren Rand asked.

"None. Less than with anything I did. They thought it was the peasants. They are in a state of partial revolt all round. They grudged the money going into machinery when they were starving. I saw the official report. The peasants—"

Phillipson took a long gulp of his wine.

"I'll tell you this, sir," he recommenced, "some people think Russia's muddling along. She isn't. The place is nothing but a dung-hill of failure and vice and misery. In the cities they keep up some sort of a show. Things are bad enough there, but my God, the country! The peasants are fit to eat one another. If they get hold of a decently dressed man alone, they kill him, hoping to find a ruble or two in his pockets. They know the truth, those so-called leaders of the people in Moscow. They know now. The peasants can't be made to work on the Soviet plan. Agriculture's gone to pot. The country people are starving. They live on anything—the bark of trees, the flesh of wolves, a few handfuls of meal thrown out to them from the Soviet depots. Another twenty years, and those that are left will be half wolves themselves. The children! Oh, my God! The young people! I can't talk about them. They make bands and hide in the woods or hills in the daytime. At night they raid any place where there's likely to be food, or foul liquor of any sort. They think nothing of killing. They have a carouse and go back again. Boys and girls together.

There's no difference. They all herd like savage animals. A few hundred miles away, there's opera going on in Moscow to bluff the world and pander to the appetites of these men who live on it all. They—they know, though. They know it can't last. It can't last unless they can bring another and richer country in. Some one to bleed is what they want. They want gold at any price. And—and—give me some more wine, miss. I must say this. It's the sum of all my experience."

Miss Stanley Erdish filled his glass. He sipped it this time slowly and gratefully. He held it before him half empty, touching the froth lovingly with his tongue, but his voice was stronger.

"I have summed it all up," he declared. "I've had the chance, and I've done it. They're broken to the world, and they know it. They'll have another revolution to face, and the bloodiest thing that was ever known on God's earth, within a year or two, if something isn't done. You know what the men at the top want. It's war. They're planning for a war. What little money they've got is going into war material. What food they've got goes to feed peasants who are willing to bear arms. Poor devils, they hate fighting, but they stream in just to get food and wear clothes. They thought of China. They did all they could to make war with China, although China wasn't what they wanted. China was short of food herself. They might have got gold, but not much else. Anyhow, fighting China is like punching a velvet ball. It's a joke. You can't do anything. The territory's too immense. If you take a town, there's always another behind it. China's no use to them. Germany's their hope. They want to join in with Germany—send a million men across the frontier and have them fed by Germany, and keep the food they've been parting with in their own land."

"Tell me," Warren Rand asked, "who is really in control of the country? We know the names of some. We try to trace their actions. They seem like puppets."

"The men who are chiefly responsible, who are really omnipotent," Phillipson pronounced, "are the two men who, to save their skins, have scuttled out of the country at the moment to Geneva—Postinoff and Vitznow. If I could see them hung before I die, I'd make it the holiday of my life—I who was always a tender-hearted man. I'd spit in their blackened faces, watch them quiver; and feel joy the whole of the time. Don't forget those two names, Warren Rand. If your arms stretch across the globe as they used to in the old days, if you know how to deal with these men as you used to know, they are the game for you. Turn your back on Russia. The country's a pigsty. You can do no good to the people. They are bestialized, but if those two men, at any time—"

"That will do," Warren Rand interrupted quietly. "Thank you, Phillipson."

"There are a hundred more things to tell you," the man murmured wearily. "I

could prove what I have said. I could go on and on. It all comes to the same. It's all there—in what I've told you. They are out for war, and the scheme was bred in the brains of those two men. They are out to sacrifice a million or so of their peasantry—the more the better. They'll light a bonfire and dance with joy when they're killed, because there'll be a little more food for the rest. That's how you'll have to look at Russia, sir."

Warren Rand rose deliberately from his chair, crossed the room, and laid his hand on Phillipson's shoulder. He made a sign to Glynde, who hurried from the room.

"Phillipson," his Chief said, "you have carried out a greater assignment than any newspaper man has ever attempted in this world. Now you are going to be taken care of and brought back to life, and in whatever way you choose to spend the rest of your days, you shall spend them. You are just as wealthy as you wish to be. You could have, if you wanted it, a blank cheque book. You have, too, my thanks."

There was a hard, strained smile upon Phillipson's face, underneath which, however, one could see the effort at gratitude. Warren Rand deliberately shook his hand—another very unusual action. The doctor came in, glanced at his patient, and helped him to his feet.

"Let us know his address," Warren Rand enjoined, "and keep us informed, day by day, of his progress. He has done his work. Keep him alive, Doctor, and your extra fee will be a thousand guineas."

The doctor bowed his acknowledgments.

"I know little of my patient yet, sir," he said, "but I rather fancy he's got the grit to keep himself alive."

John Glynde and Miss Stanley Erdish left their Chief's room together. They descended in the lift to the offices of the general staff. When she reached her room, Stanley Erdish invited her companion to follow her in. She closed the door.

"I—er—wanted to ask you something," John Glynde observed.

Miss Stanley Erdish first of all disposed of her notebook in the safe, locked it up, and attached the key to the chain around her wrist.

"And I wanted to ask you something, Mr. Glynde," she said. "You can start if you like."

"It's eight o'clock," he pointed out. "I thought you might come and have a little dinner with me."

She hesitated.

"I rather thought of having a cocktail and a sandwich and coming back," she

confided.

"You needn't," he assured her. "Everything in that book is in our brains, for the time being, at any rate. In any case, it is safer in shorthand than it would be transcribed."

"You seem rather fond of asking me out to dinner, Mr. Glynde," she remarked thoughtfully.

"I should like you to dine with me every night," he answered vigorously.

"Very well," she conceded, "that might become possible. Now I will make my request."

He smiled confidently. It seemed to him the most improbable thing that he should refuse Stanley Erdish any request she might choose to ask.

"This Afghan at Monte Carlo," she began, "waiting there with the Treaty. You heard what Mr. Rand said. He didn't think it Tellesom's job. I quite agree with him. A man couldn't deal with any one like I suspect this Afghan to be. Some one has to go down and get hold of that Treaty so that the English Government can prevent its being signed."

John Glynde nodded.

"That's about how the matter stands," he admitted.

"Very well," she said, "I want to be that person."

He stared at her for a moment, dumbfounded.

"You?" he exclaimed. "Why, it's ridiculous."

"Why ridiculous?" she demanded coolly. "I am attached to this organisation now, thanks to you. I have had the hardest work getting in, but I *am* in and I want to do my share of the serious work. I'll be honest. I want to get my share of the excitement too. I'm sick of pen and paper and beguiling editors in restaurants, and making half promises I never mean to fulfil to keep them amiable, telling fibs, and being diplomatic, and all that sort of thing. It's my job, I know, and I do it very well—so well that I deserve a reward. I want to come into the fun. Now, will you please, Mr. John Glynde, talk to the Chief, and let me go out to Monte Carlo. I can do it. I'm not afraid of anything and I have dozens of schemes."

He shook his head.

"My dear," he protested. "You don't know what a crude person like this Afghan —"

"Oh, don't be silly!" she interrupted. "I can assure you that the editor of a fashionable London Journal can be crude at times as well as subtle. I am used to taking care of myself. Those wild men from the mountains will be far less difficult than the journalist who took me out to lunch to-day. Please, Mr. John Glynde—

John, if you like—"

"But, my dear—"

"John dear, if that sounds nicer."

"But let me tell you—"

"John darling—and I'd love to dine with you. Couldn't we go and dance afterwards, and make a real night of it?"

John Glynde was vanquished. Most men would have been with Stanley Erdish's lips so close to his, and her eyes promising all sorts of wonderful things.

"It isn't your department," he ventured feebly.

"No more is this yours," she replied, disengaging herself from his arms. "I'll go home, and put a frock on, and meet you at Ciro's at nine. I'm going to Monte Carlo, aren't I?"

"I suppose so," he yielded.

CHAPTER XXI

Tellesom and Sarah were dining together, a week or so later, at the end of the rude terrace of the Restaurant of the Colombe d'Or. Below them stretched the moonlit valley of rose gardens and vineyards, which wound around the slopes of St. Paul, spreading away towards the great battlements of Cagnes. There was moonlight, as there must always be at St. Paul, for the garden knows no other form of illumination, nor any other manner of gastronomic entertainment save trout from the bustling stream below, chicken which is the pride of the house, and wine which is made from the family vineyard. It was an epic in simplicity, and yet for Tellesom through it all ran a thread of terribly complicated emotions. He was never able altogether to forget that this was Warren Rand's daughter whom he had taken to his heart, Warren Rand, the multi-millionaire, the international schemer, the mystery man of two continents.

"I heard from mother yesterday," Sarah told him. "She says that she sat next the Prime Minister of England one night—I think it was last week—and that he asked her questions about father. Apparently he's making himself troublesome."

Tellesom said nothing. He very seldom did say anything when his Chief's name was mentioned in connection with serious affairs.

"Father seems to be making a great fuss," she went on, "because France and England aren't behaving as they ought to at Geneva, or rather as he thinks they ought to. I wonder why he is such a crazy person? He seems to me to have been quite like other men as I remember him."

Tellesom embarked upon the safe path of generalities.

"Many people have a theory," he observed, as he helped his companion to more of the country vine, "that too much success upsets a man's balance without his being conscious of it himself and without other people suspecting it. In the memoirs of a great artist I was reading the other day, he writes to a friend that he feared to penetrate any further into the world of beauty, that his senses, and soul, were already dizzy with the things which had been shown to him, and that he lived in growing fear of madness."

"Sounds a trifle neurotic," she remarked.

"I don't know," he reflected. "History is full of the stories of men, from Cæsar to Napoleon, who have achieved so much that their mental stability wavered. I can conceive of a man having his brain turned with continual and increasing success—a success which gave him new powers and destroyed his sense of proportion with his fellow men. I sometimes wonder whether that might not be so with your father? Year

by year his influence and authority have increased. Now he is trying to sway nations."

"But why should he be so crazy?" she expostulated. "Don't you think, with regard to his pacifist ideas, for instance, it is true that war is a natural law of life? A certain number of men and women must be cleared out of the way to make room for their successors. Isn't it like that with insects and animals?"

"I don't think that proves that it should be the same with us," he ventured. "War is, after all, one of the crudest manners of settling a dispute. A theorist would probably argue that when the human race has reached a certain phase of intelligence it should be able to triumph over the mere brutalities of life."

"Sometimes," she mused, "I'm not at all sure that it's peace he does want."

"No one," Tellesom declared, "can tell what things lie behind your father's brain. He lives in a world of his own and it is a world of silence. He gives no confidences that are not absolutely necessary. He gives orders and other people obey."

A coatless and collarless artist from the studios below produced an ancient Provençal musical instrument and succeeded in drawing from it a few queer strains of harmony. The atmosphere was too languorous and enveloping, however, for any continuous effort at energy. Not a leaf stirred in the gardens and the groves of small cypresses below were like black outposts. The single waiter had kicked off his shoes and was running about bare-footed. The silence was almost universal, save for the honk of motor horns along the winding, mountain roads, which scarcely offended, because the sound seemed to come from another world. Her fingers suddenly crept across the tablecloth and fell upon his brown hand.

"I wish you'd marry me, dear lover of reserves," she said. "I've told you all the nice things a girl can think of. I follow your lordly finger wherever it beckons. I have written and told my mother that I am going to marry an Englishman, and she said, 'Thank God, and some day when you're writing again, you might tell me his name.' Couldn't we really do something about it?"

He smiled at her through the golden dusk, and when he smiled the lines of his face seemed to disappear and his whole expression was transformed. There was a light in his eyes too, which made her happy.

"I can't, dear child," he reminded her, "while I am in your father's employ."

"But what has father to do with it?" she argued. "He has placed us utterly and completely outside his life forever. You saw him pass me without a word at the Eden Roc. He knew who I was. He knows everything. I don't belong in his life any more than mother does. In a way, I suppose," she went on, a faint note of bitterness in her tone, "he thinks he's bought his liberty. He has made us both very rich indeed. He

escaped his responsibilities that way. Well, as I have been robbed of a father, I rather want a lover, Colonel Charles Tellesom. What are you going to do about it?"

"You have one in spirit, all right," he assured her.

"I am not in the least a spiritual person," she sighed—"not even on a night like this. I'm afraid I'm terribly human. If you're thinking about the money, I shall be furious with you."

"I won't let it stand in the way," he promised her, "and that's something, you know, from a pig-headed Anglo-Saxon. I must be free of all my obligations, though. Some of the work I carry out for your father might lead me into trouble if it were discovered. I must finish with all that sort of thing first. I am pledged to him for another few months. At the end of that time I'll find another sort of job and if you really mean—"

He hesitated. She laughed across at him.

"If you haven't found out by this time what I really mean," she whispered, "then you're as stupid as I thought all Englishmen were before I knew you."

For a while they talked nonsense. Then he paid the bill and they left the quaint little scene, which, with its one hanging lantern, its shock-headed waiter, its tangle of clinking glass and laughter and muffled voices, and its curious, entrancing vistas of distant landscapes seen through openings in the hewn stone, was more like the setting of a Near-Eastern opera. In Tellesom's two-seater they left the mountain road which led homewards and climbed higher, until even St. Paul lay below them and the sea gleamed like a great silvery pool beneath. She gave a little gasp.

"The ships!" she exclaimed. "Could any one believe that those grey, hideous-looking monsters could appear so beautiful?"

He brought the car to a standstill and they looked downward. In the bay of Golfe Juan lay a long formation of battle ships, there for a fortnight's manœuvres, lying on the placid waters like painted images, their outline only faintly visible but glittering with double and treble rows of lights. Signals were flashing from the land on all sides and answers twinkled back from the turreted cruisers. The lamps of Juan itself were like pinpricks, and of those sounds which destroy beauty there were none. The merciful distance seemed to have laid a stifling hand upon them. Sea and wind, and it seemed all humanity, were dumb. The thumping pianos in the open-air cafés of Golfe Juan, the jazz from Juan-les-Pins, the tumult of voices, the honking of motor horns,—not one of these pagan discordances could reach across the velvet-shrouded landscape to the orange-blossom-scented lane on the crest of the mountains.

"Don't let's go on," she begged. "It's the most intoxicating silence I ever knew."

He held her hand and smiled. He was looking thoughtfully downwards.

"You'd soon forget that there was such a thing in the world as silence if we were there," he told her. "The mayors of Cannes and of Antibes, and some of the local authorities of Golfe Juan and Juan-les-Pins, have banded together to-night to give a great entertainment to the crews of those two marvellous new battleships. The English sailor's pretty good when he's on a beano, but I think the Frenchman can make more noise."

They sat side by side on the low grey wall, looking over the tops of the orange trees in the orchard below, and they talked together in occasional whispers—ordinary enough words, without a doubt, but to them touched with something of the fairylike beauty by which they were enveloped. Then, without warning, a thing of wonder and horror, came that cataclysm of diabolical sound which no one who heard it ever forgot. Its prelude was a great flame of fire—red fire, as it seemed—leaping from the middle of one of the largest battleships. A twin flame blazed up from another of those dark silent shapes, and it was as though the fires of hell were shooting upwards into the sky, shedding all the time a hideous, terrifying illumination. The figures of men upon the ships were suddenly visible, running about apparently in purposeless terror. The terraces of the houses along the beach, the little skiffs lying at anchor, the Casino, with its dining tables and groups of men and women, the promenades with their loungers, the long line of cafés with their diners and dancers—all these flashed out from nowhere into momentary prominence. Even the villas upon the hills towards Cannes were disclosed in that fearful glare like toy houses, grotesquely, unnaturally distinct; and Palm Beach Casino, like a plaything from a child's dolls' house, leaped into being for those few amazing seconds, with the huge round dining room, the tables outside, the very bodies in the piscina, the whole outline as no one before had ever seen it or ever would again, clearly and faultlessly visible. All this was a matter of seconds. Then the great silence was broken. There came a roar travelling up from the sea to the mountains and passing on like the thunder of a mighty earthquake, a deafening, devastating sound, as though something in the bosom of the earth had snapped, and continents had parted from their enveloping seas. In those last fractional seconds of lurid glow, there was a sudden swift vista of destruction, a ghastly forerunner of that which the ensuing blackness was to leave to the imagination. Huge fragments of what a few minutes before had been solid and proud structures were flung in disjointed masses into the air. There was a crashing of windows for miles. A long, narrow edifice of seven storeys, between Golfe Juan and the main road, split in two and crashed to the ground. Then the sea rose up as though to take its share in the great upheaval. A mighty trough

parted what a minute or two before had seemed like a glassy lake, and from the far side of it came waves mountains high. The small boats in the harbour rocked like frenzied things. The weaker houses collapsed, the walls of the cafés round the harbour were split, the masonry fell in all directions. Then, with a hideous suddenness, darkness—a pool of black, angry darkness, with tongues of fires here and there breaking through its sombre mantle. All that remained of that brief period of terrible pandemonium was the faint echo of that tangled, hysterical tumult of human voices, pealing out with unnatural strength, a human diapason of terrified agony. When that, too, was over, the silence was appalling. Closer and closer, after that first torrent of hysterical words and questions, Sarah had crept into her companion's arms. He found her clinging in silent passion to his body, her fingernails gripping at his flesh, her panic-stricken eyes still bent downwards. His first words seemed to be the most ridiculously inadequate which had ever left his lips.

"An explosion, Sarah! Terrible! Thank God you were out of it!"

Her own powers of speech were gone. She could do nothing but clutch at him and moan. The next change was more light, and with it, alarming though its disclosures, came somehow a vague, disturbing relief. One of the smaller cruisers was on fire. Flames were springing from the windows of a row of villas and, from some concealed place in the hills, where they had been installed for the manœuvres, a long array of searchlights were flashing down into the bay. The whole sea appeared to be raging, as though lashed by a storm. Two or three of the other craft were in collision, and the sirens of some of the others were blowing frantically. The two watchers in the mountains sat there now, no longer in silence. Their tongues were freed, though all speech seemed inadequate.

"Terrible!" he muttered. "But it seems worse than it is. Remember that three quarters of the men on the big ships were on land."

She drew a deep sigh.

"Thank God you were with me," she murmured.

He rose and shook himself.

"Perhaps we'd better go down," he suggested. "One might be able to do something."

She clung to him desperately.

"Please don't—don't move," she begged. "I couldn't bear it. Wait for a time."

He took her once more into his arms and they sat there until the cold dawn.

CHAPTER XXII

Tellesom pushed his way the following morning through the crowds which thronged the promenade stretching from Juan to Golfe Juan, all bent on viewing at close quarters the ghastly scene of destruction. There were miles of windowless and shattered villas. One of the largest cafés was flat upon the ground. A long line of bathing huts lay about in grotesque positions. Half the smaller craft in Golfe Juan harbour were either submerged or smashed to pieces against the stone wall of the quay and, grimmest sight of all, two of the great new battleships which had been the pride of the fleet had disappeared, one showing the tops of her giant funnels and the other her distorted conning tower. . . .

Tellesom felt a light touch on his shoulder. Felix Behrling, spick and span in white linen clothes and sun hat, grinned at him in benign fashion.

"Well, my friend," he exclaimed, "things happen in the far corners of the earth when giants pull the strings! Let us drink a mixed vermouth together."

"I am not sure that I understand you," Tellesom replied. "This invitation sounds oddly to me."

He would have passed on, the frigid Englishman, coldly angry, but Behrling's grip upon his shoulder tightened.

"My confrère, the old methods have passed," the latter declared. "Friends and enemies consort freely together nowadays. It is to the advantage of both. I am a thirsty man and I hate drinking alone. The smell of burnt and charred metal offends my nostrils. To-day let us be like schoolboys and cry 'Pax.' You can be on your guard against me. I shall be on my guard against you. I shall tell you what I choose to tell you and you—you tight-lipped Britisher—you will tell me nothing. What does it matter? I, Felix Behrling, have no hatred for you, Charles Tellesom, in whom I recognise indeed a kindred spirit. We are enemies in cause only. Let us remember that. Let us sit down together."

Tellesom shrugged his shoulders and his companion led the way to a small café which had been left standing. People were too engrossed with the various sights to drink, and the place was empty. The waiter whom they summoned shook his head dolefully.

"Every bottle of vermouth is smashed," he declared. "The patron has gone to Nice for more. We are ruined; everybody along the front is ruined."

"In that case, we will drink a bottle of champagne for the benefit of the house," Behrling announced. "I see a case of Cliquot there."

Tellesom made a wry face, but he accepted the glass which the waiter presently

filled with wine.

"It is against my principles," he remarked, "to drink with murderers—especially murderers of women."

"Pshaw!" Behrling scoffed. "One cannot be squeamish these days. One woman—and a false jade at that! How many people, I wonder, perished last night?"

Tellesom made no sign, but he raised his glass to his lips to drink.

"I see no connection," he maintained.

Behrling laughed heartily. He unfastened a button or two of his waistcoat and leaned back in his chair.

"Play your own game in your own way, my friend Tellesom," he advised. "Keep the blinkers and mufflers on and let your tongue wag to its own tune, but the cleverest are those who realise that their adversaries are not fools. Have you had your morning collection of news?"

"The papers are all full of this affair," Tellesom replied evasively.

"Your news comes to you through no newspapers; neither does mine," Behrling continued. "I shall tell you something which may be news or not. There has been another large withdrawal of gold from England. The pound had dropped to a new low level and yesterday afternoon there was something like a panic on the Stock Exchange. I wonder how much the poor British are losing? A very terrible reflection that. Financially I am afraid that your unfortunate nation is in a bad way, Tellesom. She has parted with too much of her gold. She cannot stand this lowering of the exchange. Her trade and industries will—how should you say that?—go to pot."

"Well, she's weathered a good many storms in her time," Tellesom observed.

"Smug but illogical," Behrling declared, refilling his glass to the brim with champagne. "Now you sit there, my young friend, thinking to yourself, 'I will drink with this enemy, but he shall learn nothing from me, and perhaps I shall learn something from him, because he has an open mouth.' You shall not be disappointed. I will treat you as I love to treat people. But first, permit me."

He filled Tellesom's glass, and somehow or other Tellesom, although champagne in the morning was his special abomination, suffered him to do so without protest. Behrling leaned back in his chair. No one else was at their end of the café. From outside came the tread of ceaselessly moving feet, from the wayfarers walking up and down, gazing at the wonders of that night of disaster.

"Once more, let me tell you," Behrling recommenced, "that I will treat you as I love to treat people. There is a great man moving in the world just now. I take off my hat to him. He is a greater than either of us and he has the courage which we Germans love. Lean towards me, Tellesom. Here come secrets. We Germans did

not wish to sign the Disarmament Treaty. The great man knew this and he took a hand in the game. He has forced our consent from us, and when the congress at Geneva sits again, Germany will sign. There is news for you, my friend—news before it appears in the journals. Germany will sign the Treaty of Disarmament. He sent for Anselm Loeb and he turned him inside out. He has forced our consent from us."

"It is great news if it be true," Tellesom admitted.

"Oh, it is true," Behrling assured him. "Your great man would have told you himself, but he loves silence. We shall sign. Very well. We are dealt with. Two others of the great Powers refused for their own reasons to sign. You know who they are," he continued lowering his voice as he glanced towards a crowd of loiterers who had just entered. "France was unwilling to part with the pride of her navy—those two magnificent cruiser battleships, with their new equipment and their wonderful secret. Your great man went to Paris and he failed. France would not sign. It must have been," he went on, with something like a sneer disfiguring for a moment his big face, "the hand of the Almighty which has launched a thunderbolt upon those two ships, for there they are at the bottom of the bay, no longer to be reckoned with. France, too, will sign."

Behrling took a long drink from his glass of wine, wiped the perspiration from his forehead, and looked around the room, a great man, genial and full of good fellowship, taking his ease in pleasurable surroundings. Yet, while he looked, he reckoned up those loiterers. He convinced himself that they were what they seemed to be. Once more he leaned forward.

"There remains England," he said. "England is being dealt with. Did you see what the sterling touched in New York yesterday? Ask yourself what proud nation could face a continuance of this? Day by day your credit will drop. Your statesmen, a week or two ago, were scoffing at this man. They know better now. From seven different countries, behind the banks in which he stands supreme, comes this insistent call for gold. Never for themselves, mind. Always for the man whose agents haunt the offices of the bullion brokers in London. Great Britain is hesitating to-day; to-morrow she will consent. No country can live or trade without its gold. You know that well enough. England also will sign, and there is your Disarmament Treaty a complete and operative document—and your great man triumphant."

Tellesom waved to the barman.

"At least," he suggested, "we will behave like civilised beings. You have nothing left in your glass? You shall have another bottle with me. At any rate, you have provided me with something to smile about. You have shown me what I always

suspected—that you have the imagination of a Jules Verne. Another bottle at once, barman. If I can, I will make you drunk and you will talk a little too much. Have you any information to give me, Behrling, beyond those portentous surmises of yours which really amount to nothing? I don't want to waste my morning."

The German grinned.

"You are beginning to open your mouth and speak in the language which I understand better," he said. "I will drink another bottle with you, but we must be brief, for along the promenade I can see the little joy of my life twirling her skirts. If she sees this café standing, she will know where to look for me. Your great overlord, your mighty Chief, has bent two proud nations to his will. The Disarmament Treaty will be signed. The Peace Pact he looks upon as a thing already ordained. Yet, to us who know the game, sometimes on his side, sometimes against him, there recurs always this one question: how is it that he takes no account of the greatest enemy of peace in the world to-day—the last bidden to the table—Russia?"

Tellesom fixed a cigarette into his holder. He was puzzled. Behrling wagged a fat forefinger at him.

"Now you are asking yourself, more than ever, why this conversation, why this confidence, unless indeed it is wine-inspired? If I were to tell you, you would not believe. I shall spare my breath. Vitznow spoke his last word at Moscow a week ago. Russia does not intend to sign the Peace Pact. You have been in Russia, Tellesom, secretly. I know that. Your Chief's spies have brought in faithful word of what is going on there. The Soviet Government is a failure. A few cities can be dressed to look respectable. The whole of the peasant class is in sullen revolt. The country is becoming unproductive. Ruin is at hand. There is one thing that can save her, and that is war; and war Russia—or rather Vitznow and Postinoff—mean to have."

"You should know all about it," Tellesom observed, lighting his cigarette. "It is no secret even to the man in the street that you and Russia have private understandings."

"We have half a dozen," Behrling agreed, "but for the most part they are not worth the paper they are written upon. Russia is not in a position to carry out her promises or Germany to pay her for them if she did. The Imperialists of my country are still ineffectually seeking to make a catspaw of Russia. They said to themselves, we can overrun Europe. Russia at the time resisted. At present she is brooding. There I stop. Let your great man throw out his feelers, let him send out his spies to crawl over the country like mice and study the reports of those who get back alive. He will know then that if Moscow has its way, there will be no peace in Europe

whilst Postinoff and Vitznow live."

Behrling stumbled to his feet, gulped down his wine, tightened his belt, and buttoned up his waistcoat.

"The little one is too precious to risk in your company," he declared. "She approaches. I may spare you a dance with her one night in Maxim's, where the place is too full for whisperings, but here, no. Good morning, my cryptic friend. Buzz off one of your urgent messages to wherever the great man may be, and tell him all I have told you, and bid him think about it. I am in the main your enemy and his, but I have spoken the truth this morning."

Behrling made benevolent departure. The bartender paused in his task of polishing a glass and looked after him. He leaned forward towards Tellesom.

"A friend of Monsieur?" he enquired.

Tellesom shook his head.

"Scarcely that," he admitted.

The barman was still looking through the open door. There was a cloud upon his face.

"Monsieur had better be careful," he said. "He seems to have the good temper, but he is a man not to be trusted. I have friends who know him. He is dangerous."

Tellesom finished his drink, lit a cigarette, and nodded his farewell.

"I am inclined to think that you may be right," he agreed.

CHAPTER XXIII

Tellesom drove his two-seater car slowly back along the winding coast road to the Eden Roc, left it in the shade of some trees, and strolled into the long bar. Sarah was seated in a corner there, in one of her Parisian bathing costumes, with a marvellous peignoir round her shoulders, but with no indication of having bathed. Two or three young men were standing talking to her, but she waved her hand so eagerly that Tellesom, who, in these days had abandoned, to some extent, his first attitude of complete isolation, crossed the floor and joined them.

"Been down to see the mess?" one of them asked.

Tellesom nodded.

"Amazing sight!"

"Say, what seems to me so queer," another of the American youths declared, "is that when we on the other side have a smash-up like this we seem to lose about a thousand lives. They're saying down there that, sailors and all, there were barely eighty casualties."

"It happened to be the night of the great fête," Tellesom pointed out. "Any other night there must have been at least five or six hundred killed."

"If you come to think of it, it's more than queer," Sarah reflected. "Doesn't it almost seem as though some person had decided to blow up those two battleships and yet wanted to spare as many human lives as possible?"

Her immediate cavalier shook his head.

"I guess it was an accident, all right," he said. "These French chaps don't give away their secrets, but we all know that they had some very high explosives on board—just as the Germans had that new lining for their small guns at Jutland. Keep their secrets pretty tight, these fellows, and I don't blame them."

"Explosives at sea are terribly dangerous things," an older man who had been in the navy, explained. "You can isolate them on land all right, but a little extra heat—sometimes they say even a hot draught will do the hell of a lot of damage."

"One certainly can't conceive the idea of any one going about with a hobby for blowing up battleships," Tellesom remarked. "Anyhow, I've seen all I want to see of that end of the coast. Are you coming in, Miss Hincks?"

She sprang at once to her feet.

"But you haven't changed yet. Why not come and sit down on the rocks with me instead? I'm not keen about bathing."

"I'll change into a bathing kit, if you don't mind," Tellesom decided. "I have everything in my locker here and it won't take me a minute."

She nodded and he turned away. One of her many admirers watched him disappear.

"Say, that's a fine chap, that Tellesom," he declared. "Seemed very quiet and stand-offish when he first came, but he's no fool at any job he takes on. I saw him whack our pro at tennis the other evening, and they tell me that Zachary, the Monte Carlo man, is coming over this afternoon and bringing an amateur for a game with him and the pro here. My money's on Tellesom. He's got a terrible swerve in his serves and though he hasn't got much of a backhand drive, he can place them all right."

"Good-looking chap," another youth conceded. "I'd like him fine if he didn't monopolise Miss Hincks."

She shook her head pathetically.

"I can't help it," she confessed. "I've fallen for him. You boys are such boys. Why don't you grow up?"

"Sorrow," one of them confided, "is ageing me fast."

"I'd bribe the registrar at home if that would do me any good," another suggested.

"It's dignity you lack, and restraint," Sarah told them. "You are much too ardent, or try to be. You don't lead up to things in the proper manner. You're either crudely amorous or noisy."

"Well, we never get anywhere, anyway," her chief admirer complained.

"Take a few lessons from Colonel Tellesom," she advised him. "He asks for nothing, receives nothing, and hopes for everything. I expect he'll get it some day," she concluded, with a little sigh.

"Curse the fellow!" one of the others muttered. "Bring a round of cocktails, barman. You're depressing me, Miss Sarah."

"I have good news for you all," she announced. "Positively in a few days my mother arrives. She is younger than I am, far better-looking, and she loves boys."

"There is only one Sarah," the dispenser of cocktails groaned.

"Well, don't drown your sorrows in drink," she enjoined, rising to her feet and strolling off to meet Tellesom. "See you all here before lunch. . . . Instead of bathing," she whispered, taking Tellesom's arm, as they reached the steps, "just a word or two, please."

She led the way down on to the rocks. No place, however, seemed to suit her. There were little groups of people or solitary sun bathers in every corner. She walked to the springboard.

"We'll swim to the raft," she suggested. "There's no one there and no possibility

of being overheard. What I want to say sounds so silly. I must say it to you when we are entirely alone."

He threw off his dressing gown and they plunged in. They were both excellent swimmers, and with a few, long graceful strokes they reached their destination. They were fifty yards from the shore and the raft itself was deserted. She scrambled up with a little sigh of relief.

"Now, my dear Charles," she began, "prepare to answer my questions and to answer them truthfully."

"You know my limitations," he reminded her.

"I know," she assented, "but perhaps you can tell me this. Have you any enemies down here?"

"Half a dozen, at least," he assured her. "I have just had to drink champagne with one down at Juan. Why do you ask?"

"Listen and you will know," she told him. "This morning at ten o'clock, I came up from my first bathe. Two men were seated on the bench just outside the hotel. One of them was Gaudois, the tennis pro; the other was a young man whom I have not seen before. They were a perfectly harmless-looking couple. Gaudois is always about the hotel, as you know, when he isn't playing, and he seemed to be talking to his companion about a certain sort of backhand stroke. I said good morning to Gaudois as I passed. The other man rose quite politely and I should probably have thought no more about it, but when I got into my room I stepped out on to the balcony for a moment. They were just below me, the air was very still, and I happen to have wonderful hearing. The young man who was with Gaudois was speaking, and there was just something in his tone which struck me—the kind of way a man talks when he is trying not to be overheard."

"'You are sure he can't leave by the other entrance?' he asked.

"'Quite sure,' Gaudois replied. 'One of the lift boys here is a protégé of mine, and he has fifty francs to do nothing but watch and report to me when he comes down.'

"Then they were silent for a few moments. The young man with Gaudois unrolled what seemed to be a bundle of bathing clothes and tied them up again. It appeared to be a very curious collection of articles, but I was too far off to see exactly what they were."

"This sounds very mysterious," Tellesom remarked, with a smile.

Sarah dabbled her feet in the water.

"Please don't make fun of me," she begged. "I am beginning to believe that I have the makings of a first-class detective and I won't be laughed at. I went on

listening for—I can't tell you why—from the first I had an idea that they were speaking of you. I have never liked that tennis pro, and the other man, although he was dressed just like every one else—négligé shirt, linen trousers and sun helmet—had an unfamiliar look about him, and I feel sure that I've seen him about with that man Behrling. I waited for a minute or two, but they said not another word, so I turned back into my room, changed into pyjamas, and sent my maid down to see if you'd gone out. She came back to tell me that she had missed you by less than a minute. You had just left for Juan in your car. I can't tell you what possessed me then, but instead of coming downstairs, I mounted a flight, pretending to myself that I was going to see if Molly was awake yet. As I reached the third floor. I saw a man standing outside your room—the man who had been with Gaudois, the bundle still under his arm. He looked cautiously at the lift and up and down the corridor, but I guess he forgot the staircase. Into your room he went and disappeared."

"This sounds thrilling," Tellesom commented, now genuinely interested. "Tell me, what did you do next?"

"Well, there's a service room just opposite, as you know, by the side of the back stairs, and I came quietly up and stood just behind the door. I know the maid very well and the valet, and I had a hundred-franc note in my hand ready for them if they came along. Fortunately they were busy with their rooms and I didn't see either of them."

"What about the man who went into my suite?" Tellesom asked.

"Well, he came out again in about five minutes, I should think," Sarah continued, "opened the door carefully, glanced along the corridor, and slipped away down the staircase. The bundle he had been carrying was gone. He went out the back way, jumped into a small car, and drove off."

"More and more mysterious!" Tellesom admitted, a puzzled frown upon his forehead. "Did you see Gaudois again?"

She shook her head.

"When I came down," she confided, "he was playing tennis. Now, what could that man have wanted in your room, Charles? Was he a thief or what? And why on earth did he want to leave that bundle there?"

Tellesom reflected for several moments.

"Do you mind," he asked, "if I go straight back to my room? There's something queer about the affair."

She slid off the raft into the water and swam by his side.

"I'm coming with you," she insisted.

They made their way to the steps, changed hastily in the dressing rooms into the

fashionable déshabille of the place, and drove in Tellesom's two-seater up to the hotel. They entered the lift together and she touched the indicator. The landing of the third floor was deserted. She led the way to his room.

"Nonsense!" she interrupted his protest. "That sort of thing doesn't count down here. What does it matter? I'm coming in, anyway."

They stepped inside the bedroom and he closed the door. Everything appeared neat and orderly. Some tennis flannels were laid out upon the bed, and upon an easy-chair was an evening suit.

"My man has the day off," Tellesom explained briefly. "They might have known that."

She looked around at the various articles of furniture.

"We've got to find out," she decided, "what they've planted upon you. I'll look in here; you look in the wardrobe. Hurry up! I have a feeling somehow or other that something is going to happen quickly. The young man who started off in his car went as though he wanted to break his neck. Nothing in these drawers, that I can see. Have you found anything in the wardrobe?"

"Nothing doing."

"What about that small chest of drawers?" she asked, pointing towards it.

"That's full of papers and books," Tellesom assured her. "Nothing of any particular consequence, of course, but it happens to be locked. No one could get into that."

"Have you the key?"

He produced it. She leaned down to examine the lock of the second drawer.

"Some one's scratched this badly," she pointed out. "Open it, please."

He thrust in the key. The drawer swung open easily. In one corner was a neat little packet of notebooks, some maps, a few dictionaries, and a Polish directory; in another, concealed under a towel, was a strange little bundle. He looked at it in amazement. Then he drew it out and laid it upon the bed. There were two towels rolled up together, clearly marked in the corner—'Hotel Provençal.' In the middle was a handkerchief of fine linen, crumpled and torn, embroidered with some initials and a coronet, a string of pearls, and a thick pile of *mille* notes. Tellesom stared at them for a moment with the ingenuous expression of a startled youth. Suddenly the truth flashed in upon him.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "That is Clara von Trugner's coronet. She was staying at the Provençal. That is where she was murdered. I was out that night. What a hellish idea!"

"Listen!" she whispered.

They heard heavy footsteps in the corridor. She locked the door while he hastily rolled up the bundle. The footsteps passed on. She opened the door and peered out.

"It's all right," she told him. "It was old General Mayne. Come along!"

He hurried on to the landing. She almost snatched the bundle from him.

"No, you don't," she insisted. "You don't move one single step with these. They're going into a spare trunk in my room, locked up. They can't hurt any one there. We'll decide what to do with them later. Listen! Leave the hotel by the front way and meet me in the bar. I'll drive your car down, say I borrowed it—only go! They'll rush this thing for fear of your coming back. There was no one in the office when we came up or behind the *concierge's* desk. Try to get away without any one seeing you."

"I'm not going to leave you with those things," he protested.

There was a touch of her father in her face as she swung round to him.

"Don't be a fool," she cried. "They won't do me any harm. I'm going down by the back stairs. I know the way. I shall just call in my room for a moment and I shall be in the bar before you are." . . .

Tellesom had luck. He descended to the ground floor without seeing a soul. In the hall, the concierge was speaking on the telephone with his back to the corridor. The clerk who was generally standing there had bustled out in answer to the bell announcing newcomers. Tellesom strolled to the front door, through an empty hall, down the steps, and made his way along the board walk just in time to arrive at the bar as Sarah herself entered from the other door. She greeted him with a little wave of the hand.

"Give me a dry Martini," she begged breathlessly.

"What you two find to talk about all the time I can't imagine," her arch-admirer grumbled. "I think I shall come and join the conspiracy, whatever it is. Your heads were almost touching on the raft. Water good? I haven't been in this morning."

"This cocktail's going to taste better," Sarah answered, as she led Tellesom away. "Never mind about us, Ben. We've got a great scheme. We're going to write a novel together."

They sat down before an open window. Sarah stretched out her hand for some potato chips and drained her cocktail.

"I'm in it!" she exclaimed. "I'm off! I'm a conspirator! Charles, I feel the whole thrill of it. As I got into the car to drive down, who do you think turned in at the gate? Well, that young man who was with Gaudois, the pro, and the most official-looking person you ever saw. I believe he was the stumpy little man who was lunching here when they came and told him about the murder."

Tellesom frowned.

"What a damned fool I was to let you have those things!" he muttered.

She laughed scornfully.

"They're in the safest place on earth," she declared. "Look who's here! They haven't seen me! Sit tight! I'm going to desert."

She swung through the window on to the little terrace below, into the midst of a group of her friends. Her arm went around the shoulder of young Ben Tyson, the most ardent of her admirers.

"Thought you were being neglected, did you, Ben?" she asked soothingly. "Well, let's all have a cocktail in the corner outside here. I'll buy them for you, just to show there's no ill feeling. Come along! The whole crowd!"

Sarah was back amongst them. Her laugh was the loudest. Her gaiety the most infectious. Apparently no such person as Tellesom existed.

CHAPTER XXIV

Tellesom was sipping his cocktail, having first of all emptied the contents of Sarah's glass and pushed it to a distant part of the table, when a waiter appeared around the corner of the bar, ushering in a man whom he recognised at once as the Commissaire of Police at Antibes. They approached the table where Tellesom sat. The official saluted stiffly.

"Monsieur Tellesom?"

"That is my name."

"I require a few words with you, officially and in private," the commissaire announced.

"That sounds rather alarming," Tellesom replied. "What's it all about?"

"Too grave a matter for light speech, I fear," the other declared. "At the same time, it is not my wish to inconvenience you. Perhaps you will accompany me to the hotel. We can arrive there at a larger measure of privacy."

Tellesom rose reluctantly to his feet.

"If you wish it," he assented. "I am always anxious to answer questions any official of the law may wish to ask me, but I suppose you realise that you are making me a trifle conspicuous by addressing me in this fashion."

"That is not my affair, Monsieur. You will be so good as to follow me."

Tellesom finished his cocktail in leisurely fashion.

"You might remember when you address me, Monsieur le Commissaire," he enjoined, "that I hold the rank of Colonel in the British Army, and am entitled to be so addressed."

"That may be, if you have told the truth about your name," was the brusque retort.

Tellesom looked down at his inquisitor meditatively. The longer he looked, the more uncomfortable the little man became.

"I must tell you frankly," the former confided at last, "that I find your manner somewhat offensive. I have changed my mind to some extent. I am not inclined to leave this place and go to the hotel with you, until I know your business. There is an empty room here which is used for luncheon when the weather is bad. You can follow me there if you like and I will answer any questions which I think fit."

Tellesom strolled towards the empty, covered restaurant and the commissaire was forced to follow. They reached a retired table and Tellesom at once seated himself in the most comfortable chair.

"Now be so good, sir," he begged, "as to explain your visit and put your

questions."

"I have to ask you—Colonel," the other began, with a little gulp at the title, "what you were doing on the night of September 2d?"

Tellesom threw back his head and gazed at the ceiling.

"What day of the week was it?"

"Thursday."

"A gala night. I am able to satisfy you. I dined at Juan-les-Pins Casino with Lord Montrose and a party of young people from here."

"And afterwards?"

"I played *chemin-de-fer* for an hour or two, danced at Maxim's, and so home."

"Did you drive home alone?"

"That appears to be more my business than any one else's."

"It is the police who are questioning you," was the pompous rejoinder.

"Then I may be forgiven if I find the police a little over-anxious to assert their privileges," Tellesom observed drily. "However, we will not quibble. So far as I can remember, I drove home my host, Lord Montrose, a young man named Ben Tyson, another young man who is staying in the hotel, but whose name I forget, and a young lady, Miss Sarah Hincks. Having gone so far, I will now add this. I decline to answer any further questions until you explain your presence here."

"I can satisfy you by asking yet another question," the police commissaire declared, with a certain grimness. "Were you acquainted with the unfortunate Madame von Trugner who was murdered at the Provençal Hotel on that night?"

"I had some acquaintance with her," Tellesom admitted. "If my memory is correct, I spoke to her even on that evening in the *chemin-de-fer* rooms."

The commissaire was exultant.

"Ha, ha!" he exclaimed. "And you left the baccarat rooms with her, eh?"

Tellesom reflected.

"I believe I did," he assented. "So far as I remember, I accompanied her to the outside steps of the Casino."

The commissaire was feeling a great deal better.

"And afterwards?" he leered. "It was only a few hundred metres from there to the apartments of Madame."

"I won't dispute your geography," Tellesom replied, "I did not accompany Madame beyond the steps of the Casino, and I stood with her there for only a few minutes, for she was in a bad temper and she had been losing. I know better than to talk to gamblers when they are in that frame of mind."

The commissaire rubbed his hands softly together.

"Let me correct you, Monsieur le Colonel," he said smilingly. "Madame left the Casino that night a very large winner."

"So I have heard. She went back again, and, I believe, won a considerable sum. For her own sake, I regret it very much."

The official glanced towards the door to conceal his disappointment. There was no sign as yet of the help which he needed, the intervention which would enable him to launch his thunderbolt.

"We have information," he said solemnly, "that you have in your possession a pearl necklace and a large amount of money stolen from the rooms of Madame on the night of her murder."

"Then you have managed to become possessed of some particularly rotten information," was the cool reply. "I have nothing of any sort belonging to Madame in my possession."

"You have visited the apartment of Madame at the hotel?" the commissaire asked with unpleasant emphasis.

"I have done nothing of the sort," Tellesom rejoined. "I called upon Madame on her arrival and saw her in the lounge. That would be at least three weeks ago. Since then I have not, as a matter of fact, entered the hotel, except to take a drink at the bar in company with a number of other people."

The commissaire changed his tactics.

"You are a member of the British Secret Service, I understand."

"It seems to me," Tellesom remarked, with somewhat impatient sarcasm, "that you possess a singular aptitude for obtaining false information. I left the services of my Government some years ago—with distinction, it may interest you to know, Mr. Commissaire, and suggestions as to my future of which any man might be proud."

The commissaire was beaten. He could make nothing of this Englishman who spoke French like a native, who remained scornful and unperturbed in the face of the charge brought against him, and who certainly possessed that air of distinction which made it difficult to associate him with this particularly sordid crime. He pretended to reflect. From his pocket he produced a packet of caporals and lit one. Tellesom drew out his own case and followed suit. The commissaire frowned.

"We are in a public place," Tellesom reminded him. "I am not, I hope, for your sake, under any form of arrest, and the smell of that stuff you are smoking would make me ill if I didn't try to drown it. Have you finished with me?"

"No, Monsieur le Colonel, I have not finished with you," the commissaire replied irritably. "I will ask you this question. You have shown yourself an adept at submitting to cross-examination, even of this very mild character. No doubt you have

been in the hands of the police before. At the same time, I will ask you this. Do you for one moment imagine that the affair is finished? Do you imagine that I am satisfied with your replies, that I believe you have been telling me the truth?"

Tellesom blew out a little cloud of smoke and, abandoning his position of ease, leaned across the table.

"Monsieur le Commissaire," he said, "except that you are wearing what I suppose passes"—looking at the other's rather ragged outfit—"as the uniform of a country I respect, I should take you by the collar and throw you out of the place, whatever the consequence. If you desire to progress in your profession, you must learn that it is an impossible thing to address an English officer in such terms."

The little man was beside himself with rage.

"How do I know that you are an officer at all?" he spat at him. "Besides, things may happen. In another five minutes you may be my prisoner. We shall see then."

"Indeed! And what, may I ask, are you waiting for?"

The official rose eagerly to his feet. The two gendarmes, by whom he had been accompanied, had reappeared. They were both empty-handed. The commissaire gazed at them, speechless. The foremost gendarme hurried across the floor and saluted.

"This fellow speaks French," the commissaire warned him quickly. "Come on one side. Let me have your news."

The gendarme obeyed.

"The chamber of Monsieur," he reported, "has been searched by Henri here and myself—I, who am an expert. Every drawer has been ransacked; every possible hiding place explored. The bundle of which we had information is nowhere there."

The official twirled his moustache savagely.

"We have been deceived then!" he exclaimed. "Ha, it is Monsieur le Baron who comes! Now we shall know."

Behrling had looked in from the bar and, recognising the commissaire, strolled into the room.

"An affair of business that I interrupt?" he asked genially. "Ah, no, I see that it is my good friend Tellesom and my friend the commissaire. Inquisitive fellows, these French police, Tellesom," he added, turning towards him. "Quaintly intelligent though, sometimes. They find out things. They have a knack of finding out things."

"A word with you, Monsieur le Baron," the official who was the subject of discussion begged, strutting up to him. "A word with you at once."

"As many as you please, sir," Behrling assented good-humouredly.

Tellesom lounged back in his chair. He was really rather enjoying himself. The

police official drew Behrling out of earshot.

"The room of Monsieur who calls himself Colonel," he confided, "has been searched by experts. There is no bundle such as Monsieur le Baron has described. There is nothing incriminating whatever. Monsieur Tellesom denies that he has ever entered Madame's bedroom. I am in a position the most unfortunate."

Behrling laughed good-humouredly and heartily. He placed his hand upon the little man's shoulder and drew him nearer to Tellesom.

"Master of languages," he said to the latter in German, "listen to me whilst I tell you that these local French police are dunderheads. They see no further than their noses. No wonder that it is difficult to bring a crime home to the guilty party."

"Even with a little outside help," Tellesom remarked drily.

Behrling was upon him like a flash.

"So you know about the outside help!" he exclaimed. "My agents were clumsy for once, eh? Good! That may help us. I thought I saw my way before I came in. Now I feel sure of it. Monsieur le Commissaire, you say that you have searched the rooms of this gentleman who rightly describes himself as 'Colonel Tellesom'—a gentleman of great distinction, I assure you—you say that you have searched his rooms without result."

The commissaire extended his hands.

"That was my report," he admitted.

"I will tell you why you have searched them without result," Behrling continued, and there was no good nature now in his voice or smile upon his wrinkled face. "It is lucky that the men who watch for me are wary and long-sighted. Listen, Monsieur le Commissaire. You searched them in vain, because he has an accomplice, because he has an accomplice with whom he mounted to the hotel from here, an accomplice who sits laughing with her friends in the bar behind at the present moment. Send your men back to the hotel. Demand that they search the room, not of this Colonel Tellesom, but of Miss Sarah Hincks."

There was a moment's silence. Tellesom made one of his rare mistakes. He sprang to his feet angrily.

"You will do nothing of the sort," he exclaimed, turning to the commissaire. "Why should you obey the orders of a German spy, which is all that man is. Miss Sarah Hincks is an American citizeness and a very important one. Believe me, if you dare to be guilty of such a gross insult, you will lose your place and your uniform as surely as you stand there."

"Monsieur is discomposed," the police official remarked, with an unpleasantly triumphant smile. "My men will do as Monsieur le Baron has suggested. The room of

Mademoiselle Sarah Hincks is to be searched," he repeated firmly, turning to the gendarmes, "and do your duty thoroughly."

The two men marched out and the commissaire took Behrling on one side. Underneath his truculent attitude, there was still a great deal of uneasiness.

"You understand," he said earnestly, "I place great faith in you. The Americans are a difficult nation. If this means trouble, I hold you to your word."

"You shall have your pension to the last penny and ten thousand francs," Behrling assured him. "It is the truth which I have divined. I saw the man's face. He was touched on the raw. He will be touched again when he finds that beautiful woman driven off with him to your gendarmerie. Trust me, Monsieur le Commissaire. I do not make mistakes."

"But how do you know that the bundle is in the hotel at all?" the commissaire persisted. "How do you know that it was ever in this Tellesom's room?"

Behrling laid his hand upon the other's shoulder and drew him round.

"My friend," he admonished, holding up his forefinger, "look in my face and ask yourself if that is the face of a man who speaks of that of which he knows nothing? That bundle was in the room of Monsieur, and I hit upon the truth when I told you that in a moment of panic it had been removed to the chamber of Mademoiselle. We shall see. With me, you are safe. I would even advise you to place the man under arrest."

But when they turned around, there was no Tellesom in the room.

CHAPTER XXV

It was about twenty minutes later that the police commissaire, who had spent that time at the telephone in frantic communication with various of his branch offices, descended once more to the terrace to find Behrling, an unusually sombre figure, standing there with folded arms, looking at the gay scene below.

"Nothing has been heard of that accursed Englishman at Juan or at Cannes," he announced. "It is a certain thing, however, that he will not escape. He is being watched for at every point. His motor car is still here, so he is probably hiding close at hand. As for my men, they have not yet returned from the search."

Behrling pointed downwards across the clear strip of the sea to the raft. A man stood with his hands poised above his head, in the act of diving. The police official gave a little gasp of surprise.

"It is he! The miscreant!"

"The man has courage, at least," Behrling muttered.

The commissaire was disturbed.

"It is courage which gives one to think," he confessed anxiously. "First of all, you convince me that those evidences of his guilt will be found in his room. We search and there is nothing. Now you are confident that they will be found in the room of the young lady because they went up to the hotel together. After all, this is only surmise. You take things too much for granted for me, Monsieur le Baron. Supposing the room of the Mademoiselle is searched and they still find nothing—where then do I stand? To be laughed at. An object of ridicule—I, the commissaire of Antibes. It is bad enough already, when no arrest has been made. It will be worse still if the Englishman is charged and no evidence is produced. I relied upon you for the evidence. You are failing me, Monsieur le Baron."

"You wait," Behrling advised, trying to conceal his own uneasiness. "The men are not yet back from searching the room of Mademoiselle. Come to the head of the steps. He must not escape us again."

Tellesom sauntered up in leisurely fashion, pausing every now and then to speak to an acquaintance. The sea brine was still glittering upon his cheeks and streaming down his legs. He had the look of a man fresh from the finest tonic in the world.

"How dared you leave when you were still under examination?" the commissaire demanded, as he reached the top step.

Tellesom looked down at the speaker in surprise.

"How was I to know that I was still under examination?" he rejoined. "You have asked me a number of silly questions. You have had the impertinence to search my

room. You have found nothing. I considered that the business, so far as I was concerned, was at an end. As to my bathe—to tell you the truth, I was so fed up with you and our large friend here that I felt that I needed the purification of the sea. . . . So I am still under examination, am I?"

"You are indeed."

"Then I will get into a dry bathing suit, put on my dressing gown, and hear what more you have to say," Tellesom promised. "I warn you, however," he went on, "that my patience is very nearly at an end. I warn you also that the young lady whom you are insulting by your suspicions is the daughter of one of the most influential men in the United States, and even if I am powerless to make you suffer for your various impertinences, he can sweep you out of existence if he chooses. Somehow or other, though," he concluded, strolling away towards the bath house, "I rather fancy that I shall be able to deal with you myself. Don't walk with me if you please. I have a number of very particular friends here, and I don't care much about being seen with either of you. In my present costume, you will admit that I am not likely to attempt escape. I will join you in the indoor restaurant as soon as I have changed."

He increased his pace slightly. Behrling laid a restraining hand upon his companion's shoulder.

"Do you not see what he is trying to do?" he pointed out. "He is trying to frighten you, trying to make you angry. Silence, my friend—that is our attitude—silence and dignity. He will keep his word. He is that sort of man. He will come back."

"But the evidence?" the commissaire exclaimed uneasily. "Why should it be in Mademoiselle's room? Supposing it is not found, what comes of all this? Do we make our apologies and depart? It is unthinkable."

"I do not imagine that we shall need to make any apologies," Behrling assured him. "The evidence we are seeking was in Tellesom's room an hour ago. It must have been removed in a hurry. The girl was with him when he went up to the hotel. Where else could they find a safe hiding place within a few minutes? In her room. Nowhere else, I tell you. You saw for yourself his disquietude when I demanded that the search should be continued there."

"Nevertheless, Monsieur le Baron," the Frenchman admitted, as they turned into the empty luncheon room, "I confess to find myself suffering from some disquietude. Reassure me, I beg of you. You had really then actual evidence of the existence of these incriminating articles in the bedroom of the Englishman before you fetch me here?"

"Monsieur le Commissaire," Behrling said impressively, "I give you my word—I know that they were there. He cannot have disposed of them in the short time which

has elapsed. My conviction is that when your men return they will have been found in the apartment of Mademoiselle. Courage! You are going to make a capture which will ensure your promotion. There will be no more of this grumbling at headquarters concerning various little matters at Juan. In arresting the murderer of Madame von Trugner, you will become a marked man. Trust in me. I have had long experience of these things. I do not make mistakes and, in this case, I know."

The police official lit a cigarette and accepted a mixed vermouth which his companion had ordered at the bar, with some lightening of spirit. Afterwards they made their way into the deserted luncheon room and seated themselves at one of the empty tables. The minutes passed. A fresh fit of uneasiness seized upon the commissaire. Suddenly his eyes shone. A little exclamation broke from his lips. He gripped at his companion's arm. The two gendarmes were descending the stairs and one of them carried under his arm a little bundle wrapped in a towel.

"My friend," he cried, "they have succeeded!"

A great relief dawned in Behrling's face. The lines disappeared. He was himself again—genial, benevolent, expansive. He patted his companion upon the shoulder.

"Congratulations!" he exclaimed. "I myself expected this. It was inevitable."

The gendarmes proudly approached. They disclosed their prize. In rapid sentence they explained how carefully it had been hidden, how cunning, therefore, their search. The commissaire listened with a smile of approval. Then he brought the bundle to a table and unrolled the towels upon which, in red letters, was clearly stitched—"Hotel Provençal." There they were, those incriminating objects of which Monsieur le Baron had spoken. They gloated over them—the huge pile of *mille* notes, the pearl necklace, the towels themselves, the crumpled handkerchief. Marvellous! The commissaire swelled with pride and importance.

"Lay everything upon that table," he commanded. "Now bring me the tablecloth from over there. . . . Cover them up. . . . Good! It is excellent! We are ready now for Monsieur, the English Colonel. Perhaps he will forget this time to sneer."

Tellesom strolled in a few minutes later, attired in a dressing gown of thick silk, with a cigarette in his mouth.

"Any luck?" he asked.

There was a moment's silence. Then he read all that there was to know in the faces of the two men. Nevertheless, he did not flinch.

"So you found your little bag of tricks, eh?" he observed.

The commissaire of police ignored him. In response to some whispered instructions, one of the gendarmes had already left the room. Tellesom started to follow. The commissaire made a sign and the other gendarme barred his progress.

"Events have marched, Monsieur Tellesom—or Colonel Tellesom, if you will," he announced triumphantly. "You will be so good as to remain where you are and not to address the young lady if my messenger is fortunate enough to find her. She will need to cross more frontiers than one to escape. Between you and her, the evidences of guilt are sufficient."

"Let's have a look at them," Tellesom suggested.

The commissaire held out a protesting hand.

"Stay where you are," he enjoined, "and let me remind you, Monsieur, that this affair has reached now a different stage. It would be well for you to adopt a different tone in dealing with it."

Sarah entered as the commissaire concluded his injunctions and Tellesom swung round at the sound of her voice. He said nothing, but his smile itself was an encouragement.

"Who wants me?" she asked. "What is the matter here?"

The police functionary swelled out his chest and approached the table.

"Mademoiselle," he announced, sweeping the tablecloth from the bundle, "these things have been found in your room. Explain their presence there, if you please."

She stood, petrified. One of the gendarmes opened a notebook. They waited for her to speak. She looked across the room and met Tellesom's eyes. The smile still lingered upon his lips, but the eyes themselves were expressionless. They told her nothing.

"In *my* room?" she repeated. "But they don't belong to me."

"There shall be no misunderstanding, Mademoiselle," the commissaire said. "This is an occasion of great seriousness. A short time ago, as you may be aware, a lady was murdered at the Hotel Provençal. There is the necklace she was wearing. There are the notes which represent her winnings that unhappy night. There is a handkerchief which can be identified as belonging to her, twisted and torn as though by a woman in agony. These things are wrapped in towels marked by the Hotel Provençal. I am commissaire of the police for the district of Antibes and, in the absence of my sergeant who should have conducted the examination, I am seeking for the person who killed Clara von Trugner. I ask now for your explanation of these damning evidences of guilt in your room. Did you conceal them there yourself or are you endeavouring to shield some other person? What have you to say?"

"Nothing at all," the girl replied. "I don't understand."

The gendarme, who was standing by her side, held her wrist. Obeying a gesture of the commissaire, the other one advanced towards Tellesom. The latter, however had turned away from the window. He strolled over towards the table with his

customary nonchalance and, with his hands behind his back, gazed curiously down at the various articles disclosed in the folds of the towel.

"It seems to me, Monsieur le Commissaire," he said, "that you are rather jumping at conclusions. Here are some friends of mine," he added, turning his head towards the door. "Listen for a moment, please, to what they have to say."

A motor car had flashed by the window a moment before and three people, who had entered the restaurant by the back door, were now approaching. One was a grey-haired man in very correct morning clothes—a familiar figure in Juan-les-Pins; another a young girl, apparently of the servant class; the third, a neatly dressed woman of middle age.

"This lady," Tellesom announced, extending his hand towards the latter, "is the housekeeper at the Hotel Provençal. I telephoned a few minutes ago, asking her to come here."

"I am acquainted with Madame," the police official acknowledged stiffly. "What has she to do with the matter?"

"I wish her to tell you," Tellesom continued, "whether those towels upon the corners of which the 'Hotel Provençal' is stitched ever belonged to that establishment."

The woman took a step forward and picked up both towels. She handled them for a moment in surprise and then threw them down.

"But indeed no," she denied indignantly. "We would allow nothing of the sort, even in our servants' rooms. Our towels have an entirely different mark and are of fine linen, but those—those are kitchen rubbish. We should not allow them to be used in our sculleries."

"You have taken note of Madame's statement?" Tellesom asked, looking into the blank face of the commissaire. "This gentleman," he added, turning around, "you know perfectly well. Monsieur Parouste is Chef of the Baccarat Rooms at Juan-les-Pins. I wish to ask him a question in your presence. Monsieur Parouste, it is a fact, is it not, that the unfortunate lady who met with her death at the Provençal—Madame von Trugner—after losing at first, afterwards won a large sum at *chemin-de-fer* that night?"

"That is so, sir. Yes, she was a considerable winner," he added, turning to the commissaire.

"Does not that pile of notes prove it?" the latter demanded. "It makes it that she was worth robbing."

"Did Madame von Trugner take the money away that she won?" Tellesom enquired calmly.

"Not one franc, Monsieur," Parouste replied. "She was far too clever for that. Never would she permit in her rooms or on her person more than a *mille* note or so for her necessities. She had one of our safe-deposit vaults at the Casino, and before she left that night she emptied into it, as she did every night, all except the small money which she had upon her. I happen to know this," the Chef concluded, turning once more to the police commissaire, "because on this particular occasion, I escorted her outside and assisted her to unlock her box."

All the geniality had gone from Behrling's face. He was standing a little back, with clenched fist and dull, angry eyes. The police commissaire seemed to have shrunken.

"That pile of notes, then, could scarcely have belonged to Madame von Trugner?" Tellesom persisted.

The Chef leaned over the table, lifted the packet in his hand, and smiled derisively.

"I do not know how these questions arise," he answered, "but you may take my word for it, sir, and you, Monsieur le Commissaire, that these notes never belonged to that unfortunate lady. She was adamant in her determination to have no money in her room. Besides, see, these are tied up with fine thread. We use rubber bands in the Casino. These notes are all of the new issue too. A week ago, we had not a dozen of them in the place."

"Thank you very much, Monsieur Parouste," Tellesom said gratefully. "Now, young Mademoiselle, one moment, please. You were Madame von Trugner's chambermaid at first, and afterwards she took you as her personal *femme de chambre*?"

The girl stepped forward.

"It is true, Monsieur," she confided. "Madame liked my services. She promised that my fortune should be made if I came to her. Indeed, for the week or ten days that I waited upon Madame, I was well content. She paid generously and she was of an easy and pleasant disposition. Regarding hours only she was difficult, and sometimes I dined too late to have the good appetite."

"If you will excuse me, Mademoiselle," Tellesom broke in politely, "the question I wish to ask you concerns this handkerchief. It belonged, I think, to Madame von Trugner."

The girl picked it up and looked at its torn edges and generally ragged appearance in contempt.

"It belonged to Madame," she admitted. "There are her initials, and the small coronet which was on all her things, but how it arrives that it is in a condition like that

I do not know."

"Did you, on any occasion," Tellesom continued—"a truthful answer will not hurt you, Mademoiselle, and it is very, very necessary—part with a handkerchief of your late mistress to any one?"

The girl hesitated for a moment. Then she shrugged her shoulders.

"It is not a sin," she declared. "To monsieur of the police I shall tell the truth. He wishes to know that?"

"I wish to know the truth," the commissaire acknowledged in a hollow tone.

"Then it shall be told. There was a little lady at the hotel—ah, but Monsieur here," she added, turning to Behrling, "*he* knows. It was the little friend of Monsieur. She calls herself Mademoiselle Chloe. She came to me. She wished very much for a memento of my poor murdered mistress. At first I refused. Then I gave her what she asked—a handkerchief—like that, but when I gave it to her it was not soiled or crumpled. It was perfectly clean. *Mon Dieu!*"

"Thank you very much, Mademoiselle," Tellesom said. "No harm will come to you for that little gift. We arrive now, it seems," he added, stepping to the table, "to the question of the pearls. In a very few minutes we shall have with us Monsieur Trenchard, the manager of the Provençal. It is my belief that he may have something to say to us about them."

"I am here," proclaimed a voice in the background, and the manager of the hotel came smilingly forward. "I received your message, Colonel, but I was engaged in welcoming the most distinguished clients. I come alone in my car. I arrive this moment. Ah, my friend the commissaire, I see! There is an affair afoot, yes?"

The commissaire waved his hand. He was scarcely capable of coherent speech. Tellesom was entirely in command of the situation.

"Monsieur Trenchard," he explained, "it is a brief examination concerning that unfortunate affair which occurred in your hotel a week or so ago."

The hotel manager's face became grave.

"A bad business," he observed. "A bad business for the poor lady and also for us. Things are better now, though," he went on more cheerfully. "We have new guests and fresh enquiries every day. We recover—yes, certainly we recover."

"Listen, Monsieur Trenchard," Tellesom continued earnestly, "confidences are sacred—especially to beautiful ladies; still more especially to the dead—but to the police everything must be told. This is a serious affair. When Madame arrived here—it was a month ago, I believe—she had no friends. Even I, who knew her slightly, had not arrived, and she was penniless. Her money was delayed. Is that not so?"

"It is true," Monsieur Trenchard admitted, "but after that Madame showed

herself to be a person of means."

"One moment, Monsieur," Tellesom begged. "I believe that on the evening after her arrival Madame asked you to advance her some money to play with. You explained that it was not your business, that it was an impossibility for you to take such a risk. She then, I believe, deposited with you her pearl necklace, upon the security of which you advanced her fifty thousand francs, or some such sum."

"It is perfectly true," Monsieur Trenchard acknowledged, without hesitation —"perfectly true. I never mentioned the transaction. Why should I? Madame's money arrived within three days. She repaid the fifty thousand francs and I returned to her the pearls. The affair was at an end. Madame indeed was a valuable client and one liked her very much."

"Now, Monsieur Trenchard," Tellesom concluded, lifting the pearls from the table, "are those the pearls of Madame upon which you advanced the fifty thousand francs?"

Monsieur Trenchard adjusted an eyeglass, took the pearls into his hand and examined them for a matter of seconds. Then he handed them back with a deprecating gesture.

"Monsieur jests," he protested. "These are not even the best of imitations. I have never seen Madame wear anything of the sort. She was a very elegant woman. Nothing like those beads, I will answer for it, ever encircled her neck."

The silence which followed had about it curious qualities. Sarah found herself, without knowing why, gripping Tellesom's arm almost hysterically. He himself was standing with his eyes fixed upon Behrling. There was no triumph in his expression; nothing but a faint disgust.

"Thank you all so much for coming," he said, just as the tension began to be unbearable. "You have helped to effectually demolish a conspiracy of the most perfidious nature. Monsieur le Commissaire of police," he continued, and his tone had become very serious indeed, "these towels were faked, the necklace is faked, the handkerchief was procured for this incriminating purpose by the mistress of Behrling here, the German spy. The *mille* notes no doubt came from his secret funds. You are an official whose business it is to look into the affairs of crime. You came here to deal with one. I offer you the solution of another—the crime of vicious and disgusting conspiracy. Behrling," he wound up, swinging round to face him, "I almost liked you once as an enemy. I fancied that there was a spark of greatness in you. I find that you are nothing but a cad."

The *maître d'hôtel* looked down into the room from the top of the stairs. He recognised Tellesom and smiled.

“The table of Monsieur is ready,” he announced.

Tellesom took Sarah’s hand in his and led her away.

“I think that luncheon and a little fresh air,” he suggested, “would be an excellent thing.”

CHAPTER XXVI

With her bathing cap discarded, her fair hair brushed carefully back, her slim, boyish figure subtly concealed by the pyjamas from Paris, Sarah seemed like the child Tellesom had first thought her when she took her place opposite to him at the small luncheon table. There was a touch of fear still left in her eyes, an occasional twitch of her sensitive mouth; otherwise, there were no signs of the terrifying experience through which she had passed.

"I have quite made up my mind," she announced, "not to marry you. Such inhuman cleverness as yours must be devoted to your country alone. They ought to make you Chief of Scotland Yard, or something."

"This is rather unfortunate," he regretted, "because I had just succeeded in making up my mind that I would take all risks and insist upon your marrying me."

"Risks indeed!" she mocked. "What risk could there be in marrying me? Why, I have been proposed to on every rock here by nearly every one of the eligible, and most of the ineligible, young men."

"There is always risk," he reminded her, "when a person of mature years loses his heart to a child. Do you realise that when I am fifty you will be thirty-four?"

"As a matter of fact, I never meant to marry any one less than fifty," she replied. "You've upset all my plans, of course, and as to my ever being thirty-four, you wait until you see Mother. What other risks are there?"

"Well, it never exactly entered into my scheme of life," he went on, "to marry a young woman with millions."

"You are not marrying me; I'm marrying you," she impressed upon him. "You trifle with my affections and you've got to pay."

"Will you allow me pocket money?" he enquired, with a smile.

"Only when you behave yourself. Do you feel in the humour to talk sense for one moment?"

"I could be bullied into it."

"Then tell me, Charles dear, seriously, how on earth did you ever manage to touch a button and produce all those amazing people with their marvellous stories?"

"A good half of it was luck," he confessed; "but then, of course, one had something to go on. You and I knew that the thing was a plant to start with, so we could work backwards with confidence. I felt certain that the pearls, although I hadn't had time to examine them, weren't real. I didn't believe in that handkerchief, and I didn't believe that at the Provençal, where all the small details of the place are so finished, they would really make use of towels like those we found in the bundle.

When we seemed cornered I slipped away and telephoned to the manager, who is really rather a pal, and asked him a few straight questions. The whole thing fell into shape at once. He was only too eager to help. Every one happened to be at large, so he sent them over straight away and followed on himself directly afterwards. He is going to have the finest platinum and gold cigarette case that I can find—no, don't worry, at your father's expense—the next time I pass through Paris."

"And that big German, whom every one loves, you think that he was at the bottom of it?"

"I am perfectly sure of it. He pretended to be a friend of Madame Trugner, but she hated his race and he knew it. What he was trying to do was to make away with me, if only for a time."

He glanced around the room. The only people within possible hearing were a tableful of harmless Americans, with a large family of children.

"Sarah," he confided, "everything has been going your father's way lately. France is pretending to hesitate and demand guarantees, but she will sign the Disarmament Treaty as soon as the proceedings at Geneva are reopened. She pretends, of course, that her change of front has nothing to do with the loss of her two wonderful battleships—one can form one's own idea about that. Anyhow, she is going to sign. There is a Cabinet Council being held in England this afternoon, and England, too, will withdraw her submarine and tonnage stipulations and sign with France."

"How do you know all that?" she asked in amazement.

He smiled.

"I have three despatches a day from the Kingsway Buildings. They come by aeroplane to Lyons and afterwards direct to Antibes. One reached me, you remember, when we were lunching the other day. Behrling's secret service isn't a patch upon ours, but he knows a little of what is going on and he knows very well that I wouldn't be staying on down here unless there was something else coming along in this part of the world. That is why he has just made his second attempt to get me out of the way."

She looked at him uneasily. A gleam of the trouble was back in her eyes.

"I don't like it, Charles," she confessed. "Tell me about the accident to your car the other night?"

"Yes, that was meant for me," he admitted. "My foot was on the step of the car when I left Maxim's, and then I just happened to turn around and catch a queer expression on Behrling's face. I took the hint and went off to Cannes to see that your father was all right."

She looked away across the blue waters of the bay to the villa-dotted slopes of the Californie and beyond to the soft line of the Estérels.

"This place is spoilt for me, Charles," she complained. "It all seems so thoroughly given up to gaiety and happiness that one can't realise all these disturbing things going on underneath. Couldn't we be sensible and do as any ordinary, reasonable young people would do—take the Blue Train to Paris this afternoon and get married?"

Under cover of a procession of departing lunchers, he patted her hand fondly.

"Sarah dear, we'll do that the first moment it's possible," he promised. "For the next few weeks, though, you must remember that I am on duty."

She sighed.

"Let me help, then. I'm bored with this place now, unless you're round. The crowd seems to have become stupid all at once, and I can't stand any more of those noisy nights at Juan. After all, I should only be filial if I helped Father a little, through you."

He smiled.

"Well," he assented, "you can come into the fringe of our next little affair, anyhow. Do you feel like tennis this afternoon?"

"Of course I do, if you're playing. But what has that to do with it?"

"There's a far-away connection," he assured her. "Have you ever seen Zachary play?"

"Why, yes. He's the Monte Carlo tennis pro."

"He is," Tellesom agreed, "and he's coming over for a match with our man this afternoon, and afterwards we're going to have a four. You're quite as good as most of the men here. You'd better play with Zachary and I'll play with our man."

"What fun!" she exclaimed. "Latish, I hope."

"Latish for our set," he promised. "We'll start at four o'clock."

She looked at him with a sudden gleam of interest in her eyes.

"Is the tennis anything to do with being on the fringe of things?" she asked.

"It might have," he admitted guardedly. "Zachary might be quite an interesting person to us just now."

"Do you want me to vamp him?" she suggested, with cheerful enthusiasm.

"Certainly not."

"From what I remember of him, he seemed rather a nice boy," she sighed.

"On second thoughts," he reflected, "there is perhaps a certain risk in introducing the feminine element into this affair."

She laughed at him derisively.

"Too late!" she exclaimed. "But anyhow," she added, leaning across to him, "I'm not really very fond of Russians."

Their conversation was suddenly disturbed. The commissaire of police had arrived from below and made unobtrusive progress to their table. They looked up from their whispered conversation in time to intercept his bow.

"Mademoiselle et Monsieur," he said, stiffening his back once more, "I am a man who knows when right is right and wrong is wrong. Therefore, having duly considered the little matter, now happily disposed of down below, I present myself here to offer you both my sincere apologies for any trouble or anxiety I may have caused you."

"The matter is at an end," Tellesom assured him.

"Quite finished with, so far as I am concerned," Sarah murmured graciously.

"What," Tellesom enquired, "has become of Behrling?"

"I do not know," the police commissaire confessed. "He is a man of assurance the most extraordinary, but he is also a schemer and a liar. He is for the moment outside the law, but let him come inside it," the little man added, his muscles tensing and an angry light shining out of his eyes, "and we shall see to it that he plays no more of these strange pranks. Mademoiselle—Monsieur!"

The little man departed.

"I wonder what has really become of that adorably wicked person?" Sarah asked.

"In the train for Berlin, I should think."

Tellesom happened at that moment to glance across the room and his wineglass nearly slipped from his fingers. Chloe, in outrageous pyjamas, with her dazzling smile, her great eyes wandering everywhere, her greetings freely dispensed to right and to left, was making her way to a distant table, and behind her, in his neat linen suit, his hair freshly brushed, his whole countenance reflecting good will, peace and amiability, followed Felix Behrling.

"Well, I'm damned!" Tellesom exclaimed.

CHAPTER XXVII

Zachary, whose name had appeared so frequently in Tellesom's recent despatches from Kingsway Buildings, was rather a surprise. He was tall, with fair hair inclined to curliness, healthily tanned cheeks, deep-set blue eyes, and the smile of a boy. In his well-cut tennis flannels and with his lithe, supple movements, he might still have been in his teens. It was only in repose that one saw the faint lines, and a certain grimness about the mouth became apparent.

"A most enjoyable afternoon's tennis," he declared, as he leaned back on a seat at the end of the court and watched his glass being filled from a jug of iced wine cup, sent for by Tellesom. "We had to work very hard—Miss Hincks and I—to avoid a worse defeat. Very good though Mademoiselle is, never again should we attempt to play you and Gaudois with only half fifteen."

He lifted his tumbler to his lips and drained its contents. Tellesom looked at him in covert amazement. They had been playing for almost two hours—the first part of the time under a grilling sun—and there was not a single bead of perspiration upon his forehead.

"You must keep wonderfully fit," Tellesom remarked.

"I do keep fit," the other agreed. "What is there else for a young man to do, who earns his living by games? I swim, I play tennis, I dance until midnight. After that I sleep. It is a healthy life. It is better than London. I was in London for a month, but it was not good."

He spoke English faultlessly, but with that slight hesitation in choosing his words peculiar to his country people. He was a very picturesque-looking person, as he leaned back once more in his seat, and Tellesom studied him curiously. In his pocket was the young man's dossier and it certainly did not bear out this legend of the simple life.

"Where do you go to from here, or rather from Monte Carlo," he enquired.

"But I do not go," the young man confided. "My contract is by the year. We wish people to understand that Monte Carlo is a summer as well as a winter place. I am always there and there is always tennis. In the winter there is work, of course, and the tournaments attract great crowds, but throughout the summer now there is always some one who is wishful to play. Yesterday, I could not have accepted your invitation. I had to play for three hours with the secretary of Sir Mark Ezerum."

"Is he as interesting as his master?"

"That I do not know, because I am not acquainted with his master. We have played two or three times. I give him thirty. He works very hard. When we have

finished, he is tired, for he is not in good condition, like I am. He is too tired to speak much. He takes his one long drink and he goes."

"You have never met Sir Mark then?"

"Yes, I have met him. Your racquet should be receiving attention by this time, Colonel Tellesom. Forgive me."

He placed the racquet in its press with deft, swift fingers and accepted another tumbler of the cup.

"Do any of your old friends ever come down to visit you?" Tellesom asked.

Zachary set down his tumbler, only half-emptied this time. He looked at his companion out of the depths of his frank blue eyes.

"You are Colonel Tellesom," he said, "once in the Secret Service of the British Government, now working for some incomprehensible person in an unfathomable background. You ask me questions—me, Zachary, the tennis professional. What is there that I can tell you? What is there I know which you want to discover? You can take my life and turn it inside out. I am a simple Russian exile, earning my living, which too few of my people care to do."

Tellesom nodded thoughtfully.

"Very well put," he admitted. "You might be considerably assisted in that wholesome endeavour of yours if you would consent to answer one or two questions."

"I do not understand," the young man acknowledged. "What is a wholesome endeavour?"

Tellesom indulged in an apologetic gesture.

"I beg your pardon. What I meant was that the task of earning your living might be made a little easier if you cared to help me towards some information which I am seeking."

A smile broke across the young man's face.

"Information? You mean the cut on those back-hand drives which got past you so often? It would be an affair of the courts, that, and Miss Hincks is learning something from Gaudois."

"Yes," Tellesom acquiesced thoughtfully, "I should like to learn that cut stroke of yours. In the meantime, I have a friend who is willing to give five hundred pounds for a trifle of information which has nothing to do with your famous back-hand drive, or with tennis at all."

Zachary looked not quite so young. He glanced stealthily at his companion, but the latter was engrossed in lighting a cigarette.

"Alas," he murmured, "tennis is the only subject upon which I am well informed.

Your friend probably mistook me for some one else. There is Andrew Zachary of Budapest, who is a great collecter of coins. My name is Paul."

"I made a mistake just now," Tellesom admitted. "Just a slip of the tongue. A thousand pounds it was my friend said, not five hundred."

Three sets of gruelling tennis had brought no signs of undue warmth to Zachary's face, yet at that moment two little beads of perspiration glistened upon his forehead.

"A thousand pounds," he acknowledged, "is a great deal of money; but what information could I possibly possess worth that sum, or half of it, to any one?"

"You would like me to be perfectly frank?" Tellesom asked.

"It would be the simplest way of dealing with the matter," the young man declared. "In no other way could we progress."

"I am an advance agent," Tellesom confided, "of an American financier, who is one of the richest men in the world. He is interested in oil. He has also a hobby for developing railways and public utilities in any country which needs his help in these directions."

The young man felt for his cigarette case. Tellesom proffered his own and they settled down again to the discussion.

"Your friend should turn his attention to Russia," Zachary remarked, inhaling the smoke from his cigarette.

"Russia is already in his mind. These things, however, as you know, need a considerable amount of diplomacy, and, in my friend's case especially, a good deal of secrecy. He is one of those men whose movements and finance are watched all over the world. He likes to work secretly."

"It is to be understood," Zachary assented.

The tennis lesson had come to an end. Sarah, however, in response to a gesture from Tellesom, had turned away towards the hotel, Gaudois by her side.

"My Chief's desire, therefore," Tellesom went on, "is to keep away from Russia himself, but to get into touch with one or two of the most prominent Russians of the day with a view to making certain proposals to them, and if he can secure definite assurances that these are likely to be satisfactorily received, to accompany them afterwards to Russia."

"Accompany?" Zachary repeated.

Tellesom nodded.

"The two Russians whom he has in mind," he explained, "are the only two who count in Russia to-day—Postinoff and Vitznow."

"Ah!"

Zachary's monosyllable was noncommittal. Tellesom proceeded.

"You probably do not keep in touch with these matters, but I can tell you this. They were both in Geneva last week and they have a month to wait now before the conference recommences. They are remaining on, I believe, at the hotel, but there is nothing to prevent their taking a week or ten days' holiday. My Chief is yachting in the Mediterranean. He would like to have them brought here, which is, after all, the safest corner of Europe, and visit him. He may then, in complete secrecy, unfold his plans."

Zachary had become restless. He was also a little excited.

"But you are talking over my head," he protested. "These are matters which I do not understand. Geneva? What do I know of Geneva? I have no interest in the politics of Russia of to-day."

"Naturally," Tellesom agreed. "Still, you know these men by name. They are compatriots of yours. You could get into touch with them without compromising yourself or any one. Any form of approach from us is impossible. In brief," Tellesom went on to explain, "my Chief's idea was that you, as a young Russian who, although an aristocrat, is still patriotic enough to be in partial sympathy with his country, might be able to bring about a meeting, and for that service he is disposed to pay."

"Supposing nothing comes of the meeting?" Zachary speculated. "Postinoff and Vitznow are both difficult men. They would probably want to submit any proposals to Moscow."

"If nothing comes of the meeting, you will get your thousand pounds just the same. Your two friends will have had a pleasant little holiday, and my Chief will be disappointed. As a matter of fact, though, when he begins to talk business, something generally happens."

"What is the name of your Chief?" Zachary asked curiously.

A little murmur of impatience escaped Tellesom.

"My dear young friend," he protested, "haven't I been all this time explaining to you that my Chief's name must not be mentioned at all, until negotiations are fairly under way. You must take my word for this much. If business, or prospective business, arises from this meeting, he is in a position to put his hand upon five hundred million dollars within a week. That is the amount he had placed on one side for investment in either your country, or in another quarter which I may not mention, provided he is able to come to terms."

"Five hundred million dollars!" Zachary repeated incredulously. "Is there any one man in the world with such a sum at his disposal?"

"Several," Tellesom assured him. "The only point is that my Chief is probably the first to recognise the fact that his own country as a medium for investment has

become absolutely impossible. Every form of enterprise there has been exploited. The shares of every public utility and investment company are standing at so far above their value that to gamble in them is sheer folly. The country is glutted with money. That is why my Chief wishes to withdraw a certain amount of capital and use it where it may become more productive."

The young man was impressed. There was a gleam in his eyes. Money for even the small luxuries of life, notwithstanding several outside allowances, was difficult to come by at Monte Carlo. Often he felt himself inclined to envy the *gigolos*.

"It should not be difficult to come to terms," he muttered. "Russia has the oil. She has the gold and other metals. Russia needs the railways. She needs electric plants. She needs all that capital can buy. . . . My task, then, as I understand it, Colonel Tellesom, is simply to procure the presence here of Postinoff and Vitznow."

Tellesom produced his pocketbook.

"That is all you have to do," he assented, "but remember that it must be incognito. To show you that I am in earnest, here are twenty-five *mille*. The remainder will be yours the day the meeting takes place."

The Russian accepted the money with a little bow. It was a larger sum than he had ever handled on his own account in his life, but he showed no signs of undue emotion.

"Within a week or ten days' time," he promised, "that meeting shall take place. I address you here?"

"Here at the hotel."

Heavy footsteps were heard approaching, thrills of feminine laughter and a familiar male voice. Both men turned their heads. Behrling was passing along one of the smaller walks through the wood, his hand resting upon Chloe's shoulder.

"A dangerous fellow, that," Tellesom observed warily. "Do you happen to know him?"

"He is not of my acquaintance," the Russian answered.

Tellesom, who had shown signs of leaving the moment before, reopened his case and lit another cigarette. Zachary, too, accepted one.

"On second thoughts," the former reflected, "I think I will not ask you to communicate with me here. The bathing is almost finished and I begin to think a change would be pleasant. A week to-day, I will move into the Hôtel de Paris at Monte Carlo. We can meet there and you can tell me by word of mouth what you have arranged."

"It is even better so," the Russian agreed. "You will perhaps find time for some tennis."

Tellesom nodded. He laid his hand for a moment upon the other's shoulder.

"There is one thing," he said, "which I ought to impress upon you. It is very important indeed, for your own sake. These proposals, which I have made to you, the visit of these two men, their subsequent conversations, if any, with my Chief, are affairs which demand an utter and comprehensive secrecy. If a single word of them gets about to any one, everything is at an end. Do you understand that, Zachary?"

"Very easily," the young man replied, as he followed Tellesom's example and rose to his feet. "I am simple, perhaps, but I am not a fool, and there is so much in my past of which one does not speak that I have acquired the gift of reticence. Besides," he added, "as you English put it, does a man kill the goose which lays the golden egg?"

They swung out of the gate and met Sarah in her bathing clothes, on her way down to the sea. She came smiling up to them.

"I am glad to see you again, Mr. Zachary," she said. "Thank you so much for that wonderful tennis. I never enjoyed anything more in my life."

Zachary towered over her in the middle of the flinty road, bareheaded, with the evening sun upon his yellow hair—a fine figure of a man. He bent courteously down.

"It was a great pleasure for me also, Mademoiselle," he acknowledged. "There are few of the ladies who honour me with their patronage who play as you do. You will excuse."

He passed on towards the hotel. Tellesom and Sarah looked after him for a moment.

"What a divinely handsome person!" the latter observed. "Tell me, did I do everything I ought to? Disappear at the right time and that sort of thing? Gaudois was only polite with an effort. He was much more interested in wondering what you were saying to Zachary than in escorting me to the hotel."

He took her arm and they started down to the sea.

"You played your little part perfectly, dear," he assured her. "I only wish I could feel satisfied about my own."

CHAPTER XXVIII

Tellesom, installed very much against his will at the Hôtel de Paris in Monte Carlo to await the arrival of his world-conquering Chief, sauntered about among the little crowd of idlers in the atrium of the Casino, uncertain whether to obey the summons of the gong and reënter the theatre, where he had spent the earlier part of the evening, or to pass on into the playing rooms. Zachary's gestured invitation to join him in the distant bar passed unnoticed. He felt that for the present he had seen quite as much as was wise of that young man. Then he felt an unexpected touch upon his arm. A girl stood patiently waiting.

"Can I speak to you for a moment?" she begged.

He looked at her in some surprise. She was of unusual type for the place—tall and slim, well but simply dressed, pale, with heavily fringed eyes, eyebrows and eyelashes which had evidently received her earnest attention before the looking-glass, lips daringly vermilion, and complexion, too, which owed none of its colouring to the sun. His first impulse was to draw away. After all, though, her voice was quiet and had quality, and he felt some curious instinct of recognition. He had seen her, perhaps at Juan or at some of the other casinos, where in the brilliant light her faulty make-up would have been less noticeable. He suffered her to lead him to one side.

"Well, what is it?" he enquired. "You have a system to sell, or you have lost your last hundred francs and want to throw a little more into the melting pot."

He spoke pleasantly, in a manner which robbed his words of any possible offence. She shook her head.

"I think—pardon me, we are not acquainted, are we?" he broke off. "Your voice sounded familiar."

"We probably shall be one day," she replied. "At present, I know you only by reputation. You were just one of the people I ought not to have spoken to, of course, but there seemed to be no one else possible."

"I am beginning to be intrigued," he assured her. "What is it that I can do for you?"

"A trifle to you," she answered. "A great deal to me. I want to pass into the Rooms. Will you allow me to walk by your side?"

He looked at her in renewed surprise.

"Why, how will that help you?" he asked. "I'll do better than that for you, if you like. I'll get you an entrance ticket."

"There are difficulties," she murmured. "Permit me, please, simply to walk by your side into the Rooms. In that way, you take no responsibility. It will be a kindly

action on your part."

He indulged in a little shrug of the shoulders. Whatever her type might be, she was no ordinary example of it. That underlying current of half-wakened memory was tantalising him. His curiosity was piqued. He abandoned without regret the idea of once more occupying his seat in the theatre and turned towards the entrance.

"If you don't mind," she continued, "talk to me as though we were acquainted. I have watched you enter before. You are *persona grata* with those ogres who look at us all so suspiciously. Am I not right? . . . Of course. . . . And then too," she went on, "you're a man and life is always made so much easier for men—especially in our profession."

"Our profession?" he repeated, a little puzzled. "Do we walk the same way in life then?"

"I think that our paths are not so very far apart," she replied, with a smile. "If you please now—could you manage a shade more interest?"

He leaned down towards her, his fingers touching her arm lightly, as though to guide her through the portals. The two black-coated men returned his affable greeting with respect, but glanced curiously at the girl. One of them seemed about to speak, but changed his mind. They whispered together, but made no effort to interfere. Tellesom and his companion passed into the crowded room.

"Well," he remarked, "your enterprise is accomplished. You are free of the Kitchen, at any rate and, so long as you have penetrated so far, I don't suppose they will hesitate for a moment to let you in to the Salles Privées. Perhaps you will tell me before we part why you asked me to render you this somewhat quaint service."

"I owe you that," she admitted, "but I should like to get a little farther away from the entrance. Those two men are still talking about me."

"Will you sit in the bar for a moment," he suggested; "a liqueur perhaps?"

She assented absently. They were moving through the Rooms in leisurely fashion, but at each table she paused and her eyes deliberately searched among the players as though for a familiar face. When at last they reached the bar, she led the way to the farthermost table and, seating herself, unexpectedly removed her small, close-fitting hat. He saw then that her hair—very beautiful light brown hair it was—was smoothly brushed and of fine quality, and bore the unmistakable cachet of a London coiffeur.

"Now tell me," he begged, after he had given an order to the waiter, "have you a ticket for the Rooms already, or why would you not let me get you one?"

"I have no ticket and I do not wish to apply for one," she told him. "I prefer to keep the name upon my passport to myself."

"That sounds mysterious."

She nodded.

"Yet you, too, I should think, at one time or another in your life, Colonel Tellesom, have found a little difficulty about your passport. You probably have always had two or three, but I am only provided with one and I preferred to take my chance as I have done. These Casino people are very clever. They are not so easily fooled as the officials on the frontier."

"Why," he asked curiously, "do you suggest that I should ever have had any trouble about passports?"

"Because," she confided, "I imagine—or did I fancy it, I wonder?—that before you became head man to the modern Cæsar you were used to travelling back and forth across the world upon more or less secret government business."

"And you?"

She took a cigarette from a plain gold case, thrust it into an amber holder, and lit it.

"Yes," she confessed, "I am one of the same ilk, only a very humble beginner. This, in fact, is almost my first assignment. Nevertheless, I, too, work for Cæsar."

"The devil you do!" he exclaimed. "I beg your pardon. You surprised me a little. May I ask what you are doing down here and why I have heard nothing of your coming?"

She sipped her liqueur and set down the glass.

"You probably know the rules of the game as well as I do," she replied. "You know that if we both work for the same person, it is one of his fancies—and it seems to me very sound—that we remain, outwardly at any rate, strangers to one another. All the same, I could show you many things. I will now, if you permit me, go about my business."

"Having excited my curiosity so far," he remonstrated, "you might at least tell me your name or what name you are passing under here. I shall not ask you the nature of your business, although I myself am not exactly an idler in these parts."

She smiled as she drew on her hat.

"It is better for you to know nothing," she assured him, looking into a tiny mirror which she had taken from her vanity case, as though to see that the rearrangement of her hat was satisfactory. "Besides—"

She broke off in somewhat singular fashion. She was still peering into the little mirror. There was no change in her expression. Her last words, up to the pause, had been spoken unfalteringly, yet he knew quite well that something had happened. He glanced over her shoulder towards the entrance. A man was standing there looking

around the buffet—a bulky person of Levantine appearance, wearing over-much jewellery, and with full, red, Eastern lips. He adjusted a single eyeglass, and, as he recognised Tellesom's companion, he stood for a moment rigid and motionless. She put away her mirror and Tellesom noticed that she closed her vanity bag with steady fingers.

"Do you mind going away now, please," she begged. "The person whom I came to see has arrived."

Her little note of dismissal was urgent and final and Tellesom promptly obeyed. As he left the bar by the further entrance, he looked back. The man was still standing upon the threshold; the girl had set down her liqueur glass upon the table and was moving towards him.

Tellesom, a man of few emotions, although possessed of a keen sensibility, never forgot the thrill of those scant moments just before the closing of the last table in the far room of the Salles Privées an hour or so later on that evening. He had returned to his sitting room after leaving the Casino and had read half a novel before, glancing across the Square, he saw that it was half-past one. An odd impulse of curiosity led him to throw the book aside, descend to the lounge, and stroll once more across to the Casino. He walked first through the outer rooms where play was nearly finished, searching among the stragglers but seeing no one except the usual hardened habitués indulging in a last stake, or reluctantly cashing in their chips before departure. Afterwards, he passed into the Salles Privées—the first two rooms of which were utterly deserted—and made his way towards the vestibule which guards the larger and more important Salle de Jeux. He was within half a dozen paces of its arched entrance when he saw the woman of whom he was in unacknowledged quest only a few yards away. She was coming straight towards him, without any appearance of haste, yet moving with incredible swiftness, like one who had found some new magic in her feet so that they rested upon the floor only for the fraction of a second. She did not appear to be hurrying. She was unflurried. The whole of her somewhat elaborate make-up was undisturbed. She passed him like a mechanical doll, without a glance, without any sign of realisation that it was a human being against whose shoulder she nearly brushed in the deserted, tawdrily bedizened chamber. He half paused to greet her but understood at once that, so far as she was concerned, he was a being who had no existence. He turned slowly around to look after her. She was already disappearing through the entrance door, a proceeding strictly prohibited in the daytime but, at that hour of night, occasionally to be done. She was gone, and when he remembered the blank look in her eyes, he felt a little shiver chill his blood

as though he were conscious of some untoward happening close at hand. His first impulse, which was to follow her, he resisted, passing on instead into the vestibule which bordered the other salon. In the latter, most of the tables were already dismantled. The croupiers were counting chips and rolling up the green baize cloths, and a thin stream of players were leaking out towards him, or making their way towards the *caisse*. The impression of all these things in the background was the impression of a second. Closer at hand there was something uglier and more gruesome. Fallen forward from the divan by the side of the lift was the shapeless body of a man, already hidden by the ghouls of the place, the black-coated concealers of tragedy. Even as Tellesom stood there, he saw one of them snatch at the still smoking pistol upon the floor, saw the whole epitomized drama disappear as the lift shot downwards. With his usual air of composure, one of the chefs, his hands behind his back, was already strolling up to meet the people on their way out. Another one came towards Tellesom, a third appeared to be stifling a yawn. Nothing had happened—nothing unusual! Tellesom spoke to the man whose eyes were watching his.

"What is all this?" he enquired.

The man shook his head.

"A gentleman taken unwell, Monsieur," he explained.

"Gambling?"

"Merely a looker-on, they say," the chef confided. "The heat of the room beyond a doubt."

"What is the meaning of the pistol?" Tellesom demanded.

The man shrugged his shoulders and strolled off. The question that was really burning in Tellesom's brain was what was the meaning of the girl's flying exit.

CHAPTER XXIX

With a sigh of resignation, Tellesom, white-waistcoated, and with a carnation in the buttonhole of his dinner coat, descended a couple of nights later into the lounge of the Hôtel de Paris to join in festivities for which he was in ill humour. His prospective hostess, standing in the midst of those of her guests who were already assembled, smiled at his expression as he raised her hand to his lips.

"Here comes my last invited and most unwilling guest," she announced, introducing him to one or two people in the immediate vicinity. "I met Colonel Tellesom—who is an old friend—on the tennis courts yesterday and, although I know that he is dying to get back to his beloved Cap d'Antibes and hates dinner parties, he couldn't refuse to dine with me. Now we have to wait only for Lord Harderton. We could go in without him, but, alas, that would make us thirteen."

"Harderton!" Tellesom exclaimed. "What is he doing out here at this time of the year?"

"My dear Charles," his hostess expostulated, "how can you ever account for the whereabouts or the doings of these socialist ministers? Of course Harderton is all right, except for his associations. He was always quaint. . . . As you can't sit next me, Charles, is there any one whom you especially fancy as a neighbour? I have put you between Grace Carey and Miriam Shaw, both of whom you used to know slightly, I think, but I can change you with either of my other two young men if you like. This is an out-of-season party and we are being delightfully informal."

It was precisely at this moment that Tellesom received a mild shock. Seated a little apart, but obviously one of the party, was the lady with the flying feet. She had abandoned altogether her crude adventure in cosmetics. She was dressed with all possible restraint and she was noticeable now only for her quiet and distinguished appearance.

"Very kind of you, Duchess," he murmured. "I wonder whether you could tell me the name of the thoughtful-looking young lady seated alone there?"

The Duchess glanced in the direction indicated.

"Always an eye for the unusual," she observed, smiling. "That is Miss Stanley Erdish."

"English?"

"Of course. Rather a blue stocking, I believe. She took all kinds of degrees in her younger days and we quite expected her to stand for Parliament. I believe, as a matter of fact, she's a sort of journalist now—writes the highclass stuff which she will never sign. You would like to meet her?"

"To be frank with you, I should," he assented.

They moved towards the divan.

"Stanley," her hostess said, "this is Colonel Tellesom, who is to be your neighbour at dinner. Miss Stanley Erdish."

The girl acknowledged the greeting pleasantly but without a flicker of any sort of recognition. The Duchess turned away to greet Lord Harderton, who had just arrived, and Tellesom indulged in a few commonplace remarks. In a minute or two, the little party moved into the dining room.

"Sorry for having kept you all waiting," Lord Harderton apologised as he took his place. "As a matter of fact, I've been here for a quarter of an hour, but I had to go to the bureau. Queer sort of business," he went on, sipping his cocktail. "I had a despatch from the Foreign Office this evening asking me to enquire into the whereabouts of a mysterious Asiatic gentleman who has been staying here incognito for several weeks. He wants watching, it seems."

"How exciting!" the Duchess murmured. "Do tell me who he was?"

"This quarrelsome relative of the King of Afghan, whom they all want to have back again. He's been staying here, it appears, for some time. Called himself Mr. Tulamen and posed as a Greek or a Turk, I'm not sure which. Two days ago, they tell me, he left in a hurry. Heaven forbid that I should start a scandal," Harderton went on, finishing his cocktail, "but, as a matter of fact, I believe that he left without paying his hotel bill."

"Gambling?" his hostess enquired.

"I suppose so. Nothing serious, I should imagine. What makes it so funny is that he should have cleared off like that without a word to any one. He didn't even say good-bye to Sir Mark Ezerum, who seems to have been a friend of his."

"Do you mean that he left all his luggage behind?" some one enquired.

"Apparently so," Harderton replied. "The hotel people think that he'll turn up again."

"I wonder?" Tellesom murmured. . . .

The dinner proceeded according to custom. Tellesom made light conversation with his two neighbours and found Miss Erdish a pleasant, though somewhat reserved companion, whose personality still puzzled him. In due course, he danced with his hostess and two of the elder ladies of his acquaintance. Afterwards, he turned to his left-hand neighbour with a gesture of invitation. She hesitated for a single moment. Then she rose and they made their way on to the floor.

"I am wondering," she said abruptly, as soon as they were out of hearing of the party, "whether you have a good memory?"

"That depends."

"I mean the memory of a diplomat," she went on—"the memory of a man who is astute enough or kind enough to know when to forget. I do not wish to rely upon any semi-official connection there may be between you and me. I want this matter to remain personal."

He made no immediate answer. They were halfway round the room indeed before he spoke again.

"Mine is one of those curious types of memory," he confided, "which become subordinate to will. It is a memory which knows when to lift its hand and pull down a blind now and then, but it requires to be convinced that the lowering of the blind is advisable."

"That sounds reasonable," she admitted. "Are you going into the Rooms afterward, Colonel Tellesom?"

"I had made no plans."

"They were all going to play," she continued. "I shall go to my room. If I might come to your salon for a few minutes, I think perhaps I could deal with that memory of yours."

"An admirable idea," he assented. . . .

His hostess beckoned to him as he was preparing to resume his seat. He made his way towards the end of the table.

"Charles," she said, "I want to present you to the Princess de Montmercy. She tells me you are a great friend of her daughter."

Tellesom, for a moment, was puzzled. Then a flash of memory came to his aid and he bowed over the hand of the woman whom he had already decided, on glancing round the table, was the most charming of his fellow guests.

"It was foolish of me," he murmured. "Your daughter has spoken of you so often, and the likeness is there, of course, to remind me also. You came over from the Cap this evening?"

"To tell you the truth, I haven't been there yet," she confessed. "I'm rather ashamed of myself. I telephoned to Sarah and she begged me to look out for you. The Duchess was kind enough to ask me to this party a few nights ago in Paris and I came straight through. Perhaps I ought to confess, too, that I hate bathing, now that the weather is cooler, as much as I hate *chemin-de-fer*, and roulette is very nearly my favourite amusement. I shall stay here for a day or two and then I shall come to the Cap."

"Will you dance?" Tellesom invited.

"I should love to," she answered.

They made their way on to the floor. She danced delightfully, but her feet were a little listless. She pointed to the opened windows.

"I'm not quite a salamander," she confided, "and I'm feeling this heat. Couldn't we sit in the window there?"

"Of course," he acquiesced.

They found two chairs and sat on the balcony. In the distance the band of the Café de Paris was playing. There were lights burning everywhere behind and around the deep green of the trees. People were entering and leaving the Casino in a constant stream.

"I find this a very pleasant meeting," the Princess declared. "Sarah tells me she's terribly fond of you, Colonel Tellesom, and I was dying to see what you were like."

"I was just as anxious to meet you," he confessed. "You see, I'm very fond of Sarah, but I must admit that I'm just a little terrified."

She laughed.

"And yet the whole world tells me what a brave man you are and how many decorations you could wear if you would."

"I wasn't thinking about my profession," he replied. "I was thinking of the fact that I am thirty-seven years old and Sarah is twenty-one; she is a very rich girl and I am a very poor man, and I want to marry her."

The Princess was silent for a moment but it was a very kindly silence.

"I can't see anything against it," she said. "I feel sure I shall like you, but even if I didn't, it wouldn't matter at all. Sarah—"

She paused perceptibly.

"My late husband believes in making every one with whom he has any connection, isolated fragments of humanity. If I divorced my dear Armand—which I should never do, because he is much too charming—Warren would never expect to be told about it. If Sarah becomes engaged, or even married, he will not pretend to take any interest in the affair. He has put us outside his life and there we stay. On the other hand, he has made it possible for us to live how and where we will. He has given us the freedom of the world."

"That is something to the good, anyhow," Tellesom remarked, smiling.

"It is so much to the good that Sarah has a very large fortune and can therefore marry any one she pleases. I was in a position to do the same thing. Of course, being an American woman, every one imagined that I married Armand because he was the Prince de Montmercy. As a matter of fact, I didn't. I married for love and I should like my daughter to do the same thing."

"I have a small assured income," Tellesom explained, "but I must confess that my

largest source of revenue at the present moment comes from your former husband."

"That is of no consequence," the Princess declared. "The only surviving sentiment I still have towards Warren Rand is one of gratitude that he should have placed us both above even the consideration of money. I have an extravagant husband and I give him free access to my cheque book, but we have never yet spent our income. If you can spend Sarah's, you will be clever."

They sat in silence for a few moments. The Princess breathed a little sigh of content. She looked very beautiful and very attractive in the subdued light.

"I'm so glad I like you," she confided. "I can't pretend there's any very great affection between Sarah and myself. She has always had a vein of seriousness in her, which reminds me of her father. She will flirt and play around with the young people for weeks and then suddenly get tired of it all. I never get tired of frivolity. I think life was made for joy. I don't think, as Sarah does. Directly you begin to think, you begin to speculate, and then you wonder, and afterwards you doubt, and finally it is as though a cloud had drifted across the sun. I love life as it comes to me. Nevertheless, Colonel Tellesom—Charles, it is, isn't it?—I think I shall be an excellent mother-in-law to you."

He lifted her fingers to his lips.

"You will be a very charming one," he said warmly, "and I know that I shall be very happy. By-the-by," he went on, after a moment's pause, "there is something I ought to tell you."

"My God, you're not going to make any confessions, are you?" she exclaimed, with a gesture of dismay.

"Not I," he assured her. "There is something which I shouldn't have mentioned at all to any one else in the world, but I think you ought to know. I am here in Monte Carlo, waiting for your former husband."

She sat upright, obviously startled.

"For Warren?" she exclaimed. "You mean that he is coming here?"

"Absolutely. Last time I heard of him he had just flown to Barcelona. He is on his yacht now between Gibraltar and Marseilles. He may come direct; he may wait for a day or two, but he might, at any rate, be here within three days."

The Princess wrinkled her eyebrows in self-pity.

"There goes my roulette," she sighed. "If I saw Warren, I think I should have a fit. I shall leave for the Cap to-morrow."

"But you remain on friendly terms with him?"

She looked at him strangely. There was no vestige of a smile or any human expression upon her face. It had become like a mask.

"On friendly terms with Warren Rand!" she repeated wonderingly. "Who is there in the world who could be? Not his wife, not his daughter, not his dead sons. You know, I have a theory," she went on, after a moment's hesitation, "and I have been his wife so I ought to know something—I have a theory that he is dead—a dead man living through some supernatural power."

Tellesom looked questioningly at his companion. Did she, by chance, belong to one of these new cults?

"Dead?" he repeated.

"I believe," she continued, "that he died the day the twins fell at Cambrai. I swear there's been something else—not blood—in his veins since then."

The platitudes died away on Tellesom's lips. He remained silent.

"Warren Rand," she continued, and even her voice fell as though she feared to speak his name, "has set himself out to conquer the world. He will do it too. If he can live long enough—and what disease is there of which he could die?—he will wield a sovereign power in the world, he will own all the money in the world, he will have all the rulers and great people on their knees. I don't understand—I'm a woman without much brain—what it is he has in view, but I think that he will do it. Listen, Charles. I have lived with Warren Rand as his wife in the old days, so I know what I am talking about, and I tell you that I would board the fastest aeroplane—although I hate the air—or clamber up the steps of the swiftest steamer—although I loathe the sea—and I would go to the far ends of the world—although I hate travelling—sooner than find myself anywhere near Warren Rand."

A breath of wind stirred in the trees. The music from the Café de Paris drifted over to them with a new and fuller cadence. It was as though its warm melody melted something in the suddenly frozen woman by his side. She jumped to her feet and clung to him.

"No one could understand," she cried—"no one will ever understand—but there you are. You've had just a moment of knowing how I feel and will always feel, and so will Sarah, and so will every one in time who moves across the squares of life at his bidding. When he has finished with a puppet, overboard it goes. . . . Shall we dance one turn more? And then Lord Harderton has promised to take me into the Rooms. . . . You're quite a dear, Charles, and I'll try to be a good mother-in-law to you, and," she added, raising herself a little to whisper in his ear—"thank you for your thoughtfulness in telling me."

CHAPTER XXX

Tellesom stood on his balcony a quarter of an hour later, gazing down at the gay scene which never failed to intrigue him. Below were the flower-starred gardens, with the trees and shrubs looking like stark things in the windless air; beyond, the lights of the Café de Paris, with crowds of men and women seated at the little tables, and the faint refrain of music in the farther distance. Down the hill hurried a seemingly incessant stream of people, the men mostly in dinner clothes and bareheaded, the women in chiffon and gossamer-like cloaks, the electric light flashing upon their jewellery, illuminating their laughing, eager faces as they passed on, all towards the same goal—the strange, grotesque yet somehow impressive-looking building at the end of the Square. From every window the lights were blazing. Servants in the familiar livery were waiting at the top of the steps. Vehicles were all the time drawing up and depositing visitors from the outlying villas, gay parties from Nice or Villefranche or Mentone, engaged in the same eternal quest. In the background, the deep purple sombreness of the mountains was stabbed by vivid pin pricks of fire, stretching up almost to the lowest of the stars. . . .

Tellesom swung round quickly at the sound of the stealthy opening and closing of his door. It was Stanley Erdish—the lady of the flying feet—who stood just across the threshold, listening intently. She turned towards him as he stepped back into the room.

"Have the police visited you yet to ask about me?" she enquired abruptly.

"I have had no communication from them at all," he assured her. "Won't you sit down? I am anxious to hear what you have to tell me."

She was apparently ill at ease. She wandered restlessly around the room, occasionally pausing to listen. She was very unlike the self-composed young woman who had attached herself to Warren Rand's staff.

"I do not wish," she declared, "to be found here talking to you. I do not wish that any one should know that we are in any way acquainted. That we met at dinner to-night was a misfortune which could not be helped. I accepted because I thought, if trouble came, it might help me with the police to have been seen with those people. You know now, I suppose, who the man was who came into the bar of the Casino?"

"I can guess," Tellesom admitted.

"He called himself Tulamen here," she went on, "but he was the man of whom Lord Harderton was speaking—Prince Omdurfa, whom the Afghans wanted, and want now for king. He has always been secretly in treaty with the Russians and he came over here to make terms with them. He had a draft treaty with them in his

pocket the night he died. You know what that would have meant? The people would have welcomed him back again. He would have been king without striking a blow. The Russians would have poured into Afghanistan and England would have lost India within five years."

"How did Warren Rand get to know this?" Tellesom asked.

"One of his agents, who had been in Russia for five years, got back last week. A terrible wreck he is, but he brought all sorts of information. My mission here was to see what I could do with Tulamen before the Russians arrived. I soon found that, actually, there was nothing to be done with him. He was an ignorant, conceited man, full of contempt for England and France, and an immense believer in Russia. They are due here now, at any moment, from Geneva—Postinoff and Vitznow—and they were prepared to sign the treaty, which doesn't exist any more. I tore it up."

"How did you get hold of it?"

"He was out of money and I lent him fifty *mille* to let me read it," she confided. "He brought it that night. I read it in the bar while he was playing. Then I gave it back to him, but when the—the tragedy happened, I took it out of his pocket. I tore it up in my room that night. It doesn't exist any longer. I did what I thought best, but —"

She broke off and listened. This time she was right. There had been footsteps outside and there was a knocking now at the door. She held up her finger and crept cautiously out of sight on to the balcony. Tellesom, without undue haste, opened the door to find two very official-looking personages standing there, dressed in the sober black affected by the Monégasque professional classes.

"You wished to see me?" he enquired.

"Colonel Tellesom?" the elder of the two ventured.

"That is my name."

"Permit that we enter, if you please," his visitor begged. "I am the Commissaire of Police. My *confrère* is the *avocat* of the Principality."

"Enter, by all means," Tellesom invited. "Come this way."

He led them to his sitting room. The Commissaire of Police refused a chair. He was a short, dark man, with a carefully curled black moustache and almost jet-black eyes. His companion was a smaller edition of himself. Neither seemed altogether at his ease.

"Monsieur has perhaps heard," the commissaire began, "that there was a little trouble at the Casino the other night."

Tellesom nodded.

"One of those affairs," he remarked drily, "which somehow or other never seem

to find their way into the journals."

The commissaire threw out his hands.

"But *was* it one of those affairs?" he demanded. "That is what we ask ourselves. That is what it is our duty to discover. Monsieur understands," he went on, "that it is in keeping with the established custom of the place to treat as an unfortunate, a deeply regrettable but unavoidable incident, certain tragedies which occur in every corner of the world where gambling is indulged in. In this present case, however, one is not sure. A question has been raised. Notwithstanding the great prejudice which exists here, quite rightly, in favour of keeping secret these untoward happenings, the law of the Principality is as jealous as the law of other countries. Monsieur follows me?"

"Quite well."

He pushed a box of cigarettes across the table which divided him from his visitors. The commissaire bowed and accepted one; his companion followed suit.

"There have been rumours which Colonel Tellesom may have heard," the former continued, with portentous solemnity, "that the unfortunate gentleman who was found shot just before closing time at the Casino the other night was not alone at the moment of the tragedy. It has even been suggested that his companion was a lady."

"Indeed!" Tellesom murmured.

"No one seems to have seen this mysterious personage distinctly; no one, in fact, is able actually to swear to her presence. Hence our visit to you, sir. Various officials at the Casino report that you entered the Salles Privées at the moment of the tragedy. You were the only person who passed through the outer rooms at about that time. It is very certain, therefore, that if any one had been with the unfortunate man at the moment of his death, for which they may or may not have been responsible, you must have seen them escaping."

"I was certainly there," Tellesom acknowledged, "a few seconds, I imagine, after the tragedy had occurred."

"The books of the Casino have been examined," the police functionary went on, "and it seems clear that the person upon whom suspicion might, for various reasons, fall, had taken out no ticket for the Rooms, which would have been available on the night in question. That in itself is a great factor in inducing us to believe that the rumours which have been circulating are untrue, as it is almost impossible for any one to enter without a *carte d'entrée*. We come to Monsieur, however, to help us arrive at a definite decision. I have to ask you, Monsieur Tellesom to answer me this question in the name of the law. Did you, or did you not, in your passage across the outer room of the Salles Privées, meet a young woman hurrying from the scene of

the tragedy. . . . Ah!"

Tellesom, too, had heard the half-smothered little exclamation on the balcony. The commissaire was perplexed. He took a hasty step forward. Tellesom barred his further progress.

"Monsieur," he begged, "I am here to receive your visit and to answer any questions you choose to ask me, out of respect for your profession and your Government. I must remind you, however, that this is my private room. If I choose to receive a visitor and that visitor happens to be a lady, I must ask you to listen with deaf ears and to see, if you do see, with blind eyes. That, I think, Monsieur le Commissaire, is an attitude which the whole world respects."

Tellesom's very appealing smile evoked a sympathetic impulse in the Monégasque, who was above all things a man of gallantry. Nevertheless, it was a difficult position.

"Monsieur is aware that it is a lady who is upon his balcony?" he ventured.

"It is a lady who has done me the honour to pay me a visit," Tellesom admitted. "I can tell you no more about her than this—that she was a fellow guest at a dinner party given to-night by the Duchess of Weymouth, and at which a member of your own royal family was present. Her visit here was, perhaps, a little indiscreet, but—"

"It is sufficient, Monsieur," the commissaire interrupted. "One is not aware of her presence. We will revert to the vital question. I am to ask you, Monsieur, on your entrance to the Salles Privées, when you crossed the outer and deserted room, did you, or did you not, meet any one leaving the vestibule where the tragedy took place?"

"I met no one," Tellesom avowed. "I reached the vestibule a few seconds after the tragedy. The outer room through which I passed was empty."

The commissaire breathed a great sigh of relief.

"The affair then," he declared, "may, in your opinion, be looked upon as one of those others—unfortunate, deeply regrettable from every point of view, but without any specially sinister features?"

"That is how I should regard it," Tellesom assented.

The commissaire was relieved; the *avocat*, apparently, disappointed. For the first time he intervened and his question was a point-blank one.

"Let me put it to you this way, Monsieur," he begged. "You saw nothing that night which might have led you to believe that the tragedy with which we are concerned was not due to a self-inflicted wound?"

"Nothing whatever," was the brief reply.

The *avocat* took up his hat. The commissaire saluted. The latter was very polite

indeed.

"We infinitely regret," he apologised, with a valedictory and significant smile, "our inopportune intrusion upon Monsieur."

Tellesom threw open the door and took the precaution of following his departing guests out into the corridor. He waited until he heard the lift arrive in response to their summons, and descend. Then he made his way back to the salon and, hurrying out on to the balcony, drew his concealed guest into the room. Her hands were cold and she was shivering. Perhaps the night air was chill; perhaps the pent-up feelings of the last few days were beginning to tell.

"You heard?" he asked.

"I heard everything."

"Lucky I was the only one who saw you," he remarked coolly.

She looked at him with frightened eyes. She was no longer the perfectly self-contained young woman who had stormed Warren Rand's stronghold, bewitched John Glynde, and begged her way into the land of adventure.

"You lied," she murmured below her breath.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"If you come seriously into our profession," he confided, "you will realise that it is sometimes our duty to believe that our eyes and ears are alike deceiving us. . . . You had better hurry off now. They might come back."

She left him at once and something in her swift, effortless progress down the corridor reminded him of her flight across the deserted room. He turned back and from the balcony of his salon watched the two officials step into their motor car and drive away.

CHAPTER XXXI

The Princess toyed with her caviare and sipped her vodka in leisurely fashion. She was very elegant in her silken deshabille, designed by the greatest of French artists. An intruding ray of sunshine failed to discover a single line upon her beautiful face or a lifeless fibre in her golden hair.

"I like your man, my dear Sarah," she confided to her more primitively arrayed daughter. "He drove me over this morning in the way I like to be driven, talked to me charmingly, and understood how necessary it was that I had an early cocktail at Nice. He knows how to order a lunch. He doesn't seem to mind my being a little greedy and he wears his clothes as well as even my Armand."

Sarah smiled and Tellesom bowed his acknowledgments across the table. They were lunching in the open-air restaurant at Eden Roc, at one of the few chosen tables which overlooked the sea.

"Where is my adorable stepfather?" Sarah enquired.

Her mother sighed without undue emotion.

"Still at Deauville, my dear. He says it's the golf, but the women all spoil him there. I'd have brought him with me, but he really hates the sea, except from the deck of a yacht, and all his world are up there. I don't think I should have come away myself but for this tiresome chaperone of yours going back to America. I'm afraid you'll either have to get married, my dear, or come back to Deauville with me. I couldn't possibly stay here for more than a few days. It is very charming, but it's too cold to bathe—or rather it's too cold for the sun bath afterwards—and this new crowd is too noisy for me. Such a dear little church, just outside the gates, I noticed this morning. I would give you my Lancia car for one of my wedding presents—it positively can't do less than a hundred and twenty—and go back myself comfortably by train."

Sarah laughed.

"Your ideas of marriage, Mother, are unstable," she declared. "It would take us about a month before we could get married here. Besides, Charles is working."

"Working?" the Princess repeated.

"I told you," he reminded her, "that I was waiting for—your ex-husband. I had a wireless this morning to say that he is off Marseilles, so I knew that I had time to bring you over here. As soon as we have finished our present enterprise I shall explain the position to him and hand in my resignation."

"I do hope," the Princess observed, glancing tenderly at the dish of young lobsters which the *maître d'hôtel* had brought for her inspection, "that he isn't

getting you mixed up in any of those bloodthirsty adventures of his. I remember one of his exploits in his younger days, before he went crazy. He got together an army of mercenaries, with all the latest artillery, landed them in one of those ramshackle South American Republics, started a rebellion—shot the president, by-the-by, which got him into terrible trouble in Washington—set up another government, and made millions building electric-light works and reservoirs and roads and things. As to what he's doing nowadays, no one seems to know. I never even see his name in the papers."

"It is rather a hobby of his," Tellesom remarked, "to work in the dark."

"What on earth brings him down to Monte Carlo?" the Princess asked, a little petulantly. "I could have spent a week there quite happily with you two dears to look after me."

Tellesom said nothing; Sarah came to his relief.

"You mustn't ask Charles any questions about his work or his Chief," she enjoined. "He never speaks of them, even to me. That's all part of the show, I suppose."

"It has to be," Tellesom regretted. "With regard to Sarah, Princess—"

"Angela," she interrupted. "It must be Angela. I won't be called mother-in-law, or any of those stupid things."

"Angela then," he amended, with a little bow, "I shall have a sister arriving here in three days. I'm sure she'll look after Sarah with pleasure."

The Princess sighed happily.

"Then that's settled," she declared. "I shall leave on the fourth day, and don't you dare to desert us until then, Charles."

"I shall come over if I can," he promised, "but I shall certainly have to go back to Monte Carlo this afternoon."

Sarah leaned forward in her place. She was gazing seaward with curious eyes.

"What is that extraordinary ship?" she asked. "It looks like a destroyer. What a pace it's travelling!"

Tellesom turned around and followed the direction of her gaze. Three or four miles out to sea, heading eastwards, was a long, grey ship, with two squat funnels, from which no smoke issued, awnings fore and aft, and travelling at a speed which, even from where they were, seemed phenomenal. A light suddenly flashed in Tellesom's eyes. He whispered to a *maître d'hôtel*, who passed him some field glasses through which he looked for several moments steadily. Then he handed them back, whispered a word or two to the head waiter, and turned to his companions.

"I am terribly sorry," he apologised. "I thought there might be just a chance of

this, and I have my car all tuned up outside. It will be a race which of us gets to Monte Carlo first—but if I don't," he added, with a queer little smile, "I may be a free man to-morrow."

The Princess's eyebrows were raised in dismay.

"You mean?"

"Please not," he begged, with uplifted hand. "We know who travels there, but if you don't mind—it all seems very stupid, but Sarah will explain. The head waiter will look after you. He has all my instructions. If I can't come over, my sister's name is Lady Furneston. You'll find her all right, but a little British. Furneston hasn't an idea in his head except farm life and breeding horses, but I dare say you can put up with him for a day or two. I am wiped out. Sarah, if you don't mind," he whispered. "Don't telephone; don't write. Leave it to me."

"I just love it all," she confessed. "Take care of yourself, though."

He nodded.

"I rather fancy we're getting to the end of the whole show," he confided, "and if we are I'd like to see it through. Prin—Angela, I'll make my apologies later on and try to atone."

She raised both her hands to his lips.

"There is so much before us, dear Charles," she murmured. "I have always thought that there were such possibilities in the relationship between a mother and her daughter's husband." . . .

He kissed her fingers, held Sarah's for a moment in his, and slipped quietly away. At the entrance to the restaurant a breathless boy from the hotel handed him a despatch. He tore it open, found the *pourboire* for the messenger, and jumped into his car. As he rushed past the Garoupe beach, the destroyer was well ahead, standing out to avoid the shoals. He pressed down his accelerator and gave himself up to the chase.

From the heights of the Middle Corniche, the converted destroyer—a harmless-looking vessel enough in the centre of the great pool of glassy sea—seemed about to turn into Villefranche Harbour. Short of the entrance, however, she swung around, passed Cap Ferrat, and changed her course to clear the Rock of Monaco. Tellesom was still driving fast. But without taking undue risks, for he knew now that he was safe. He passed the Hôtel de Paris, in fact, before his quarry was in sight and, with the small flints and pebbles of the harbour road flying up to his mudguards, he reached the bend of the harbour as the grey nose of the destroyer crept between the parapets. There was no delay. Evidently everything had been thought out and arranged for by wireless. The new arrival was brought to her moorings within a

quarter of an hour, the gangplank was lowered, and the officials made their sedate way on board. A steward, hurrying on shore, came up to Tellesom and saluted.

"Colonel Tellesom, sir, I was to give you this."

He handed over a sealed envelope and retreated. Tellesom read his message, climbed back into his car, and drove slowly up to the tennis courts. He found Zachary giving a lesson to a pupil.

"Any time this afternoon?" he called out cheerfully.

"In ten minutes, Colonel Tellesom, if you want a game," was the prompt reply.

Tellesom made his way to his locker and changed into flannels. He played two sets without a word, except the calling of the score. Once he came to the net to ask some advice about a backhand drive. One of the attendants, who was picking up balls, drifted a little nearer. Tellesom thanked his instructor and went back to his place. Afterwards the two men strolled up to the terrace, side by side. There was a steelier light in Zachary's face, as he glanced around.

"I cannot make it out," he confided in his slow but very correct English. "I am being watched. There are two new attendants. I cannot find out from any one who engaged them. There is a new waiter who seems always to be near me. They appear to be Russians, these three, yet they will not answer in my language. I am anxious, Colonel Tellesom. What does it mean? I have succeeded in inducing Postinoff and Vitznow to come here to meet your friend. It is true that you pay me a great sum of money to do this, but it is also a patriotic action. Russia needs such men as your friend. Why are we suddenly surrounded by spies?"

Tellesom yawned. The coast was clear just then, at any rate.

"It is reasonable that we take a drink together," he pointed out. "We will sit in a corner of the bar, with our backs to the wall."

Zachary approved and they installed themselves at a retired table. Tellesom, standing up to light a cigarette, looked through the window, to find a white-coated waiter a foot or two away on the terrace. He pulled down the sash, muttering something or other about a draught.

"Well, tell us the news, my young friend," he invited.

"I can bring both of the men whom you wish to see on board for luncheon to-morrow," Zachary announced, very slowly and very cautiously. "There will be two of them and myself. They want to know, however, the name of your friend. There is one man of whom they stand in great fear. His agents have penetrated farther into Russia than any one else and he seems to control the destinies of every bank where they have tried to raise loans. His name is Warren Rand. You may have heard of him."

"I do not think so," Tellesom replied. "At any rate, the name of my friend is George P. Bowman. The yacht in which he is travelling—a converted Chilean destroyer, as a matter of fact—is chartered in his own name."

"George P. Bowman," Zachary repeated. "It is strange that one has never heard of a man so amazingly rich."

"It isn't his business to advertise himself," Tellesom pointed out. "As a matter of fact too, besides his own money, he is at the head of the largest syndicate of capitalists in the whole world. They keep their identities secret and their activities concealed so far as possible. Bowman is quite an insignificant person to look at and talk to, but he can sign a cheque, if necessary, for fifty million dollars to clinch any bargain you may make, and the same the next day, and then begin to talk business. What he would really like, though, is to go back with your friends to Russia and examine for himself the possibilities. There should be a fortune for you in that, Zachary, if it can be arranged—apart from the small fee we are paying you."

Zachary's eyes glistened. He glanced at his tennis racquet for a moment and flung it on to a divan.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "There should be enough to keep me from wielding this infernal phantasy of woodwork and gut again for the rest of my life. Be careful," he whispered. "There is a new man hanging about the bar now—a stranger to me. Barman, two more whiskies and perriers."

The man brought them across himself.

"Have you a new assistant?" Zachary asked.

The man looked a little glum.

"I don't know who he is, sir," he admitted. "The management sent him down. We don't need any one else here."

Tellesom paid for the drinks and forced a smile from the man's face by the magnitude of his tip. Zachary waited until the latter was out of hearing.

"You see how it is," he murmured, letting his finger run over the gut of his companion's racquet. "This place is haunted with spies. They are Russians, I believe, but they don't trust me, and I don't know half of them. They must have come with Postinoff and Vitznow, or else they must be watching them for the Soviet Government. That's the worst of the whole accursed business," he continued bitterly. "It seems to be the principle of Moscow to trust nobody, and if they send out an envoy, to send spies out after him. How can they expect to carry on a government like that?"

"They may not all be Russian," Tellesom suggested. "There is a pretty useful system of German espionage round here. Anyhow, our doings are straight and

above-board. There's nothing for them to find out about us, and I should think Moscow would send their best wishes to Postinoff and Vitznow for the success of their mission to-morrow."

"To-morrow," Zachary repeated. "Yes, that is arranged."

Tellesom nodded.

"At one o'clock you and your two friends had better come down to the harbour and ask for the *Hermonides*. She lies Number Two in the moorings. If I'm invited to lunch, as I think I shall be, I will be on board to welcome you. I'll go and have my bath and change now."

"Shall I see you again this evening?" Zachary enquired.

Tellesom shook his head.

"I'm going on board," he said, "and Bowman isn't likely to land. He hates gambling."

They strolled out side by side. Even Zachary was suspicious, but Tellesom, with years of experience behind him, noted the fresh faces, felt intuitively the eyes which watched them from behind, heard the footsteps of the men passing on purposeless errands. In the cloakroom he paused. There, for a moment, the two men were alone.

"Stick to your friends this evening, Zachary," Tellesom advised. "Don't let them speak to a soul. Remember that to-morrow's engagement may mean the making of you all for life. Don't risk anything for the sake of a little amusement. Don't let them cross the threshold of the Casino, and if that fellow Behrling comes over from Juan, don't let them see him."

The door shook a little and was opened a few inches. Tellesom continued in a louder voice.

"I know it's really nothing to do with you, old chap," he said testily, "but I do wish you'd get your committee to see that there's sometimes hot water in these sprays."

"I'll speak to the secretary about it," Zachary promised. "See you to-morrow afternoon?"

"About the same time," Tellesom called after the retreating figure. "Give me a full hour if you can." . . .

Zachary, with a curious but insistent craving for solitude, walked to the middle of one of the courts, where he bent over the net as though examining the upright. Twenty-four hours! Englishmen always kept their word. Twenty-four hours! A thousand pounds, with a huge commission to follow—and the Blue Train at five—and freedom! He looked up and waved his hand to Tellesom, driving his car round the curving road.

CHAPTER XXXII

Weeks of strain, anxiety, and huge accomplishments had left Warren Rand unchanged. He looked up from his chair, welcomed Tellesom upon his entrance with the same mechanical nod, and waved him to a seat. His nautical adventure had produced no variation in the manner of his attire. He still wore exactly the same type of quiet grey clothes that he affected on land; the same shaped collar and patterned tie. There was the same half derisive curl about his lips.

"So the rats have bitten," he remarked.

"They are coming at a few minutes before one," Tellesom reported—"Postinoff and Vitznow. Zachary is bringing them himself."

Warren Rand glanced at a paper by his side.

"Paul Zachary," he muttered. "Hm! Yes."

"I hope nothing will prevent it," Tellesom went on, "but the whole place seems full of spies. Last night, they both wanted to go into the Casino, but I made Zachary keep them in their sitting room."

Warren Rand frowned.

"Nothing must prevent it," he said shortly. "I have been working up to this for a long time and recent information from Russia makes my conversation with them to-day a necessity. As for the spies you speak of, Hammond's successor—a young man whom you must meet, called Bartlett—has turned more than a dozen of our own men loose in Monte Carlo. I never rely upon information from one source alone. For instance," he went on, glancing back at the paper which lay upon his desk, "you arrived at the tennis courts yesterday some time about four o'clock. You played two sets with Zachary, one of which you won, and one of which you lost. You went into the bar for drinks, whispered to yourselves—evidently you had become suspicious of espionage—and deliberately chose a corner where you were out of hearing."

"That's all very well, but I am convinced that there were other men working besides ours," Tellesom warned his Chief.

"What does it matter?" the latter demanded. "Postinoff and Vitznow are watched by their own people, as a matter of course. Zachary's probably in the same boat. These Russians never trust one another, anyway. As for Behrling, if you're thinking of him, he's gone off to Geneva to meet these two men. He sent them a message in their own private code. Postinoff got drunk and left it about in a café at Geneva for half an hour one night last week. We answered it for him."

John Glynde made noiseless entrance with a roll of papers and a locked ledger

under his arm. He nodded to Tellesom and took his place at the table.

"What do these fellows believe about me?" Warren Rand asked.

"They think that your name is Bowman and that you represent an American syndicate of millionaires who find it impossible to go on investing in their own country," Tellesom explained. "They are ready to make easy enough terms, though how much of the money they expect you to advance will go into industrial work, I do not know. The men at the top seem hungry enough."

"A filthy generation," Warren Rand declared. "I know the truth about them now. Nations run to seed like that sometimes. We'll talk money to your friends."

"They also believe that you yourself are one of the richest men in the world," Tellesom continued.

"At the present moment, it is more than true," his Chief admitted. "In a month or so's time I shall be a pauper."

Tellesom stared across the table. There was no sign of humour—not even of the old sardonic variety—in his companion's face. Neither was there any sign of mental collapse or the weakening at last of that stupendous brain.

"What's happened?" he asked bluntly.

"Oh, I have the money, all right," was the imperturbable reply. "I am going to spend it."

Tellesom leaned back in his chair, thrust his hands a little farther into his trousers pockets, and looked thoughtful.

"How on earth can you be going to spend hundreds of millions of pounds in a month or so?" he speculated.

They were alone in the large saloon. John Glynde, the weak-eyed, weak-chinned little man, with the mighty brain, Tellesom, and Warren Rand, the undeclared ruler of bourses and empires. In those few moments, Warren Rand parted with half the secret of his life.

"I am buying gold," he announced—"Half the gold in the world, my friend. All these little chancellors of Europe are squirming like eels. London is in fair fettle because she has obeyed my dictum, but in a few days every other stock exchange in Europe will be in a panic. It is perhaps," he went on, with perfect calm and with the air of a man who took purely an academic interest in the great upheavals he was discussing, "one of the most interesting experiments one could make, like drawing the flour out of a loaf of bread, or the life from the soil of a great and fruitful valley. In a week, the question the political economists are never tired of asking will be answered—how can a nation deal with its exchange without gold? How can it continue to buy and sell, now that the days of primitive barter have passed? Have

one of your diabolical cocktails, Tellesom," he added, with his finger upon the bell.

"Delighted," was the cordial response. "A dry Martini if I may. You are out of my depth in these financial matters, you know. Of course, I realise that you can bring pressure to bear upon any nation through manipulating the money market, but you can't tackle all Europe or stop New York from coming in to help."

John Glynde chuckled drily—chuckled like a man revolving some inward emotion of humour too enjoyable to part with. There was no flicker of any interest or feeling in Warren Rand's face.

"Ah, well," he remarked tolerantly, giving an order to the steward, "after we have finished with our two visitors to-day, you will begin to hear the earthquakes tremble under your feet."

The drinks were brought and Tellesom, as he sipped his, studied his host with a new curiosity. He ventured, almost for the first time in his life, upon a personal question. Warren Rand himself, by his confidences, seemed to have lightened the tension of the atmosphere by which he was always surrounded.

"Have you been ill, sir?" he asked.

Warren Rand shook his head. In the clearer sunlight which was now streaming through the portholes, he certainly had the appearance of a man who had fallen physically upon evil times. The flesh upon his cheeks had sagged. His shoulders had drooped. Only the eyes remained defiant and undimmed, and the old mockery was still in the curve of the lips.

"Nothing to speak of. Something has happened to me, all the same, of which I never dreamed in my worst nightmare. I make the confession, because you may discover it for yourself. Temporarily—only temporarily, I can assure you—I have lost just a little of my nerve."

John Glynde rose furiously to his feet. He smashed the book which he had been reading against the table. There were points of fire shining through his spectacles.

"It isn't true. It's a lie. You signed a draft for a hundred million yesterday without faltering. You never flinched when that bullet at Barcelona went within a couple of inches of your head. You flung that newspaper man, as he called himself, into the harbour without the help of a soul."

Warren Rand was certainly not himself. He patted his devoted little secretary on the shoulder and pushed him back into his place.

"Steady, John, steady!" he enjoined.

"It doesn't sound like you, sir," Tellesom ventured.

"It isn't. Nevertheless, it is the truth. I have always boasted that I had no fear of death or of anything else which could happen to me. I have lived like that. I have

done what I chose, defied governments, societies, enemies, whenever I thought fit. And now, only during the last few days, I have felt myself hesitating, felt the nerves in my body vibrating, felt myself nearer life as other people understand it. Mind you," he went on, refilling a cocktail glass from the shaker and pushing it towards Tellesom, "I have a certain amount of justification. I was wrong to part with you, even for these few weeks. Seven times in the last twenty-two days I have just escaped assassination, and once I was only able to save poor Glynde by a miracle. The secret service of countries who have felt my grip upon their exchequer, bankers—a banking community can stoop pretty low sometimes—Bolshevists, Communists, and all that scum—they are all busy. Hence the increase in my bodyguard. We doubled it before we left London. Some of them are out in the Principality now. I have half a dozen on the dock; I wouldn't like to tell you how many on the yacht. This isn't nerves, I'd have you know. This is simply because I want to keep alive for another six weeks."

"Has there been a real scrap yet?" Tellesom asked, a little wistfully.

"Half a dozen. Did you notice the little man with the pale cheeks who stood at the top of the gangway to let you pass? He is an Italian by birth, and he has been taking your place while you have been doing more important work. The Commissioner spared him to me from the New York police headquarters. He has saved my life twice already. He doesn't look to have the strength of a chicken, but he can throw a man over his shoulder or break his neck with a flick of the wrist. He is outside now, as my intelligence department tells me that this is the most dangerous port in Europe. The Monégasques don't understand regulations. Any one who likes can walk along the quay or the sea wall there, and come right to our gangway without being challenged."

"Just why have you run all this risk and taken all this trouble to get Postinoff and Vitznow to meet you?" Tellesom asked curiously. "Even if they are given the chance, it can't make very much difference whether they sign the Peace Pact or not. One can't help noticing that within the last fortnight or so you have started a devastating campaign against Russia in every one of your newspapers. That isn't likely to help them to get seats at the Conference."

Warren Rand leaned back and lit one of his long cigars. The couple of cocktails he had drunk had brought colour to his cheeks, and in the temporary absence of the sunshine, the deep, graven lines around his eyes were not so noticeable.

"What it's all about is simply told," he said, "and yet in a certain sense, it is the greatest drama the world has ever known. A week or two ago, the most successful foreign agent I ever had returned to me in London after five years' torture and

hiding, spying and investigating, being fêted and imprisoned, in Russia. He brought me a comprehensive and bird's-eye view of conditions there which no other man in the world possesses. To-day, John Glynde and I know more about that country than any other person who has ever crossed its frontiers. Now I shall tell you what has followed upon the disclosures which have been made to me."

The clouds, which had rolled down from the mountains, had been driven out to sea, and the sunshine once more streamed through the porthole. This time, however, it was merciful, for some sort of light from within, whether of the spirit or the brain, had effaced the pallid melancholy which had preyed upon Warren Rand's features. He was himself again, and the biting and chosen words left his lips deliberately.

"A man has declared war against a State," he went on. "The State has taken up the challenge and declared a war of assassination against the man. Your observations have been correct, Tellesom. In every newspaper which I own, and I own a good many, not a day passes now, not a single day, that I do not attack, expose, and declaim against the horrible self-government of the Russia of to-day, and the foul and poisonous crusade which the Soviet régime is attempting to spread over the whole world. I sometimes wonder whether I am wise. No one believes in a danger which is too much talked about. Dogs know when there is danger afoot and prepare for it instinctively. Human beings—especially Anglo-Saxons—can be locked in a chamber, with the writing upon the wall, and refuse to read the words. Something more important presses—generally their own trifling affairs of love-making or money-getting."

Tellesom sipped his cocktail thoughtfully.

"You permit remarks, sir?" he enquired. "I admit that I am very ignorant."

"Let me hear what you have to say," his Chief invited.

"I grant that the will for mischief—foul mischief too—is there," Tellesom proceeded. "I discovered that for myself, in my one hasty visit—but I must admit that I can't see that the Russians are making much headway with it. It seems to me, as it does to the man in the street, that Bolshevism as a practical menace is rather off the map—something like the occasional smallpox scares which send us rushing to the doctor to be vaccinated."

"That is because the Man in the Street, in a larger sense, and you, in a smaller, are solemn, short-sighted asses," Warren Rand declared. "If anything happens to me before I have done my work, the world will have to face even a greater danger than another European War. You will find that the whole of Asia, and most of Europe, will be Bolshevist in less than twenty years, and the wealth of these countries will be conveyed in the most cynical and flagrant manner back to Russia. You people are all

so terribly ignorant—possibly because you have a muzzled press. Mine are the only newspapers to-day which are telling the truth and, because confirmation doesn't appear in the *Morning Post* or the *Daily Telegraph*, you affect not to believe me. Now listen to me, Tellesom. You should know something of this. India is absolutely lost to you. You can struggle as long as you like, but India is Bolshevist to the backbone. If it were not for my efforts and the successful enterprise of one of the first lady workers I have ever employed, Afghanistan, before the end of the year, would have been the camping ground for half a million Russians, and you would have had to evacuate the country within twelve months. There are thousands of Russians to-day in Teheran. Your own country had to send a gunboat to an island in the Gulf a few weeks ago to rescue a little colony of English prospectors—not from Persian bandits, as was reported, but from Russians, who are forming local governments there without the slightest disguise. China is doomed because she refused to allow Russia the outlet she desired and indulged in a first-class war. China thought she was cunning, but Russia was more cunning still. Russia knew well enough that China was honeycombed by secret societies, and into those secret societies, day by day, the poison of Russia is spreading, so that when the time comes for the next upheaval, there will be the end of the old dynasty and, to the amazement even of the people themselves, it will be a Russianised China which springs from the ashes."

"I must interrupt," Tellesom broke in. "How in God's name do you know all this, sir?"

"From the lips of the most wonderful agent man ever had," Warren Rand replied, "from his living words, whispered and gasped out in Kingsway Buildings to John Glynde and myself when we feared that every breath would be his last. I have never reckoned the gift of life of much avail to a man, but the hospital where he lies, to their knowledge, will be a hundred thousand pounds the richer if they save his."

"It is never worth while," John Glynde intervened, in a thin, squeaky voice, "to interrupt our Chief when he is in the humour for speech."

Tellesom signalled his apologies and Warren Rand continued.

"It is my fierce desire," he said, "that the bandages should be torn from the eyes of all persons who assume to themselves any degree of civilisation. Your English Government—if such a hotch-potch conglomeration of nonentities can be called a government—is openly negotiating with this nation of assassins, with this crazy nation of assassins and lunatics. Russian propagandists are streaming into England every day. Mussolini dealt with them; no other country has the courage. You read of the riots in Berlin on the first of May—fifteen men killed and thirty injured. In my press, you read, if you read at all, of over a hundred men killed and over a thousand

injured. . . . Because I know these things, and because their existence interferes with the great enterprise to which I have given my life and my millions, I have to fight for my existence day by day, minute by minute. That is why you find me a little shattered. It isn't that I fear death or that I care how I die. I haven't the slightest feeling in the matter. The song and cry of my blood and brain is only that, before death comes, I shall finish the task which has been the theme of my life."

An electric gong rang from the gangway. Warren Rand stood up. He was himself again, all traces of fatigue gone, the eager light of the man planning great things in his eyes.

"Nature is nature," he said, "and it is perhaps well for a man to purge himself with talk sometimes. We will go on deck and meet our visitors."

CHAPTER XXXIII

It was a cheerful little trio which, under the supervision of two of the petty officers, made their way along the deck to meet their host. Zachary was still in his tennis clothes, bronzed, handsome and light-hearted. Ivan Postinoff, bearded and bespectacled, a large, bulky figure of a man, with an intelligent forehead and somewhat impressive demeanour, was more formally attired. The famous, or rather infamous, Stephen Vitznow, whose boast it was that no photograph of him had ever appeared in any paper, turned out to be a person of insignificant carriage and stature, of sallow complexion, deep-set, uneasy eyes, puny features, but a cruel, hungry mouth. He, alone, his eyes flashing everywhere, seemed disposed to be querulous.

"A private yacht, this," he muttered, almost in Warren Rand's hearing. "To me she has the appearance of a small man-of-war."

Zachary stepped forward and introduced his companions to Tellesom and their host. As George P. Bowman there was a subtle change in the latter's manner and speech. He shook hands with all three of his visitors. His voice seemed to have caught a reflection of the American business man's heartiness.

"A small warship is exactly what my craft was," he acknowledged. "She is transformed now, of course, or you wouldn't have room to turn round on these decks. I bought her for speed. Thirty-eight knots an hour she can do. We Americans, when we start out, like to get somewhere."

"We are able, at any rate," Tellesom pointed out, "to carry on the naval traditions of hospitality."

The features of the two visiting Russians relaxed as their eyes followed the direction of Tellesom's gesture. Under an awning was spread a small table, upon which were silver dishes of caviare sandwiches, smoked salmon and other delicacies. A steward in white linen clothes was dealing with an enormous cocktail shaker. There was vodka in the ice. The coarse good humour in Postinoff's face broadened with this anticipation of pleasure. Vitznow moistened his lips and his eyes shone greedily. Certain vague suspicions which had troubled his mind were fast fading away.

"It is very kind of you gentlemen to come and take luncheon with me like this," Warren Rand said, as he raised his glass. "I have been wanting to get acquainted with some one from your part of the world for months past."

"It is we who are honoured," Postinoff declared, draining his first glass of vodka at a gulp.

"It is always a pleasure to meet a citizen of your amazing country," Vitznow

added.

Glasses were replenished and Warren Rand still further expanded.

"I am told you are well-known people, both of you," he observed, "but I'll have to confess that I have only heard about you from my young friend here. You see, I'm in oil, and when you're in oil as deep as I am, you've no time for politics. I like to make money, and I want to deal with any country where there's oil. I'm ready to invest my money in any country where there's oil. I'm willing to build railways, make roads, stock your country with traction engines and mowers, finance your banks, sink wells, and provide you with all the latest machinery, so long as there's oil at the back of it. They tell me you gentlemen are high up in politics. I'd like to come to your country and get in touch with some of your bosses there."

"Something can certainly be arranged," Vitznow said, his cunning brain already busy with the subject of commissions.

"Our Government," Postinoff expounded, "is only too anxious to open up its resources—its vast resources, its great opportunities for the employment of capital—to investors such as yourself."

Warren Rand laughed noisily. It was so unlike him that Tellesom nearly dropped his wineglass.

"As for capital," he boasted, "I have two hundred million lying idle at the present moment."

"Dollars?" Postinoff exclaimed, in an awed tone.

"I should say not," was the contemptuous rejoinder. "Solid British pounds. We all have our ambitions," he went on. "Any one can know mine who chooses. I have a big holding in almost every oil company in the world, but I want control, and I can't get it unless I can do business with you fellows."

"Two hundred million British pounds!" Postinoff repeated to himself, in a thick guttural whisper.

"I thought there was only one man in the world with a fortune like that," Vitznow muttered, his lips parting above his fanglike teeth, and the suspicion creeping back to his eyes.

"I could tell you of half a dozen," Warren Rand scoffed, with swift appreciation of the momentary danger. "There's been more money made in the United States of America during the last twelve months than at any time in the world's history. We haven't got an industrial concern left that isn't glutted with money. We've bought Canada and the money's brimming over there now. You're our only hope. I'm for oil and gold. If I can make terms with your people, I can bring along all the capital you want. Is the vodka all right?"

"It is without a doubt veritable," Postinoff pronounced reverently. "Since I left my own country, I have not tasted anything like it."

"All that I shall ask you to do then," their host begged with a smile, as, at a signal from him, the glasses of his guests were refilled, "is to show your appreciation of it."

The descent to the saloon for lunch was a little noisy and the conversation turbulent, for the subject of commissions had already been hinted at. It was not until the first course had been served that either Postinoff or Vitznow noticed the fact that they were moving. The latter rose unsteadily in his place and looked through the porthole.

"Why, we're leaving the harbour!" he exclaimed. "What is this?"

Their host smiled. Somehow or other, now that he was seated in his accustomed place at the head of the table and the initial stage of the meeting with his guests was over, he seemed to have relapsed into something more like his old self. A certain measure of dignity had returned. His voice was colder and more precise.

"I understand that your stay here is brief," he explained, "and I wanted you to see Monte Carlo from its most beautiful aspect, which is, from my point of view, about a mile or two out to sea. It is so marvellously calm that I thought you would scarcely notice the motion, although you are, no doubt, excellent sailors."

Vitznow resumed his seat.

"For me it matters nothing," he declared, "nor for Ivan. Our young friend Paul Zachary, at his age, should be able to stand anything. You are a wonderful host, Mr. Bowman. If you have enough champagne of this vintage, we will go with you round the world."

"If we do," Postinoff threatened, "we shall drink it all, however much you have. I promise you that. We will keep at sea until it is all gone."

"It is a bargain," Warren Rand agreed hospitably. "When I have made a hundred millions or so out of public utilities in your country, and have control of your oil, we may speak of it again."

"Why not fix a date for your visit, now that we are together?" Vitznow suggested, leaning, or rather crouching, forward in his place. "Our business at Geneva draws to a close and we might begin to make plans."

"That is good talk," Postinoff agreed. "Stephen Vitznow and I have influence with the home Government. We can arrange for you to be received in Moscow whenever you will. A committee shall be formed to visit the various districts with you —a committee under the direction of Stephen Vitznow and myself. Together, we will draw up definite proposals. We cannot give you better vodka or caviare than you have offered us and our champagne will be sweeter, but you shall not starve. No,

dear host, you shall not starve—neither you nor whomever you may bring with you," he added, with a genial smile towards Tellesom.

"This wonderful country of ours," Vitznow went on, finishing without a blink the contents of a whole glass of champagne and watching its replenishment, "needs one thing and one thing only. It has oil. It has minerals. It has vast and amazing resources. It wants nothing but capital."

"In which respect," Postinoff added, with a huge, stomachic laugh, "it rather resembles us. To serve one's country, Mr. Bowman, is to remain always poor."

"Unless—" Warren Rand began.

"Unless," Vitznow interrupted, with a covetous gleam in his eyes, "one meets a millionaire like you, sir, to whom one may possibly be of the greatest service. In your agreements with our Government, we shall have a voice, we shall be able to save you large sums of money."

"No one who has ever done business with me," Warren Rand remarked, "has ever found me anything but generous."

"Capital!" Postinoff boomed.

"I can see that we shall be in excellent agreement," Vitznow echoed.

Zachary leaned across the table, with a little cough. The gleam had found its way into his eyes too.

"The first introduction," he suggested, "will not be forgotten? There may be a post in connection with the railways, or better still, a financial post, to be disposed of. I am not an exile. I can go back at any time. My passport is always in order."

"Something must certainly be done for the ambassador who brought together this happy little party," Warren Rand agreed. "You shall not be forgotten, Zachary. I promise you that. By-the-by," he added, finishing the contents of his glass and setting it thoughtfully down, "talking about passports. There will be no trouble, I presume, about my own?"

The two Russians roared with laughter. Paul Zachary, who had drunk little and who had noticed many things, looked at his host with the faint commencements of apprehension in his eyes.

"Your passport?" he repeated. "Why should there be any trouble about that, sir?"

Warren Rand tapped softly upon the table with his forefinger. The action itself seemed to have a certain significance, for the stewards who had been standing behind the chairs, one for each guest, closed in and stood at attention.

"Because," he confided, "I know nothing about this fellow Bowman. The name upon my passport would be Warren Rand, and I gather from my agents there that

my name is not very popular in your country just now."

CHAPTER XXXIV

A bomb thrown into the saloon might have produced more boisterous consternation, but nothing could have been more dramatic than the strained and terrible silence which ensued. The three Russians leaned in various attitudes towards their host. The good-humoured expression of subdued enjoyment had entirely left Zachary's sunburnt face. He was like a ferocious wolf, his lithe body ready to spring. The other two sat dumbfounded, the evil thoughts growing slowly in their brains.

"Gentlemen," Warren Rand proposed, "I suggest that you accept the situation as it exists, without brawling or unseemly disturbance."

He waved his right hand. They looked at the stewards and they looked down the black and ugly muzzles of half a dozen automatics.

"If any one of you moves," their host warned them, "or if your hands wander in forbidden places, you will be blown to pieces and save me all further trouble. I am Warren Rand, the sworn enemy of your country and your appalling creed, very much the more so since a month ago, when my agent Phillipson returned after five years spent among you."

There was a little shiver, like the whistling of an east wind in a gaunt avenue of elms, a stifled breath of terror.

"Very few days have gone by during the last few months," Warren Rand went on implacably, "during which one of your assassins has not tried to get at me. I know all about you, Postinoff, and you, Vitznow. I know of your secret visits to London, and Barcelona, and Berlin, before you ever turned up to plead with your smooth tongues about peace at Geneva."

"You know nothing against me, sir," Zachary declared, finding the power of speech return to him at last. "Whatever your quarrels with Soviet Russia may be, I am not concerned."

"That sounds strangely to me," Warren Rand rejoined. "You are a renegade from your class. You have consented to become the secret agent of the destroyers of your country."

"What harm is there in that?" the young man demanded passionately. "You can call these two men all the names you like—I have done it myself in the old days—but they represent a recognised form of government; they represent the only government Russia is likely to have in my days. Can you blame me for hanging on, even to the riffraff of my native land?"

Warren Rand eyed him coldly.

"My quarrel with these miscreants," he said, "is not based upon their government

or misgovernment of their own country, but on their damnable and poisonous interference in the government of other countries. They are not content with having invented the most inhuman and virulent code of laws for themselves, but in every country in the world their agents are trying these same doctrines, whose failure is already proved, upon the ignorant and discontented. No single government has thought it worth while to probe into your activities, Postinoff and Vitznow, but my secret service man has done so. I could tell you why you have had to abandon the war with China. I could tell you why you are disappointed in Afghanistan. I could show you a record of your workings in the slums of London and New York. I could read to you the minutes of your last meeting in Barcelona. My secret service is ahead even of yours, although it has cost me men's lives."

"What is all this talk leading to?" Postinoff asked angrily, curious gaps occurring in the deep bass of his voice. "Turn your yacht round and land us. To such a man as you, there is nothing more to be said."

That rare and terrifying smile parted Warren Rand's lips.

"Let me have my way," he begged. "I am known throughout the world as a man of few words. To-night, in this company, it pleases me to talk. This morning, the newspapers of Europe announced my presence in London. That is according to instructions. If I had sent you two gentlemen an invitation under my own name, I doubt very much whether this great honour would have been vouchsafed to me; or if our friend Zachary had met with his Nice agent, I doubt very much whether he would have brought you two gentlemen here this evening. Your Nice agent, by-the-by, is very thorough, Zachary," Warren Rand concluded. "He called here on his way to see you last night. It was a mistake to come on board, though. He is lying at the bottom of the harbour somewhere now. Not a pleasant sight, I should think, if ever he is found."

The spray was streaming faster than ever against the closed portholes. The destroyer was beginning to roll. No one seemed to notice.

"So you are Warren Rand," Postinoff commented, mopping his forehead with a highly scented pocket handkerchief.

"I am Warren Rand, and I am at war with your country," was the calm reply. "The situation, as you perceive, is unfortunate for you."

"I do not see why it should be unfortunate," Zachary argued, with an attempt at indifference. "What harm could come to us? There are many people in Monte Carlo who know that we have come to lunch with you, and many others who saw us embark."

"And all Monte Carlo, I am sure," Warren Rand observed, "would be bowed

down with regret if any accident should happen to you upon this pleasure trip—you or your friends,—but one never knows."

"What accident could happen to us?" Vitznow intervened harshly.

"The deck of a destroyer is not the same thing as the deck of a yacht," Warren Rand pointed out. "Just now every part of it is dangerously slippery with the spray. Walking is difficult. My champagne is powerful. You might even, without any special carelessness, fall overboard."

"All three of us," Zachary scoffed.

"It might occur. You see, I picture it in this way. Vitznow, here, would be walking arm-in-arm with his friend Postinoff. He would slip. He would cling to Postinoff and Postinoff also would slip. Both would go overboard. You, Paul Zachary—now, what would be your natural instinct in a case like that?" Warren Rand meditated, with a wicked gleam in his eyes and mockery in his tone. "We know, of course. A young man, and a famous athlete, you would throw off your coat and go overboard to the rescue of your friends. We are now doing, I should say, thirty knots an hour. We should be a mile and a half distant before we could swing round to offer you help. . . . Shall we go on deck?"

"In view of the present unpleasant conversation," Postinoff demurred, "I prefer the saloon."

Vitznow seized the half-filled bottle of champagne by his side, helped himself with a trembling hand, and tossed off nearly a tumblerful of the wine. His face was already white and drawn with fear.

"I refuse to move," he announced.

"And I," Postinoff echoed. "I demand to be taken back to Monte Carlo."

Tellesom, almost for the first time, spoke.

"In all seriousness, sir, haven't you frightened these men enough?" he remonstrated.

His Chief, ignoring the question, lit one of his cigars and passed the box around.

"Don't deny yourselves any little luxury which appeals to you, gentlemen," he suggested significantly.

Zachary leaped to his feet and suddenly felt the pressure of a pistol at his side.

"Sit down, you fool," his host enjoined. "You don't suppose I would stage a scene like this without preparation? These stewards of mine are all gunmen and they have their orders. Tellesom, you will find John Glynde in the smaller saloon. Ask him for my reference books—P and V."

Tellesom rose from his place and obeyed his Chief's directions. He reappeared in a few minutes, bearing two limp, calf-bound volumes. The latter, after turning over

the pages of one of them until he found what he sought, prepared to read from the text.

"Stephen Vitznow," he began. "Listen. Some of your crimes without doubt remained unreported, but here are others, the memory of which should make your last hours a vision of hell."

Warren Rand read in a dry, hard, but very distinct tone, and when he finished, the sweat was pouring down the forehead of the man who had been leaning forward in an attitude of strained attention.

"Lies!" he gasped. "All lies!"

His accuser made no remark. He picked up the second volume and turned towards the other man.

"Postinoff," he announced, in a matter-of-fact tone, "your turn has come."

Again he read. Postinoff sat back in his chair, gasping. The whole of his bulky frame seemed to have become convulsed. The veins stood out upon his forehead. He had the appearance of a man threatened with a stroke. When he tried to speak, he was dumb. The fear of death had paralysed his tongue. Warren Rand pushed the books back towards Tellesom.

"Well," he concluded, "there you are—unpleasant reading, even for me, who am not a man of sentiment."

"What concern is it of yours?" Vitznow demanded hysterically. "You are not even a Russian. You do not realise the conditions under which we were living."

"I see your point of view," Warren Rand agreed. "You may say that I am a self-appointed judge, sitting upon a self-constituted bench. You, too, were the same. You have dealt out death to hundreds of innocent people—innocent except that their vision differed from yours, their principles were not yours, they stood in the way of your clumsy progress towards an impossible dynasty. Now at last you are the condemned and I the judge."

"Where did you get all that rubbish from?" Postinoff groaned.

"From Moscow, from your own archives and your own people," was the stern reply. "You have sent spies into every country in the world. You see, at the present moment, how much better mine have served me. Each of you two creatures—I cannot bring myself to call you men—have dealt out, without flinching, a multitude of death sentences from an illegal bench. You have sent men and women to their death without a throb of pity, hideously, brutally, wantonly. I retaliate. You are to die, and you too, Zachary, the renegade—their tool—unless you can swim to shore, but by this time I should say that the minarets of Monte Carlo Casino have melted into the clouds."

Warren Rand rose to his feet, merciless, the contempt in his face growing every moment as he watched the frantic struggle of his unwilling guests to escape from the man who had closed in around them and listened to the clamour of their terrified voices.

"Fill them with wine or brandy," he directed the stewards. "Let the affair be finished quickly."

Tellesom and his Chief were left alone in the saloon. The former had opened one of the portholes and fringes of spray came flying in.

"You can't go on with this, sir," Tellesom protested firmly. "It's nothing more nor less than murder."

Warren Rand finished lighting a fresh cigar before he answered. There was a faint disgust in his expressionless face as he threw away the match.

"That is the Englishman all the world over," he sneered. "That is the weakness which has made you drop from your place among the Powers. Forgive your enemies, dilute your justice, turn your other cheek to the smiter. A weak-kneed race, all of you, lapping up false sentimentality with your mother's milk. I make no mistakes. Concerning those two Russians, one of them has been guilty of seventeen recorded murders of brutal character—several of them women. The other has taken a willing share in sentencing to death, without trial, ninety-two political prisoners, men who had done no wrong save to try to keep what was their own. Three of those ninety-two were my own men—spies, if you will, but honest spies, working in a just cause. What is the worth of justice, Tellesom, if it dare not punish as well as reward? As these men have sinned against humanity, so they die."

They were rushing into the wind. Papers were blowing about the saloon. The curtains rattled, and great, salty gusts, the breath of the sobbing dusk, roared through the porthole. Even above it, the human voice triumphed. Warren Rand listened, unmoved. Tellesom sprang to the nearest door and found it locked.

"Surely Zachary isn't as bad as the other two!" he pleaded.

"He was a creature of these men and a renegade," was the indifferent reply. "Besides, it would be highly inconvenient to let him live, with the story he might have to tell."

Tellesom returned to the table. Some instinct told him that he was too late. He was shaken, however, with the horror of the whole thing.

"But how on earth are you going to explain this?" he demanded. "It seems to me that you are breaking off in your schemes, whatever they may be, and risking everything for the sake of punishing these men."

Warren Rand smiled mirthlessly.

"There will be no trouble," he pronounced. "The decks are slippery to-day for men who drink as deeply as these Russians."

CHAPTER XXXV

Mr. Philip Hawkeson rose with some surprise to greet his host. It is not given to every man to be entertained by a Prime Minister in his dressing gown. Mr. Hawkeson himself wore the morning attire of a banker prince, with the addition of a scarlet carnation in his buttonhole.

"I won't apologise," the Right Honourable Oliver Trowse said a little irritably, as he shook hands. "I have scarcely slept all night. Don't tell me there's any fresh trouble?"

"There doesn't need to be," Mr. Hawkeson remarked drearily. "Bank rate eight and a half per cent; the Stock Exchange is going to pieces; merchants and manufacturers all over the country are becoming demoralised. How the devil does your Chancellor suppose this country can keep its end up with the pound at its present price? Why, the whole of the profit on any ordinary commercial transaction in any foreign country whatsoever is gone straight away. We can't live here by taking in one another's washing."

"Very good to start with," Oliver Trowse grunted. "This is the sort of conversation a man loves to wake up to after a bad night. Can't you present a few more horrors?"

"Why should I?" Hawkeson replied. "The time is past for treating our condition as merely a matter for irritation, sir. Something must be done."

"Something? What?"

"I have only one suggestion to make, and you'll hate it, but here it is. Send for Warren Rand."

The Prime Minister was guilty of a most undignified action. He threw the *Times*, which he had just picked up, into a distant corner of the room.

"That damned fellow again!" he exclaimed. "What can he have to do with it? Besides, he's still down at Monaco, isn't he, on that infernal yacht of his?"

"He flew home last week," Hawkeson confided, "and I'm afraid that he has a great deal to do with our present troubles."

The Prime Minister rang the bell three times. A young man, who had the air of having just arrived, hurried in.

"Sorry, sir, if I'm late," he apologised. "I didn't know you'd be moving at this time."

"It's Mr. Hawkeson here who's brought me out of bed," the Prime Minister explained. "Are there any telephones to that blasted Kingsway Buildings?"

"Something like a hundred private lines, I believe, sir."

"Get on to any one of them that brings you into touch with the archvillain there," his Chief directed. "Let them know that I wish to see Warren Rand."

"Something a little more genial, I suggest," Hawkeson ventured. "Ask if Mr. Warren Rand will stop round and take breakfast with the Prime Minister—"

"Anything you like," Trowse interrupted. "Send the message and get it over."

The secretary hurried off. Hawkeson reëstablished himself in a more comfortable chair.

"Forgive me if I seem to have quartered myself upon you," he begged. "The fact of it is, I haven't the faintest idea what to do if I go down to the City. You see, if there was a war or a dissolution of Parliament, we should know how to deal with matters. As it is, we're paralysed. They keep on coming to me for advice and I don't know what to say to them. You must face the position, sir. We're up against something unprecedented. We're being starved for gold. We must get hold of it or we shall have the most disastrous month's exchequer to show that's ever been known."

"It's your job to prevent it all slipping away," the Prime Minister declared.

Mr. Hawkeson shook his head.

"You can't look at it like that, sir," he objected. "The depositor must withdraw when he chooses. They've skun us dry. Politically, we may be all right. As a commercial institution—which is what a country must be, after all—we're on the rocks. . . ."

A few minutes later there was a sharp ring at the front doorbell—a moment's pause. The butler threw open the door.

"Mr. Fogge, sir," he announced.

The Chancellor made quiet but dignified entrance. He shook hands with the Prime Minister and with Hawkeson.

"You haven't brought any fresh problems with you, I hope?" Trowse asked, pointing to an easy-chair.

The Chancellor smiled a little drily as he accepted the invitation. He took off his spectacles and laid them by his side.

"I do not think," he said, "that fresh problems need be considered. The old ones are trying us high enough."

"The present one is about as much as we can manage," Hawkeson declared. "How the devil are we to go on paying our debts and keeping our gold reserve so that our exchange holds up? I'm beat. What about you, Fogge?"

"There is only one course open for us," the Chancellor of the Exchequer pronounced, smoothing his silvery-grey hair with his right hand. "We must add to our

gold reserve—and add to it at once. The exchange just now is in a deplorable condition. Nothing but gold will help to stabilise it."

"You haven't a little gold in the cellars of your house, I suppose?" Hawkeson suggested sarcastically.

"I regret to say that I have not," the Chancellor replied, "but I may point out that if you are not in a position to add to our reserves, then at least we must stop these withdrawals, even by an urgency Act of Parliament. Now, will you tell me, Hawkeson," he went on, "who the mischief is it who's digging into the bowels of our resources like this. France has had her whack, but it isn't she who persists. Germany reached her limit some time ago. Of course I know the rumours, but what private person is there in the world who could embarrass a great country as we are being embarrassed?"

Once more there was a sedate opening of the door. The butler presented himself.

"Mr. Warren Rand, sir," he announced.

There was a brief and ominous silence, which had in it qualities almost of drama. The three men leaned forward in their places and studied the newcomer with eager curiosity. Warren Rand advanced into the room indifferently, without the slightest trace of embarrassment. He wished the Prime Minister good morning, without offering his hand, and nodded to the other two men. The former pulled himself together.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Rand," he said. "I must apologise for ringing you up so early, but I thought perhaps you'd have breakfast with us and a slight business talk before the day's work begins. You know Mr. Fogge and Mr. Philip Hawkeson, I am sure."

"I have met these gentlemen," Warren Rand admitted.

Trowse rang the bell and ordered breakfast to be served. A footman followed the butler and the usual array of silver dishes, with tea and coffee pots, was set out upon the sideboard. The Prime Minister waved the servants away.

"We will help ourselves," he suggested. "Mr. Rand, Hawkeson, Fogge, you will find everything you want, I hope. After such a night as I've had, tea—although I generally prefer coffee. Serve yourselves, gentlemen. As soon as we get started, we'll ask Mr. Rand a few questions."

Warren Rand helped himself with great deliberation and chose a seat opposite his host, with his back to the light. Trowse did not wait long before he commenced the attack.

"Mr. Rand," he began, "we've had one or two conversations already, but we

have never made much progress. I'm hoping we shall have better luck to-day. We need your advice—perhaps your help."

"I am an American," Warren Rand reminded them. "Isn't it rather unusual that you should call me in to help solve your problems?"

"Not in the least," Hawkeson snapped. "You're a citizen of the world—the world of finance, at any rate. Your country doesn't matter. Where's all the gold going to, Mr. Rand?"

"I could answer your question," the latter confessed. "I see no benefit to myself in doing so, but I could. Who wants gold?"

"Great Britain," was the unanimous response.

Warren Rand looked coldly down the table.

"Mr. Trowse can tell you how to get it," he said.

"I wish to heaven that I could!" the Prime Minister exclaimed. "Exactly what do you mean by that, Mr. Rand?"

"You have a bad memory, sir."

"You paid me a visit not long ago," the Prime Minister reflected. "You indulged in some rather vague threats as to what might happen if France and Great Britain persisted in their perfectly justified attitude towards the disarmament question. Am I to understand that this is the conversation to which you allude?"

"Precisely. Unfortunately, you were not able to fall in with my point of view. Fate seems to have been rather against you since then, doesn't it? France has apparently lost the two battleships which inspired her opposition to sign and you seem to have got into a curious financial tangle."

The Prime Minister stirred his tea vigorously.

"We'll have to use plain words, Mr. Warren Rand," he said. "Are you suggesting that it was because France and England stood out against the disarmament clauses that France has lost her battleships and we have found financial trouble?"

"I never suggest anything," Warren Rand replied drily. "I'm simply pointing out facts. France is withdrawing her objections to the Disarmament Treaty and will shortly instruct her representatives to sign it in due course. I think that she has done wisely. I think—if I might presume to advise—that you would do well to follow her example."

The Prime Minister raised his eyebrows and pushed back the over-obtrusive hair from his forehead.

"I am afraid you have been listening to rumours, Mr. Warren Rand," he observed.

"Ring up the French Embassy and see," was the cold rejoinder. "You would

probably have heard from them during the day."

The Prime Minister touched a bell under his foot twice. Carstairs answered the summons.

"Richard," his Chief enjoined, "ring up the French Embassy."

He gave him some instructions in a low voice. The young man nodded and disappeared.

"Mind you," the Prime Minister went on, as he attacked his bacon and endeavoured to avoid the close observation of his vis-à-vis, "I won't say that it is impossible that France might sign, especially under pressure from us. I don't say that it is impossible that we might sign, but I can tell you this—at the present moment, nothing is settled."

Warren Rand made no reply. There was a stilted effort for a few minutes at general conversation. Presently Richard Carstairs reappeared. He laid a slip of paper by his Chief's side. The Prime Minister glanced at it, frowned, read it through more carefully, and then passed it on to Fogge.

"You have at least the gift of prophecy, Mr. Rand," he admitted. "I hear from the French Embassy that a special envoy left Paris this morning with despatches for us by aeroplane. The Ambassador, in his confidential message, has given me an idea of their tenor. He believes that France is disposed, if we are willing, to modify her attitude towards the Disarmament Treaty."

Warren Rand pushed his plate away from him.

"You are talking diplomatically," he remarked caustically. "I only understand business talk. France is going to sign the Disarmament Treaty whether you do or not. If you are prepared to sign it and give me your word—you and Mr. Fogge here—that you will, I will undertake that there shall be no further withdrawals of gold for the present and that you shall take what you want of forthcoming shipments without danger of interference from outside sources. You sent for me, I suppose, to make a bargain. There's my end of it."

They were all three guilty of unpardonable rudeness. They stared at Warren Rand with their lips parted, if not with their mouths open. The Prime Minister leaned forward in his place. Mr. Fogge adjusted his spectacles. The Bank Governor thrust a horn-rimmed monocle into his eye. They all seemed hypnotised by the man who had made this amazing proposition. Warren Rand took no more notice of them than if they had been flies.

"May I smoke?" he asked, producing his case. . . . "No, I'll take one of my own," he added, as the Prime Minister laid his hand upon a cedarwood box. . . . "Thanks!"

He lit one of his black cigars, finished his coffee, and leaned back in his chair. Mr. Fogge was the first of his companions to find words.

"I confess myself dumbfounded," he said. "I do not think that in the whole history of Downing Street such an amazing proposition has ever been put forward by a private person to two Cabinet Ministers and a governor of the Bank of England."

"I dare say you're right," Warren Rand agreed. "Generalities and reflections seldom interest me. It's up to you three gentlemen to answer my proposition, however astonishing you may find it. I've a lot of work waiting for me. We don't need pen and ink and paper at a conference like this. I've given you my word. I shall keep it. You give me yours. I'll trust you."

The Prime Minister drew a long breath and rose to the occasion.

"Our messenger shall leave for Geneva this afternoon," he promised. "Great Britain shall sign the Disarmament Treaty in its present shape."

Warren Rand nodded shortly and rose to his feet.

"You two financial gentlemen," he said, "can go and take a holiday. I shall keep my word to the letter. I think you know that. Mr. Trowse, I thank you for your hospitality. You will forgive me if I hurry away."

The Prime Minister held up his hand.

"One moment, Mr. Rand," he begged. "You're a difficult man to get hold of. You seem to pass all over the face of Europe without warning, whenever the fancy takes you. You are here now, and we are secure from journalists or any outside interference. I am not going to be impertinent. I am not going to ask you, as a great many people might, how in God's name you can perform the miracles you promise, but I am going to take something for granted, and when I have told you what it is, I am going to ask you one question afterwards. They say that you are out for the peace of the world. Good! It is a noble aim and any man might be proud to have embraced it. This Disarmament Treaty is a rung in the ladder. After all, though, what must come afterwards? The Peace Pact."

"The Peace Pact," Warren Rand pronounced calmly, "will be signed within a year."

"I will even go so far as to grant you that," Trowse conceded. "I will grant you that the Peace Pact may be signed with all its boundary clauses, its provisos, and everything else. An amazing document! And now, answer me this, Mr. Rand. A new law is established, just as a thousand years ago or more laws were established in this country. It becomes illegal to bear arms. Who interferes if any one chooses to break the law? Who, in God's name, is going to tower over the nations of the earth and wield the policeman's baton?"

Warren Rand nodded slowly.

"Sensibly put, Mr. Trowse," he admitted.

"Our Prime Minister has gone to the root of the whole business," the Right Honourable William Fogge pronounced. "That is where the steady, common-sense mind revolts logically against any scheme that has ever been suggested for the pacification of the world. How are you going to stop the growth of the nations? Some may shrink, others develop in muscle and power. How are you going to keep the strong child from thrusting his hands into the pockets of his weaker brother? Your Peace Pact says he may not. Who is going to impose its conditions?"

"Very well put again," Warren Rand acknowledged, without change of countenance. "Now, Mr. Banker," he added, turning to Hawkeson, "what about you? You are thrusting this question upon me, all of you. What have you got to say?"

"I am not a politician," Hawkeson replied. "I am not even an ordinary human being with a broad outlook upon life. In a sense, I am not even a man. I am a creature of bank notes and gold and drafts. I am the silent, logical force of the world. I haven't a brain; I don't need one. I add eight to eight and make it sixteen. I take ten from twenty and find ten remaining. I am a machine, Mr. Rand. I have no opinions."

"You are the greatest machine in the world," Warren Rand assented, "and when I am prepared to give an answer to the question you have asked me, Mr. Prime Minister, I will invite Mr. Hawkeson here to come to the conference, because he and I speak the same language. A pleasant breakfast and an interesting conversation, Gentlemen. I thank you. Don't ring, Mr. Trowse. I see the door there and my car is outside."

He was gone with one of those incredibly swift movements of his which outdistanced even the butler who hurried after him. They watched the car drive away.

"That man," the Prime Minister declared slowly, "is mad."

"Crazy," the Chancellor of the Exchequer agreed. "He uses words like bricks from a child's toy palace."

Hawkeson, too, had walked to the window. He was looking through the slight mist at Warren Rand's disappearing limousine. He said nothing.

CHAPTER XXXVI

Tellesom, a little irritated by the long delay, strolled into his wife's compartment of the Transcontinental Train de Luxe. She held out her hand and drew him down to the place by her side.

"Listen," she said, "I have just come across this sentence in the *European Review*:

> "It might be said that the poison was drawn from the fangs of Russia with the tragic death of the two men who had by some means or other usurped the leading place in her destinies. It was only a short time ago that the rumours of their disappearance were substantiated. Even now, full details are lacking. It is known that they were yachting somewhere upon the Riviera at a time when they were supposed to be at work for their country in Geneva, and it is certain that they were in Monaco only a day or so before the rumour spread—a rumour of which there is now ample confirmation—of their death by drowning."

"What do you think of that, Charles? It's the first time that I have seen even as much as that in print."

"I think, as I always have thought," he replied, lighting a cigarette, "that your father is the most amazing man in the world."

"Anything else?"

"Also that he contrived by some means or other to have the most adorable daughter."

"Not bad for a husband of barely two months," she approved. "I wonder how much you know about this?"

"I wonder," he mused.

"It happened while you were in Monte Carlo those few days?"

"Let it go at that," he begged. "I am bringing my work with your father to an end in Geneva this time. In fact, from what I can hear, he is breaking up all his establishment. I'll tell you more of the story afterwards, if it is possible, even if I can't tell you the whole truth."

"I am not very curious," she assured him, "but, speaking of Geneva, do you really think we shall ever get there?"

A train attendant was passing and Tellesom stopped him.

"Why have we been shunted on to this siding?" he demanded. "We've been here

an hour already."

"Orders from Geneva, sir," was the apologetic reply. "We have to let a special train go through here."

"More delegates?" Tellesom grumbled.

"It is for some one very important, sir. The whole line is being cleared. We shall get away in a few more minutes, though. The special is coming up the gradient now. You can see her pass this side."

They moved to the window, which Tellesom promptly lowered, and the man disappeared. The roar of the approaching train already filled the air. It was travelling at no great speed, toiling up the final ascent before the run down to the plain. It consisted of two saloon cars only. The first seemed filled with men seated at small tables, two or three of them busy with typewriters. In the second, a man sat at a green baize table, apparently studying a document which his companion had spread out before him. A sharp exclamation broke from Tellesom's lips.

"My God!" he cried. "Do you know who that is?"

A glimpse was all they had—a glimpse of a man with a face like a statue, one hand upon the table in front of him, the forefinger of the other travelling down what seemed to be columns of figures on the paper which was being held out for his inspection. He was speaking. One could almost imagine the crisp words from that hard, firm mouth. In the chair opposite, the little man with flaxen hair and gold-rimmed spectacles was listening intently. There was an air of almost doglike devotion in his expression as he leaned across the table. Even as they looked, the train, with its flaming lights, had roared its way on into the darkness and disappeared in a tunnel. It was like a picture flashed upon a screen—a picture of real life.

"Your father and John Glynde!" Tellesom exclaimed.

They pulled up the window and stepped back into the compartment.

"What an amazing silhouette!" Tellesom continued, in a tone almost of awe. "The modern Napoleon on his way to lay down the law to the rulers of the world. If the thing had been staged, it couldn't have been more dramatic."

"It was marvellous," she agreed, a little gleam in her eyes. "If I weren't married to you, Charles, I think I'd like to be his secretary."

"You wouldn't have had a chance," he assured her. "Your father keeps women of all sorts at arm's length. We have only had one who's ever held any post at all important in the administration. She is marrying John Glynde at the end of the week."

"What did Father say about that?" she asked.

"Very much the same thing as he said when I told him that I was going to marry you—that he wasn't interested in the private lives of his assistants. In John Glynde's

case, however, marriage was almost a necessity. He'll have a great position in Geneva as the Governing Director of the International Bank."

"It sounds magnificent. Does that belong to my parent too?"

He nodded.

"It's somehow or other connected with the end of his schemes. I don't pretend to understand it. I've watched the building grow for years and I should think there isn't another like it in the world."

"Shall you tell him I am with you?" she asked curiously.

"It wouldn't make any difference," he assured her. "There was never any one in history like your father. I used to wonder whether he was a poseur. I know now he isn't. He hasn't one single human feeling in his body except for his work. And concerning that he seldom opens his lips, except to give orders."

"If he's so utterly heartless," she queried—"why this terrific, grinding energy of his? I could understand a man like Ford, who is full of principles, devoting his life to a sacred object; but apparently my revered father doesn't possess any. Why should he bother himself about what happens to the world?"

Tellesom shook his head.

"My dear," he said, "I long ago gave up any attempt to understand the working of your father's mind. I've just done my job to the best of my ability and left it at that. I don't believe even John Glynde, who has scarcely left his side for over twenty years knows much more about him than I do."

There was a shrill whistle, a rattle of couplings. With shrieking of steam and much labour, the Transcontinental express abandoned its ignominious position, glided back on to the main line, and toiled on round the mountainside towards Geneva.

CHAPTER XXXVII

If indeed there was something of melodrama in Warren Rand's night journey across Western Europe, with all his suite and retinue, there was drama of the real sort in the palatial room which Tellesom entered for the first time the following afternoon. "A triumph of interior simplicity," the world-famous architect who was responsible for its structure had declared, as he looked lovingly at the Doric pillars, the white marble floor, the stately, carved roof, the fine sweep of the great windows. Of furniture there was scarcely any. A long oak table, which could have seated forty people, was almost lost in the centre of the floor. At its head, on that memorable afternoon, sat Warren Rand, with John Glynde on a small chair a little behind him. On his right was the Right Honourable Oliver Trowse, Prime Minister of England; next to him Monsieur Foucquailles. Medano, Mussolini's one trusted minister, was opposite; Friedmann, successor to Anselm Loeb, and whose nickname was "The Honest German," sat a few places away. By his side was Grateson, the American, a great diplomat and a future President. Behind, at a small table by themselves, were four other men of highly professional appearance. It was an amazing gathering to have been brought together at the invitation of any one man.

Warren Rand had been speaking when Tellesom was passed into the room, but he broke off and waited while the latter made swift progress towards him. He spoke no word of welcome; simply took the despatch which Tellesom handed to him, slit open the envelope, and glanced at its contents. He laid the communication with some other papers by his side and motioned to a chair in the background.

"Remain for the present, Tellesom," he directed. . . . "Gentlemen," he continued, turning to his audience, "I thank you for your presence here. I should not have asked for it, had I not something worth saying to you. I am going to be brief—perhaps you will think surprisingly brief. You see several strangers at the table beyond yours. One of them is Sir Hugo Myer, who, I think you know, is one of the greatest authorities upon international finance. There is also Mr. Henry Pritchard, representing, I am told, the best-known firm of accountants in the world, and the other two gentlemen are the most famous exponents of American and English law—Mr. Remington of New York and Lord Hindhead from London. I have thought it wise to require their presence, in case you should wish to ask any questions arising out of the matter which we are about to discuss."

He paused for a moment. The Frenchman, who had never ceased looking around him since his entrance, indulged in a little gesture.

"We came to you full of anticipations, Mr. Rand," he acknowledged, "but before

we go further let me congratulate you. I have watched this building in the course of construction for years. I congratulate you upon owning the most palatial and wonderful bank architecturally in the world."

"The building is truly amazing," Medano observed. "I should appreciate it more if our friend Mr. Rand had not apparently helped himself to half the money in the universe to fill it."

There was a little murmur of amusement—not altogether sincere. Warren Rand smiled grimly as he realised its artificial note. No one knew better than himself how he had embarrassed the money dealers of the world.

"Your complaint against me may be justified, Signor," he admitted. "Perhaps, however, before we have finished this evening, you will look at things differently. I asked you to meet me here because, although I represent no country and therefore can take no part in your formal discussions, I do represent a Power—one of the greatest Powers in the world—and for that reason I am venturing to claim a few minutes—half an hour possibly—of your time."

"I quite agree with Mr. Rand that he has the right to call us into conference," Trowse declared. "I have come all the way from England at his request. Otherwise, our representative, Mr. Peatfield, is in charge of proceedings here."

"You have already," Warren Rand continued, "signed a Treaty of Disarmament, which, if faithfully kept—and I believe that it will be faithfully kept—should lead to a great decrease in your national expenditures. To-morrow is the final day for you to come to your decisions as to the Peace Pact. You five gentlemen who are assembled here this afternoon represent the five World Powers. What you do, the others will do. Therefore, I address myself to you. We are an unofficial gathering. Nothing that we say here is binding nor will it be reported outside this room. I shall ask you, therefore, whatever questions I choose, leaving you to answer them or not, according to your inclinations. What are your instructions to your representative, Mr. Trowse, with reference to signing the Peace Pact to-morrow?"

"I have not absolutely decided," was the somewhat surprised reply.

"Monsieur Foucquailles, I venture to ask you the same question."

"I may sign—but—"

The little gesture was eloquent.

"I shall sign," the American declared. "Those are my instructions."

"I reserve my decision," the German observed. "My present convictions are against signing. My government has left me a free hand, however."

"I shall sign," Medano announced, "unless anything happens between now and to-morrow to influence my decision."

"Now we know where we are," Warren Rand proceeded coolly. "This subject has been amply discussed in committee and in general session. I believe that I have correctly gauged the spirit of the majority of you. You probably say to yourselves—in fact, you have already said it—that no Peace Pact is of solid value because there is no guarantee that in the hour of temptation it would be kept. You argue that it is useless to make laws unless you have the power behind to enforce them. In this case, you ask yourselves, who is to exact any penalties that may be decided upon against the aggressor? You have a code of laws, but you are without police or law courts to enforce them. Therefore—to the minds of some of you—the Peace Pact rests upon no logical foundation."

"I could not," Doctor Friedmann remarked, "have expressed my objections to the Peace Pact more clearly myself."

"I must confess that I feel the same way about it," Trowse assented.

"Very well," Warren Rand went on, "I have known for some weeks that the sentiment in favour of signing the Peace Pact was by no means unanimous and I have prepared myself. It is my desire that it shall be signed whole-heartedly by all of you. It is to induce your signatures that I have invited you to meet me here to-day."

Then Oliver Trowse—always the blunderer—asked that simple question which the whole world had asked itself many times during the last few months.

"Why are you so anxious for the adoption of the Peace Pact, Mr. Rand?"

There was no change in the latter's face. If anything, his tone was a little drier than ever as he answered.

"That seems to me, sir, a very reasonable question to ask, but a little beside the point. What does it matter? I may, although few people would believe it of me, have the heart of a philanthropist. I may be working towards this end for love of my fellow creatures, but I don't think that any one would believe that either. Let the question remain unanswered. It will not affect the result. Let it suffice that I am going to offer you all what I hope you will consider adequate inducement to sign the Peace Pact."

Genuine interest quickly stifled curiosity. Every one leaned a little forward in his place. It was an occasion, this, which had never happened before in the history of mankind—the coming together of the statesmen of the world at the bidding of a capitalist. Somehow or other, every one felt that it was an amazing and momentous crisis, that his standard of proportions was about to be changed as though by an earthquake. Capital has found voice—the world's latent and dynamic force, harmless enough when distributed among millions, but a terrible danger when gathered together from all quarters of the universe as this man had gathered it. In what manner would he propose to use his power?

"Before I proceed," Warren Rand went on, "I must convince you that I am in a position to carry out my promise. With that object in view, I have asked for the attendance here of Mr. Pritchard, the accountant, who is well-known both in London and New York. Mr. Pritchard, you have had free access to my banks, to my secret ledgers, to my brokers, to my men of law, for the last six months. An exact balance sheet no one could make out, because my fortune changes from minute to minute, but you can tell these gentlemen who are present here approximately how much capital I own free of all charge or liability."

Mr. Pritchard rose to his feet. He looked round the table. This was a proud moment in his life. No one else in the world had ever been able to make such an announcement to such an audience.

"Gentlemen," he said, "Mr. Rand has told you the truth. He has given me the secret keys to his affairs. With a staff of twenty clerks, I have been engaged for a great many months in making my calculations. I have been able to arrive at more or less final figures. When I tell you what they are, you will have to acknowledge to yourselves that not only is Mr. Warren Rand the richest man in the world, but he is by so far the richest that he stands alone as a power and a force to be reckoned with in the day-by-day history of affairs. I estimate Mr. Warren Rand, on to-day's figuring, to be worth some seven hundred million pounds sterling."

There was a dead and significance silence. One man's lips moved slowly, as though he were saying the sum over to himself.

"Pounds?" the American gasped.

"Pounds sterling," the accountant repeated. "There is no possibility of any vital mistake in the calculations. At any time, if Mr. Rand chose, he could increase those figures hugely by sacking your markets. He has refrained from doing anything of the sort. Mr. Warren Rand is worth seven hundred million pounds."

They were all more or less stupefied. Warren Rand continued coldly.

"Gentlemen," he explained, "I have asked my accountant to make this statement, not from any sense of vain-glory, because the possession or non-possession of money is largely a matter of accident, and it is probable that, even though I am in command of this sum to-day, I shall die a poor man."

This time every one found breath to indulge in little exclamations of mingled awe and wonder. Warren Rand listened to them all without change of countenance.

"Wait, Gentlemen," he enjoined, "until I have stated my proposition. I pass on now to another phase of the present situation. Throughout Europe, and more or less in America, every country is suffering from scarcity of gold."

"Gold!"

One could almost hear some of these men beginning to think. The mystery of the generation—the slow absorption of gold in unknown channels!

"Gentlemen," Warren Rand went on, "you might, perhaps, believe that what I have done is an impossibility. It is for that I have asked Sir Hugo to be present. His cousin, as you know, is the first bullion broker in London. The world is suffering from a shortage of gold. All your exchanges are flopping about. Do you know where that gold is? In my cellars."

"It isn't possible," the American, who was the only one who seemed to have any breath in his body, gasped.

"It is the truth," Warren Rand pronounced. "I have been buying gold anonymously through my banks in various countries for five years—stripping myself to buy gold, especially where I could do so with some measure of secrecy. The banks have been supposed to be buying for their governments. They were not. They were my banks and they were buying for me. I even risked the insurance sometimes to prevent my name being published. In the States this week there is an article pointing out that the shortage of gold to-day amounts to very nearly five hundred million pounds. The man who wrote that article knew what he was talking about. In the vaults of this bank, Gentlemen, is deposited in bullion, specie and sovereigns, gold to the amount of five hundred million pounds."

Monsieur Foucquailles struck the table with his clenched fist.

"It is incredible," he cried.

"The man is mad!" Medano shouted.

Trowse laughed heartily and scornfully.

"I always said that he was mad," he declared. "We were fools to come here."

The German was almost as hysterical as the rest, but he preserved his reason.

"Let him finish," he begged. "Let him spin the rest of his fairy tale."

Every one was talking at once, contradicting one another, exclaiming, disputing. The American's voice was the first to ring out with any final word of challenge.

"Warren Rand," he said, "I'll commence by telling you frankly I don't believe you. Having told you that, I'll ask you a question. If this is true, what in the name of God is the meaning of it? You've plunged the whole financial world into embarrassment and distress, at your own cost. You can make no money hoarding gold. You're losing a man-sized fortune every day of your life."

"I will deal with your first statement," Warren Rand announced, touching a bell by his side. "This is a world's event, Gentlemen. I shall make no apologies for causing you a little trouble. I shall ask you to visit my vaults. Sir Hugo and you, John Glynde, will escort our friends."

A man in uniform had entered the room from a private entrance close to Warren Rand's chair. The latter turned towards him.

"Sergeant," he directed, "let me have a guard of thirty men, on the vault floors, armed. These gentlemen will inspect the bullion."

The man saluted and withdrew. One by one the delegates rose to their feet.

"You are not accompanying us?" Trowse asked.

"It is not necessary," was the indifferent reply. "I spent an hour in the vaults as soon as I arrived. Sir Hugo is a great expert. He will show you that my calculations are correct."

They trooped out of the room. Warren Rand neither changed his place nor his posture.

"Tellesom," he asked, without looking round, "how many men of our original bodyguard have you here?"

"Eight, sir."

"Where are they stationed?"

Tellesom answered in some surprise. It was the first time he had ever been asked such a question.

"Four in your hotel, sir—one in your apartments. Two are in a taxicab drawn up behind your car here. One of them will be on the pavement as you cross. Another one has a motor bicycle to see if you are watched when you leave. This isn't a bad place for trouble."

"Isn't it?" Warren Rand queried. "I was shot at last night. I think they knew that you had not arrived. The man never came near, though. He may be skulking about again to-night."

Tellesom was troubled. He looked anxiously at his Chief. Warren Rand had never before shown the slightest anxiety as regards the means taken for his protection.

"I'll leave the place with you myself, sir, if you'll allow me," he suggested.

Warren Rand pinched a cigar but laid it down by his place without lighting it.

"After all," he muttered, "it is of very little consequence."

"I should think it was a great deal of consequence if any one got at you while I was in charge," Tellesom declared. "It's my job to keep you alive."

Warren Rand made no remark. He sat in his old posture, waiting. Presently there was the sound of voices and footsteps in the corridor. The door was opened. They all came solemnly in. There was a new expression in their eyes as they looked at Warren Rand. Here indeed was a superman.

"Well, Gentlemen?" he asked.

"The bullion is there," Grateson acknowledged in an awed tone. "I have never seen such a sight in my life, nor such wonderful vaults."

"How you accumulated it all I cannot imagine," Foucquailles murmured.

"That is not our present concern," Warren Rand observed. "I have had to use many subterfuges and sometimes it has been very difficult. But there it is. Now, Gentlemen, listen to me. We are agreed upon one point, I believe. No country in these days would dare to go to war without a large gold reserve in her treasury."

"It would be impossible," Medano declared.

"Absolutely out of the question," Foucquailles agreed.

"Very well. This is my idea of policing the Pact of Peace. The gold, as I dare say you noticed, is contained in four chambers of the vault. There is a letter on the door of each of these chambers. There is an 'F' for France, 'E' for England, 'G' for Germany, 'I' for Italy. You will sign that Peace Pact to-morrow or agree to sign it now, and the keys of those four chambers are at your disposal."

No one understood. Trowse expressed the general bewilderment.

"Tell us in plain words what you mean, Mr. Rand?" he begged.

"I mean," Warren Rand explained, "that I am placing at your disposal, Monsieur Foucquailles, and yours, Mr. Trowse, and yours Signor Medano, and yours, Doctor Friedmann, one hundred million pounds' worth of gold each, on certain conditions. You will find them fully elaborated in papers drawn up by my counsellor here in collaboration with Lord Hindhead. You can examine them at your leisure, but, in plain words, here are the terms. First of all, the gold must be kept in the vaults of this bank, but in your name, belonging to your country, a tangible and available asset against your paper issue. Should any one of you embark upon war, you lose your gold. It is added to the stock of the others and the recalcitrant Power is free to make war if he can. As for you, Grateson," Warren Rand pointed out, turning to his countryman, "I have not offered you a stock of gold, for you have no need of it. Whatever comes upon the market now is yours for the buying."

Trowse was clasping his forehead.

"I am an ordinary human being," he bemoaned. "My brain cannot grasp this. Is the gold a loan?"

"Certainly not," Warren Rand replied, "else it would be valueless to you as against your paper issue. It is a free gift, on condition that it be not moved from here. It will make not the slightest difference to your financial position whether it is here or in the vaults of the Bank of England, so long as it belongs to you. You part with it only if you break the Peace Pact. The President of the United States is the trustee. I received a cable from him brought by my friend Colonel Tellesom here within the last

hour, accepting the charge. The papers are there with Mr. Remington and Lord Hindhead. The whole affair is very simple."

"Is Mr. Rand correct when he says that the gold lying here can be reckoned as gold available and in the nature of currency?" Trowse asked the lawyers seated at the smaller table.

"Absolutely," was Remington's confident reply. "The gold is under the trusteeship of the President of the United States. That is protection enough, I think, for any one here."

They drifted into spasms of violent conversation, alternated by brief spells of stupefied silence. Medano leaned forward in his place.

"One realises a thing like this but slowly," he admitted. "Help us, Mr. Rand—help us by telling us what your object is in this, the most stupendous gift the world has ever known."

"My object should be fairly evident," was the patient reply. "I desire to end war. I desire the signing of the Peace Pact by the four European Powers. I spent some years trying to think of a way by which the Pact could be made not only a florid gesture, but a permanent reality. I took the advice of my counsellors here. We evolved this scheme."

"But why?" Medano demanded. "*Why* are you so passionately anxious to stop war? I have never heard your name mentioned as a great philanthropist. Men fear you rather than anything else. I have heard of you simply as the unscrupulous wrecker of the money markets."

"I have laid no claim at any time to being a philanthropist," Warren Rand reminded him, "and I have no explanation to offer of my action. You can call me mad, if you like. It really does not matter. I desire to end war."

Grateson leaned forward in his seat.

"Warren Rand," he declared solemnly, "you're one of the most wonderful men the world has ever known but I don't get you yet. You don't suppose that you're going to stop war for all eternity?"

"My plan," Warren Rand pronounced confidently, "and I have thought it out with great care, will end war for many generations to come. I will tell you why. The scheme itself will be successfully operative for forty years. After that, when there has been peace for so long, no nation will ever feel again the lust for war. The spirit will die with the shrinking of armaments. No one in the earlier days will risk losing the gold, and when those are past, the habit of strife will cease to be one of men's instincts."

Warren Rand had not the air of a man who argues. He just spoke. The burble of

talk began again, but in a lesser degree. Presently he tapped upon the table.

"Let us bring this matter to a conclusion," he suggested. "Mr. Trowse, you will sign the Peace Pact and accept the gold?"

"I will," was the firm reply.

"And you, Monsieur Foucquailles?"

"I sign—I sign now—I sign when you like."

"And you, Grateson?"

"I was signing, anyway," the latter reminded him. "I am bound to say I sign in a very different spirit now, though."

"Signor Medano?"

"My fingers are only aching to hold the pen," Medano declared.

"And you, Friedmann?"

"I sign too, on behalf of my country, with a clear conscience and a full heart."

"The matter, then, is now out of my hands," Warren Rand concluded. "Lord Hindhead has the keys and he will deliver one to each one of you four to-morrow, after the signing of the Treaty, together with my Deed of Gift. He will also have the documents prepared, setting out the terms of the gift, which you will also sign."

Friedmann got up and began a confused little speech of thanks. Warren Rand listened unmoved. They crowded around him with grateful gestures but he remained curiously unresponsive.

"You waste words, Gentlemen," he said. "What I have done, what I am doing, is not for your sakes. I do it because I choose. No one can read inside my mind and discover when or why I came to the determination which I have carried out, nor shall I take any one into my confidence. I do this because I choose to do it."

They drifted away, chilled a little by his stony aloofness. Hindhead, who had papers to be signed, was the last to go.

"I never dreamed," he confided, before he took his departure, "that I should ever have the luck to see history made like this."

Warren Rand's response was cold and monosyllabic. Not for a moment had one of the speeches which had been showered upon him brought the slightest sign of gratification into his face. The great lawyer, who was reputed to be one of the most eloquent of living men, left him because he could think of nothing to say.

"If you will let me know when you are ready to start, sir," Tellesom suggested, "I'll get my men together."

"It is of no consequence now," Warren Rand muttered. "The thing is finished. By-the-by, did you tell me, Tellesom, that you had married my daughter?"

"Yes, sir," Tellesom replied. "She is here now in Geneva with me."

Warren Rand made no comment. He sat still in the same position, looking down the long table. Then he spoke as though to himself, yet distinctly and so unexpectedly that his listener started.

"I had two sons once."

Tellesom stared at his Chief, amazed. After all, was it a human being who was coming to life, stirred by the great event of the day?

"They were killed in the war, weren't they, sir?" he asked.

Warren Rand had the air of a man who had heard nothing. Tellesom lingered for a moment. Then, reluctantly, he left the room. . . .

Twilight was coming upon the city. Lights from the street flashed in through the broad windows. The solitary occupant of the great room never moved his hand to touch one of the buttons which would have flooded the place at any moment with soft light. He sat still in the same position, only in his eyes now there was indeed a touch of the visionary. The empty chairs pushed back from the table had left no ghosts for him. He was looking through the wall and his thoughts, whatever they may have been, were his own. When Tellesom came back, after a few moments, he started with surprise to find the room in darkness. He turned on the lights.

"The men are all ready, sir," he announced. "Will you come now?"

His Chief made no reply. Tellesom hurried forward. The horror of it was already crushing his senses. Warren Rand had sunk a little lower in his chair, but his eyes looked out into the unknown world. The irony of it was like a sob in Tellesom's throat. Eight men below to protect the life of a man who was already dead!

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.

Inconsistency in accents has been retained.

[The end of *Up the Ladder of Gold* by E. Phillips (Edward Phillips) Oppenheim]