THE CHANNAY SYNDICATE

E. Phillips Oppenheim

HODDER AND STOUGHTON

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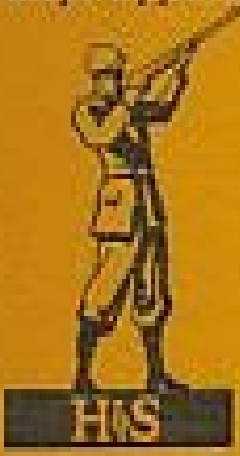

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THE CHANNAY SYNDICATE

BY

E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

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CHAPTER I
GILBERT CHANNAY TAKES THE AIR

Major Egerton Warling, D.S.O., Governor of one of His Majesty's Prisons situated in the vicinity of London, was not altogether at his ease in this somewhat singular farewell interview to which he was committed. He was a youngish man who had not held the appointment very long, and he could still remember the days when the name of the departing visitor, who had just been brought in for his final benediction, had been one to conjure with in highly desirable circles. He stood with his hands thrust into the pockets of his dressing-gown and sought for words which might not offend.

"We have acceded to your request, as you see, Channay," he began. "One o'clock in the morning is an extraordinary hour for us to dismiss—er—a prisoner who has served his time, but, from what I can hear, your request is not altogether unreasonable. You want to escape annoyance from your past associates I gather."

Gilbert Channay smiled very faintly. He was a man of only slightly over medium height, inclined to be slim, but with the carriage and broad shoulders of an athlete. His features were good, but his complexion had suffered from several years of confinement and unnatural living. There were pleasant little lines about his eyes and the corners of his mouth, in spite of the hardening of the latter during the grim days of a routine driven life. He was well-dressed, in clothes cut obviously by a good tailor but now become too large for him. He was wearing gloves as though to conceal his hands and he carried a Homburg hat.

"That was rather the idea, sir," he admitted.

"You can drop the 'sir' now, Channay," the Governor remarked. "What I want to say to you is this. If you would care for police protection for the first stage of your journey it could be arranged."

Channay shook his head meditatively.

"No one knows that I am leaving at this hour, I suppose?" he asked.

"Not a soul," was the confident reply.

"In that case I'd rather be without it," he decided. "When I reach my destination—well, I shall be ready for what may happen. Good of you to arrange this for me, Warling, and to get out of your bed at this hour of the morning to see me off. There's nothing else, I suppose."

"A word of advice wouldn't be acceptable, eh?" the Governor enquired, a little diffidently.

"It is, I believe, usual under the circumstances," Channay conceded, with a faint smile. "Are you going to suggest that I try to earn an honest living?"

Major Warling lit a cigarette. His slight movement in striking a match disclosed the fact that he was wearing his pyjamas.

"Sorry I can't offer you one, yet, Channay," he regretted, "but take a handful if you will to smoke in the car. What I should like to say to you is this. I have always looked upon you as a hardly treated man. You were certainly the brains of the syndicate which bore your name, but although you signed the balance sheets of the Siamese Corporation I have never felt satisfied that it was you who alone were responsible for the dishonest side of the affair—if it was dishonest. . . . That's *en passant*," he went on, blowing out his match. "Listen to me, now, for a moment. I've got it at the back of my head that your arrest was brought about by a kind of conspiracy amongst the others, who meant to profit by your absence, and that you've been laying it up against them all these years. Am I right?"

Gilbert Channay shrugged his shoulders slightly. He made no reply whatever. After a moment or two the other continued.

"Well, you're not bound to commit yourself, of course. I'm going to give you a word of advice, because you must remember that the whole of a great prison like this is a kind of whispering gallery. One hears everything. There's a sort of idea about that you're going back into the world with the fixed intention of getting level with some of these fellows who were responsible for your—er—misfortune. Kind of vendetta, you know, only it's one against a gang. I should drop that if I were you. This place ain't much catch for a man brought up like you were, but believe me Dartmoor's worse. And there are worse things than Dartmoor," the Governor added meaningly.

Channay smiled again; a smile of a different order this time. Of the two men he seemed by far the more at his ease.

"There's one of that pack of vermin," he confided, "whom I shall certainly kill, if I have the opportunity, the first time I meet him. To risk my life against his, however, would be such a ridiculously one-sided bargain, that I think I can promise you I shall go about my business in such a fashion that no one will ever be able to fasten the guilt upon me."

"They all think that," was the grave rejoinder.

"That is because most crimes are committed without due forethought," Channay pointed out. "The murderer is generally in a passion and loses his wits. It will not be like that with me. In any case, in return for your interest, I will promise you this. I shall never again see the inside of a criminal prison, nor shall I ever risk the other eventuality at which you delicately hinted."

"Of course," Major Warling continued, "I am young at this prison job yet, but I do know that in here men brood and brood and brood until everything

seems out of proportion. Give yourself a chance, Channay. You're a youngish man. Enjoy yourself. Even if you find England difficult there are plenty of other countries. Give yourself a chance before you chuck up the whole thing just for an idea. You did devilish well at philosophy, I remember, when you were at Magdalen. Get back to the old aphorisms, and cultivate 'em. There are no weeds worse than the wrong ideas, and I am afraid this is a foul place for developing them. What about it, eh?"

"Is this my little lecture?" the departing prisoner asked pleasantly.

"It's about all I have to say, except to wish you good luck."

"It's good of you, at any rate, to get up out of your bed to see the last of me, and not to altogether forget old times," Channay declared. "As for your advice—well, I will bear it in mind."

"The taxicab is waiting outside as you asked," the Governor announced. "The chauffeur has orders to take you to the garage where you will change into the car. If you would like to have a plain clothes man on the box with you, for the first stage of your journey, at any rate, you can have him."

"I will be alone, thanks," was the firm reply.

"Before you leave," Warling concluded, "I have given permission for a fellow downstairs to have a word with you—used to be in the Force, but quitted when he came into a little money. He's got something to say to you and he's a harmless fellow, anyway. . . . Good-bye, old chap! Good luck to you!"

Major Warling held out his hand. His departing guest hesitated.

"Don't be an ass!" the former begged. "It's a quaint sort of position, ours, but after all you don't think I'm going to forget that it was you who gave me my cap when we were youngsters and my colours later on. You've come a cropper for a bit, but there was nothing mean about your show, anyway, and you've paid for it. Shake hands, Channay, and start again. Don't you remember that famous occasion when you made a duck in your first innings for the Gentlemen and a hundred and thirty-three and won the match in the second?"

Gilbert Channay held out his hand. His voice and whole manner had softened. The years seemed to have fallen away.

"You have a good memory and you're a good fellow, Warling," he said. "Good-bye!"

For the last time, Gilbert Channay passed along those empty corridors and down the stairs towards the entrance hall. The warder who was escorting him pushed open the door of a waiting-room.

"Someone in here to see you," he announced. "I'll stay outside."

Channay, inclined to be impatient, glanced almost irritably at the visitor who was standing ready to receive him. He was certainly not an impressive-looking person. He was plainly dressed in ready-made clothes, and such errors

in taste as it was possible for a man to commit in the details of his toilette, he seemed to have embraced gladly. His hair was ginger coloured, his eyebrows sandy. His smile of welcome, which was meant to be ingratiating, disclosed rows of ill-formed teeth.

"You want to speak to me," Gilbert Channay said shortly. "As you may imagine, I am in rather a hurry."

"My name is Fogg," the other confided—"Martin Fogg. I was in the Force for some years—junior detective officer. I took an interest in your case. Have you heard from any of those friends of yours lately—you know who I mean? The men who sold you, and then found themselves in the wrong boat."

"One hears nothing in here," was the brusque rejoinder. "You seem to have studied my affairs."

"I have," the little man admitted eagerly. "They are interesting. Isham is in England—he is a Lord now—and Sinclair Coles. They are pretty desperate—not a bob between them, and debts—up to their necks! They're counting the seconds until they can get at you."

"They are not the men in whom I am most interested," Channay said calmly.

"They are the men who are on the spot," the other reminded him, taking out a blue silk handkerchief and dabbing his forehead with it. "They expected to divide about a hundred thousand pounds when you were sentenced, and, so far, I don't believe they have touched a bob. The others may be more dangerous, but there's vice enough in those two and they're bang up against it."

Channay nodded.

"I expect they'll do what they can," he agreed. "It wasn't for nothing, you know, that I asked to be let out at one o'clock in the morning. I'm a few days before my time, you see, too. Somewhere about next Thursday. I imagine there'll be a reception committee outside."

"I'm not so sure about the present moment," Martin Fogg declared bluntly. "I don't want to ask where you're going, but I'd like a front seat on your car. I'm armed and I'm semi-official, you know. You might find me useful. They ain't easy men to deal with, those two, and they're desperate."

"Is that all?" Channay enquired.

Martin Fogg who had seated himself upon a deal table in the centre of the room, swung his leg backwards and forwards and watched the tip of his shoe meditatively.

"You don't want my help, then?" he asked.

Channay shook his head.

"I'll look after myself, thanks," he decided.

"Look here, do you mean to divvy up with them?" the ex-detective

persisted.

"A little inquisitive, aren't you?" Channay remarked coldly. "Still, since you ask me—no. I applied for the shares in my own name, they were allotted to me in my own name, and, under the circumstances, I mean to stick to them."

"Then let me tell you this," Martin Fogg continued earnestly. "If you really mean that you don't intend to part, they'll have you. You can't tackle that gang alone. Take my advice. Either make terms with them or leave the country. There are one or two of them might not have the pluck to get on the wrong side of the law, but neither Sayers nor Drood would stick at anything."

Channay shook his head.

"These men," he said, "have been my associates. They have behaved like curs. They deserve punishment, and some of them are going to get it."

"You're making a great mistake in trying to tackle this job alone," the ex-detective urged. "Look here, sir. I'm not a poor man. I don't want money——"

"Nor do I want help," Channay interrupted. "I listened to advice once, took a risk, and you see what happened to me! I'll take the sequel on alone."

"Let me travel with you to-night," Martin Fogg begged—"just to-night."

Channay's refusal was curt and decided.

"There was never a time when I needed more to be alone," he declared.

"I shouldn't intrude," the other persisted. "I'd sit with the chauffeur and as soon as you'd reached your destination I'd slip away. But just to-night—I'll swear——"

Mr. Martin Fogg broke off in his speech. Once more he mopped his forehead with his bright blue silk handkerchief, and looked disconsolately towards the door through which Gilbert Channay had passed, slamming it behind him.

Another short walk through echoing corridors, the rolling back of the heavy doors, a breath of semi-fresh air in the square courtyard, a moment's delay in the porter's lodge, and then the portentous opening of the massive gates. Gilbert Channay stood for a moment upon the pavement, and, though outwardly his self-possession had never faltered, he was conscious of feeling a little dazed. Before him stretched a wide thoroughfare, leading east and west to open worlds. There were other branching streets in the distance, a vista of roofs, an unbroken outline of sky, an indubitable though darkened earth beneath his feet, across which people might wander strangely at will. He pulled himself together with an effort. The emotion of freedom had been stronger than he had imagined. A few feet away a taxicab was standing with lamps burning and engine throbbing. The man who had been polishing the glasses moved aside, and threw open the door.

"To Adams's Garage," Channay directed, stepping in.

From each window, as the driver mounted to his seat, Channay looked up

and down the broad thoroughfare. The night was cloudy but the lamps hanging from the electric standards were brilliant, their lights reflected in patches upon the pavements, moist with rain. There was apparently not a soul in sight. The byways through which they presently passed were also deserted. In less than ten minutes they drew up outside a large garage whose great front stretched black and empty. There was a single light burning from somewhere in the rear, and at the sound of the throbbing of the taxicab the head-lights flashed out from a powerful car already half-way across the portals. Channay paid his fare and advanced to meet the chauffeur who had appeared from the gloom behind.

"You know where to go?" he enquired.

For answer the man opened the door.

"Quite well, sir."

"And you know the road?"

"Every inch of it."

"At what time shall we reach Norwich?"

The man considered.

"At about seven o'clock, sir."

"We will stop there for breakfast," Channay directed.

They were off once more; this time with a smooth, gliding motion, very different from the jolting of the taxicab. With fingers which shook a little, Gilbert Channay took one of the cigarettes which the Governor had thrust upon him, sniffed at the tobacco, and paused for fully a minute before lighting it. Then, with momentous deliberation, he struck a match from the well-filled stand in the fittings of the car, lit it and began slowly to inhale. Almost for the first time his face wholly relaxed. He held the cigarette away and looked at it, then smoked on; rapturously at first, afterwards with a slight feeling of distaste, almost of disappointment, revelling every now and then in the fragrance of the tobacco, but enjoying his actual inhalations fitfully. Presently he let down both windows and looked out from side to side curiously. They were in better lighted and more familiar thoroughfares now. With a little catch of his breath he recognised St. James's Street, and a moment later he was craning his neck to look down Piccadilly. He smiled as he passed his hosier's in Bond Street, but felt, perhaps, the complete thrill of coming back after they had crossed Oxford Street and the Marylebone Road and swung to the right, skirting Lord's. His sense of proportion tottered. The drama of his immediate past had lost its significance. The supreme moment of his life seemed after all to have been spent in the centre of that sweep of sun-baked turf, when he had paused, breathless for a moment, to lean upon his bat, and listened to the acclaiming roars from that mistily-seen circle of thickly packed humanity. It was all so silent now in the darkness, and the wall which he was passing seemed somehow menacing. He leaned back in his corner and closed his eyes.

When he opened them again there was a fresh experience in which to revel. He had escaped at last from the wide-flung wilderness of brick and stone. There were hedges on each side, a perfume of dried grass, once a wonderful waft of odour from a beflowered cottage garden. The air was different now. The twinkling lights receded and diminished. The speed of the car increased. Once more he closed his eyes, and this time he slept.

There were contrary elements, confusing to the impressions, in the long room of the old-fashioned house near Newmarket, where two men and a woman waited for Gilbert Channay. The ceiling was heavily-beamed. There was a magnificent old fire-place at one end, in which, notwithstanding the season, a log fire was burning, rows of sporting prints upon the walls, a medley of guns, riding crops and fishing rods in every available corner, but indications, also, in plenty, of less desirable pursuits. On a long table in the centre of the room were many packs of cards thrown together, and a discarded *chemin de fer* shoe. On the sideboard was an inordinate array of bottles, full and empty, a multitude of glasses, and many dishes—some empty, some still heaped with sandwiches. The atmosphere of the room with its low ceiling and unopened windows was over-heavy with tobacco smoke. There was cigar ash upon the floor and table, an overturned chair, and everywhere an unpleasing sense of disorder and lack of restraint. The two men lounged opposite one another in easy-chairs; the woman, seated at the table, still toyed with the cards. As the clock struck four she threw them away from her with a little gesture of impatience. Her whole expression was one of querulousness and discontent. Otherwise she was beautiful.

"I hate this waiting," she declared. "You needn't have packed everyone away so early, Sinclair."

One of the men—known more or less favourably to a somewhat critical world as Sir Sinclair Coles—tall, with grizzled grey hair, sallow complexion and unpleasant mouth—turned his head slightly towards her.

"It was better to be on the safe side," he said. "Bomford had had too much drink and was getting excited about his losses."

"Losses!" the woman repeated impatiently. "Five or six hundred at the most. I didn't get a penny of it either! Heaven knows I need it!"

"Nor I," muttered Lord Isham, from the depths of his easy-chair.

The woman struck the polished table in front of her with the palm of her hand.

"I don't know what's come to us," she exclaimed. "Luck! We haven't a vestige of it. Everything we touch goes wrong. Did you go round to the stables before dinner, Sinclair?"

"No," was the curt reply.

"I did," the woman went on. "Harding's quite right. We've had all our trouble with 'Lady Ann' for nothing. Her fetlock's as big as my head. She couldn't hobble to the post."

Isham rose to his feet. He was clumsily built, carried too much flesh, his complexion was pasty and his eyes bloodshot. There were wine stains upon his shirt front and his tie was disordered. Even his companion regarded him with distaste.

"It's foul luck," he muttered. "I'd got enough laid against her to give me a fresh start. Got it all done on the Q.T. too. Even the clever ones thought the mare was meant to win, and she was always good enough to make a show."

The woman gathered up the cards again and let them fall idly through her fingers.

"Gilbert seems to be our last chance," she said, "and I am terrified."

Lord Isham picked up his tumbler and was on his way to the sideboard. His *vis-à-vis* checked him.

"No more, George," he insisted. "You've drunk enough already, and you'll need all your nerve."

Isham scowled.

"I don't see why," he grumbled. "Your prize-fighting gamekeeper's enough for the rough and tumble work, if it comes to that. I'll have some soda-water, at any rate."

He helped himself, surreptitiously adding whiskey. Once more the woman raised her head and listened.

"He won't be here yet," her host assured her. "You're quite right. I packed the others off too soon."

"Supposing all goes well and we get Gilbert here," she asked quietly, "what are you going to do? How far do you mean to go?"

Sinclair Coles rose to his feet and rang the bell. He waited until it was answered by a sleepy manservant.

"Is anyone up besides yourself, Johnson?" he enquired.

"No one, sir."

"You can go to bed. I will see to the lights and lock up. We may have a visitor for a few minutes. You can leave the hall door undone."

"Very good, sir."

The man withdrew. His master waited until the door was closed. Then he turned to the woman. He spoke unpleasantly. His upper lip was a trifle too short, and he showed his teeth over-much.

"We're going to have an explanation with Gilbert Channay," he said. "It is through him we've led this dog's life for the last three years. Somewhere or other he must have nearly half a million tucked away, and not a penny of our share have we touched. He has to disgorge."

“If he refuses how shall you make him?” the woman asked. “The law doesn’t come in, does it?”

The man’s expression was for a moment almost ferocious. Though his hair was grey, his eyes were black and as bright as a boy’s.

“Short of killing him—” he began slowly.

“Why short of killing him?” Isham interrupted. “He deserves it, the brute! If we could get to know from him where the stuff is, and there was a quarrel, an accident, he’d be a damned sight better out of the way.”

The woman looked up from the table.

“Do we ever forget, I wonder,” she observed, “that it was we who really made the great mistake. Gilbert was the only honest man amongst us all. He’d have kept faith with us if we’d kept faith with him.”

Sinclair Coles was angry. He showed it in a strange, intensive fashion. He drew a long breath between his teeth. The pupils of his eyes seemed to dilate. He glanced across the room towards the other man.

“I can see that we shall have to look after her ladyship, George,” he scoffed. “I believe she’s in love with him still.”

The woman rose to her feet. She looked from one to the other of her two companions; looked at one with contempt, at the other with hatred.

“If I still allowed myself the luxury of feeling,” she said, “don’t you imagine that I should be stark staring mad not to prefer a man like Gilbert Channay to either of you?”

“Miriam!” her husband bawled.

She waved him back into silence.

“I have no feeling,” she continued. “Those days have passed for me. What I want is money to pay some of my bills, a measure of security, to get rid of the eternal insolence of these tradespeople, not to be all the time worrying from whom and with what manner of persuasions I can borrow. I hate it! There was a time when I thought that a life of adventure appealed to me. Well, it doesn’t any longer. I want a bank balance, a home, and rest. That’s why I want this money.”

“Leanings towards domesticity, I see,” her husband sneered. “Perhaps, if we get it, you’d like me to pay off the mortgages at Undercombe and settle down into the small county magnate. We couldn’t afford to race—not even sure that I could afford the hounds—but we could lead a very pleasant life. Bridge at a shilling a hundred, rough shooting with all my pheasants wandering off to someone’s land where they rear—”

“Oh, be quiet!” she interrupted scornfully. “You haven’t enough nerve to hunt the hounds even if they gave them to you. Listen!”

This time there was no mistake. The sound they heard was the sound of the opening of the front door, of heavy footsteps in the hall. They all three held

their breaths. A moment before the woman had declared that she had no feeling, but a flush of colour had suddenly crept into her cheeks. She shrank a little away, as though she dreaded what might be coming. The door was abruptly thrown open. The man who had made his re-entry into the world some hour or so before entered, and by his side a most unpleasant-looking companion, dressed like a gamekeeper.

"No trouble at all, sir," the latter announced with a grin. "When he saw me there waiting for him on the doorstep, he come along like a lamb."

There was a somewhat curious silence. Gilbert Channay from the moment of his entrance had looked at no one but the woman. Her first little gesture was almost pathetic. She had the air of waiting for some word from him. He, like the others, remained speechless. Suddenly the woman called out to him—called him by his Christian name, with swift, staccato expression. The spell seemed to be broken. Channay looked around him with a smile.

"Trouble!" he repeated. "The invitation of my friend here in brown velveteen was far too irresistible. Who am I to risk the happiness of my first day of liberty in unseemly brawling with a man of his stature? . . . Well, well, only you three! I might have expected a larger gathering. George, you haven't changed a bit. By-the-by, you have succeeded, haven't you? 'Your lordship,' I should say. Capital! Worth a hundred a year more on the board of any company. And Sinclair there—I beg his pardon. I forgot my unfortunate lapse from social equality—Sir Sinclair Coles. And the lady, whom I was once privileged to call 'Miriam,'—by what name does she pass nowadays?"

Lord Isham frowned angrily.

"Miriam is my wife," he replied. "Don't pretend you didn't know all about it. I don't think she's particularly grateful. I ain't a good husband, you know, Channay—never pretended I'd make a good husband."

"If I had been a woman," was the calm retort, "I should have found you an intolerable lover."

The woman who had declared that she possessed no feeling sprang to her feet, quivering. There was a look of torture in her eyes.

"Your tongue is as cruel as ever!" she cried.

Channay shrugged his shoulders.

"I am not in a good temper," he confessed.

"I am here against my will, and it always annoys me to do things against my will. Can we get to business? These first few hours of freedom, notwithstanding their charm, are a little exhausting. I have been used to making my own bed and retiring at half-past eight."

Sinclair Coles turned to the gamekeeper—a burly fellow with enormous shoulders and the face and physique of a prize-fighter.

"Have you felt his pockets?" he demanded.

“In a clumsy fashion, he has,” Channay intervened. “Let me spare you any anxiety. I am unarmed.”

“Couldn’t feel anything, sir,” the man agreed.

“Take a chair then, and sit with your back to the door,” Sinclair Coles directed. “Keep your ears shut and be prepared to act if you’re wanted. . . . That’s all right. Now, Channay, we can get to business. I’m speaking at this moment for Isham and myself. You can settle with the others afterwards. We want a matter of a hundred thousand pounds to be going on with.”

Channay, apparently more at his ease than any one of the little company, glanced around the room towards the sideboard.

“Aren’t you a little inhospitable?” he protested. “I am warned by the prison doctor to go very slowly with alcohol at first, but I must confess that a small whiskey and soda—the first, by-the-by—— You wish me to help myself? Good!”

He crossed the room in obedience to a sullen gesture from Sinclair Coles, and with almost meticulous care searched for a clean tumbler, mixed a whiskey and soda, sipped it and helped himself to a cigarette. Afterwards he selected a comfortable easy-chair and, with a little sigh of relief, relapsed into its depths. All the time they watched him, uneasy and discomposed.

“One hundred thousand pounds was the sum you mentioned, I think,” he remarked.

“Well?” Sinclair Coles exclaimed, with a flash in his beady eyes.

“Do we get it?” Isham demanded.

“Not a single penny,” was the distinctly spoken reply.

There was a brief, ugly silence. Even the woman, who had raised her head, seemed to have grown colder. The two men were more unpleasant to look upon than ever. Sinclair Coles’s thin lips were parted a little, his eyes were full of menace, Isham was scowling fiercely. The custodian of the door, who was hoping for a scrap, was mildly interested. The note of defiance in Channay’s tone seemed to him full of promise.

“A hundred thousand pounds,” Isham said, “represents considerably less than a quarter of the funds which should belong to the syndicate. Do you deny our claim?”

“Not altogether,” Channay admitted. “Under normal circumstances I imagine that your share might have come to more than that. But you see—without entering into details which are known to all of us—you chose, instead of being content with your share, to try and do me out of mine. You chose to play upon me the foulest, most dishonourable trick a little company of men engaged in any enterprise for purposes of mutual profit could possibly conceive. You forced me to assume a clerical and technical responsibility which happened to be slightly on the wrong side of the law, after which you

turned informers, with the sole idea of helping yourselves to the whole of the plunder during my forced absence from society, knowing very well that my claim to recover my share of the same would—er—scarcely be upheld in a Court of Law. . . . Forgive me! I find this rather exhausting. Conversation amongst my late surroundings was not encouraged."

He stretched out a languid arm and helped himself to more whiskey and soda. Not one of his auditors had opened their lips. All three remained listeners.

"I happened, if I may say so," Channay continued, "to be a little too clever for you. The shares in the Nyasa Mine, for which I applied on behalf of the syndicate, were allotted to me in my own name, and in my own name they have remained. You got rid of me all right, but you found yourselves no nearer the booty. You failed, indeed, to get what might have been your own share. Now you will never have it. You forgot the homely adage—'Honour Amongst Thieves.' You will probably regret this superlative meanness for the rest of your lives, as you undoubtedly have regretted it during the last few years. . . . Of my deeper and more personal wrong I have nothing to say. It is one principle of my life," he added, with a little bow to Miriam—"never to criticise your sex. You are above the ordinary laws. You do what seems fit to you. But, whilst we are upon this subject, since I have gone so far, let me finish all that I have to say to you now, or at any future time. You knew very well that when I came out of prison, if the Nyasa shares had been allotted to the treasurer of the Channay Syndicate, I should never have been able to claim my own share. Quite right! The converse, however, unluckily for you, is also true. I make no pretence about the matter. The extraordinary premium to which the shares immediately rose enabled my brokers to take up the whole of them on such capital as I myself possessed. A sum of something like half a million is in my possession—a very pleasant sum, Isham, eh? Worth having, Coles! Well, for what you have done to me, not one penny of that do I part with to any one of you. Now, I have finished. It is your turn."

The woman, suddenly and unexpectedly, chose to be spokesman.

"Gilbert," she said, "think of us as you will. You couldn't think badly enough of us. We are the scum of the earth, and we deserve to be treated as such, but you can't get away from facts. Supposing my dear husband and Sinclair Coles here accepted your point of view, there are others—different types of men, as you well know, one or two of them. If you talk to them as you are talking to us, Sayers, for one, will kill you on the spot."

"You and I were once engaged to be married," Channay remarked. "Have you ever, during the whole time of our association, dreamed for a moment that it was possible to gain anything from me by threats?"

"I know that you are brave," she admitted, "but the situation is hopeless.

You want to live."

"You want to live as a sound man," Sinclair Coles interrupted harshly, "not as a poor, maimed creature with every bone in your body broken. Look here, Channay, we'll make a bargain with you. You shall keep your share—your full share—so long as you hand over the rest. You will be a wealthy man. What more do you want?"

"To keep you paupers, which I mean to do," was the quiet reply.

Even the woman's face hardened. Sinclair Coles, who some time before had risen to his feet, came a little forward.

"You were never a fool, Channay," he said. "What do you think of my gamekeeper there? 'Fighting Charlie' they call him. He was in the ring for four years and never beaten."

Channay glanced across at the man in brown velveteen, unmoved.

"Frankly," he replied, "and since you ask me, I think that he is the most unpleasant-looking person I ever saw in my life."

The gamekeeper rose to his feet, rubbing his hands together. He glanced at his master as though waiting for a sign. The latter shrugged his shoulders.

"Miriam," he advised, "I think you had better leave us."

She hesitated for a moment, then she turned to Channay.

"Gilbert," she said, "the only difficult part was to get you here. Don't you realise that now they have succeeded in that it isn't any use holding out? They can half kill you here between them, and it will only be an ordinary row. They might even go further."

Channay stretched out his hand and helped himself to another cigarette.

"Honestly," he confided, "I don't think they'll go quite so far as that. It's a little risky, you know, isn't it? Terrible scandal in high life, anyway—especially for Isham, now he's a Peer! And, besides, they won't come any nearer to the money."

"They will hurt you horribly," she protested.

"It would hurt me more," he assured her, "to contribute a single penny to your absurd ménage."

The gamekeeper crept stealthily nearer. He was swinging his right arm a little; his left fist was clenched. Already he was developing a slight crouch. The greed of battle was in his eyes.

"Too much talk," he muttered. "Won't you say the word, sir? Am I to send him straight to sleep or shall we have a little fun with him first?"

Channay watched his approach coldly.

"You'll get the fun, my lad," he warned him, "when you're picking oakum for this. I——-"

He broke off suddenly in his speech. A most unexpected sound rang through the house. Someone had pulled the old-fashioned bell of the front door

and in the silence of the early morning there was a menacing, even an uncanny note in its hoarse clanging. The gamekeeper's arm fell to his side. He looked around.

"What the hell's that?" he demanded.

The two men exchanged startled glances. The woman listened with a gleam of something which was almost like relief in her face.

"Someone who has seen the lights, I suppose," Sinclair Coles muttered angrily. "Get close to him, you others. Keep him quiet while I open the door. . . . My God!" he went on. "They're in the hall!"

Almost immediately the door of the room was opened. Sinclair Coles in his progress towards it, stood transfixed. An inspector of police had entered. He saluted hastily and glanced around.

"Sorry to intrude, gentlemen," he apologised curtly. "Inspector Peacock is my name. My business is with your visitor there—Mr. Gilbert Channay."

Channay rose to his feet. The others seemed curiously tongue-tied.

"Without wishing for one moment to deny, Inspector," he observed, "that your arrival is in its way opportune, I am still quite at a loss to know what the devil you want with me. I was duly discharged from Brixton Prison soon after midnight. I can assure you that since then I have not committed any breach of the law."

"Sorry, sir," the Inspector replied civilly. "Maybe you didn't get adequate information. You're out three weeks before your time, and the first provision of your licence is that you don't travel fifty miles beyond London. I was told off to follow you and see that you kept within the radius. You've exceeded it already by something like twenty miles. I'm sorry to break up this little reunion with your friends, but you'll have to return with me to London."

Channay shrugged his shoulders, with an air of resignation.

"To tell you the truth, Inspector," he confided, "I'm not quite so disappointed as I might have been under other circumstances. Believe me I am quite at your disposal."

"I must apologise for my unceremonious entrance, gentlemen," the Inspector observed, as he let his hand rest lightly upon Channay's elbow. "As I said before I'm sorry to interrupt. Mr. Channay, however, should have known the regulations. This may mean another fortnight for him. You will be able to entertain him all right then."

"We shall look forward to the opportunity," Sinclair Coles muttered.

Channay looked back from the doorway and smiled. The Inspector's hand still rested upon his arm.

"Forewarned is forearmed," he announced with a faint note of mockery in his tone. "Next time I leave London I think I shall get my friend here to escort me to the railway station. Your idea of hospitality does not appeal to me,

Coles. I don't think that either you or Isham have improved during my regrettable absence. I don't like your methods of entertainment. I'm afraid that for the future I shall have to deny myself the privilege of your acquaintance. . . . I am quite at your service, Inspector. Forgive my reminding you that your grip upon my arm is getting a little painful. Good-night!"

The Inspector had indeed shown signs of impatience. He hastened his captive across the hall, withdrew the key from the inside of the front door and, after they had passed through, locked it on the outside. He hurried his companion to a small two-seater car which was standing drawn up against the steps, pressed the starting lever, and drove rapidly down the avenue.

"Sorry to interrupt any farewell speeches, Mr. Channay," he observed, as he pressed down the accelerator, "but I could see that Sir Sinclair Coles was beginning to get suspicious. The peak of my cap is all wrong and my tunic isn't at all what it should be. They wouldn't help me out at the Prison, and I had to get these things from a pal."

Channay, who had been leaning out of the window looking backwards, resumed his seat. There was a pleasantly amused smile upon his lips.

"Martin Fogg," he declared, "you are a genius. What can you do on the road?"

"Fifty," was the confident reply.

"Better let her have it then. The turn to the left is the Norwich road. There are lights flashing out in the garage and someone's in the avenue already. Your story was ingenious enough but a bit thin when they come to think it over."

They swung into the main road. Far ahead was a rift in the sky; a faint lightening further eastwards. The heath on each side drifted away from them like a frozen sea, and before them the road unwound itself into the semblance of a thin strip of ribbon. The light was scanty enough, but Fogg turned out the lamps.

"We'll breakfast in Norwich all right," he promised. "I punctured the back tyre of the car you came down in. They won't be on the road until after we've passed Thetford. I'll have to stop and change my kit before we go through a town."

"Wake me when you do," Channay enjoined, leaning back in his corner with a yawn. . . .

There was no pursuit or if there were it was ineffectual. When Channay awoke he was being driven joltily through the cobbled streets of Norwich, and his companion had resumed his civilian attire.

"What about it now, Mr. Channay?" the latter asked him anxiously. "A defensive partnership, mind, nothing more! You see I've ways of my own of discovering things. I knew that chauffeur at Adams's Garage had been got at."

Gilbert Channay looked out upon the sunlit streets, thronged with their

early morning crowd of loiterers. There was something wistful, almost eager, in his expression as he watched the passers-by.

"Fogg," he said, "you're a good fellow and I'm immensely obliged to you, but as regards the future, if this is the prelude, it is too good to share. . . . First turn to the left, and you'll see the hotel opposite. Bacon and eggs and coffee, Fogg! Jove, I'm hungry!"

Martin Fogg pursed out his lips.

"You'll change your mind before long," he declared confidently.

CHAPTER II
MARK LEVY PAYS

As the hour of ten struck from the cathedral clock the doors of the Norwich and Norfolk Bank were slowly and portentously rolled back by the porter—an individual who, in his dark-coloured livery and well brushed but quaintly-shaped tall hat, occupied a position in the civic imagination very little inferior to that of the manager himself. Before the chimes had ceased a slim, well-built man, who had been loitering upon the other side of the road, had crossed the threshold. He paused to look around him with the pleased and interested air of one who revisits a familiar scene. A clerk, who had only just opened an enormous ledger somewhere in the background, came to the counter with an air of resigned displeasure. The echoes of the last stroke of the hour had barely died away. Such precipitation on the part of a customer betokened either impecuniosity or lack of consideration.

"I should like a cheque book," the early visitor remarked—"a hundred order cheque book."

The young man looked at him searchingly.

"Excuse me, but are you a customer of the bank?" he enquired.

"Certainly," was the prompt reply. "I rather think that I have a good deal of money here. My name is Gilbert Channay."

If the newcomer had declared his name to be that of the Archangel Gabriel, and produced documentary evidence of his identity, his statement could scarcely have created a greater sensation. A dozen heads shot up from behind their desks in every part of the premises, and an elderly cashier reached the manager's sanctum with a single stride. The door of the private office flew open; the manager himself appeared. Some twenty pairs of eyes were focused upon this amazingly unexpected apparition.

"Mr. Channay! Dear me, Mr. Channay at last!" the manager exclaimed, as he approached with extended hand.

"I came as soon as I was able," his visitor assured him.

The manager coughed.

"Step into my office, if you please," he begged. "There are a great many matters of business I should like to discuss."

Gilbert Channay accepted the invitation but without marked enthusiasm. The manager pointed to his own easy-chair; he himself remained at his desk.

"I must confess, Mr. Channay," he began, "that your visit is a great relief. Whilst your account, during your absence, has naturally been an immense

asset, it has also been a source of considerable embarrassment. Besides the share certificates which we are holding on your behalf, I wonder whether you have any idea as to what your actual cash balance is?"

Gilbert Channay leaned back and looked up thoughtfully towards the ceiling.

"I came straight down here without visiting either my lawyer, who has been acting for me under power of attorney, or my brokers," he said at length, "but I should think it must amount to nearly a hundred thousand pounds."

"It amounts to one hundred and twenty-two thousand pounds, odd," was the impressive pronouncement. "We're not a large banking establishment, Mr. Channay, and the responsibility of such an account has at times been a source of anxiety to us. You are aware, of course, that there have been two suits brought against us on behalf of the Channay Syndicate with the idea of diverting a portion of the balance towards an alleged trust fund."

The founder of that syndicate smiled.

"The actions failed, as they were bound to fail," he observed. "The money is mine. I'll take a thousand with me now, and I'll go into the matter of some further investments as soon as I have had time to communicate with my brokers."

"If our people can be of any use," the manager suggested—"most respectable firm, here in the city. . . . Ah Morgan," he added, addressing the young man who entered, carrying a cheque book, "bring in a thousand pounds—fives, tens and twenties, I suppose, Mr. Channay, and a few treasury notes. . . . I hope you are going to spend some time down in these parts, sir."

"I have a small house on Blickley marshes," Channay confided. "I think I shall stay there for a time. I need a few months to accustom myself to the alteration in my daily routine. Prison life is, of course, quite an experience for anyone."

The manager was a little distressed. He had not meant himself to allude to the subject.

"We all feel," he declared, "that you were somewhat harshly treated. The evidence of your friends, for instance, seemed a trifle prejudiced."

"My enemies, you mean," was the prompt amendment. "It was a curious little conspiracy, but after all there was no doubt that I broke the law, although, from a commonsense point of view, no one suffered. However—that's done with!"

"A man with your wealth," the manager ventured, "will not have the slightest difficulty in re-establishing himself."

"I suppose not," his client mused. "The point I have to consider, though, is in what way do I desire to re-establish myself?—certainly not amongst my former associates."

"It is the universal opinion," the other persisted, "that your friends and fellow directors, to say the least of it, behaved in a most selfish and inconsiderate fashion."

"They behaved like damned rogues," Channay assented, "but they made a terrible hash of it all. However, that's neither here nor there. Tell your brokers to send me a list of investments down to Seaman's Grange, Blickley. You shall hear from me in a day or two."

"The sooner the better," the manager begged. "A current balance such as yours is not a wholesome thing in banking, sir. We're proud of it and at the same time distressed. We shall welcome your instructions as regards investment with relief."

"You shall have them. . . ."

Channay strolled out into the sunlit street, with the thousand pounds buttoned up in his pocket, called at the gun-maker's, where he made considerable purchases, and finally sought a garage where he hired a car, collected his belongings and returned to the hotel to pay his bill. As he approached the office window, he felt a touch upon his arm. He swung round, and instinctively his right hand crept towards the pocket wherein reposed one of his recent purchases. His uneasiness, however, was of short duration. The man who had accosted him was not the kind of person to inspire any anxiety of that sort. He was a man of under medium height, pink-cheeked, dark-eyed, and with curly black hair; obviously a Jew, and one who attempted no concealment of his nationality.

"It is Mr. Channay!" he exclaimed. "Well, I am glad!"

"Are you?" was the colourless reply. "Why?"

Mr. Mark Levy was a little hurt.

"Why?" he repeated. "Are we not friends—partners, even? Have I not many reasons for being glad to see you?"

"I wasn't aware of them," was the curt rejoinder.

"Now, my dear sir," Levy expostulated, with the air of one seeking to soothe an angry child, "you are ruffled. Everything is strange to you. You have had a very terrible time. Take things gently. You know why I am here? I found out that you were likely to come to Blickley and I determined to be one of the first of your partners to greet you."

"Partners?" Channay queried. "I didn't know I had any partners. If I had," he went on meaningly, "they certainly ought to have shared this unfortunate seclusion of mine."

"That was not our fault—not mine, at any rate," Mr. Levy protested.

"The evidence of one or two of you at my trial," Channay began——

"Stop!" his companion interrupted. "Why should I think that my evidence was necessary. There were all the others in London. I myself was in New

York. You must not be too hard upon us, Mr. Channay—upon some of us, I mean. And that reminds me, you have a great deal of money to distribute. I have made up my mind that I would be one of the first."

"I have also," Channay observed, "a few old scores to settle."

His companion coughed.

"Let us find a quiet place," he suggested, "and talk business together."

Channay laughed tolerantly. He led the way into a small reading-room and closed the door.

"Now, Levy," he demanded, "what business have we to discuss?"

"My dear Mr. Channay," the other begged, "let us talk amiably. This is pleasant matter we have to talk about. It is not losses we have to face. Nyasas closed at thirty yesterday. We have made money—a great deal of money—thanks to your wonderful judgment—an unexpectedly great sum of money."

"We?" Gilbert Channay repeated coldly.

"Why, my dear sir," was the wondering protest, "of course it is 'we.' There were eleven of us. The transactions were undertaken in your name, but everything was clearly understood. You were to raise the money and apply for fifteen thousand shares. The profits were to be divided into fifteen equal parts, of which you took five and the other ten were to be divided amongst us. I think my share comes to thirty thousand pounds. I have not been fortunate lately, Mr. Channay. I need money very badly. That thirty thousand pounds will be a godsend."

"If you get it," Channay observed, smiling.

Mr. Levy dabbed his forehead. He was very anxious, and there was something about his companion's manner which filled him with vague disquietude.

"You do not dispute the arrangement?" he exclaimed.

"What about the conspiracy to get rid of me and my five shares, and collar the lot?" Gilbert Channay demanded.

"Upon my word of honour," Mr. Levy insisted, with feverish earnestness —"upon my word of honour, I swear that I was not in that. It was just your swell friends who tried that on."

"Why did you not come and give evidence on my behalf?" Channay enquired. "You knew that we had all agreed that the balance sheet of the Siamese Corporation should be signed."

"I was in New York," the other declared. "I had nothing to do with it at all."

"You had time to come back," Channay reminded him. "If you had come back and told the truth it might have made all the difference."

The man squirmed in his over-eagerness.

"There were others," he protested—"others in England, on the spot. I never

dreamed but that they would go into the box. I never claimed anything, I never wanted anything except my rightful share. When I heard that you had been sentenced to imprisonment I was thunder-struck."

Gilbert Channay lit a cigarette and threw himself into an easy-chair. The sunlight was drifting in through the windows. It was market day and the streets outside were crowded.

"Well, Mr. Levy," he announced, "it is unfortunate, but I have decided to take advantage of the legal aspect of the situation, and to keep for myself the profits which have accrued during my—er—temporary absence from the world. I applied for those shares in my own name, instead of in the name of the Channay Syndicate, simply as a matter of convenience, and I intended to apportion the shares as soon as they were delivered. Under the circumstances, however, I have changed my mind. I have sold some of the shares and the remainder are registered in my name. Your treachery is going to cost you, Mr. Mark Levy, to be exact, twenty-nine thousand pounds."

"You are not going to pay me my share?" Mr. Levy gasped.

"Not one penny," was the bland reply. "I do not mind confiding to you that I have a balance of over a hundred thousand pounds in that bank across the way there. I have, too, as you see, a cheque book in my pocket," Gilbert Channay continued, producing it and laying it upon the table. "I could write you your cheque for thirty thousand pounds at this minute, and not feel it—but I shan't!"

Mr. Levy was almost distracted with heat and despair. He was on the verge of tears. He would have gone on his knees if he had imagined that it might be of any use. He was shaking from head to foot. There were thirty thousand pounds in the balance.

"But Mr. Channay—my dear sir," he begged, losing for a moment, in his excitement, his prim precision of speech—"I was a bankrupt unless that money reach me this week. The others are all so wealthy—some of them. For me everything that I have touched for years has been bad. I get poorer and poorer, Mr. Channay. Fifteen thousand pounds of that money I owe now, and I will be a bankrupt unless I pay. My creditors have given me time because I tell them that when you come out there is money for me. Mr. Channay, you wouldn't want to ruin me?"

Gilbert Channay smiled as though the idea amused him.

"You didn't seem to mind doing worse than ruining me," he observed.

"But it was not my idea," Levy cried hysterically. "I was against it. I signed the affidavit only because, if I had not, the others would have scooped in the money and there would have been nothing for me. On my honour, Mr. Channay, this is the truth."

He paused to wipe the beads of perspiration from his forehead. His eyes

were watery, his thick red lips all a-quiver.

"Tell me precisely what happened?" Channay demanded, after a moment's reflection.

"It was like this," Levy explained. "I was in New York. I was trying to sell some shares in an orange grove, but no brokers would help me. In New York everybody is so suspicious. Then I got a letter."

"From whom?" Channay asked.

"From Sinclair Coles," Levy continued, dropping his voice a little as though afraid of being overheard even in the empty room—"Sir Sinclair Coles, he is now. He wrote me that, although they hadn't believed it at first, there was a fortune in these Nyasa shares, and that they had been applied for on behalf of the Channay Syndicate in our joint names. He said that you hadn't treated the company quite fair—that five shares to you was too much—and he said that Kulse should come and see me in New York with a proposition."

"And Kulse came?"

"He came the next day. He brought the affidavit and stayed with me until I went to a lawyer and signed it."

"Tell me exactly what he said," Channay insisted.

"I tell you everything," Levy promised, mopping once more his damp forehead. "Afterwards you must treat me right for it. Kulse told me that everyone thought your five shares to their one was too much, and they had a scheme for getting rid of you. You signed the balance sheets for the Siamese Corporation so as to pay the application money for the Nyasa shares. That was before they began to boom. Mr. Kulse told me that the other members of the Syndicate had held a meeting in London, they felt they hadn't been treated fair by you, so they proposed to have you lagged for signing those false balance sheets, and while you were in prison they would distribute the shares equally."

"Didn't it occur to you that this was a very dirty piece of work?" Channay asked sternly. "You were to put me into prison for a technical offence, committed not for myself, but for the Syndicate, and whilst I was safely in prison you were to help yourselves to the funds. How does that seem to you now, Mark Levy—a fair deal?"

The tortured man groaned.

"I was a fool when I listened," he admitted, "but you see I would have got forty-five thousand pounds instead of thirty. Forty-five thousand pounds! Kulse kept on telling me that until I couldn't bear it, so I swore on the affidavit that you was the one responsible for the Siamese Corporation accounts, that none of us others had been shown them to the best of my knowledge, and that we none of us knew that the whole of the cash balance had been withdrawn for the purchase of Nyasa shares. So you see, with nine members of the syndicate swearing that they knew nothing of the accounts, and me signing an affidavit

—well, they figured it out that you wouldn't have a show."

"I didn't," Gilbert Channay assented. "I got five years' penal servitude for something which we all agreed upon jointly, and with the shares of the company standing at that moment at a higher price than the people paid for them, and the Siamese Corporation even in a better financial position than their balance sheet showed."

"It was terrible," Mr. Levy faltered.

Gilbert Channay walked to the window for a moment and looked out at the steep, sunlit street, the crowds of people, and the busy stream of motor cars and vehicles of every description. Perhaps there was something in his face which he did not care for his companion to see. When he turned round his expression was purely negative.

"Levy," he said, "I would like you to understand this matter from my point of view. Some years ago, eleven of us formed a little syndicate to conduct certain financial operations. I think I can say without undue conceit that I had most of the brains, as I certainly had most of the capital. We agreed that the profits should be pooled into fifteen shares, of which I should have five and the remaining members one each. Is that right?"

"Quite right, quite right, Mr. Channay. You were very much the cleverest of us all. We ought to have been content."

"A good many of our transactions," Gilbert Channay continued, "were pretty close to the wind. We were dealing with all sorts of people—sharks, speculators and, I suppose, a few mugs. We took our first risk with the Siamese Corporation. I signed balance sheets which certainly gave an optimistic view of the company's properties, and which the Law Courts have since decided were fraudulent. Fraudulent or not, however, my valuations turned out to be correct, and a very large profit was the result. We made so much that you others grew dissatisfied. You were making, or I was making for you, more money than you had ever made before in your lives, but one and all you grudged me my share. You went into a conspiracy."

"It was not my idea," Levy muttered.

"You forgot that you had me to thank for a very pleasant little fortune. To possess yourselves of my share as well as your own you raked up this Siamese Corporation affair, which if we had all stuck together would never have come to the Law Courts. You plotted to put me into a false position, believing that you would be able to handle the whole of the funds of the Syndicate during my retirement. That is right, isn't it, Levy? You signed your false affidavit with the idea of getting me into trouble and helping yourself to my share of the profits during my absence. Right or wrong?

"Quite true, Mr. Channay," Levy confessed, with tears in his eyes. "I was a fool. I was led away."

"You were all fools," Gilbert Channay continued, "to think that I should leave the money where anyone could get at it but myself. However, you have confessed and that is an end of it. You have confessed to an act of incredible meanness, and now I will show you how I propose to return good for evil."

Mr. Levy began to tremble again. His eyes grew like beads as they followed his companion's movements. The latter withdrew his cheque-book from his pocket, stretched it out upon the table, dipped his pen in the ink, and wrote. As though he were obeying some natural law of fascination, Mr. Levy rose stealthily from his seat, moved across the room and looked over the other's shoulder. What he saw was like a message from paradise:—

"*Pay to* Mark Levy
the sum of thirty thousand pounds.
(*Signed*) Gilbert Channay."

Veritable tears stood in his eyes. There was a real gulp in his throat. It was a wonderful moment.

"Mr. Channay—my dear friend—my dear sir," he exclaimed, as he took the cheque into his pudgy, trembling fingers, "what can I say?"

"Don't say anything," Gilbert Channay advised quietly. "I shall probably treat one or two of the other members of the Syndicate in practically the same fashion. You are going to learn a new quality in life."

Mr. Levy's eyes were glued to the cheque.

"Your handwriting, Mr. Channay," he remarked sympathetically, "is not what it used to be. It is very shaky and much larger."

"You forget where I have spent the last three years," was the dry rejoinder.

Levy coughed and changed the subject.

"Norwich and Norfolk Bank," he murmured, still gloating over his treasure.

Gilbert Channay pointed out through the window.

"Across the street there," he said. "You can draw your money and be off back to London by the next train."

Mr. Levy picked up his hat and held out his hand, of which Channay took no notice.

"I will not pretend," the latter concluded, "that I have forgiven you. Perhaps later on in life, I may do so. I am teaching you a little lesson, which I hope you will take to your heart. Good-morning!"

The excited man was incoherent but precipitate. With the cheque clasped tightly between his fingers he hurried out of the room, down the stairs, across the hall and into the street. In more leisurely fashion, with his cheque-book still in his hand, his benefactor followed him. Mr. Levy entered the bank without recognition from anybody and took up his position before the desk of one of

the cashiers. Gilbert Channay received a cordial and respectful welcome from the liveried attendant, a smile and bow from those of the employees who caught his eye, as he made his way past the backs of the customers to the manager's office, to which he was instantly admitted. The latter welcomed him smilingly.

"Glad to see you again, Mr. Channay," he said. "What can I do for you?"

His client displayed his cheque-book.

"Rather foolishly," he explained, "I left this in my sitting-room for a few minutes this morning, and when I returned there I found a very suspicious character waiting for me—a man whom I have every reason to mistrust. After his departure I saw that a cheque had been torn out. I simply came across to stop payment of the cheque in case of any trouble."

"Quite so," the manager concurred—"quite so! If you will excuse me for one moment, I will go out and give orders myself to the cashiers. It is market day here, as you know, and we are so terribly busy that we should only lose time if I were to send a message."

He hurried out to the bank and Gilbert Channay lounged in the very handsome leather-covered chair, whistling softly to himself. The manager was gone for several minutes. When he returned he was followed by a little procession. First of all came a cashier. With him was Mark Levy, and behind, the stalwart defender of the door. At a gesture from the manager the latter remained outside.

"Here is the gentleman who gave me the cheque," Mr. Levy declared, pointing to Channay. "He gave it to me himself not five minutes ago."

Channay looked at him with a portentous frown.

"I gave you a cheque?" he repeated incredulously. "Why, I refused to pay your fare from London even! Do I understand," he continued, turning towards the manager, "that this man has presented a cheque purporting to be signed by me?"

The cashier silently handed him the oblong slip of paper.

"The handwriting, as you will see, Mr. Channay," he pointed out, "is very unlike yours, and the signature does not correspond at all with the signature we have, nor does your private mark appear under the 'Channay.' I was bringing the cheque in to Mr. Brown here, for instructions, when he came out."

"This cheque is a forgery," Channay announced quietly—"an impudent, inconceivable forgery!"

The manager touched the bell and whispered a word to the attendant. The countenance of Mark Levy was an amazing epitome of consternation, fear and bewilderment.

"But Mr. Channay—my dear sir—is this a joke? I don't understand. This is the cheque you gave me this morning for my share of the Syndicate funds."

Channay looked at the distressed man coldly.

"You will scarcely improve matters by trying to brazen it out, Levy," he warned him. "You came whining to me this morning, and you know very well what my reply was. It seems that you have attempted to help yourself. I wash my hands of the affair. It remains between you and the bank."

"But you mean that you are going to deny that you gave me the cheque?" Levy gasped.

Channay turned from him contemptuously.

"The cheque," he assured the manager, "is, as anyone can see, simply a clumsy forgery. This man came whining to me to pay him money in connection with a syndicate to which we both belonged years ago. My reply to him was definite enough. I told him he would have to discover a new quality in human nature before he found even a rich man making a tout of his class a present of thirty thousand pounds."

Mr. Levy's red lips were twitching. There was a ghastly pallor in his face, drops of sweat upon his forehead. He struggled for speech in vain. There was a knock at the door, a brief response from the manager, the reappearance of the bank attendant followed by an inspector of police. Gilbert Channay rose to his feet.

"This, I imagine, is your affair, Mr. Brown," he said, addressing the manager. "My evidence is at your disposal at any time. A more barefaced and preposterous attempt at forgery I never saw. A matter of five years, I should think, Levy," he went on, turning towards him. "We shall be able to compare experiences."

There was a whispered word from the manager. The inspector laid his hand upon Levy's shoulder. The latter started as though he had been stung.

"I won't go!" he cried. "This is a conspiracy! It's ruin! Mr. Channay, say something! For God's sake, say something!"

"If I were to trust myself to speak," Gilbert Channay rejoined calmly, "I might say too much. You have made a very serious mistake in life, Levy, and, as other and better men have done before you, you are going to pay for it."

The inspector of police and his charge passed from the room; the latter almost in a state of collapse. Channay shook hands with the manager.

"A most extraordinary piece of good fortune," he remarked, "that I should have come to you at once. I very nearly left it until after luncheon—even though I knew that the cheque must have been stolen. Then I remembered what a wrong 'un the fellow was. I see your cashier noticed the absence of the two little dots in the loop of the 'y.' "

The manager smiled benignly.

"One of the clumsiest attempts at forgery within my experience," he observed.

“Positively asking for trouble,” his client agreed as he took his leave.

An hour or so later, Channay, his hired car filled with his various purchases, left the city and turned eastward. There was a faint smile upon his lips as he leaned back amongst the cushions; a smile of reminiscence, not in the least malicious, but the placid smile of one who has succeeded in some interesting task. He thought of the agony of the man whom he had last seen in the magistrate’s court, a policeman on each side, without the slightest compunction. He recalled his own evidence with satisfaction and self-approbation. This was entirely according to plan. He was by no means a sentimentalist, and he felt no shadow of regret at what he had done. If he had borne false evidence he had borne it against a man whose chief weapon it had been. He had returned evil for evil, subtlety for subtlety. There was not a single quality pertaining to his victim which entitled him to consideration. The only astounding thing was the way Mark Levy had walked into the trap, and that within a few hours of his release one of his ten enemies should have been dealt with. His thoughts naturally wandered on to the others. He sat up a little in the car. The sun was hot, but with every mile there came a keener tang of ozone in the breeze from eastward. There came into his mind, one by one, memories of these men with whom he had worked and dined, and in whose company he had wandered through the tortuous ways of the financial world. Isham had grown fat and vicious, Sinclair Coles more saturnine than ever and, without a doubt, less principled. Mark Levy had always been an object of contempt; the worst kind of fool, humble but grasping, servile yet untrustworthy. He was always doomed to be an easy victim, but there were some of the others!—Channay’s face grew a little grimmer in the sunshine as he thought of them. Each in turn should pay, if it cost him his life. No need, he thought, for him to go and seek for them. The pages of his cheque-book were the bait which would draw them to him. Even if he had chosen for refuge the other end of the world, they would come. There might be a day or two’s delay, sometimes a week, sometimes a month, but he possessed the irresistible magnet. In the end they would come.

CHAPTER III
LORD ISHAM'S GAMBLE

Gilbert Channay, attired in a grey fisherman's sweater, grey knickerbockers and waders, was standing on the narrowest point of the little spit of land upon the base of which was his temporary abode. The pallor of his years of confinement had almost disappeared during these days of fresh sea winds and warm sunshine. He had a gun under his arm. In the marshes there was always an odd snipe in the daytime, and, beyond the breakwater, a string of flighting duck at twilight. By his side—a somewhat inappropriate figure in so desolate a region stood Parsons, his immaculate servant, dressed, with some desire to subscribe to his rural surroundings, in a blue serge suit instead of black, but wearing the inevitable black tie, and preserving still the slightly deferential air which was part of his nature.

"I followed out your instructions so far as I was able, sir," he explained. "You wanted a place for a month or two with something to be had in the shape of sport—a place that was inaccessible and where it was possible to watch the approach of a stranger. No one can reach the house, even at low tide, except by walking that mile of rough track, and at high tide it is only the locals who care to tackle it, and from the sea—well, one would have to know these waters thoroughly, sir, to get in through the shoals and down the creek, even when the tide's running."

"It's a wonderful spot, Parsons," his master declared—"suits me down to the ground. Sea fishing, rough shooting, and all the books I asked for. I hope your wife doesn't mind the loneliness of it?"

"Mrs. Parsons feels as I do, sir," the man replied, "that no sacrifice on our part could be too great if we could do anything to make you comfortable, after those wicked years. We're hoping, though, that later on you'll feel like mixing with your friends again."

Gilbert Channay smiled pleasantly.

"You needn't be afraid, either of you," he said, "that a little trouble like I've had is going to make a hermit of me. I've a few matters to attend to, Parsons, and I think I can deal with them better from here. When they're arranged, I think I'll try London and Paris for a few months, and afterwards I shall probably buy a house either here or in Devonshire."

Parsons coughed.

"You'll excuse my mentioning it, sir," he begged—"it's a great liberty, I know—but I've seen you sometimes the last few days look as though you were

watching for someone."

"I expect to receive a few visitors, Parsons," Channay admitted cheerfully.

"I'm thinking sometimes, sir," Parsons went on, "of those who were responsible for the thing which happened to you. You wouldn't wish to court further trouble, sir, by trying—I mean by trying to get level with them, sir, or anything of that sort. I hope I'm not presuming, sir."

"Not at all," Channay assured him. "Go ahead, Parsons."

"There's that Mr. Mark Levy, sir. He was one of the gang," the man continued. "He got what he deserved at the Norfolk Assizes all right—three years hard—and I wish it were ten. Well, if I might put it roughly, sir, that was a bit of your own back, wasn't it? Quite by accident, like. You're not going to worry about all the others. They'll come to a bad end all right."

Gilbert Channay started to walk towards the house, removing the cartridges from his gun.

"I'm not at all sure, Parsons," he said, "that the boot may not be on the other leg. These people may be coming to try to find me. You see I have a great deal of money in hand, to which some of them think that they have a claim. Personally, I think they have forfeited that claim, but opinions differ. They may look at it in another light. I expect I shall have an importunate visitor or two."

"I've known you, Mr. Channay, sir," Parsons persisted, "since you were a lad at school and afterwards at college, and for that bit of time you were in the army—before your father, sir, lost all that money and you went into the city. You were always a little on the daring side, sir. You're safeish now and you've plenty of money. There's such a thing as having too much courage. You won't—look for trouble, sir? We don't want—no one wants—to lose you again."

Gilbert Channay paused at the gate which led into his little domain, and handed over his gun.

"Parsons," he said, "you're a good fellow. You're talking common sense, too. I'll let you into a secret. I want to get level with those who have wronged me more than anything else in life. I don't think I shall start enjoying things thoroughly until some of those little affairs have been cleared up, but—never forget this—what happens to them is their lookout. I am going to take care of myself. . . . Now go and telephone to Padmore's, in Norwich, for some more of the number eight cartridges and for the duck shot, and tell Mrs. Parsons to let me have an omelette, like yesterday's, for luncheon. I'm going to walk to the end of the creek."

"You'll have the tide up in about three-quarters an hour, sir," Parsons reminded him.

"I'll watch it," his master promised.

Gilbert scrambled down the grassy bank and across the mud bottom of the

creek, where his little yawl and dinghy lay high and dry. On the other side was a great strip of marsh, stretching away to the mainland, with here and there a bank of sea lavender, many bog holes, where the grass was emerald green, and further away the sluggish silvery streak of the long inlet which led from the sea to the old village; a picturesque medley of red tiled roofs, clustering around the harbour where the small freighters and fishing boats lay, also upon the mud now and at all manner of angles. Behind and beyond, the country, deep coloured and rich soiled, a patchwork of gold and stubble and dark green meadow-land, sloped upwards to a long ridge, crowned with belts of fir trees. The tower of a fine old church stood out vividly against the empty background. There were farmhouses with their little bordering of ricks, a ribbon of road winding its way into a wood. Down that road, as Channay stood gazing meditatively landwards, came an automobile; a shapeless thing at that distance but with the sun flashing on its brighter parts until it seemed at times almost on fire. It disappeared into the village, and Channay found himself watching the spot at the back of the quay where it would emerge, unless it stayed at one or other of the two inns in the main street. The sun was beating down upon him where he stood, a lark was singing directly overhead, the sky was cloudless save for one or two little filmy fragments of white gossamer, almost burnt into vapour by the noonday heat. Channay was no longer looking about him aimlessly. He watched that little opening at the end of the village street with eyes that never faltered. Presently the automobile reappeared, swung round upon the quay and made its way along the rough stretch of road which led to only one other low-lying farm-house on the edge of the mainland and to Seaman's Grange, which was the name of his own abode. He followed its jolting progress until it came to a standstill in front of the black gate, half-a-mile away, on which was painted the name of his house. The chauffeur asked a question of a waggoner lumbering up to the farm, and presently, leaving his seat, opened the door of the car. He talked for a minute or two to its occupant, and Channay's face hardened as he watched the descent of a tall, slim figure—the figure of a woman. The chauffeur held open the gate through which she passed, pausing for a moment apparently to turn round and give him a final order. Then she set out upon the walk along the raised grass dyke bank, which was the sole possible approach to the Grange. Channay scrambled once more across the creek, up which now a thin finger of salt water was slowly stealing, opened the door of his singular dwelling, mounted to the first floor and made his way to a window. On the broad sill lay a revolver, a box of cartridges, a shot gun and a pair of field-glasses. He raised the latter to his eyes and studied the slowly advancing figure. He had no need to look twice. There was no other woman in the world who walked with that peculiar, swinging grace.

So they had found him out already! She came, no doubt, as an ambassador.

How typical of the men who sent her! . . . On his way downstairs he paused for a moment to speak to Mrs. Parsons. Then he went out on to the little circular lawn in front of the Grange, and leaned with his back against the flag post waiting. A brick wall surrounded the whole of the small demesne, and from where he stood the approaching figure was invisible. Before long, however, he heard the swinging to of the outer gate and the raising of the latch of the postern. He moved forward and met her at the commencement of the tiled walk.

"This is a great honour," he said, with a low bow.

She advanced towards him, her great brown eyes filled with appeal; a little fearful, for once not altogether sure of herself.

"Gilbert," she pleaded, "this is not my fault. They made me come."

"I can imagine," he replied, "that it is scarcely an expedition you would undertake for pleasure."

She shivered.

"You have changed so much, Gilbert," she continued. "You never used to say things just to hurt. Why are you living in so strange a place?"

"It rather appeals to me," he explained. "Besides, I am like the mediæval baron in his fortress: I can spy out intruders and prepare."

"You saw me coming?"

"Directly you left the road. You see there are only two approaches; along the dyke bank and up the creek, and it is only when the tide is high that the creek is useful."

"Why do you declare war upon everyone?" she demanded, with a sudden little note of passion in her tone. "Why don't you behave like a reasonable person? You would still be rich. There are many of your friends who would be only too anxious to welcome you back."

"You did not, I presume," he remarked, "come here to discuss my future."

"I did not," she agreed. "It was an idea of Sinclair's that brought me—of his and George's. Presently, I shall tell you about it."

"You will come in?" he invited. "Or there are chairs here, and a seat just outside the wall. We can watch the tide come up the creek if you like. It is rather fascinating as it begins to deepen."

"I should like to sit outside," she decided. "Can I have a glass of wine first? I am fainting. They made me start in the small hours so as to get back before dark."

"By all means," he acquiesced, turning towards the house.

Parsons met them, however, announcing luncheon. They sat side by side at a round table in the quaintly shaped dining-room. The woman ate and drank almost mechanically. She seemed to find the position difficult. Channay, on the other hand, though once or twice he relapsed into thought, appeared

entirely at his ease. At his suggestion their coffee was brought to them outside. They sat in two basket chairs, watching the long tongue of salt water steal into the creek, lapping with more and more insistency at the bottoms of the two boats.

"They sent me," the woman began, suddenly breaking a short silence, "because Sinclair has had charge of a document which he thinks you would like to see. The very fact that I offer it to you now is their confession. Nothing can expiate or justify in any way what they did, but this document they think would interest you."

She gave him a roll of thick legal paper, a little yellow at the edges and worn where it had been folded to go into the long envelope from which she drew it. Gilbert Channay smoothed it out upon his knee and read:—

122a, Pall Mall,
London, S.W.

We, the undersigned, have come to this agreement:—

1. that Gilbert Channay has taken advantage of his position as head of our Syndicate to demand an unfair and unjust share of the profits;

2. that we all agree to give such evidence as the lawyers advise us is necessary to secure the conviction of Gilbert Channay on the charge of signing a fraudulent balance sheet with reference to the affairs of the Siamese Corporation;

3. that should Gilbert Channay be convicted, the funds in hand be divided equally amongst the undersigned—

(Signed)—

Isham
Sinclair Coles
Edward Sayers
Matthew Baynes
Malcolm Drood
George F. Browning
Nicholas Euphratos
Giles Anderton
Mark Levy (by power of attorney).

Channay read with stony face, but when he had finished his mouth seemed to have hardened and the half bantering light had left his eyes.

"A more cold-blooded, blackguardly document," he pronounced calmly, "I have never come across in my life."

“It is simply horrible,” she admitted. “Of course, they try to say that you over-reached them, that in the city such things are done. Yet they must know. The whole thing was horrible!”

“It was also,” he reflected, “a little foolish. Did they really think, I wonder, that the money was deposited so that anyone else, save myself, could touch it. My private ledger was perfectly kept. Every penny of our profits would have been justly distributed, but I knew better than to let anyone else have access to the money. It was in my name and my name only.”

“They found that out,” she said. “Still, Gilbert, though all these men behaved disgustingly, a share of the money does belong to them, doesn’t it?”

“In a sense it does,” he assented, “but they won’t have it. They know perfectly well that legally not a soul has the slightest claim.”

“Morally you owe them—each one of those men—the twenty-five thousand pounds, or whatever it is.”

“The term morally, under the circumstances, annoys me,” he objected coldly. “I am glad to see this document. I am glad to know that everyone of the Syndicate was concerned in this disgraceful business—every one except one, that is to say.”

“Eric Rodes refused,” she concurred. “He left the country soon after.”

“I shall search for Eric Rodes,” Channay announced. “He will have his share. None of the others will ever receive a single penny. On the contrary, for what they have done, they have become my enemies, and you know, my dear Miriam, that I have never embraced Christian tenets as regards my treatment of my enemies.”

Once more she shivered a little, sitting there in the sunshine. The man’s voice was so hard and implacable.

“My errand is going to be in vain, then?” she sighed.

“What exactly did you expect?” he demanded.

She looked away from him for several moments. Her eyes followed idly the sinuous curlings of the incoming waters. At the back of her mind other thoughts were moving.

“I will tell you what accursed idea made these two men plan this errand of mine,” she confided scornfully. “They know how much you were, or seemed to be, in love with me in the old days. George, my husband, whose jealousy used to make life a curse for me, thought it all out. He believed that if I came here when you were alone, I could say pleasant things to you, that you would weaken; that when I put this document in your hands, giving you information which you would never have had by any other means, that I—I—should be able to work upon your feelings! You see how George trusts me, for all his jealousy. I am permitted, I imagine, to go so far as to look things I may not utter; to let my hand rest upon yours, perhaps, to plead with you, to melt you

into opening your cheque-book; and then I am to get into the motor and ride back and arrive there to-night, when they are finishing their very excellent dinner—although we are paupers, Sinclair always will have an expensive *chef*—and brandish the cheque before them, and George will give me a little pat on the back and Sinclair will pour me out a glass of wine, and I shall be allowed to have a few hundred pounds to pay the most pressing of my debts. . . . There you are, Gilbert—a true epitome of what is expected of me!"

"Things do not always," Channay remarked, "work out according to plan. There may be one or two slight hitches in this one."

He turned towards her. To all appearance his face had softened, his eyes were full of interest. Only that upward curl at the corner of his mouth seemed a little menacing.

"Are you still in love with George?" he asked.

"Good God, no!" she answered.

"What made you marry him?" he persisted.

"I don't know," she admitted.

"You do know. Tell me."

"If you insist," she acquiesced, with a gesture of distaste. "It sounds horrid. You were in prison. I felt sure that even if I could be woman enough to forget that, you wouldn't let me. I wasn't a woman. I was just as spoilt as the life we girls led in those days was certain to spoil anyone. I put away the idea of marrying you. I thought it would be rather wonderful to be the Countess of Isham. George was insistent just at the right time, and I married him. I can't tell you any more—except what you have probably guessed—that our marriage has been a horrible failure."

"I see," he murmured. "And George is jealous, is he?"

"Absurdly," she answered. "And, so far, without any cause."

She had raised her head and was looking at him. She was very beautiful. Even the dark shades under her eyes seemed to give her a sort of exotic charm. Her plainly knitted silk gown suited her long, slim figure. The absence of any cosmetics enabled her to sit there in the sunshine and to be glorified by it.

"Are you still in love with me, by any chance?" Channay asked.

"Don't be a brute, Gilbert," she begged, a little unsteadily.

"I want to know just how we stand," he continued, taking her unresisting hand in his, "Do you think George would have let you come if he had imagined I was likely to make love to you?"

She shook her head.

"Even George is not such an unutterable cad," she answered.

"I see. He is jealous, but he is also conceited. You belong to him, and he thinks he can make use of you, and yet risk nothing. I just wanted to know."

"I will tell you this much more," she confided, with a little break in her

voice. “I think that if he realised just one feeling that I have managed to keep alive in my heart, he would have torn this document up, and settled down to face the bankruptcy court, before he would have allowed me to come.”

“The bankruptcy court! As bad as that?”

“Within the next few weeks, unless a miracle happens, or unless I succeed with you.”

“Tell me, in plain words, what you want from me?” he enquired.

She turned her head towards him, but he refused to meet her eyes. Presently she looked away seawards.

“I am not sure,” she sighed. “I can’t tell you that, Gilbert. Isn’t it rather a hard question?”

“Then answer me from their point of view only,” he suggested. “Just what do they expect from your visit?”

“That is another matter,” she replied. “They would like you to accept that document as proving that every one except Eric Rodes was equally implicated, and, a little for my sake, owing to my impassioned pleadings and appeals to you, and a little because they have handed up the document, they would like you to give me a cheque for their shares—something like fifty thousand pounds. If you did that I don’t think they would care a little bit whether you paid the others or not.”

“I see,” he murmured.

There was a long silence. Below them now the creek had filled with a softly flowing, deep-bosomed river of salt water. The dinghy and the yawl were both afloat. Gilbert Channay rose to his feet.

“Would you like to go for a sail?” he enquired.

She glanced up in some surprise.

“Would it take long?” she asked, a little wistfully.

“Does it matter?” he rejoined, once more with that kinder note in his voice.

She looked at him fixedly, her eyes full of almost hungry questioning. He had certainly changed since the moment of her arrival—in a sense softened. Yet there was something she mistrusted in his expression, something which seemed still like a barrier between them.

“I suppose not,” she admitted. “Nothing matters really.”

“Come in and give Mrs. Parsons your hat,” he suggested. “We may find a breeze blowing outside and you’ll be better with a handkerchief round your hair.”

They walked up the tiled path to the house. Channay gave some orders to Parsons and then busied himself in the boat. Very soon they were on their way, Miriam lying on a pile of cushions; he, for the first half-mile, until the channel widened, poling occasionally with only an intermittent short tack. Presently the banks seemed to disappear, the marsh fell away from them. They were still

sand-locked, but they were in an arm of the sea. He adjusted the sail, took the tiller in his hand and came and sat by her side, helping himself to one of the cigarettes which lay upon her lap.

"Do you remember that we used to do this sort of thing at Bourne End?" he reflected.

"How kind are you going to be to me?" she asked abruptly. "Because if you are not going to be altogether kind, don't keep on reminding me of things. You wouldn't do it if you knew what my life was like now."

He ignored the note of appeal in her tone, but sat for a time looking moodily out over the boat's side. Then he began to talk disjointedly of the neighbourhood, showing her the various landmarks, the fishing grounds, the dangerous sands over which there was a white line of broken sea. She answered in monosyllables. Presently he relapsed into silence. There was, after all, very little breeze, and their progress was restfully slow. Half the time she lay quite still with closed eyes, half the time she watched him. Time itself seemed to become an indeterminate thing. It was only when she looked at the sun, as they found themselves once more in the creek nearing the Grange, that she gave a little cry.

"We must have been away for hours and hours," she exclaimed.

"We have," he answered. "It's six o'clock."

"Heavens!"

She sat up, startled.

"Do you know that it took me five hours to get here?"

"I dare say," he rejoined.

He was busy for a few minutes manœuvring their landing. Parsons came out and caught the rope which he threw to him.

"You have some tea ready?" Channay enquired.

"It is waiting in the study, sir," was the prompt reply. "I ordered it as soon as you came into sight."

"Ought I to stop?" she asked doubtfully.

"Yes," he answered.

He led her to the little room which he had made into his own den; a room with dull red walls, a profusion of books, some wonderful Queen Anne furniture, a few priceless engravings, a medley of guns, fishing rods and golf clubs in a distant corner. The window opened on to the little strip of lawn, and there was a great couch upon which one could lie and look seawards. He served her with tea in silence. She praised the cakes and the cream, but every moment his manner was beginning to puzzle her more. As soon as she had lit a cigarette she turned towards him.

"Gilbert," she said, "it is time you made up your mind. I'm going to be terribly late as it is."

“I have not made it up yet,” he replied.

“But you must give me some sort of an answer.”

“I will, when the time comes. Let us go out on to the lawn again. I hear Parsons coming to clear away the tea.”

She stood by his side and they leaned together over the wall.

“I shall scarcely be home before midnight,” she reminded him again. “Johnson must have been waiting for me for hours. I told him to be here at three o’clock.”

She looked along the dyke bank to the gate. There was no sign of the car.

“I wonder where he is?” she murmured.

“Back at Ringley by now, I should think,” he answered.

She turned her head slowly and looked at him.

“What do you mean, Gilbert?”

“Just what I said. Rather a habit of mine, that,” he replied. “I sent him back home with a message to your husband that you would be returning sometime to-morrow.”

There was a sudden rush of colour into her cheeks, a strange gleam in her eyes. She gripped his arm.

“Gilbert!” she cried. “Gilbert?”

“The exact significance of this enforced hospitality,” he continued, “I shall explain to you to-morrow, before you go. For the present you will have to be content with this. You are going to stay here for the night. I have told Parsons to have dinner at eight o’clock. I have a very excellent spare room where I think you will be comfortable. I shall do my best to be an attentive host.”

“But George will go mad!” she exclaimed. “And what do you mean, Gilbert? Why do you want me to stop? Tell me why. I don’t understand!”

“You will before you go,” he assured her. “Please accept the inevitable. You can see for yourself that you cannot leave here. I am not attempting the melodramatic. There are no locked doors or anything of that sort, but you couldn’t very well traverse that three-quarters of a mile of dyke bank, could you, without being seen and followed; and besides, when you got to the village, it wouldn’t do you much good. The last train left the nearest railway station—which, by-the-bye, is eleven miles away—half an hour ago, and there isn’t a motor in the place.”

“And you really mean that the car’s gone back?”

“Absolutely,” he replied.

Her fingers tightened upon his arm. She seemed to be shivering all over, but scarcely with fear.

“Well,” she declared, “George sent me. I suppose he knew there was a risk with you—a risk of your doing something amazing. How do you expect me to accept the situation?”

“Just remember you are my very charming guest in this not unpleasant spot,” he answered. “We might stroll on the marshes for an hour, if you like. Afterwards I will show you that I have not forgotten how to make cocktails, and Parsons has been to the village during our absence to arrange for our dinner.”

“And afterwards?” she asked, breathlessly.

“There is a piano,” he said. “It will perhaps amuse you to play for a little time, and at night I think you will appreciate the quiet. I never slept in my life like I have done here.”

She gave a queer, strained laugh.

“Take me out on those marshes,” she insisted. “They look most fascinating. Can I have a stick, please?”

They walked for an hour or more, jumping from one to the other of the little stretches of soft, mossy turf, skirting bog holes, at times with the sea lavender over their ankles. The gulls wheeled above their heads from seaward, and now and then a snipe rose abruptly with its quaint, startled cry. When they returned to the Grange it was already half-past seven. Miriam, who had been talking lightly enough all the time they had been out, became suddenly silent. She sat back in an easy-chair and watched Channay mix the cocktails. He handed her a large, frosted glass and pushed the cigarettes towards her.

“Gilbert,” she confided, “when I first came I thought that you were mad. Now I think that you are the most sensible man I ever knew. This place is wonderful.”

“A little lonely,” he sighed.

Her eyes fell before his. The fingers which held her glass shook. He turned away to help himself.

“I will drink to this unexpected pleasure,” he said quietly. “Please let me ____”

He refilled her glass.

“Gilbert,” she begged, as she rose to her feet a few minutes afterwards, “for God’s sake let me ask one thing of you. Here I am—obedient, your slave. Be natural! Even now I feel there is something strange all around us, something strange between you and me. Why can’t you——”

She broke off. He took her fingers in his hands and raised them to his lips. His arm lightly encircled her waist.

“My dear Miriam,” he said, “for a matter of three years or so, the privilege of conversation with your sex has been denied me. I am still a little uncouth. That, no doubt, will pass. . . . Here is Mrs. Parsons. She will do her best to help you make any change in your toilette that you may deem advisable, and she will show you where you sleep. Shall we meet, say, in half an hour?”

The sense of strain, never altogether absent, was modified during the service of dinner by the presence of Parsons. The meal was simple enough but excellent—lobster, drawn from the pots that afternoon, a small saddle of lamb, asparagus, fruit and cream. The champagne was iced to exactly the right temperature. At Miriam's suggestion they sat outside for their coffee, and watched the lights steal out one by one from the farm-houses along the ridge, and the darkness gather over the marshes. They talked very little; Miriam appeared to have abandoned herself entirely to the exigencies of the situation. A curious sort of languor seemed to have crept over her, mentally as well as physically. She lounged in her chair, her hands clasped behind her head, her eyes turned eternally seawards. Once, soon after they had emerged from the house, she had cast a half frightened glance towards the end of the rough road. After that she looked no more in that direction. One by one she pointed out the glimmering lights of the fishing boats and the small freighting steamers, as they appeared. Every now and then, through the dusk, a flight of duck whose wings beat the air above their heads passed rapidly over, and once they heard the honk of geese high up—so high indeed, that they could only discern the bare outline of the drawn-out phalanx. A clock from the church tower struck eleven. Suddenly Miriam leaned a little towards him and Channay felt the warm grip of her fingers upon his hand.

"You tortured me this afternoon," she whispered. "Shall I remind you of that night on the yacht at Gibraltar?"

She leaned still closer towards him and, as though against his will, he bent over her. Their lips met and rested where they met. An owl from a little way inland hooted. Far in the distance they could hear the throb of the engine from an invisible steamer. Very gently he unclasped his arms, his lips left hers lingeringly.

"Mrs. Parsons," he whispered, "is waiting to show you your room."

"Must I go?" she asked reluctantly.

"You had better," he answered.

He listened to her unwilling footsteps, to her soft voice as she talked with his housekeeper. For an hour or more he wrote in his study. Then he came out, and, still in his dinner clothes, undid the rope and drifted out on his yawl as far as the sand-locked bay. In the distance he saw the lights of the little sailing fleet as it left the harbour. He dropped his anchor and lay there, watched the stars appear, the moon rise over the ridge and mount into the heavens. Once he fancied that he dozed. At any rate when again he looked skywards the stars seemed to have paled, and a faint breeze had sprung up—the first herald of the dawn. He hauled his anchor and drifted back, poling the last part of the way, just in time to reach his landing-place before the ebbing tide would have left him high and dry. There was still no light, only a thin pencil of silver in the

east. He let himself in and made his way to his room.

It was a coincidence that, as he lingered outside over his morning coffee, Isham, half running, half walking, down that narrow dyke way, should have appeared almost as Miriam—pale as death and with dark circles under her eyes—issued from the house. Channay rose to receive her.

"You slept well, I hope? Your coffee——"

"Thank you," she interrupted. "I asked for tea. Mrs. Parsons brought it to me. At what hour am I permitted to depart?"

He pointed towards the figure of her husband, now barely fifty yards away.

"You see," he said, "the car is waiting there."

"And what is the meaning of it all?" she asked.

"I shall explain," he answered. "In a sense your mission is not wholly a failure."

"I suppose you realise," she said deliberately, "that you have treated me brutally."

"I realise nothing of the sort," he protested. "I ask your pardon for one thing only—last night, in those chairs."

She drew herself up.

"And I," she rejoined, "but for that one moment should feel my humiliation too great for further life. . . ."

Isham had thought out his words, but when he reached them he was speechless. He looked from one to the other, his fists clenched, the veins swollen on his forehead.

"I think," he said to his wife, "that you had better go to the car. I have something to say to Channay."

"I do not see the necessity," she answered. "It was you who sent me to him. Let me hear the end."

"And let me," Gilbert Channay said, drawing an envelope from his pocket, "make it easy for you. Your wife, Lord Isham, has spent the night in my cottage here, under the same roof as myself. I greatly fear that unless your chauffeur is discreet—unless the innkeeper be muzzled—unless the inhabitants of this very gossipy little village have changed their nature—a certain amount of scandal may arise. Of course, you ran a risk, Isham. You sent your wife here to me, trusting to her influence over me, to her persuasive powers, to work out a scheme for your advantage. You ran a risk, Isham, especially when you remember that we were once attached to one another."

"What about your risk?" Isham retorted. "You don't come off scot-free. I trusted her, and it seems I was a fool, but you—I shall divorce her—what about you?"

Channay smiled.

“You will never divorce her,” he answered. “You’re on your way down the hill, Isham. It is because I see that clearly that I do not deal with you as I feel inclined, and throw you neck over crop into that stream. No, you will never leave your wife until she leaves you. You see she will become your principal source of income. I wrote out these papers last night,” he added, passing the envelope over. “I will not pay you your twenty-five thousand pounds, nor will I give a single penny to any of your confederates in crime, but I am settling two thousand a year for life upon your wife. Now, are you so anxious to divorce her?”

There was a tense silence, broken first by a little moan from Miriam, and then by the shrill call of a drifting gull overhead.

“Two thousand a year,” Channay continued, “is not much. On the other hand it is a certainty. It provides, you know, the necessities. Well—Miriam has that for the rest of her life. That document needs stamping, Isham. That is all.”

For a single moment the man who stood there—haggard, wild-eyed and tremulous—seemed as though he would have torn it in half. Miriam watched him eagerly. So did Channay. The mood passed. He slipped it into the breast pocket of his coat.

“I shall look into this,” he muttered. “Come Miriam!”

Gilbert Channay smiled once more.

“You will look into it,” he repeated, “and you will be glad of it. You will take back your wife, because she has two thousand a year. Every time she writes you a cheque you will sink a little lower. Every month you live upon her money you will feel a little baser. That’s what I have to say to you, Isham. One by one you—nine of you—who signed that accursed document and sent me to hell are going to taste a little of that hell yourselves. I’m dealing you out your share with two thousand a year.”

He opened the gate. Isham took his wife’s arm. She remained motionless. Her eyes were fixed upon Channay.

“Do I go?” she asked.

“If you please,” he answered.

“You know that you are a devil?” she cried, with sudden fury.

He shrugged his shoulders. They had started to move through the gate which led out on to the dyke walk.

“I was so badly treated,” he rejoined. “Besides,” he added, with that faint smile which in those last few hours she had learned to hate, “if you tell your husband the whole truth he may believe you!”

CHAPTER IV
MARTIN FOGG PERSISTS

Edward Sayer's manner was from the first menacing. He was a bulky, pudgy man, wearing clothes of American cut and material; a man out of condition, it would seem, from his breathlessness after his walk from the mainland, but with great muscular arms and a magnificent chest. His colour was unwholesome, but his stature almost the stature of a prize-fighter. From the first he showed few signs of desiring to ingratiate himself with the man whom he had come to visit.

"Say, this is a damned long way you've brought me to collect my bit!" he complained, as Channay motioned him to a seat and Parsons, the discreet manservant, left the room. "Letters too! I've written you a dozen times!"

"My opportunities for correspondence," Channay explained, "have been scanty. Also, as you know, I always affected a secretary. My own handwriting is atrocious."

"Just a line would have done," Sayers grumbled. "A cheque would have been better. I need the money, but it's the hell of a way to have to come and fetch it."

"At least," Channay reminded him, "you cannot say that I invited you."

"Look here, Mr. Glib Tongue," Sayers said roughly, "I never did care about you much when you had one of those sarcastic fits on. Plain English is what we need just now. I want my share of the Syndicate's profits. Nigh on thirty thousand pounds I make it. What's doing?"

"Nothing," was the curt reply.

Sayers' eyes seemed to have become smaller. It was noticeable now that there was a tinge of green in them. They had retreated into a setting of pudgy flesh.

"You mean," he persisted, "that you're not parting?"

"Precisely," Gilbert Channay agreed. "I am not parting."

The newcomer sat quite still. It was probable that he had been prepared for a response of this sort. Nevertheless there was something portentous in his silence. His right hand with its thick fingers left his knee and was on its way to his hip pocket. Channay, however, was much quicker. From the open drawer in front of him he drew out an ugly little automatic. Sayers cowered back in his place.

"I can defend myself, if you like, you see," Channay observed. "I am not in favour of this sort of dispute, however. We're in a country with old fashioned

ideas as to the use of fire-arms. I would rather settle our difference in another fashion."

"You can settle it by paying me what you owe me," the other declared. "I've got to have that money, and the sooner you make your mind up to it the better."

Gilbert Channay sighed. He thrust his hand into his breast coat pocket, drew out a small morocco-bound book, and from it a slip of paper. He held it out towards Sayers.

"Your signature?" he asked.

The man flushed; a streak of colour, unhealthy, almost purple, crept into his cheeks.

"Where the hell did you get that?" he demanded.

"Never mind," was the cold reply. "I have it. You are one of those who plotted to break my life, and to help yourselves to the money which had been made through my brains and enterprise. A very honourable proceeding! One part of it was all right. The second is where you fall down. Not a man who signed this paper shall touch a penny of the money. That is my decision. Now you can go back to the States, or wherever you came from, as quickly as you like. The sight of you is unpleasant to me."

Sayers rose to his feet. He kept his hands well away from his hip pocket though.

"Channay," he said, "this is a dirty trick."

Gilbert Channay flourished for a moment the half sheet of paper which he was just returning to his pocket.

"Not so dirty as this," he retorted.

"There are others besides me," Sayers went on. "They'll make you disgorge, as I shall."

"Two of them have tried," Gilbert Channay replied. "They didn't get very far with it. Neither will you. And, Sayers, remember this. I mention it for my sake more than yours. The men who signed this accursed document are my enemies, but of the whole lot you are the one I dislike and despise the most. You are the man I helped when he was broke to the world. I paid your creditors when you might have been sent to prison. Later I got to know you as you were—as you probably are. I warn you. Don't try to bully me."

Sayers was leaning over the desk now.

"I'm going to have my money," he declared, "if I break every bone in your body."

"Once more let me warn you," Channay rejoined, "there is no man whom personally I dislike and detest as I do you. Take my advice. You go out of that door and back to where you came from. I shall do you no harm except in self-defence, but if I have to defend myself you had better look out."

Sayers was not a pretty sight. An ill-living and ill-conditioned man of great muscular strength, he was suddenly torn with passion. He managed to rid himself, however, of a few coherent words.

"You b . . . y little Britisher!" he shouted. "You talk of hating me. Why, I've loathed the sight of you all my life; dictating what we should do, ordering us about as though we were your servants instead of your partners. Curse you, Channay, with your sneering manners, your British starch and insolence! Sign that cheque, or I'll beat you to hell!"

He suddenly gripped Channay by the collar. Channay swung round, avoiding a blow which the other aimed at him savagely, and seized his assailant by the throat.

Twenty minutes later Gilbert Channay, having changed his collar and tie and brushed his hair, lit a cigarette and paused to consider the situation. The sound of the muttering of thunder had drawn him towards the window, where he lingered, fascinated by the somewhat sinister silence which now seemed to be brooding over the marshes; a grey, uncanny silence, behind which lurked the tragedy of the coming storm. The gulls were flying about in disorder. Seaward the line of white around the sand banks seemed to have grown broader and higher. The sky was strewn with fragments of black clouds with jagged edges. The sun, showing for a single moment, seemed to shine with an almost ghastly light. The birds had suddenly ceased to call, and the gulls were flying high, most of them making their way landwards. The incoming tide, stealing up the creek, appeared to be flowing faster than usual, as though driven on by some unseen force. Channay, with his hands in his pockets, stood considering the situation carefully from every point of view. It was unfortunate, in a way, that Parsons was absent in the village. He would be back within an hour, however, before which time any other visitor was unlikely. Nevertheless he was determined to run no risks. It seemed to him, as he stood there, looking out across the sombre landscape, that he had known from the first that this must happen, that as soon as he and Edward Sayers met face to face one of them would kill the other. He felt no remorse, scarcely any horror. One idea, and one idea only, was foremost in his mind, and that was, having ridded the world of one of its worst scoundrels, to secure himself against any untoward consequences. It was impossible to do much before the return of Parsons. Sayers was a heavy man and the problem of the disposal of the body would be a difficult one enough even with help. Parsons might return perhaps in half-an-hour. In the meantime Channay, acting upon an impulse the genesis of which was entirely obscure, moved a sofa in front of the exceedingly unpleasant-looking object which had lain stretched across the floor, re-arranged other pieces of furniture so as to form a screen, and finally returned, a

little breathless, to his desk, with the intention of writing a letter. He had drawn some notepaper towards him, the pen was already in his hand, when suddenly his fingers became rigid, his whole frame stiffened. Without a doubt the room had become momentarily darkened, as though by the presence of some shadow outside. Gilbert Channay raised his head. Looking in through the French window was the figure of a man. . . .

Channay, though his nerves were of steel, was after all human, and for a moment he could not trust himself to rise. He felt his heart pounding against his ribs. Then he realised the necessity for prompt action. He rose to his feet, thrust open the French window and looked enquiringly at the intruder. At first he failed to recognise him. He was walking without a hat, as was the custom amongst the tourists and holiday-makers in that part of the world, and his tousled mass of ginger-coloured hair, blown this way and that by the breeze which was just springing up, gave him, to start with, a thoroughly unkempt appearance. He wore a suit of tourist's clothes, which bore the unmistakable brand of the ready-made tailor. He was carrying his collar and his tie in his hand, and his boots were unlaced, as though he had been paddling. He smiled ingratiatingly through the opened window.

"Nice spot you've got here, Mr. Channay," he said. "They told me down in the village where to find you."

"What on earth are you doing here?" Channay asked abruptly.

"Holiday making, sir—nothing more," Martin Fogg replied. "I wasn't on my way to see you particularly. You refused my help, so I had to let it go at that. . . . That your boat?" he added pointing to the ketch, which was lying high and dry upon the shore, but around the keel of which little waves were now beginning to trickle.

Gilbert Channay nodded.

"I don't want to seem inhospitable," he said, "but I can't offer to take you down to the village in her. It will be hours before she floats. You had better take the dyke path through that gate there, and you had better not delay, either. If the storm comes the waves break over our causeway."

Mr. Martin Fogg remained unperturbed. He showed, too, a disturbing knowledge of the locality.

"It will be an hour-and-a-half before there's any tide up on the other side," he observed. "I'm a bit tired, Mr. Channay—nasty walking out Widdiscombe way. Might I ask the favour of a seat for a few minutes?"

Channay motioned him to enter, placed him in a chair with his back to the sofa, and pushed a box of cigarettes to the end of the table.

"Have a drink?" he asked.

"A drop of whiskey, if you have it, sir."

Channay went to a cupboard and mixed a whiskey and soda. All the time

he had an uneasy feeling that Martin Fogg's eyes were travelling around the room.

"You haven't changed your mind, I suppose, sir?" the latter ventured, as he accepted the tumbler.

"I haven't changed it, nor am I likely to," was the firm reply. "You did me a good turn, Martin Fogg—a thing few men in this world would have troubled to have done—and I am not likely to forget it—but I prefer to run my own affairs."

Martin Fogg blinked once or twice without speaking. As he appeared at that moment, holding his tumbler in one hand and his cigarette in the other, he seemed rather like a human ferret; cunning, but without breadth of intelligence, persistent, but lacking in sensibility. Then he suddenly smiled and he seemed a very different person.

"You're wrong, Mr. Channay," he said. "They're a dangerous lot you're up against. Those two Americans, for instance—thoroughly unscrupulous men, both of them. Let me see, wasn't one of them Mr. Sayers—Edward P. Sayers?"

Channay felt a sudden chill, but his face remained immovable.

"That was the name of the biggest scoundrel of the lot," he replied.

"Desperate fellows, some of these Americans," Martin Fogg went on, "apt to take the law into their own hands. A rough lot—a very rough lot! This is a lonely place for a man like you to live, Mr. Channay."

"I can take care of myself," was the brief response.

"Now if you had accepted my offer," Martin Fogg persisted, "you would have someone always looking around—someone to let you know, for instance, if Sayers set foot in this county, or the man who was once his partner—Drood. I should be able to keep you advised as to the movements of any of them—especially of the dangerous ones. If you don't go out to look for them, Mr. Channay, they'll come to look for you."

"I am very much obliged," Gilbert Channay said, "for the one service you have rendered me, Mr. Fogg. Apart from that I can only repeat what I have already told you. I desire no help."

Martin Fogg set down his empty tumbler regretfully.

"You may be right, sir," he acknowledged. "You have made a pretty good start. The Mark Levy affair, for instance—very ingenious! Very ingenious! I saw Lord and Lady Isham, too, the other day. He is drinking, I am afraid—very ill indeed he looked. And her ladyship—a great change! Something seems to have got on their nerves, Mr. Channay."

Channay looked at his visitor with a little shiver. Despite his inclinations he felt that some day or other he would have to take a very definite line with Mr. Martin Fogg.

"Why are you so interested in my affairs?" he asked curtly.

Martin Fogg smiled weakly.

"In one respect," he explained, "I am like the author of a story. An idea comes to him. He may not like the idea. He may try to discard it. He may wish that it had never come, but so long as it is there he has to use it sooner or later. The idea of working with you has rather fixed itself on to me. I was offered a very interesting job last week in South America. I couldn't go. I couldn't leave you."

Channay rose abruptly to his feet.

"If you have finished your whiskey and soda, Mr. Fogg," he suggested, "I think you had better be making your way back to the village."

"Certainly, certainly," was the complaisant reply. "Of course you've done quite well up to now, Mr. Channay. Two of them off the list—or is it three? Two anyway, but there are still seven left."

"Walk in the middle of the path, Mr. Fogg," Channay enjoined, as he held open the French window. "If you take my advice you won't loiter. We shall have a storm presently."

"Not for an hour or two, I think," Martin Fogg said, with a glance seaward. "There's mischief brewing—mischief on the way, I think, but it's not here yet. The thunder's heavy out yonder—very heavy, Mr. Channay. Good-evening, sir."

Channay stood on his little circle of lawn, watching his visitor disappear. His walk was shambling and undignified, his manners uncultivated, his appearance insignificant, yet, somehow or other, Channay felt that he had qualities, that even this visit which he had just paid was no casual one. He looked back and studied the appearance of the room. There was very little there to attract notice. A bachelor apartment might be expected to be slightly untidy. Suddenly he started and frowned. There was a boot just visible round the edge of the sofa—a square-toed, patent boot. Channay placed himself in his visitor's chair. To a man of ordinary observations there was nothing in the least suspicious—but Martin Fogg——!

At ten o'clock that night an unseasonable darkness brooded over the land. The wind had come—a gusty, fitful wind, blowing sometimes almost in a cyclone—and the roar of the sea sweeping over the sand-banks was like a deep-throated cannonade. The first part of his task accomplished, Channay, with Parsons at the tiller, poled his way down the little inlet towards the sea. Progress was slow, for in that narrow passage it was impossible to hoist a sail, and it was nearly an hour before they reached the abrupt widening of the creek and passed out into the open sea. Navigation even here was still exceedingly hazardous, for the long line of sandbanks acted almost like a ridge of rocks, turning and twisting the incoming sea into a thousand currents. With great

difficulty the two men unfurled a few feet of sail, and scudded away immediately northwards. Inland were only a few flickering lights, mostly from the village and from some scattered farmhouses beyond, where the land sloped upward. Seawards was mystery and terror; a black bank of clouds, lit every now and then by jagged forks of lightning, and from nearer at hand, louder than either man had ever heard it before, came the dull booming of the surf, driven over the sandy breakwaters by the angry wind. Parsons who seldom spoke when in his master's company, stood up, clasping the tiller in his left hand and the bending mast in his right, and watched the white line of foam.

"There's a great storm outside, sir," he remarked.

"So much the better," was his master's brief comment.

The man looked landwards, and his tone and manner became instantly discomposed.

"The fishing boats are coming out, sir," he announced.

Channay leaned over the side of the boat. Five lights swinging in a great semicircle were visible slowly moving down the river. They could hear the faint note of the beating of a petrol engine.

"We are showing no light, Parsons?" Channay enquired.

"I pulled down the lantern, sir. It is underneath your feet," Parsons replied. "I'll knock out my pipe in case the wind drives it into sparks."

They took a beat to windward, skirting a long spit of land which necessitated careful navigation and then headed for the open sea, passing out of the mass of currents which made the coast notorious. At a certain point Channay fastened the rope, which he had been holding, to the seat.

"Now," he whispered.

It was all over in a moment; a dull splash, a momentary rocking of the boat, a sudden nightmare-like vision, which Channay sometimes afterwards found it hard to forget, of a white distorted face. Then they came about and, soaked to the skin, Gilbert Channay leaned over the tiller.

"Another reef, Parsons," he muttered.

"We must pass the river mouth before they come out."

The man obeyed, after a moment's hesitation. The wind howled and sobbed around them, an occasional wave broke right over the boat. Channay, crouching down, with the tiller lashed under his arm, watched all the time the five lights bobbing about near the mouth of the river. When they passed they were scarcely forty yards away, driving into the wall of darkness. Neither of the two men spoke. They listened, however, intently. Soon a voice hailed them from the nearest boat. Channay swore softly. In the gale he had hoped that the sound of their passing would have attracted no notice.

"Boat ahoy, there!" came the second challenge.

Channay bent over the tiller and Parsons tightened the rope which he was

holding in his hand. They were flying along now, the waves breaking over them, but rapidly passing outside the ken of the little fishing fleet. Their renewed challenge was inaudible in the increasing clamour of the wind. The black cloud leaning over them began to discharge itself in violent rain; big drops that came hissing down into the water. Channay leaned forward and took the rope from Parsons.

"Sit tight and be prepared," he whispered. "The depth of the water's all different. We may miss the creek. Get ready to jump the moment I shout. Take in every stitch. We'll pole up if we can make the entrance. The moment you see the light, shout."

Suddenly through the storm they saw it—the flickering light from Seaman's Grange. Channay sprung at the sails. There was one moment of doubt. Then they found themselves in calmer water. Parsons took out the pole. The spray and hail were stinging their faces, but with every inch they moved they were drifting into shelter.

"Light your pipe again, Parsons, whenever you like," Channay enjoined, leaning back in his place breathlessly. "We're through with to-night's job!"

And almost as he spoke the rockets went up from the great passenger steamer, ashore on the outer banks.

Fourteen days! Eventful ones outside where relics of the great storm were every hour coming to hand, but without incident to Gilbert Channay marking time in his sea-girt abode. Then one afternoon, when he was playing the piano in his little sanctum at the back of the house, Parsons, after a discreet knock, silently entered the room. Channay frowned, annoyed at any form of disturbance, for he was playing a Rhapsodie Hongroise of Liszt and the music suited his humour. He swung abruptly round.

"What the devil is it, Parsons?" he demanded.

"A man wishes to see you, sir," was the colourless answer. "He gave me this card."

Channay looked at it; a cheap lithographed affair, on which was inscribed the name of Mr. Martin Fogg, with an address in London.

"This fellow again!" he muttered. "What does he want?

"He refused to say, sir," Parsons replied. "I thought it wisest to bring you his message. But," he added, dropping his voice ominously and hesitating——

"You think, perhaps, that he brings trouble," Channay suggested.

"Yes, sir," was the anxious admission.

Channay closed the piano and made his way thoughtfully to the front sitting-room. Martin Fogg was seated upon the edge of the couch, twirling a battered straw hat in his hand. His hair was as tousled as ever, his eyes as weak, his attire as incongruous. Even at that moment, when his mind was full

of graver things, Channay found himself wondering where on earth he could have stumbled across a shirt and tie of such outrageous ugliness. The newcomer rose to his feet.

"Good afternoon," he said, with what appeared to be an almost painful effort at geniality.

Gilbert Channay wasted no time upon preliminaries. He glanced at the card which he was carrying and back at the speaker.

"What do you want with me this time, Mr. Martin Fogg?" he demanded.

The visitor coughed.

"Well," he said, almost apologetically, "that's quite a leading question, isn't it?"

"I have neither time nor inclination to waste with others," was the curt reply. "If you have business, state it. If not——"

Channay glanced significantly towards the door. Martin Fogg blinked several times without moving.

"Oh, I have business all right," he declared. "Quite important business too, of its sort. You see I am what is known as a blackmailer."

"You interest me," Channay confessed, genuinely enough. "At least I admire your frankness. Do you propose to make me a victim of your craft?"

"In a way, yes," he replied.

"And my particular delinquency?"

Fogg scratched his chin thoughtfully for a moment. His eyes seemed to be tracing out the pattern of the carpet.

"A yokel's verdict, that!" he observed. "'Found Drowned'! Found drowned indeed he was, but what about those marks upon his throat? They couldn't identify him either as a passenger or a member of the crew of the *Dahlia*. . . . A yokel's verdict!"

He paused, glancing covertly up at the other man as though to watch the effect of his words. Channay's face remained absolutely impassive.

"You are obviously not a bungler," Martin Fogg went on. "It was clever of you to take the corpse down to the Hell's Mouth where the currents turn and twist and where even the body of a dead man could travel for miles before it comes to a resting place. You had luck, too—a shipwreck that night and the body being washed up with the others. At the same time those marks upon the throat! It was extraordinary that only one man asked questions about them. . . . Ah, I see now!"

His tone had suddenly changed. He was looking intently at Channay's hands. He nodded to himself as though he had made some welcome discovery.

"I, too, was privileged," he continued, "to see the body, by the courtesy of the coroner. I am staying at the village and I thought possibly that I might be able to identify it. Those marks puzzled me. I understand them now perfectly.

The third finger of your left hand is, I see, disabled. That accounts for the fact that there were only four marks on one side of the neck and five on the other."

Gilbert Channay at last broke his silence.

"Let us understand one another," he said. "You are accusing me of having murdered the man whose body was washed up about a week ago on the sands near Britling?"

Martin Fogg smiled amiably.

"Precisely," he assented. "You see I followed Sayers that afternoon to your cottage. I was in no hurry to put in an appearance. I waited for him to leave, but he did not leave. His body must have been behind that sofa all the time I was in the room. Cool—very cool! Still you always had a wonderful reputation, Gilbert Channay. A reputation for nerve and unscrupulous courage."

Channay knew then that grave things were at hand. He moved nearer to the chair by his desk, and, perhaps unconsciously, one of his hands strayed towards the topmost drawer. Again his visitor smiled, showing again those rather prominent teeth.

"No use," he declared pleasantly—"not a bit of use! I wasn't here alone for ten minutes, whilst you were playing that Rhapsodie of Liszt, for nothing. The cartridges are in my pocket. I am not a fighting man myself. I can accomplish my ends, as a rule, by means of other weapons. For instance, it is not unknown, to one other at any rate, that I am paying you a visit this afternoon."

It was a curious fact that for the moment Gilbert Channay's mind wandered altogether away from the coming of this imminent and unexpected danger. His dominant impulse was simply one of wonder that this strange visitor should have known the music which he had been playing.

"Well," he said, after a pause, "so far you have succeeded in making your visit very interesting. Supposing we take the truth of what you have suggested for granted."

"Ah!" Martin Fogg murmured. "That might save time. That might save time, indeed."

It was precisely then that Gilbert Channay glanced idly enough out of his wide-flung French window. The indifference which he had successfully maintained throughout the course of this somewhat extraordinary interview, suddenly in some measure deserted him. Seated upon his overturned boat, her hands clasped around one knee, her eyes watching the slow approach of the evening tide, was a girl, a complete stranger to him. She was dressed simply enough and like any other holiday seeker in the neighbourhood, in a white sweater, open at the throat, a plain white skirt, and white shoes and stockings. She was bare-headed and in the sunshine her hair—brown with a tinge of chestnut—shone like a flame. There was nothing particularly striking about her

appearance, except that the curve of her body was in itself a beautiful thing; a curve in her present posture as delicate and perfect as the soul of any artist could desire. At the sound of Channay's exclamation, she turned her head and he noticed that there were faint shadows under her eyes, making them seem almost unnaturally large. It was several seconds before Channay looked away.

"Who is that?" he asked Martin Fogg abruptly.

"Dear me," was the half apologetic reply—"my daughter! My daughter Catherine—an only child! You see," he went on, "mine is a peculiar errand. I thought that in case you were likely to become unreasonable, a witness of my visit here might be advisable."

"Your daughter!" Gilbert Channay repeated incredulously.

Martin Fogg smiled. He was quite at his best as he glanced out of the window. His face had softened and he had lost that strained air of always watching for untoward events.

"I suppose," he remarked, "it seems incredible. Her mother was a very beautiful woman."

The two men stood side by side at the window. The girl had moved a little away and only the nape of her neck and her shapely, not over-slender back, were to be seen.

"Yours seems a strange business to drag a girl into," Channay observed with a faint note of contempt in his tone.

"I might have fear for myself," Martin Fogg rejoined. "I have none for her. You see," he continued, scratching his chin thoughtfully, "I have made quite a study of your character—quite a study, Mr. Channay, I can assure you."

Gilbert Channay turned back into the room.

"Perhaps," he suggested, "you had better proceed with your blackmailing."

"Certainly, certainly," his visitor acquiesced. "This, then, is the position. A certain person has been found drowned under quite natural circumstances, and, excepting myself, no one has the slightest suspicion that you were in any way concerned with his death. I, however, knew it, for I followed him here, visiting you afterwards. I noticed the slight disarrangement of the room, his hat upon a chair, the singular appearance of a boot behind the sofa, and a few other details with which I will not worry you. I noticed, also, at the inquest, where I could have identified him if I had chosen, the peculiar marks upon his throat, explained by the accident to that finger upon your left hand. You may remark that it is too late now to dwell upon this. I reply, not at all. His body could be exhumed at any moment."

There was a brief silence. Gilbert Channay's eyes had wandered back once more to the quiet, pensive figure, seated upon the boat. She was looking upward now, watching the flight of some gulls.

"In addition to this," Martin Fogg continued, "I could, if it were necessary,

supply the enquiring British public with the motive for this apparently purposeless deed. I could explain why you killed Edward Sayers, and why you will probably kill one or two more of his late associates, unless one of them is fortunate enough to kill you. You have entered upon a vendetta of revenge, Mr. Channay, and on the other hand these same men have their grievance against you. Thirty thousand pounds a head confiscated by you in return for their treachery!"

"Your knowledge of my affairs," Channay confessed, "seems to be little short of remarkable. I will admit everything you say. Now, what is the price of your silence?"

"The granting of the request I made to you when I motored you down from Ringley Hall to Norwich," was the prompt reply. "I asked then to become your partner; to help protect, to help destroy. You refused. I accepted your decision and left you in Norwich, but I did not accept it as final. You see I am here again."

Channay was puzzled.

"Why should you take this interest in me?" he asked. "What reward do you expect?"

"Very little," Martin Fogg assured him. "I have not the slightest use for money, and I am not a poor man, but, although you perhaps would not think it to judge from my appearance, I love adventure. Furthermore, I knew all about your affairs from the moment of the forming of the Syndicate. I was watching you then for a client, but those days have passed. I was in the Court when you were tried. I have every fact in connection with your affairs at my fingers' ends. For instance I can tell you this. You have dealt with Levy. I believe also that you have worked out some scheme against Lord Isham. You have dealt finally and deservedly with Edward Sayers. But there are others. There is Matthew Baynes, a Member of Parliament, Chairman of the Board of several very important companies. There is Giles Anderton, the great financier. There is Nicholas Euphratos, the Greek, on his way to Paris at the present moment, if I am not mistaken, and more dangerous than any of these, there is Malcolm Drood——"

"What do you know about Malcolm Drood?" Channay interrupted.

"I know this," Martin Fogg replied, dropping his voice a little and with a curious glint of something which was almost like fear in his weak eyes, "that when I was in the Force, Malcolm Drood killed my best friend and, with all Scotland Yard against him, escaped from this country with the wife of the man he had murdered. We were short of evidence against him when he lived at the Savoy Court, spending twenty thousand a year and entertaining like a prince. We have evidence enough now to hang him a dozen times over. . . . Listen. You think he'll never set foot in this country again. I know differently. Do you

know why you were let out a day and a half before your shortened time? I will tell you. It was because of what I discovered. The Bermondsey Black Clan were waiting for you the day you were to have been released. The whole thing was worked out—a harmless taxicab, a pull up at the corner of a quiet street and a motor car waiting. They'd have had you all right. They were working for Drood."

"Why don't they follow me down here?" Channay enquired a little incredulously.

"They never leave London," the other explained. "They have a perfect network of streets there where their confederates swarm like flies. There are thoroughfares in Bermondsey where when they hear a particular hooting of a motor horn the vehicles draw up and stand on one side as though a fire engine were coming. You'd have had no chance, Mr. Channay, if you'd come out at six o'clock on the Thursday evening you were expected, and they'd got hold of you."

Channay threw himself into an easy-chair, lit a cigarette and pushed over the box towards his visitor. Martin Fogg flushed with pleasure as he accepted one. He saw in this action a tacit admission of the situation. The desire of his life was accomplished.

"You have interested me so much, Mr. Fogg," Channay said, "that I am anxious to improve my acquaintance with you. I hope that you and your daughter will do me the honour of dining with me to-morrow night."

"With great pleasure," Mr. Martin Fogg assented heartily.

CHAPTER V
THE INQUISITIVE SHAREHOLDER

Sir Matthew Baynes threw himself into a very comfortable easy-chair in his luxuriously-furnished office and mopped his forehead vigorously with a fine cambric handkerchief. He was a large florid man, unaccustomed to contradiction, and he had been hectored. He was angry, thoroughly disgruntled, and a little frightened. He banged the bell which stood upon the table just within his reach.

"Pitson," he directed—"tell Pitson to come to me at once."

The clerk withdrew hurriedly. The faithful Pitson almost immediately made his appearance—a thin, cadaverous-looking man in horn-rimmed spectacles.

"You sent for me, Sir Matthew," he said tentatively.

"Sent for you! I should think I did," his employer exploded. "Who the hell was that tousled-haired, sandy, shabby nincompoop who dared to get up and ask me questions about my holdings in the Nyasa mines?"

"I ascertained his name, sir, from the list of shareholders," the secretary replied. "He is a Mr. Martin Fogg."

"How many shares in the Company does he hold?"

"One, sir," was the meek reply.

"Good God?" Sir Matthew cried. "One five-pound share and he dares to get up and ask me questions—personal questions, too—questions which reflect almost upon my probity. I was never treated in such a manner at a public meeting in my life—never!"

"The sympathy of the meeting was entirely with you, sir," the secretary ventured.

"I should think so," Sir Matthew exclaimed—"I should think so, indeed! I give him a dividend of five per cent. What more can anyone want nowadays? The questions that fellow asked—a holder of one five-pound share, mark you, Pitson—were impertinent—impertinent to a degree!"

"Yes, Sir Matthew," Pitson repeated, with some faint suggestion in his manner of suspended judgment.

"What the devil do you mean by just repeating 'Yes, Sir Matthew?' " his employer demanded irritably. "Is it or is it not a reflection upon me when a man gets up—a holder of a five-pound share—and, pointing to the assets of the Company, enquires as to one of the items guaranteed in my name? Persists, too, mark you, Pitson. Asks the one question of all others the fellow has no

right to ask—whether that twenty-five thousand pounds is represented by scrip, or whether it is a debt? Damn the fellow! I never heard of such impertinence in my life."

"It was a very awkward question, Sir Matthew," Pitson agreed. "You did well in asking him to see you after the meeting. I fancied that I noticed a slight appearance of curiosity on the part of some of the other shareholders."

"I'll buy his share," Sir Matthew growled. "I'll buy his silly tongue, too. I don't mind telling you, Pitson, that I never had such an uncomfortable two minutes in my life. Mr. Martin Fogg, eh? Well, tell 'em to show him in the moment he arrives. Are they all out of the Board Room?"

"All except Mr. Martin Fogg, sir, the gentleman who is waiting to see you."

"Go and fetch him, Pitson—fetch him at once."

Mr. Martin Fogg was shown in a few minutes later. The costume which he deemed suitable for attending a meeting of a City company, presided over by no less a person than Sir Matthew Baynes, M.P., was scarcely impressive. He wore a black cut-away coat, shiny at the seams, no waistcoat—the day being hot—a soft collar and an unpleasant-looking tie. His trousers were of grey flannel and his shoes brown. Sir Matthew, scrupulously attired according to the dictates of Savile Row and Bond Street, looked his visitor up and down as though he were some curiosity from an unknown world. Nevertheless he did his best to appear civil.

"Sit down, sir, sit down," he invited gruffly. "Now let me know what you were driving at, asking me those questions at the meeting. What is your holding with us, eh?"

Mr. Fogg took a chair and twirled his hat in his hand.

"Very small, Sir Matthew," he acknowledged—"very small indeed. One share only."

"Then, God bless my soul!" Sir Matthew exclaimed. "How can you make it pay you to come to a meeting in which your only interest is to that amount, and ask questions as though you were a large shareholder? What did you do it for?"

"I wanted to know," Mr. Martin Fogg said diffidently.

"Wanted to know!" his vis-à-vis spluttered. . . . "Look here," he went on, regaining his self-control with an effort. "I'll tell you what I'll do with you. You've got one five-pound share. I'll give you fifty pounds for it, if you'll give me your word not to acquire any others now or at any time."

"Fifty pounds," Mr. Fogg murmured.

Sir Matthew leaned back in his swivel chair.

"It is an absurd offer," he continued, "but I tell you frankly, Mr. Fogg, that I don't care for shareholders in my Company who get up and ask such

questions as you asked this afternoon."

"I dare say not," Mr. Fogg rejoined quietly.

Sir Matthew stared at his visitor. Mr. Martin Fogg stared back at him.

"Well?" the former queried.

Mr. Martin Fogg drummed upon the table with his finger-tips.

"I will sell you my share if you like, Sir Matthew," he agreed. "I gave three-pound fifteen for it, so it would yield me a very nice profit, but I will be honest with you. I want to clear up the matter of that twenty-five thousand pounds. There is the Press you know, and I can get proxies for future meetings."

"You want to clear it up?" the City magnate repeated angrily. "But if I buy your share what the devil business is it of yours?"

Martin Fogg smiled.

"I am a professional blackmailer," he explained gently. "I have made my living at it for many years. I have a feeling that there is a mystery with regard to that twenty-five thousand pounds. The accountants themselves are reticent about it. I should like the matter cleared up."

"A blackmailer, eh?" Sir Matthew growled.

"You see," his visitor continued with undisturbed amiability, "you are a rather promising subject."

"I've dealt with your sort before," was the menacing retort.

"Deal with me the same way," Martin Fogg invited, leaning a little further back in his chair.

Sir Matthew, whatever his faults, was not a fool. He realised that losing his temper was simply playing his opponent's game.

"I have dealt with them," he continued impressively, "by knocking the ground from underneath their feet. I will do the same with you. The twenty-five thousand pounds represents shares in the Nyasa mine standing in my name. Twenty-five thousand is a moderate valuation. At to-day's price they are worth thirty thousand."

"You surprise me!" Martin Fogg confessed. "Gilbert Channay has only been out of prison for three months."

Sir Matthew whistled softly.

"So you know all about the purchase of Nyasas by the Channay Syndicate," he muttered.

"I know all about it," the other assented. "What I intended to ask you this afternoon, only you put the closure on, was, when did Gilbert Channay make those shares over to you?"

"What the hell business is that of yours?" Sir Matthew demanded.

"As a humble shareholder in your Company, sir," Martin Fogg replied, "I am curious about that particular amount. I was under the impression—certainly

I was under the impression—that Mr. Channay had refused to part with any of the Nyasa shares to any of the Syndicate."

Martin Fogg was smiling dangerously across the table. Sir Matthew, for a moment, was silent. There were two courses open to him; to compromise with this man who had already confessed to his abominable profession, or by one bold stroke to close his mouth. He decided suddenly upon the latter course. He drew himself a little more upright in his chair. His manner stiffened. He became the man of affairs whose integrity has been questioned, but whose position is above calumny.

"Mr. Fogg," he said, "I might very well order you to leave the room and deal with you publicly next time we meet. I might, if I chose, on the strength of your own admission, hand you over to the police. I prefer to do nothing of the sort. You have stumbled upon a mare's-nest. The Nyasa shares are duly deposited at my bank in my name and are a tangible and very valuable security. Do me the favour to call at this office to-morrow at the same time, and I will show you the receipt from my bank. Will that satisfy you?"

Martin Fogg was to all appearance taken by surprise.

"Certainly it would satisfy me," he acknowledged, "but I rather fancy, Sir Matthew, that you're what they call 'putting up a bluff' on me. To tell you the truth I don't ever expect to see that receipt."

Sir Matthew struck the bell.

"To-morrow at the same time," he directed. "That ends our business for to-day, Mr. Fogg. Good-afternoon!"

"Now!" Gilbert Channay shouted. "Hard over and lean against the tiller. Mind your head!"

The girl obeyed and their flying race with the broken seas, south of the western sand-banks, was brought to an abrupt termination. Channay busied himself for a moment with the ropes. The sails swung across. A shower of spray drenched them and every plank in the boat seemed for a moment to shiver and tremble. Man and girl leaned heavily over; Channay with the rope wound around his arm, the girl with the tiller pressed home by her firm, capable, brown, hands. One more cloud of spray, and the boat righted herself. They were standing inland now, the sun in their eyes, and the wind almost fair. Channay fastened the sail and turned towards his companion.

"We shall make the creek this tack," he said. "Just about time, too. The tide's on the ebb and you can hear what the wind's doing outside the banks. . . . Port, just a trifle. Keep the church tower over the east end of the harbour."

The girl obeyed without comment. Her whole attention seemed engrossed by her task. Her lips were parted, her eyes filled with a sort of subdued joy of

the sunshine, the exhilarating motion, the excitement. Channay, kneeling down in the bows, shouted instructions without glancing once in her direction. The final effort she made on her own, sweeping round the buoy which marked the entrance to the creek, skilfully avoiding the spot where a swirl of waters marked a sunken ridge of sand, and bringing the little craft at last into the sheltered side of the inlet. Channay hastily let down the sails and took out the pole.

"Good work!" he exclaimed briefly. "Sorry about our fishing, though."

The girl smiled for the first time. The shadows had gone from under her eyes during the last few weeks. The pallor of her cheeks had given way to a distinct tan.

"The sailing was better," she said. "The only pity was that it didn't last long enough."

"We stayed out quite as long as was wise," Channay remarked looking seaward. "The weather's set fair enough, but a west wind as strong as this in these broken-up seas keeps one busy. Do you know that we nearly capsized that last beat but one?"

The girl nodded indifferently.

"It wouldn't have mattered, would it?" she asked. "I was getting ready to slip off my skirt. I suppose you can swim?"

"After a fashion," he admitted.

"I'm rather good," she confided. "I won prizes when I was at school. There's the faithful Parsons looking out for you."

"You will come in and lunch," he invited.

She shook her head.

"I've brought my sandwiches."

"They must be wet through," he rejoined impatiently.

She opened the little wicker basket and looked inside ruefully.

"Soaked!" she admitted.

"Unnecessary anyway," he declared. "Mrs. Parsons has seen us coming. Get ready to throw the rope to Parsons. No joke poleing against this ebb."

They were fast against the side in a moment or two. The girl glanced towards the village irresolutely.

"I think I'll go back," she said tentatively.

"You'll do nothing of the sort," Channay insisted. "Your father left you in my charge, and you know that you haven't once crossed my threshold. Parsons, tell your wife that there will be one extra for luncheon. . . . This way, Miss Fogg."

The girl followed him, after a moment's hesitation.

"I'm in a wild state of disorder," she remarked, "but you're pretty much the same, aren't you?"

"Worse! But what does it matter?"

They threw off their oil-skins and Channay mixed cocktails. The girl only sipped hers, but accepted a cigarette.

"One feels almost dazed with the quietness of it all," she declared, leaning back a little lazily in her seat. "Is it going to get rougher outside, do you think?"

He shook his head.

"The sea is going down already," he told her, "and the wind is dropping every moment. We can sail again after lunch if you like. There might be some mackerel later on."

"I think I have had enough for one day," the girl replied. "Besides, I ought to do some work."

They lunched in the pleasant little dining-room, with the thunder of the sea still in their ears through the wide-flung window. Channay, who was not yet accustomed to the propinquity of women, and who had never been able to break through his habit of reticence even with this unusually silent, somewhat mysterious daughter of his new partner, nevertheless did his duty as host, trying all the time to make genial conversation, and more than ever disposed to wonder at the many reserves which seemed part of the girl's nature. If she had enthusiasms she kept them to herself. Even her tastes were hard to gauge. She baffled him by her noncommittal replies to his questions, inspiring in him a curiosity which he found no means of gratifying. Only when she spoke of her future was she inclined to be explicit.

"I am quite sure," she confided, "that my father has spent more than he can afford on my education and I am determined, whatever way I can manage it, to be a working woman of some sort or another. I should like to get on a woman's paper if I can. They say I have some sort of trick of writing."

"Have you had anything published?" he asked.

"Some little things, not worth mentioning," she told him. . . . "Couldn't we take our coffee out on that seat? It seems a pity to miss the sunshine even for a moment."

He acquiesced at once. They found a spot in the corner of the walled garden, where they sat with their backs to the wind, the perfume of roses all around them, and a vista of the marshland and the sea beyond, through the opening. The girl curled herself up with a little sigh of content.

"You shouldn't have shown me this place," she told him. "I shall probably monopolise it."

"You will always be welcome," he assured her.

"Rubbish!" she answered bluntly. "You know perfectly well that I shan't. I believe you consider me rather a nuisance even now. I'm thinking of going back to town to-morrow if father doesn't turn up."

He was in no hurry to contradict her; more interested, perhaps, in the genesis of the feeling which had prompted her impatient words. Leaning back upon the seat she reminded him of the first moment he had seen her. There was in her broad, sensitive face, with its clear skin, soft brown eyes and tremulous mouth, something half insolent, half querulous; suggestions, perhaps, of a generous and frank nature which had more than once been worsted in the small skirmishes of life. He was in a languid frame of mind, however, and he passed almost at once from his brief impulse of psychological speculation towards a more material and certainly more human appreciation of those graceful lines of her strong young body, which had first appealed to him when he had seen her seated upon his boat. She would make a fine subject for a sculptor, he decided, with her slender yet swelling hips, her long, graceful arms with their suggestion of power, her sinuous, waistless outline. A daughter of Martin Fogg! She was certainly a curious freak of heredity. No wonder she was a little discontented, liable at times to make these oddly ungracious speeches. . . . Parsons came out to him whilst he was still pursuing this train of thought.

"A gentleman has called to see you, sir," he announced.

Channay rose slowly to his feet. He was surprised to find the interruption so unwelcome.

"Who is it, Parsons?" he enquired.

"Sir Matthew Baynes, he said his name was, sir. He has left his motor car over at the gate."

Gilbert Channay woke from the stupor of the scented garden, the caress of the wind and the warmth of the sun. Everything else was blotted out. He was back amongst the ugly but significant places of his life. His excuses to his companion were only monosyllabic, as he rose slowly to his feet and followed Parsons into the little study where his visitor waited.

"God bless my soul! So it's you at last, Channay! Well, well! And I meant to be around to welcome you out. A dinner at the Café Royal, eh? A celebration of some sort? The folk up there cheated us all."

Sir Matthew's line of action had long ago been decided upon. In his check knickerbocker suit, his face wreathed in smiles, his appearance that of a prosperous tourist, his expression one of exuberant geniality, he stood with both hands out-stretched towards the slim, portentous figure of the man who was slowly closing the door behind him. The sun and the wind had triumphed over the pallor of Channay's appearance, but the stern light was still in his eyes, and in that upward curve of his lips there was something menacing and unsympathetic. He waved his visitor back to his seat and contented himself with a little nod.

"So it's you, Baynes, is it?" he remarked. "I thought I might be seeing something of you before long."

Sir Matthew laughed exuberantly.

"My dear fellow," he said, "even a prosperous city man can find plenty of use for a matter of—what is it?—thirty thousand pounds. I'm not going to grumble, Channay. I'm too glad to see you out and looking yourself again; but it wasn't necessary to keep us waiting so long, was it? If I'd had that money, say two years ago, I could have trebled it. You'd have had your share, too."

"No doubt," Gilbert Channay observed politely. "But tell me, exactly what thirty thousand pounds are you referring to?"

"My share in the winding-up of the Syndicate," was the confident reply.

Gilbert Channay opened his pocket-book and produced a certain memorandum of agreement. He spread it out—it was rather a crumpled little document—and held it towards his visitor.

"Recognise your signature, Baynes?" he asked.

The arrogant good-humour passed almost at once from the man's face. One became conscious of the drawn look about his eyes, the loose inconsequence of his mouth.

"My God, Channay, where did you get that?" he gasped.

"Does it matter?" the other asked, folding it up, and restoring it to his pocket-book. "I have it and I understand. Isn't that sufficient?

"Pressure was put upon me," Baynes faltered—"great pressure. I started to come and shake hands with you in the dock—I did, indeed. My sympathies were with you all the time."

"To precisely the same extent," Channay observed, "my sympathies are with you now, when I tell you that your thirty thousand pounds, or whatever your share in the Nyasa Mine might have been, is forfeited. You know very well that the funds of the Syndicate stood in my name, and my name only. That is an old story. You know very well that no one else can touch them. You've thrashed that out whilst I was in gaol. Well, in consequence of this precious document, I have confiscated the lot. I haven't a penny for you and," Channay added significantly, "you are not a welcome visitor here, Sir Matthew Baynes."

The latter showed every intention of starting an argument, though a fit of terror was already upon him.

"You're in honour bound, Channay," he began—and got no further.

"Don't mention the word 'honour' to me, you swine," Channay interrupted. "Get out of my house as quickly as you can, and thank Providence that you are an elderly man and very much out of condition."

Sir Matthew dabbed his forehead with a handkerchief. He did not resemble in the least the bland and urbane city gentleman whose speeches in the House were models of discretion and competence, and who looked so entirely the right man in the right place at the head of the long table in the Board Room at

Gracechurch Street.

"Channay," he begged, "you've got to listen to me. I never dreamed of this. I always looked upon that thirty thousand pounds' worth of Nyasa shares as an absolute asset. Things haven't gone so well the last two years. I made a lot the year before that, but it's been a struggle lately. Those shares figure in the balance sheet of one of my companies as an asset."

"Do they?" Channay observed indifferently. "Your finance was always a little daring."

"I was hard pressed and I had to put them in," Baynes continued. "I believed that you would share up as soon as you were free. They are amongst the assets of my East African Exploration Company. Without them I should have had to show a considerable loss the last half year. I couldn't afford to do it, Channay—I couldn't, indeed."

"You amuse me slightly," Channay admitted, seating himself on the edge of his writing table. "Otherwise I am not interested."

"But you must listen," Baynes went on. "I am already in some trouble about the affair. A little scrub of a fellow came asking questions at the last meeting. Insisted upon an auditor's or a banker's certificate for the existence of the shares. I must have them, Channay—I must indeed."

"You never will from me," was the firm reply.

Sir Matthew looked about him helplessly. There was something extraordinarily uncompromising about the slim, cynical figure of the man who had once seemed to all of them the soul of generosity; the man with the mind of an eagle, and the brain of a Rothschild.

"Channay," Baynes pleaded, "listen to me. The world doesn't guess it—not a soul in the city knows—but I'm up against it. A single word, a whisper about one of my companies, and I should be face to face with absolute disaster. Every one of them has had to be bolstered up, more or less."

"Financial disaster?"

"And worse," Baynes groaned—"worse than that. I spoke of that little scrub of a fellow—Martin Fogg, his name was. He absolutely hectored me at the last meeting. He attacked the auditors first, and then me, about the existence of these Nyasa shares. The auditors were friendly, but they have their own position to think of. They replied at once that the shares were in the balance sheet upon my personal guarantee of their existence. Then he turned to me. I assured him that they were at the bank. For the first time in my life my word was not accepted. I was obliged to ask him to come and visit me at my office."

"Persistent little fellow, Martin Fogg," Channay observed.

"You know him?" Baynes asked, with sudden suspicion.

"Quite well," Gilbert Channay admitted. "He's not much of a

correspondent, though. What happened at his visit to you?"

"I had nothing to show him in the way of documents," Baynes replied. "I tried compromise and failed. He admitted that he was out to blackmail me, but I couldn't find his price. I changed my tactics. I offered to show him the bank receipt for the shares on the next day."

"And did you?" Channay enquired.

"Yes."

Gilbert Channay smiled.

"How did you induce the bank to sign a fictitious document?" he demanded.

"I didn't," Baynes replied hoarsely. "I got a sheet of the bank's notepaper, typed the receipt and forged the name of the manager. Now you know the truth, Channay. Now you know how I stand. You see I must either have those shares or go under."

The man's face was pitiable; gone all its complacency, its smug air of well-being and prosperity. There was a curious twitch of the mouth as he had spoken the last few words, a frightened look in his eyes, a livid patch underneath them. He was face to face with the hell of his class, the end of everything—ruin, irretrievable disgrace. He rubbed his hands nervously together.

"You see, Channay?" he asked. "You understand?"

"Perfectly," was the prompt assent. "It has always been an interesting problem to me how you city men could be so shrewd, yet behave so absolutely like simpletons at times. You say that Fogg was blackmailing you. Well, you'll have to pay his price, whatever it is."

"You won't let me down, Channay," Baynes gasped. "I'll—I'll make it up to you. I haven't a penny in the world I can touch just now, but if I can keep going for another month or two I've got the flotation of a big new company. There will be hundreds of thousands in it."

"Don't be such a fool," Channay scoffed. "You call yourself a shrewd man, and yet you waste your time coming down here and appealing to me, remembering your signature of that document, and knowing all the time the sort of man I am. Martin Fogg is my creature. His one object was to lure you into some such indiscretion as you have committed. He'll have called at your banker's with that document before you get home and have circularised your shareholders before to-morrow. I wonder if they'll send you to the same prison," he went on musingly. "I was comfortable, you know, in a way. The diet's a little restricted and you'll miss your champagne at first. I may come to the trial. But I can promise you, Sir Matthew Baynes, I shan't come over and shake hands with you."

Baynes sat quite silent for several moments. He seemed to have become

smaller. He had the air indeed of a man threatened with a stroke. His lips moved again in that ugly fashion, but he said nothing. Then he groped for his hat.

"You're hard, Channay," he muttered, as he found it and staggered to his feet.

"Not hard," Channay replied—"only just."

Sir Matthew Baynes walked down the narrow dyke path to his car with stumbling footsteps and unseeing eyes. Gilbert Channay returned to the sheltered little corner in the garden to meet with what he swiftly recognised was a grievous disappointment. The same perfume was being shaken from the roses by even a gentler breath of the slackening west wind, the sun was pouring down into his corner, but the seat was vacant. He strolled back at once to the little lawn in front of the Grange. About a hundred yards away, in the centre of the marshes, Martin Fogg's daughter was seated upon a little mound of green moss, putting on her shoes and stockings. Without a doubt she had waded through the creek and was taking the circuitous but fascinating way back to the village. He stood and watched her gloomily. When she rose she raised her hand in what might have been a gesture of farewell, a little abrupt, certainly perfunctory. He made no effort to return it, but watched her disappear, walking, sure-footed, around the pools and bog-holes, pausing every now and then to gather a handful of wild lavender. She was gone—for the day, at any rate. There was no surety even of seeing her on the morrow. Channay turned back to his empty study. The glow of sombre triumph with which he had concluded his interview with his former confederate had passed. Solitude had lost its charm. An unusual sense of loneliness oppressed him.

Late on the following afternoon, Martin Fogg put in his appearance. He was wearing the same incongruous costume as when he had visited the office of Sir Matthew Baynes, and his sartorial impossibility was further accentuated by the fact that, during his motor ride from Norwich, he had taken off his tie and collar and deposited them in his pocket. He carried in his hand a mid-day edition of a London newspaper.

"I have heard of you," Channay observed, with a dry little smile.

Fogg nodded complacently.

"I saw him arrive at Liverpool Street Station last night," he said. "I could guess pretty well what was going to happen. Shot himself in his bath early this morning. Here's the account."

Channay took the newspaper and read the paragraph without change of expression. Then he laid it upon his table deliberately.

"I was a fool ever to think I could manage without you, Fogg," he

admitted.

CHAPTER VI
THE DRAMA OF THE MARSHES

Martin Fogg, October having arrived and the heat-wave passed, had yielded to his daughter's persuasions and was attired in more or less civilised fashion. He sat in a corner of the grill-room of a great cosmopolitan restaurant, and in his neat grey suit and black and white check tie—a tie chosen by Catherine, and the neutrality of which he despised—presented an absolutely inconspicuous appearance.

"Tell me," Catherine enquired, after their coffee had been served, "why have you insisted upon lunching here five days following?"

"The food is good," her father answered.

"It might be better," she observed, with a little shrug of the shoulders. "Tell me why you choose this particular restaurant and over-tip the waiter to let you have this particular table."

Martin Fogg coughed. He was watching—he might even be said to be listening to the conversation of two men a few yards away—two men of very dissimilar types; one hard-faced, square-jawed, with brilliant black eyes and a mouth as uncompromising as a steel trap; the other, a shrewd-looking person in his way, dressed with professional exactness, with grey hair, keen grey eyes, and a parchment-like skin.

"I have a reason for coming here, Catherine," Martin Fogg admitted. "That reason is not unconnected with the affairs of Mr. Gilbert Channay."

"Interesting but vague," the young lady remarked, as she lit a cigarette. "I know which two men you are watching. Who are they?"

Martin Fogg scrutinised them furtively for a few moments. Then he leaned a little forward and dropped his voice.

"One of them," he confided—"The powerful-looking man—is the most dangerous criminal who ever escaped the gallows. He is on the black list of the police in half-a dozen countries, yet he has always been so clever that one little piece of evidence, necessary for his conviction, has invariably been lacking. Everyone knows, for instance, that it was he who murdered Senator Haslam, and that he lived for years in luxury upon the proceeds of his crime. No one has ever been able to prove it."

"What is his name?" Catherine asked.

"The name he is passing by now is the one by which he has always been known in this country—Malcolm Drood," her father replied. "He was one of Gilbert Channay's Syndicate—no one knew much about him, but he was quite

a figure in the City in those days—one of the men who thinks he's being kept out of thirty thousand pounds."

"Is he one of those who signed the document which Mr. Channay has—the document which was to send Mr. Channay to prison and rob him of his money?" the girl enquired.

"It is supposed to have been his idea," her father confided—"his idea and Lord Isham's."

"And the man with him?"

"Another person who is walking the tight rope. He is known as the 'Crooks' Lawyer.' Three times he has been had up before the Council, but just succeeded in remaining upon the Rolls. His name is Morrow—William Morrow."

"I wonder what they are planning now," the girl mused.

"I don't know yet," Martin Fogg admitted, "but I hope to this afternoon. What I really want to know is the nature of that document they keep on passing backwards and forwards."

"I can tell you that," Catherine declared. "I saw what was engrossed on the outside when the lawyer folded it up a minute ago. 'Last Will and Testament of—' "

"Did you see the name?" her father asked eagerly.

"There was no name," she replied—"none, at any rate, that I could see. . . ."

'*Last Will and Testament!*' The idea of that document fascinated Martin Fogg. He thought of it throughout the remainder of his stay in the restaurant. He thought of it as he walked to the corner of Shaftesbury Avenue with his daughter and helped her to climb into a Fleet Street bus. He followed on foot towards the City, deep in thought. Finally he arrived at a decision. He made his way to a retired street in the neighbourhood of Holborn, presented himself at the offices of Messrs. Morrow and Sinclair, and demanded an interview with Mr. William Morrow. After a brief delay he was shown into the lawyer's presence.

"Mr. Martin Fogg," the latter remarked, reading his card. "What can I have the pleasure of doing for you, sir? If it is a matter of conveyancing, my partner Mr. Sinclair has taken over that branch."

"My business is with you," Martin Fogg answered, taking the chair to which the lawyer pointed. "For one thing I want to make my will."

"That is Mr. Sinclair's department," the lawyer announced. "He has a room on the next floor. I will send a boy up there with you."

The visitor pointed to the oblong strip of parchment which lay stretched out on the top of some other documents.

" 'Last Will and Testament' of somebody or other," he observed. "You

attend to these matters sometimes yourself, I suppose."

"That is an exceptional case," the lawyer explained hastily. "The will is merely here for my advice upon a certain clause."

"I have never seen a will," Mr. Fogg confided. "May I have a look at the wording."

He stretched out his hand. The lawyer took up the document and thrust it into a drawer by the side of his desk.

"This particular will happens to be completed," he said stiffly. "We could not possibly betray the confidence of our client by showing it to a stranger. If it is merely a question of a will, Mr. Fogg, I shall send you upstairs to Mr. Sinclair. I am expecting another caller."

Martin Fogg stopped him as his finger reached out towards the bell.

"One moment," he enjoined. "I have another piece of business."

"Name it, if you please, sir," the lawyer begged, glancing impatiently at his clock. Martin Fogg's appearance as a prospective client was not impressive.

"I am in trouble," he confided in a low tone.

The lawyer was slightly more interested. There was generally money to be made somehow or other out of people who were in trouble.

"Tell me your story," he invited. "If it is possible to help, my services will be at your disposal."

His visitor drew his chair up a little closer. He was about to speak when there was a knock at the door. A boy entered with a card.

"Lord Isham is here, to see you by appointment, sir," he announced.

The lawyer nodded.

"Ask his lordship to wait for three minutes," he directed.

Martin Fogg leaned forward and clutched the lawyer by the arm as the boy departed.

"Mr. Morrow," he said, "I cannot tell you my story in three minutes. It will take at least ten. Go out and speak to this gentleman for a moment. Tell him that you are dealing with a very important affair. When you return I'll make a clean breast of it."

The lawyer hesitated. There was no doubt about it that his possible client was in a state of some agitation. He was dabbing his forehead and blinking rapidly. His hands were trembling. Mr. Morrow rose to his feet.

"I will do as you suggest," he conceded, "but I must ask you to be as brief as possible when I return. I can see you later in the day, if desirable. The client who is waiting for me is a very important one."

He left the room, leaving the door ajar behind him. With a quickness of touch, which was in itself a triumph, Martin Fogg leaned over and opened the drawer, snatched up the parchment document, glanced first at the signature and afterwards briefly at the text. In less than twenty seconds it was back again and

the drawer closed. When the solicitor returned his visitor was seated in exactly the same position, only his face was buried in his hands.

"My client has promised to wait for ten minutes," the former announced. "Now, sir, I will hear your story."

Martin Fogg made a great effort and told it, borrowing from the recesses of his brain and from a sort of pot pourri of all the sensational romances which were his daily reading. The lawyer's face became more and more amazed as he listened to an outpouring of crime which grew every moment more lurid. His client's voice was shaking, his agitation was convincing. Nevertheless, when he had finished, the lawyer looked at him coldly.

"Am I to understand, sir," he demanded, "that you expect me to believe all that you have been telling me?"

"It is the gospel truth," Martin Fogg groaned. "I can't live with the burden of it any longer."

The lawyer rang the bell.

"I do not understand the object of your visit, sir," he announced drily. "For all I know you may have a genuine confession to make to me. If so, come back when you are in a more coherent frame of mind, and I will listen to you. . . . Show this gentleman out," he added, as the clerk entered.

Martin Fogg picked up his hat, avoided looking at the lawyer as he mumbled "good-afternoon," avoided looking at the clerk who showed him out, and more than anything else avoided being seen by Lord Isham, who was waiting outside. He made his way to Fleet Street on foot, called for Catherine at their *rendezvous* in the waiting-room of a well-known newspaper, and was piloted by her into a tea shop.

"I thought of going back to Blickley to-morrow morning," he announced, as soon as they were seated at a table.

"Why?" she asked, with some surprise. "The weather seems to have broken up. I should have thought you would have found it beastly there."

"I want to see Mr. Channay," he explained. "I've been looking after a little affair for him up here. . . . So you won't come?"

She turned away from him, gazing out of the plate-glass window at the throngs in the street. Her face was quite inscrutable.

"No, I don't think so," she decided. "I shall stay up here for a time. My rooms are quite comfortable and I have plenty to do."

"I don't know," her father observed, half to himself, "that it wouldn't be as well for you to be out of the way. . . ."

After tea they strolled down westwards together. When they reached the Strand, Martin Fogg stopped before a well-known gunsmith's.

"I am going to buy a gun," he announced.

"Buy a what?" Catherine repeated, astonished.

“A gun,” her father reiterated dismally.

“Are you going to shoot duck on the marshes?” she asked with interest. “That would be rather fun. Mr. Channay said anyone could shoot as far as Saltlash.”

“I didn’t mean that sort of gun,” her father replied a little diffidently. “I mean one of those—what do you call them—automatics? Pistols they call ’em over here; guns in the States.”

“What on earth do you want one of those for?” she demanded. “You know you’re frightened to death of fire-arms. You’d never use it.”

“I don’t think I should,” he admitted, “but I’ve got to have it, all the same.”

“I’m coming in with you,” Catherine declared. “I think your shopping might be amusing. . . .”

The young man who waited upon them apparently shared her idea. Nevertheless, he sold his customer an automatic pistol of the latest design, the mechanism of which he explained to Catherine. Her father pointed to the glass cases which lined the wall.

“I’ll have one of those, too,” he said—“one of those that carry further.”

The young man gasped.

“Do you mean a shot gun or a sporting rifle, sir?” he enquired.

“If you want it for duck, dad, you want a shot-gun,” Catherine reminded him.

Mr. Martin Fogg turned the matter over in his mind for several moments. His next question very nearly resulted in his leaving the shop a compulsory non-purchaser.

“Supposing I were to hit a man by accident—say at a hundred yards—with a shot-gun, would it hurt him?”

“Not very much.”

“And with a rifle?”

“It would be perfectly possible to kill him at a longer range than a hundred yards.”

“I’ll have a rifle,” Mr. Fogg decided.

The young man stared at him.

“I am afraid I must ask you for what purpose you are buying this?” he said. “We are not supposed to sell firearms in an absolutely promiscuous fashion, unless we know our customers.”

“My father is simply being rather foolish,” Catherine explained. “As a matter of fact we live in a very lonely part of Norfolk, and he wants people to know we have firearms in the place.”

“All the same, miss, if you’ll excuse my saying so,” the salesman ventured, “a rifle is a dangerous sort of thing to handle for anyone not accustomed to firearms. If I might make a suggestion, why not have something of this kind,”

he went on, drawing a light two-barrelled shot-gun from its stand. “It is a twenty-eight bore, but you can do some very pretty shooting with it. I’d rather sell the gentleman this than a rifle.”

Mr. Martin Fogg acquiesced with some reluctance in the suggestion, and, after having parted with a considerable sum of money, his purchases were conveyed to a taxicab. They had no sooner started off than Catherine clutched his arm.

“Now, perhaps, you’ll tell me what this means, dad?” she demanded.

“Just an idea,” was the evasive reply. “You know, Catherine, I dare say I am very silly indeed. You’re always telling me I read too many sensational novels and amateur detective stories; still it does seem to me that there’s just a chance of trouble down at Blickley. That chap Drood—positively I don’t like to think of it, Catherine—but there’s no doubt about it that he’s killed men before now. There are others, too, almost as bad.”

“But what good could any of them do by killing Mr. Channay?” she asked.

Martin Fogg leaned out of the window and cast longing glances at a shop window, full of gay-coloured neckties. Then he remembered that his daughter was with him and leaned back with a sigh.

“That fellow Drood,” he murmured, “besides being absolutely unprincipled, is clever and full of schemes. If any man could think out a plan for getting rid of Channay and still handling the money, he’s the fellow to do it. . . .”

“Are you driving the Ford down, father?” Catherine enquired, after a brief period of abstraction.

“I thought of it,” he admitted.

“I shall come too,” she decided.

Martin Fogg looked doubtful.

“I think,” he began, “that if you were to come along, say the middle of next week——”

“We will start at nine o’clock and take sandwiches,” Catherine interrupted. “If the weather’s bad we can eat them inside the car.”

“Very well, dear,” her father assented meekly.

Gilbert Channay blamed the weather for the restlessness which had possessed him for the last few weeks. An early autumn had set in with an apparently boisterous desire to chase all remains of summer from the face of the earth. The fruit trees in the walled garden, bent double with the wind, were stripped of their fruit, the flowers were dashed by storms of rain, and even the tidal stream in front of the house had become so swollen with water, and lashed by the wind, that the dinghy and the ketch had both been dragged up on to the lawn. The trees, full of life only a few weeks ago, now stood grim and

bare, as though winter itself had touched them. Parsons had laid in a stock of coal and logs and set the furnace going, but nothing could altogether drive the chill from the atmosphere. One evening, soon after twilight, he knocked at the door of his master's study.

"A car has stopped at the dyke gate, sir," he announced. "My eyes are not so good as they were, but I believe two people are coming along the bank."

Channay nodded and strolled outside. Through the gloom he could just discern two figures—one a man and the other a girl—both heavily laden, and battling their way against the wind. He moved forward with a queer little sensation of pleasure. It was absurd that he should be so pleased to see Mr. Martin Fogg.

"What on earth are you people carrying?" he demanded, as he met and greeted them.

"A whole armoury of weapons," Catherine declared breathlessly. "Father has developed a sudden bloodthirsty mood."

"God bless my soul!" Gilbert Channay exclaimed, as he took the gun-case from her. "Cartridges, too!"

"I thought I might shoot a few duck," Martin Fogg explained apologetically. "Then there's an automatic here, which Catherine seems to have taken possession of."

Channay piloted them into his study and rang for tea.

"Take off your hat, please, Miss Fogg, and make yourself comfortable by the fire," he enjoined.

She obeyed and allowed him also to take the cloak which she had been wearing. In her town dress she seemed somehow thinner and finer. In disposition, too, there was a change. The touch of fierceness had temporarily, at any rate, gone from her manner. She seemed to have slipped with effortless tranquillity into the world with which he was more familiar. Her appearance almost startled him. It was incredible that he had ever thought her ordinary. He had not realised the perfection of her low forehead, silky eyelashes, clear brown eyes, her mouth with its firm yet tender lines. . . .

"How long are you going to stay down here, Mr. Channay?" Martin Fogg asked, after the tea equipage had been taken away.

Channay shrugged his shoulders.

"I was just beginning to feel it a little dreary," he confessed. "I might wait until after Christmas. . . . The cigarettes are at your elbow, Miss Fogg," he went on. "I hope, now you have come back, you will stay and dine. Why not, Fogg, eh?"

"We shall be delighted," Martin Fogg replied.

"The only trouble is we can't leave the car standing in the middle of the road," Catherine reminded her father.

“I’ll run it back to the inn and return,” the latter suggested. “There might be letters for me. I wonder if you would be so good as to walk so far as the road with me, Mr. Channay?”

“I should like it,” the latter acquiesced. “I have scarcely been out of doors all day. . . .”

The two men left the house a few minutes later. The night was fairly still, but dark. Channay produced an electric torch from his pocket, but his companion immediately covered it with his hand.

“Put it away,” he begged. “I can see the way perfectly.”

“You have something to tell me?”

“Drood is here,” Martin Fogg announced. “He is hard pressed, too. I heard of him in the City trying to raise money. There’s a man from Police Headquarters in New York over here watching him, and they seem to have got hold of something fresh at Scotland Yard. Between you and me, Mr. Channay, he’s desperate.”

“Well, let him come along,” was the confident reply. “I’m ready for him.”

Martin Fogg shook his head dubiously.

“I don’t want you to underrate this present danger, Mr. Channay,” he persisted. “Drood won’t come along like some of these others and try a whine or two, and a threat or two, or think out some mug’s trick. When he comes he’ll mean business. He’s got that little gang together again—the Bermondsey Gang. They’re supposed never to leave London, but you can’t tell. There are two of them up to anything.”

“But, my dear fellow,” Channay protested, “What on earth good would it do Drood to kill me. He’s not that sort of man. Everything he does is done with a purpose. He may be angry with me, but he wouldn’t run the risk of killing me unless there were some definite prospect of profit from it.”

“Quite right,” his companion agreed portentously. “But listen. Have you made a will lately?”

“Made a will?” Channay repeated. “Not I! I haven’t a relative in the world I care tuppence about.”

“You may be surprised to hear then,” Martin Fogg continued, “that there is a will in the office of a London solicitor at the present moment purporting to be signed by you and leaving everything of which you are possessed to the members of the Syndicate.”

Channay stopped short in the path.

“You’re talking nonsense, Fogg!” he exclaimed.

“Sounds like it,” the other admitted. “But—I’ve seen the will.”

They were about three-quarters of the way to the car, whose lights were still burning. Martin Fogg’s fingers suddenly gripped the other’s arm.

“Hush!” he whispered.

They both listened. It was a night with scarcely any wind, but the little there was came from westward where the marsh broadened out into a creek-riven wilderness, bounded a mile or so away by a high bank. A curious sea bird went floating through the obscurity with a wailing cry. In the distance there was the rise and fall of the sea; presently a splash in one of the pools of water, which might well have been a stray duck or a fish left behind by the tide.

"My fancy, I suppose," Fogg muttered. "I thought I heard voices."

"Why not?" Channay rejoined. "There are several people who shoot duck here. But get on with it, Fogg—get on with this extraordinary story of yours."

"I have been shadowing Drood," the latter explained. "That's why I knew he was pretty desperate. Three times lately he has lunched at a restaurant close to me, with a lawyer—Morrow, his name is—one of the worst—a man who is always having to fight to keep on the Rolls. Last time they were there they had a document. I could only see the back of it—'Last Will and Testament of'—someone. The thing haunted me. I went to see Morrow to question him. I tried to make him believe that I was a crook up against it and needing advice. I wasn't much of a success, but I had this much luck anyway. He left me alone in his office for a few minutes, and I saw the will. Your signature—not at all badly done either—and the money left back to the Syndicate—a debt of honour?"

Channay whistled softly.

"Then it would pay them to kill me after all," he murmured.

"That's just the point," Martin Fogg assented eagerly.

They had reached the gate. Martin Fogg climbed into the car.

"I'll be back in an hour," he promised. "Given you something to think of, eh?"

"You have indeed," was the grim reply.

Channay turned towards the Grange. There was no tide and the creek, which should have been on his left-hand side, was empty. About half-way to his destination, he halted for a moment, took out his electric torch, switched on the light, and fastened it with his handkerchief to the end of his stick. Then he scrambled a few steps down the side of the bank and walked on, holding the lamp above his head. He was within a dozen paces of the gate when he heard the swish of shot passing over his head, and the report from a gun out in the marshes. The lamp was smashed. He paused for a moment and listened, still safely behind the bank. In the distance he could distinctly hear voices and advancing footsteps. He jumped down to the bottom of the dry creek, hurried along it, swung himself up to the landing stage and entered the Grange by the back door. He looked at his own gun for a moment longingly. Then a sudden thought struck him—a thought which he never followed to any finite

conclusion, but which was powerful enough to drive all idea of adventure for a moment out of his mind. He made his way instead to the study. Catherine—the new Catherine—was lying curled up upon his sofa smoking a cigarette. She looked at him anxiously as he entered.

"Didn't I hear a gun just now?" she enquired.

"Someone duck shooting," he answered. "We'll have a try ourselves to-morrow night if you like."

She pointed to the broken torch which he was still carrying.

"How did you do that?" she asked.

For a moment he hesitated. Then he began a not too coherent explanation. She waved him back to silence and pointed to a chair.

"Come and sit down by me," she invited. "It is absurd for you both to attempt to shut me out of your confidences. Tell me what has brought father down here with that humorous armoury of his?"

He hesitated for a moment and then he told her the whole story. She sat up on the couch with her hands clasped around her knees. Notwithstanding the increased femininity with which her clinging gown and silk stockings endowed her she looked an exceedingly capable young person.

"This is most exciting," she observed. "Tell me exactly what you are going to do."

"Make another will to-night for one thing," he confided. "Then——"

He broke off in his speech. They both looked at one another intently. Seaman's Grange, in the place of the ordinary knocker and electric bell, possessed at its front door a huge ship's bell, pulled by a rusty chain. Its clanging, as though rung by some impatient hand, had suddenly broken the stillness which reigned through the house.

"What is that?" Catherine demanded, breathlessly.

"Nothing very terrible after all," he replied—"only the front door bell."

"I've never heard it before."

"No one ever uses it. Listen!"

They heard Parsons answer the summons. A moment later he entered the room a little diffidently.

"There's a person outside, sir," he announced, "who says that he has lost his way upon the marshes. He asked me some questions about the shooting rights, to which I felt scarcely able to reply."

"I'll come and speak to him," Channay decided.

He sought excuse from Catherine with a little glance, monosyllabically answered. In the hall was a man who might have passed for a typical Fenn country sportsman; a rough-looking youth in top-boots and soiled tweed clothes. His complexion was sallow for one who led an out-of-door life, and there was a touch of the Semitic in his full red lips, and black eyes.

Nevertheless, he might very well have been a fishmonger from Norwich or a sporting tradesman from Lynn.

"Sorry to disturb you, sir," the newcomer said, as Channay appeared. "My mates and I we got sort of turned round. We've got permission from the Blickley Freemen's Association to shoot on the marshes here, but we were warned that the seaward beat belonged to the Grange. We can't see any boundary, and we don't want to trespass, so I took the liberty of popping in to ask where your landward stance might be."

Channay was interested. He looked the young man over carefully.

"You're very conscientious," he remarked. "I'm afraid the wild fowl men who come over this way aren't so particular as a rule."

"We don't want to get fined," the other replied, "and one stand is as good as another."

"How many of you are there?" Channay enquired.

"Five."

Channay glanced at his watch.

"The early flight is over by now," he remarked.

The young man grinned.

"It isn't often we get a holiday, sir," he said. "We've got a keg of liquor and sandwiches there. We'll be out until midnight."

"Go wherever you like," Channay invited. "If I'm out later, or to-morrow evening, I'll take my stand where we shan't interfere with one another. This isn't pheasant shooting, you know."

The visitor picked up his gun from the table where he had laid it down.

"Much obliged, sir," he said. "Very kind of you, I am sure."

The young man threw a backward glance round the hall, turned up his coat-collar and Gilbert Channay stood upon the threshold and watched him disappear. Parsons gently pushed him on one side and closed the door a little abruptly.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he apologised.

"Why did you do that?" his master demanded.

The man hesitated.

"From what I have seen of this last lot of duck shooters, sir," he said, "I haven't much confidence in them. I'd just as soon be indoors a night-time and out in the day-time. That's all." . . .

Channay went back to the study. He found Catherine busy examining the mechanism of the automatic pistol, which she had adopted as her own particular toy. She laid it down at his coming.

"Well, has your burglar friend departed?" she enquired.

"Where did you see him?" he asked.

"I watched him through the doorway. Didn't you notice his eyes? He was

looking around the whole of the time. I bet he could draw a plan of this house now."

He moved to the sideboard.

"Come," he proposed, "I'll mix you a cocktail and we'll forget these pestilential fellows."

She played once more with the automatic.

"I suppose the philosophers are right," she reflected, "and that one places a ludicrous over-value on human life."

He shrugged his shoulders, pushing the box of cigarettes towards her.

"I have only one regret," he observed, "in case any accident should happen to me—that I shan't be there to see Drood and his fellow conspirators when they find the will which I have just planned."

She shuddered a little.

"You haven't any nerves, have you?" she remarked.

"Prison life," he replied.

They dined immediately after Martin Fogg's return—not in any way cheerlessly, for in some queer fashion Channay found the girl's presence stimulating, and he was at his best notwithstanding that background of unacknowledged anxiety which at times made conversation difficult. With the rising of the moon father and daughter went homeward, the latter reluctantly.

"I think we ought to stay," she suggested half seriously.

Channay shook his head.

"There is only just sensation enough for one," he told her. "I doubt whether the night will bring me even a thrill." . . .

Nothing whatever happened through the night, or on the following day. At twilight Martin Fogg and Catherine arrived; the former eager to try his new plaything. They all tramped out across the marshes, whitened a little with the faint frost, until they found Channay's favourite position behind a high dyke bank. With the darkness came a few duck, two of which Channay shot, and at all of which Martin Fogg blazed happily away. A faint fall of snow followed the darkness and as soon as the flighting was over they turned homewards, pausing once or twice to listen. There was a curious, brooding silence everywhere. The sea—it was almost full tide—was noiseless. The birds seemed to have found their homes for the night and with the slight flurry of snow the last vestiges of wind had dropped. Catherine shivered a little.

"I don't like this silence," she admitted.

"Either our duck shooting friends are lying low, or it was a false alarm and those fellows were merely what they professed to be," Channay observed, pausing to light his pipe.

Just at that moment there was a familiar, indescribable sound—the swish,

ping of a bullet close at hand, followed immediately by a report from the other end of the dyke. Channay dropped his pipe, but picked it up almost at once and with it his hat. He laid down his shot-gun pulled out his automatic, and ran a few steps in the direction from which the shot had come. Suddenly he stopped short. The duck shooters were not such fools after all. Between him and the place from which the shot had been fired was a great morass, through which no one could pass, bounded on one side by a stagnant lake. He shrugged his shoulders and came back.

"First effort a failure," he remarked, "but they have a marksman with them."

Catherine was frankly terrified. She caught hold of Channay's arm and forced him to hurry. Martin Fogg, bare-headed and carrying his gun in an absurd fashion, lingered behind, his blinking eyes searching everywhere for some suspicious object.

"No more duck shooting," Catherine declared firmly, when at last they reached the shelter of the house.

"Consider my housekeeping!" Channay protested.

"I can buy them in the village for eighteen-pence," she told him scornfully. "Why don't you get out of this and come up to London. It's getting awfully cold."

"I'll give it another day," he decided. "I might consider a move then. Not that I'm at all sure it would be wise. I think London is rather their happy hunting ground."

There were complications, however, about their proposed departure for London. On the following morning Parsons came to his master with an air of grave concern. The garage had been broken into and all four tyres of the car had been cut. Channay listened to the recital with the air of a chess player who watches with mild amusement a move on the part of an inferior player.

"When you go to the village this morning, Parsons," he directed, "telephone to Norwich for a fresh set. Have them sent out by car and have the man who puts them on drive the car down to Jarvice's Garage. Ask them to put it in a lock-up box and give you the key, and to be sure they tell no one it is there."

"Very good, sir," Parsons replied. "And shall we be leaving these parts soon?"

"Almost at once," his master promised. "Are you nervous?"

"It isn't I, sir. It's the missus," Parsons explained, apologetically. "All last night she kept on waking and hearing footsteps around the house and the sound of oars in the creek. If you'll pardon my saying so, sir, I think they've got us pretty well hemmed in."

"If they have they don't seem to do much about it," Channay rejoined.

“These fellows who come out on jobs like this are generally cowards. They want to try and hit upon a plan by means of which they risk nothing. They mayn’t find it quite so easy.”

“I’ve got padlocks on the back doors and I’ve moved heavy furniture up against the lower windows,” Parsons reported. “You’ll keep indoors after twilight as much as possible, sir.”

Channay promised, but on the following night the lust of excitement crept into his blood. There were masses of black cloud all over the sky and a strong wind blowing, but here and there were clear spaces overhead, and from behind the jagged edge of the rolling clouds there was at times a gleam of moonlight. Channay took some number three shot he kept for geese, filled his pocket with cartridges and with his automatic in the hip pocket of his breeches, left the house during a moment’s darkness. He followed the creek for some distance and then turned round and stole across the dyke bank from seawards. Arrived at the spot where he usually stood he lay down upon his stomach and watched. Presently he heard the coming of duck. He made no movement. Almost simultaneously, his eyes becoming trained to the gloom, he saw a dark figure about eighty paces distant. He lifted his gun and, still without rising from the ground, fired at the duck already out of range. Almost immediately a bullet whistled above him, just where his head would have been. Still upon his stomach he returned the fire with his shot-gun. He saw the black form stagger and heard a cry of pain. Instantly he scrambled to his feet, crossed the dyke, climbed up a bank of shingle, and dropped on to the sands. Listening intently he could hear a rush of feet toward the spot where he had been standing. He waited, tense and expectant. In a moment or two one of the party climbed cautiously up and stood on the bank, looking around. Channay fired again and with an oath the shape disappeared. There was a murmur of angry voices, and this time Channay delayed no longer. He took to the hard sands and ran. He heard his pursuers floundering in the marsh land, but they had no chance of cutting him off. He reached home safely, and at once bolted and barred all the doors and windows.

“Anyone called. Parsons?” he asked, on his way up to the bath-room.

“A boy has been here from the village, sir,” Parsons announced. “He brought a message from Mr. Fogg. He asked if he and his daughter could dine here to-night as they are going to London to-morrow in any case. I took the liberty of saying ‘yes,’ as Mrs. Parsons is well prepared.”

“Quite right,” his master approved.

Channay, bathed and changed, made his way to the study, mixed the cocktails, opened yesterday’s papers and settled down to wait with an air of pleasurable anticipation. It was eight o’clock, however—half an hour after the appointed time—before his guests arrived. Mr. Martin Fogg was carrying his

twenty-eight bore gun, which he set down gingerly upon the hall table, and from which Channay quickly extracted the two cartridges.

"The duck party arrived home just as we were starting," Catherine explained. "They had very little to say about it, but two of them are wounded. Not very seriously, the doctor reported, but one of them will have to go to hospital."

"Good," Gilbert Channay declared. "I gave them number three shot for a treat."

"You've been out on the marshes?" she asked, with a note of reproof in her tone.

"I had to," he admitted, as he handed her a cocktail. "Remember that the greatest principle of defence is to sometimes take the offensive. They had one go at me. Let me see, that leaves only three, doesn't it?"

"Four now," she replied. "Another arrived this evening. Father will tell you."

"Drood himself," Martin Fogg announced gravely. "I wish you had taken our advice and got away yesterday, Mr. Channay."

"How could I?" the other protested. "The car wasn't ready. The man only got the tyres on this afternoon. To-morrow morning, if you like. We'll dine in town. You shall choose your favourite restaurant, and we'll see if these fellows are any handier on their own happy hunting ground."

Catherine shivered.

"You treat the whole thing altogether too lightly," she complained. "I don't. I'm tired of it. Why don't you make terms with this Mr. Drood?"

He laughed scornfully.

"If I did that," he said, "I should go through the rest of my days feeling that I was a coward."

"You would risk your life for an idea," she exclaimed bitterly.

"The best lives the world has ever known," he rejoined, "have been given for ideas. . . . After that trite saying, let us go in and dine."

They lingered longer than usual over the meal. Mrs. Parsons had produced some unexpected partridges and Parsons, without orders, had opened a second bottle of champagne. With the serving of coffee Martin Fogg left the room to report upon the weather. Channay spoke briefly of his plans.

"When this present little affair of Channay versus Drood, or Drood versus Channay, is over," he confided, "I think that I shall go to Monte Carlo. Do you think we could induce your father to bring you down there, Miss Fogg?"

"I am not sure whether I want to go," she replied.

"Why not?" he asked earnestly. "What do you want in life? Travel, a career —or a home?"

She leaned back in her chair, looking away for a moment into space, and

then returned his gaze, her clear brown eyes as unflinching as his, her little smile an answer to the interest, deeper than curiosity, which lay beneath his words.

"You ask me more than I know myself," she confessed. "Self-analysis makes one feel so self-conscious, or else I really think it would be amusing, at any rate to make the effort, to understand oneself a little more. I don't think that I'm a weak woman, I don't think that I am altogether an idiot, but somehow or other I feel so atomic, if you know what I mean—torn into little bits—the home of too many differing desires. The worst of it is I have no courage. I want experiences which I should never have the courage to undertake. I want to travel along paths in which I should be terrified to find myself. Yet I want the knowledge which comes from all these things. . . . I hope I make myself perfectly clear," she added with an amused little laugh.

"Perfectly," he answered. "I cannot say that I know exactly what you want, but I know what would be best for you."

He leaned a little forward. By accident, at first, his hand touched hers. Her eyes, which had wandered away, suddenly flashed back. It was a moment, the significance of which neither of them in the least understood, a moment pregnant with emotions, entirely latent, perhaps in her case—for she was singularly honest—undivined. Just then her father returned.

"Winter," he pronounced, "and dark as pitch. Have you broken the news to our host, Catherine?"

"I never thought of it," she confessed, turning towards him. "Have you guessed why you see me wearing a knitted frock instead of an evening toilette? We want to stay the night. May we?"

"You are more than welcome," he answered readily. "Your rooms have always been prepared but I suspect that your demand upon my hospitality is rather more for my sake than for your own."

"Not at all," she assured him. "It is a bitterly cold night, and it will be so comfortable not to hurry off. You are going to play to us—real music—and then I will oblige with some jingle. Father has a volume of absolutely new detective stories which he is going to read and make fun of."

"All the elements," Channay sighed contentedly, "of a very happy evening."

It was little short of midnight when, with old-fashioned silver candlesticks in their hands, everyone said good-night in the hall. It was another hour before Channay undressed. The music which he had been playing and some of the more sentimental melodies with which Catherine had followed, seemed to be ringing in his consciousness, to have driven the rougher edges and apprehensions of the moment into the background. For another hour he lay

awake, listening to the wind. It was about twenty past three when, after a brief sleep, he awoke, suddenly, yet without any definite sense of disturbing sound. He lay still and listened. He could hear nothing, yet the feeling of uneasiness increased. He swung himself out of bed, thrust his feet into his slippers, took his automatic pistol in one hand and his torch in the other, and crept out on to the landing. Still he could hear nothing. The rain was screaming against the window-pane, and the wind booming away outside, but, inside—silence. Nevertheless he was not satisfied. He descended the stairs, and on the last step paused abruptly. There was the distinct sound of a stealthy movement in his study. A sudden sense of excitement made him forget all caution. He crossed the hall on tiptoe and threw open the door. The room was unlit, but looming over the writing-table was the shape of a man, and flashing into the open drawers the light of an electric torch.

"If you move," Channay said quietly, "I shall shoot. Stay there until I've had a look at you."

The figure became motionless, but in that second Gilbert Channay realised that in his impetuous advance he had committed the unpardonable offence of leaving his flank unprotected. His arms were seized from behind. Another pair of arms was around his neck. Something was pushed between his teeth before he could even raise his voice. There was the feel of metal upon his wrists, and a horribly familiar click. He heard a fierce, triumphant whisper, almost in his ear:

"We've got him!"

"Hold him there while I light the lamp," the man who had been inside the room directed.

Channay made no movement. He realised that if he was to have a chance at all the time for action had not yet arrived. The lamp on his table was lit and the figures of three intruders became visible. It was Drood himself—burly, forceful, menacing—who had been rummaging his study table. One of the two who had seized him from behind was the man who had visited his house a few days before.

"Rather rash, aren't you, Channay, for a man who knows that there's trouble about?" Drood sneered. "Ah, I forgot you can't answer. Put him in that chair."

The two men pushed him into his own easy-chair.

"Take the gag out," Drood ordered.

They obeyed.

"You can shout if you like," Drood told him. "Your butler and his amiable wife are safely tied and trussed. You'll have to shout loud enough to be heard at the mainland for you to do any good, and there's a gale blowing outside."

"I hadn't the least idea of shouting," Channay assured him. "Can't we get

to business. An explanation of some sort would be in order."

"The explanation," Drood said, "must naturally be a little primitive. I want fifty thousand pounds. If I get that I might consider taking the safest course and letting you live."

"And if I give you nothing?" Channay asked coldly.

"We shall kill you," was the matter of fact reply. "A certain amount of risk, of course, but not much. You will be found on the marshes in a bog hole, into which you have stumbled, with your gun by your side."

"The manservant and his wife?" Channay enquired.

"We have means of dealing with them," Drood answered—"regrettable, but necessary."

"And what good financially does my death bring you?" the captured man demanded.

Drood smiled—an unpleasant, brutal smile.

"That is the part of the whole scheme," he announced, "upon which I congratulate myself most. You may not know it, Gilbert Channay, but you have signed a will, now deposited in the office of my excellent friend, Mr. Morrow, the lawyer, leaving your estate to the surviving members of the Channay Syndicate."

"I see," Gilbert Channay observed. "An excellent scheme, but unfortunately the will won't be worth the paper it's written upon."

Drood turned around suddenly. There was a scowl on his face, but there was also unbelief.

"Why not?" he growled.

"Because I executed a will of my own within the last two days, and posted it to my own lawyer's in Lincoln's Inn yesterday," was the mocking reply.

Drood crossed the room and stood over his prisoner.

"My God, Channay," he exclaimed, "if I thought that was the truth——"

"It is the truth right enough," Channay assured him. "By-the-bye, couldn't I have my hands free? This is really a little melodramatic, and you've got my pistol."

Drood took no notice. There was something terrible in the grimness of his face. He believed.

"How did you know?" he asked.

"You think, perhaps, that I have the courage of a fool," Channay replied. "I could assure you that I don't play altogether a lone hand. I have friends. I have friends even at this moment, whom I hope to God——"

He broke off in his speech. Drood, too, was listening. The two men, who were helping themselves to whiskey and soda at the sideboard, raised their heads. Drood took a few steps towards the window, then came to a sudden, paralysed halt. There were no bolts to protect it, for it was the window by

which he himself had entered, after the fastenings had been treated by a professional hand, and the actual resistance was slight, but through a mass of splintering wood and shivering glass there stepped into the room a figure so strange as to be almost ludicrous. Mr. Martin Fogg, in pyjamas of vivid blue and pink, his hair looking redder than ever, in his eyes a gleam of wild excitement, stood there with his new toy, the twenty-eight bore shot-gun, clasped firmly in his hands. He waited for no threats, he acted upon no precedent, his sense of the melodramatic seemed woefully absent. Without a word of explanation he pulled the trigger of his weapon and let fly. Shot rattled in every direction. Drood, with a horrible curse, spun around, gripping his leg, only to suddenly feel the other one give way beneath him. The two men had scarcely time to take a single step towards this nightmare of an intruder, when a woman's voice from the abruptly opened door stopped them.

"Stand still! Mine's an automatic. If I fire you're dead!"

They stood still. Just inside the window with his legs astride was Martin Fogg, the light of battle in his eyes, and two fresh cartridges in his gun, and guarding the door was a woman, holding with remarkable steadiness a weapon which they knew much better and feared much more. Whilst they hesitated, Martin Fogg let fly again. The men wheeled about. Four hands shot into the air. Drood was already lying upon his side, groaning. Gilbert Channay, who had taken shelter behind an easy-chair with the first discharge of Martin Fogg's gun, rose suddenly to his feet.

"Keep them covered, Catherine," he cried, using her Christian name for the first time. "Undo these things, one of you fellows."

He held out his hands. The nearer of the two obeyed, talking rapidly all the time.

"Governor, we were only here for a lark—thought you wanted frightening. Those were the boss's words. You can take our guns. I've got a half dozen pellets in my leg now."

The handcuffs clattered to the carpet. Gilbert Channay accepted the guns which the two men offered him. From the floor Drood spat at them.

"Get out of the house and run!" Channay directed. "This way!"

He passed in front of them into the hall, walking backwards, and threw open the front door, watching their every movement and listening intently for any sound in the library.

"You won't be safe until you get to London," he warned them. "I shall give information at daylight."

They vanished into the night precipitately. Channay came back to find Catherine looking at him in amazement.

"Mr. Channay," she exclaimed, "I do believe when you got up from behind that chair—yes, and even now—you're laughing."

He pointed to the figure of her father, still toying with his gun, still gazing longingly at the prostrate and cursing figure of Drood.

"My dear Catherine," he rejoined, "you buy your father's ties. It's time you did something about his pyjamas!"

There was a miasma of remands and committals. The attempted burglary at Seaman's Grange had excited an amazing amount of interest in the whole locality. Gilbert Channay went to visit Drood in the Norwich Infirmary. The latter greeted him sullenly.

"Channay," he said, "you can count me beat. I know when I have met a better man. I'm through."

"You didn't reckon on Mr. Martin Fogg," Gilbert Channay remarked softly.

Drood proved at that moment that he shared one quality with better men. A humorous grin illumined his face.

"Never seen anything like him," he admitted, sitting up and wiping his eyes. "If any ordinary man had stepped in with an automatic, I should have downed him. I reckon I'm a second quicker on the draw than most; but, honest, when I saw him standing there in those pyjamas and with that coloured hair and his silly toy gun, I thought my brain had given way and I couldn't do a damned thing. . . . They tell me I'll get six months. If you'll start me with a trifle when I get out, I'll be grateful. No threats, mind. I've finished."

"I'll give you five hundred for every month," Channay promised.

"Then please God they give me twelve," were Drood's valedictory words, as the nurse came to remove his visitor.

CHAPTER VII
THE AMAZING BANQUET

"Father isn't coming," Catherine announced, as she greeted her host in the vestibule of Mario's Club Restaurant, "and I've lost my job."

"It sounds rather an alarming series of calamities," Channay observed, as he bent over her hand. "Your father's absence, under the circumstances, I can scarcely be expected to regret, but the job—do you mind much?"

"I am resigned," she admitted. "I have come to the conclusion that nature meant me to be an idle woman. I have ambitions, I suppose, but I can't seem to focus them."

He led her into the restaurant, to a corner table laid for three. One place was cleared away, and they sat side by side amongst the cushions.

"Do I understand," he asked, "that the *Daily Line* has had the hardihood to dispense with your services?"

She nodded.

"I am bored to death with the work," she confided. "It's all drudgery. Last night I was sent to report on a reception held at the house of one of the new nobility. It was all very dull and usual, with the exception of the new nobleman himself. He was neither dull, nor, I hope, usual. He took me into his library to copy my notes, and suggested that we ended the evening with a dance—here, I think it was. He must have had a lot of experience," she went on meditatively. "Most men are so easy to escape from. He wasn't. So I went back to the *Daily Line* and tore up my notes, and here I am, a free lance."

"You wouldn't like a job as private secretary, I suppose?" he ventured.

"Not to you," she replied, helping herself to caviare. "Your scheme of life is too bloodthirsty. I like adventures up to a certain point, but I have had enough of battle, murder, and sudden death for a time. Not so, father," she continued, "I honestly believe, if they'd take him back, he'd rejoin the Force, he's so pleased with his last exploit. I heard him tell his tailor that he must have hip pockets in all his trousers."

"Why didn't your father come to-day, really?" he asked.

"To tell you the truth, there is a coolness between us," she confided. "I wouldn't let him wear either of his new ties this morning. The one he had set his mind on was a mixture of purple and green with a thin red line. He insisted that he had bought it because they were the colours of a defunct rowing club he was once connected with. Anyhow it couldn't be thought of. He's been grumpy ever since, and just as I went to tell him that it was time to start, the

telephone bell rang. He became deeply engrossed in some mysterious conversation, and finally sent me off alone—said he'd see you later."

"The first advantage I've ever known from your father's somewhat aggressive taste in neckwear," Channay murmured. "Now tell me about this newspaper business. Are you going to give it up?"

"Absolutely," she answered. "You know I was mistaken when I thought that I wanted to earn my own living. I try to come into touch with all this feminist business, but I'm not really a bit ambitious. I was meant to be a drone. All my aspirations are artificial. It is the glamour of everything that attracts, not the thing itself. So long as father's able to pay my bills and I can have decent clothes, and go to the sea-side for three months in the year, and see the new plays—I prefer the stalls, but I might put up with the dress circle—I'm perfectly contented. It's a terrible confession, isn't it, but the long and short of it is—I'm an ordinary woman!"

"I am inclined to contest the point," he declared.

"And I beg you not to," she pleaded. "I shall become dumb with self-consciousness if you persist. Let us talk of something else."

"Tell me some more about the incident last night," he suggested.

"There isn't much to be said about that," she observed. "I don't know how it is, but there always seems to me to be something a little undignified in anything like a scrimmage with a man. They say in politics that Lord Heatherton has been one of the most persistent and pushing of the younger generation. He certainly carries out his principles in the minor details of life."

"Heatherton!" Channay exclaimed quickly.

"Now I've told you his name," she sighed. "I didn't mean to. It doesn't really matter. If you were father I might be afraid of his sallying out to Grosvenor Square with his twenty-eight bore gun."

"Why shouldn't I do something of the sort?" he asked.

"You haven't the right," she replied coolly. "And, besides, you have too much common sense. . . . Tell me what sort of people come here. The place seems to have a note of its own."

"Cinema actresses, producers, film magnates, theatrical agents, a few authors, a few actors, and a good many young ladies who have, or might have, business interests with such," he told her. "Then, of course, there is always a sprinkling of perfectly respectable people who come because they think it's different, and a leaven now and then of the tarnished aristocracy. Amusing for an occasional visit, but cloying as a habit."

"What made you choose it to-day, then?" she asked.

"Because, socially, I am in a peculiar position," he answered. "The fact of having enjoyed His Majesty's hospitality for two or three years is scarcely counted a recommendation in the most exclusive circles. I can see a lady at

Claridge's, for instance, looking at me from the next table with indignation, and a heavy father at the Ritz conveying his young daughter to some other part of the room."

"You're talking rubbish," she exclaimed indignantly.

He did not pursue the subject at the time, but returned to it a few minutes later.

"I wonder," he reflected, "exactly how I should stand if, at any time in the future, I should wish to marry and settle down. I have money—stolen money, but honestly stolen—and I complied properly to the social fetish of public school and university."

"How should I know about such things?" she answered bluntly. "My father was a policeman and my mother a grocer's daughter."

"But respectable," he murmured—"eminently respectable."

"Aren't you rather wasting your time considering such a subject?" she observed. "To me you always represent the perfect type of the civilised adventurer. I don't believe you could settle down if you wanted to, and a more impossible person as regards women I never met. You don't even trouble to be civil to them. You were absolutely rude to me for weeks before you decided that I didn't count."

He sipped his wine thoughtfully. She continued her lunch, unconscious or unmindful of his obvious contemplation of her.

"An experience like mine," he remarked, "is sobering. Besides, I am approaching that time of life——"

"You are thirty-eight," she interrupted. "I know all about it. Father is fifty-four, and I know at least three women who are trying to marry him. That is really the only anxiety I have with regard to my future life."

"You might marry yourself," he suggested.

"Very unlikely," she replied. "I have no qualities, no accomplishments, and tastes beyond my station. . . . Here comes the hero of my adventure last night," she added, dropping her voice, "He is really rather nice-looking, you know. I suppose mine was quite the wrong attitude."

A fair man of medium height and pleasant expression was moving down the room, nodding to a few intimates. He apparently failed to recognise Catherine, but he came to a momentary standstill as he saw Channay. So far as a man whose *savoir-faire* in most of the crises of life had never been questioned could be said to appear embarrassed, he, for a moment, had that appearance. He diverted his course a little and paused before their table. He did not offer his hand; neither did Channay. Yet there was something about the newcomer's manner which denoted a desire to ingratiate.

"Well, Gilbert," he exclaimed, "are you going to say 'how-do-you-do' to me?"

“With pleasure,” Channay assented. “A man in my position,” he added, with a little mocking smile, “is never quite sure as to the attitude of his erstwhile companions.”

“Don’t be an idiot,” Heatherton replied, with increased confidence. “I should like to have a talk with you. Will you come and see me some day. There is a little matter to be straightened out between us, isn’t there?”

“Yes,” Channay admitted, “there is a little matter to be straightened out. Up to the present, Browning—Lord Heatherton it is now, I think—I have refrained from entering anyone’s house. If you care to come and see me at eighty-nine, Milan Court, I am at home most mornings between ten and eleven.”

“To-morrow morning, for instance?” the other suggested.

“To-morrow morning would suit me admirably,” Channay assented. “By-the-bye, let me present you to my friend, Miss Fogg. Lord Heatherton—Miss Fogg.”

For the second time this very accomplished man of the world showed signs of discomfiture. He recovered himself quickly, however.

“I am pleased to meet Miss Fogg,” he said, with a little bow, and still with a complete absence of any recognition.

He passed on to join some friends higher up the room. Catherine looked after him with a smile.

“On the whole, tactful,” she decided. “Now please tell me how you happen to know him.”

Channay drew out a pocket-book and laid it upon the table. From an inner receptacle he withdrew a strip of paper, yellowed with age, and containing a list of names. His finger rested upon one about three-quarters of the way down.

“George F. Browning,” he pointed out. “It was George F. Browning, Bart., then. He got a peerage the year I made my little bow to society. I read it in a Sunday paper—one of my special treats!”

Catherine shivered a little as she glanced across the room.

“He too, then, is one of your enemies,” she remarked. “What are you going to do about him?”

“His case presents difficulties,” Channay admitted. “Without a doubt Browning has progressed in the world. Nothing could ever have made him a gentleman, but he is nevertheless a peer, and, I understand, popular. I have all the commoner’s respect for nobility. I am not at all sure that I ought not to forgive him.”

She helped herself to another cigarette.

“I rather like you when you’re talking nonsense,” she confided. “It relieves the situation a little. All the same I should like to know what you are going to do with him.”

"It is a problem," he confessed. "I should like to bring flaming tragedy into his life, to bring him up against such a situation that he should spend his last hours in agony with a revolver and a brandy bottle at his side—and I have only until to-morrow morning at half-past ten to make plans."

"You'll think of something," she assured him hopefully.

Lord Heatherton, on the occasion of his visit to Channay on the following morning, showed every desire to place their relations upon a friendly footing. He lit a very long cigar, and made himself comfortable in an easy-chair. His manner was distinctly genial.

"Very good of you to congratulate me and all that, Gilbert," he said, referring to Channay's welcoming speech, "but between you and me a title and all that sort of thing takes a devil of a lot of living up to, especially with the missus, who is inclined to be extravagant, as you know Myra always was. I used to make quite a decent bit by having my name on the board of City companies, but I daren't do it now, unless the thing's really good, and when it is really good they don't want figure heads. So there's the text for you, and here's the sermon. I want money like the devil."

"Ah!" Channay murmured.

"Now there's that matter of my claim to a certain number of shares in the Nyasa Mines, isn't there?" Heatherton continued. "I've seen Isham, of course, and I've heard what your attitude is. You feel that you have a grudge against us others for not seeing you through it, and you're not disposed to part. I don't blame you altogether, although as a matter of honour——"

"We'll leave that out, if you don't mind," Channay interrupted.

"Very well," the other assented. "I'll put it to you like this. You're a young man, you're rich, you've got to live and you don't want to live like an outsider. I say it without boasting, I don't think there's anyone could do more than I could to get you on the tracks again. What I propose is that you come to a friendly arrangement with me about my shares in these mines, and that I do my level best to get you back where you belong—it's a rotten phrase, but shall we say, in society. I'll give a dinner for you—one at my club and another one at my house. Myra was always a pal of yours, and I'm sure she'd enter into it like a shot. This is bald, Channay, but you know I made my way in the world through plain speaking. Are you prepared to treat?"

"You must need money pretty badly," Channay observed.

"I do," was the frank reply. "All the same, the other thing isn't going to hurt me even if there are one or two men I couldn't talk round. It never makes you any the less popular to try to help a pal who's had a knock. There are plenty of men now who'd like to be your friends, if you'd let 'em, Channay. We were at the 'Varsity together, and all that, but you've always had one big

advantage over me. You were an athlete and I wasn't, and men never forget the fellows they played games with."

"So this is your proposition," Channay ruminated, after a few minutes' pause.

"It is," Heatherton assented, "and I don't want you to look upon it too much as a bargain either, Channay. As you know, I wasn't in nearly so assured a position four years ago, but if there'd been a chance any way of intervening —I'd have done it. I did try all I could, behind the scenes."

Channay was silent for several moments. All the time that worn little document with its terrible story seemed to be burning in his pocket-book. He made no allusion to it, however. He appeared all the time to be thinking out his visitor's proposition.

"When do you require this money?" he asked at length.

"I want five thousand now, like the devil," Lord Heatherton confessed, with a gleam of anticipation in his eyes. "The rest could wait over for a little time."

Gilbert Channay took his cheque-book from his pocket, wrote out a cheque, payable to the order of his visitor, and passed it over.

"There is five thousand pounds on account," he said. "The actual transfer of the shares, we can talk about later. I will accept your offer of a men's dinner to take place when convenient to you. The other one at your house we will postpone for a time. I am scarcely used to women's society yet."

Lord Heatherton folded the cheque with a sigh of relief. What a clever fellow he was!

"Just as you like, Gilbert," he agreed, "although I know Myra will be wanting to get at it. I'll let you know the date, and I will send you a list of the guests. I'm glad we've come together again, old fellow. If there's anything I can do for you, don't hesitate to let me know."

"I will do so with pleasure," Channay promised, in a colourless tone.

"I'll get some good chaps," Heatherton continued. "Petersfield will come, I know. I don't think I shall ask Isham. You haven't seen anything of him lately, I suppose."

"Not very lately," Channay admitted.

Heatherton shook his head sombrely.

"All U.P. with him, I'm afraid," he confided. "He's drinking hard—going downhill in every way. Gave me quite a shock to see him in Piccadilly the other day. His wife looks like a ghost, too. They're never together nowadays, though. . . . Well, so long, Channay! You'll hear from me in a day or two."

Heatherton took his leave, passed through the hall of the hotel, dispensing greetings everywhere, stepped into a Rolls-Royce and departed for his Committee Room at the House of Lords. He was the very prototype of the

genial, shrewd, successful man of the world. His bearing was full of self-assurance and self-esteem. His supremely beatific moment, however, was when he gave his chauffeur a brief instruction through the speaking tube.

"Call at the Bank, John."

There were all the elements of a great success about that party which Lord Heatherton conscientiously arranged at the Club about a fortnight later. He had found the task surprisingly easy. Channay had been popular amongst his men friends, had never been guilty of anything likely to bring him into personal discredit with them, and they were all inclined to accept a charitable view of the momentary lapse which had brought him to disaster. There were two or three refusals from members of the very old-fashioned set, but when the table was finally arranged it was found that there were six members of the committee itself present, and perfectly adequate representatives of the worlds of sport, fashion and finance. Obeying a tactful understanding, initiated by Lord Heatherton, no reference whatever was made to any special circumstances connected with the matter. Everyone shook hands with Channay, as though their separation had been an ordinary one of a few months only. No allusion was made to anything untoward in his three years' absence from familiar spots. The thoroughly British gift of being able to greet a man returned from half a lifetime's exile in India or Africa, as though they had met a few days before in Bond Street, found perfect exemplification in the deportment of every member of the little gathering. Such references as were made to the past at all were to the days of Channay's prowess at cricket, both at the 'Varsity, for his County and for the Gentlemen. Cricket gossip provided a very suitable subject for that pre-prandial quarter-of-an-hour of cocktails, which might possibly have been the most difficult time to get over. As it was everything went well. Channay, though his manner was one of extraordinary restraint, showed not the slightest sign of nervousness or awkwardness. Half-way through dinner, when the champagne had circulated freely, nearly every man was already thinking out some scheme for bringing the guest of the evening back into the circle of his everyday life. When Lord Heatherton rose to his feet with the coming of the port he was received with tumultuous applause. It was not everyone who thoroughly approved of this very distinguished young politician, but on this occasion at least they felt that he had done the right and generous thing. He had come forward like a man to help reinstate a pal who had had a nasty knock. It was a sporting and thoroughly British thing to do. Heatherton had probably never been so popular with these men as when, after proposing the King's health, he said his few words concerning their guest. As might have been expected he was neither prolix nor prosy. He spoke of the deep sorrow which he and his associates had felt at the time of Channay's

trouble because of their inability to do anything to help him. He, Channay, of his own will, had taken a great responsibility, which subsequent events had entirely justified, but which the law had regarded from a grim and unbending point of view. However, that was in the past. Gilbert Channay was back with them again, for such indiscretion as he might have been guilty—and he himself ventured confidently to state that he considered Channay's offence never amounted to more than an indiscretion—he had amply atoned, and it was up to them to bid him welcome and to see that he took the place in their lives and thoughts to which, as a thoroughly good fellow, he was entitled. There was a little more in the same vein, all very eloquent, very tactful, and delivered in those silvery and rounded phrases which had earned for Heatherton the reputation of being quite one of the foremost of after-dinner speakers. When he sat down, having proposed the health of their guest, there was uproarious applause, which was redoubled when the latter rose to his feet. There was a quietness and reserve in Channay's deportment amongst this gathering of men, inclined for once to let themselves go a little, to find in this reunion an excuse for something approaching licence, which at any other time might have seemed to them ominous. It was certainly a moment which none of those present ever forgot. The strangers' dining-room at the Club was a very handsome apartment with high windows luxuriously curtained, on one side, and with a valuable collection of oil paintings around the other walls. The table in the middle of the room had been extended to accommodate precisely the number of guests present. Its profuse decorations had excited everyone's admiration and the Club's famous twin magnum decanters in front of the Chairman made a brave show. The overhead lights had been turned out, and the illumination was soft and impressive. The waiters had left the room, and the silence which followed the dying away of that prolonged and welcoming applause was curiously intense. Everyone was keenly interested in what Channay might have to say. They expected a few words of gratitude, especially directed towards Lord Heatherton, who sat sipping his port, a little flushed but well content; a slight reference to his absence, relieved, perhaps, with a flash of humour; some expression of his plans for the future; an allusion or two to some of his older friends who were present. Nothing of the sort happened. With Channay's first sentence, spoken without a note of emotion or even feeling, the warning was delivered. Everyone felt that the unexpected was going to happen. It did.

"Lord Heatherton and gentlemen," he began, "I am more ashamed of myself this evening than when I stood in the dock, and was sent to prison on a technical charge of fraud. Then, at least, I was, according to my lights, so far as anyone can be who is engaged in the great game of finance, an honest man. To-night, I am a trickster. Under any other circumstances it would have been a great joy to me to meet so many of my old friends. Knowing, as I do, that I am

here in an utterly false position, it has been and is still a very painful experience."

Already a slow change was visible in the faces of the men grouped around the table. Their air of pleased and curious anticipation had disappeared. They were listening in faint but growing perplexity. It was certainly a very singular opening, this. Heatherton, more than anyone, was conscious of some sinister portent. He had abandoned his careless and easy attitude, and was leaning forward with his elbows upon the table, his cigar burning unnoticed between his fingers.

"I am here," Channay went on simply, "as the result of an infamous bargain to which I have been only nominally a participant. These are the facts. As you all know, I alone was left to bear the brunt of what I still consider a very justifiable attempt to make money for my Syndicate. But what you do not know is this—that I became the victim of a scandalous conspiracy on the part of every other member of the Syndicate, including Lord Heatherton. The plot was simple enough. Every member of the Syndicate, except one, agreed not to give evidence on my behalf. Everyone was to attest, if called upon, to my guilt, and during that temporary incarceration, which they could easily have prevented, the funds of the Syndicate including my own possessions were to be divided amongst them. I am not telling you a fairy story, gentlemen. I have here the most iniquittous agreement that was ever penned, signed by every member of the Syndicate except one. The one dissentient, I may remark, was not our host of this evening—Lord Heatherton. I shall ask you to examine this copy of the original agreement which I hold here, if anyone should desire it, for your inspection."

With unfaltering fingers Channay passed around the table a typewritten copy of the document which he had bought from Isham. Everyone received the sheet and examined it, at first a little dazed, afterwards with swift comprehension of its brutal cynicism. There was a little murmur. Many eyes were turned towards Heatherton, who remained, however, speechless. After a moment or two, Channay continued.

"The plot I have revealed to you," he said, "was only partially successful. Deserted by everyone on whom I had the right to rely, I went to prison; but, alas, a great disappointment was to come. The same arrangement which made me alone responsible for the affairs of the Siamese Corporation, made me the sole nominal custodian of those funds which had gone into the Nyasa Mines. The shares had been applied for in my name, and allotted to me personally, and not a soul except myself and the lawyer who held my power of attorney could deal with them. They remained in my name, except those that my brokers decided to dispose of, until my release. Since that time various members of the Syndicate which bore my name, ignorant of the fact that their

perfidy was known to me, have attempted to claim their portion of the shares. Amongst them I come to our host to-night. Lord Heatherton is a very clever man. He realised the situation perfectly. He knew that without a *quid pro quo* he had very little chance of obtaining his portion of the Syndicate's profits, of which, by-the-bye, I believe that he is grievously in need. Accordingly, he came to me and proposed a bargain. 'Pay me my thirty thousand pounds,' he said, 'and I will put you right with the world. I will use my influence in club-land, in society and in the City. I will start by giving you a dinner, and in return be so kind as to advance me five thousand pounds at once, of which I am badly in need.' . . . That is the story of my misfortune, and the story of my presence here to-night. The renewal of your friendship, inspired and spurred on by Lord Heatherton in return for my cheque of five thousand pounds, I do not value. I decline the consideration of any man upon such terms, and my presence at this dinner to-night has not been for a single moment with the object of worming my way back into my old place in your esteem, but simply to expose the lack of morals, the pernicious habit of mind, and the utterly false attitude towards life of your successful but very infamous friend, Lord Heatherton."

Before anyone could realise what was happening, Channay, who was seated nearest to the door, had left the room. A sort of paralysis had fallen upon the little company, and no one attempted to stop him. A moment later, however, one or two of them rose. They stood about in groups, talking. Heatherton, his cigar cold in his fingers, his face dark and troubled, essayed to join them.

"Can I say a few words?" he asked.

One of his guests turned towards him.

"I don't think it would be of any use Heatherton," he said, "unless you could disprove what Channay has said, and I don't think you could do that."

"No use at all," another man echoed.

"I'm going to try to find Channay," a third added.

One by one they slipped quietly from the room. Heatherton watched them with cynical eyes, back in his place, face to face for the first time in his life with a position with which even his Machiavellian subtlety could show him no safe means of dealing. He walked slowly homewards, turning the matter over in his mind, seeking for some means to destroy Channay's plain statement, some method of rehabilitating himself with those twenty men. In his library his secretary, awaiting him impatiently, turned at his entrance with a little exclamation of triumph.

"A special messenger has brought this letter," he announced, holding it out.

Heatherton took it into his hands, broke the seal and read. He had known beforehand what it might contain; the one invitation to gain which the whole of

his life had been devoted. He sat down in his chair with the letter in his hand. His secretary watched him in surprise. He had imagined a moment of mutual joyfulness and self-congratulation. There was no trace of anything of the sort in his chief's face. He ran through feverishly the list of the men whom he had invited to that ghastly dinner and his heart sank.

"Is anything wrong, sir?" his secretary asked.

"A slight complication," he observed, with an effort. "Leave me for half an hour, Angus."

For half an hour Heatherton sat twisting the letter between his fingers, thinking vain and futile thoughts. Then his secretary came back bearing another letter.

"This has just come from the Duke of Oakham, from the Carlton Club," he announced. "The messenger said that there was no answer."

Heatherton tore open the envelope. There were only a few lines, written evidently within the last hour. They were from the Duke, the Vice-President of the dinner, to whom, only a few hours ago, he had been 'My dear Heatherton': —

> "*Dear Lord Heatherton,*
>
> "*Unless you are in a position to absolutely disprove the statements and story, including the* RAISON D'ÊTRE *and consideration for the dinner to which you invited us this evening, it is my own opinion and the opinion of every one of the undersigned that you will do well not to accept the invitation from the Prime Minister, which I gather has reached you this evening.*
>
> "OAKHAM."

There was this much of courage and fineness in Heatherton's disposition. The idea of a tarnished life, a struggle amongst second rate people, discarded by the best, always under a cloud, was impossible. He tore up the Duke's letter, left that other very flattering invitation upon his writing-table, opened the secret door of his desk, loaded his revolver with firm fingers and, seated in his chair, blew out his brains.

CHAPTER VIII
THE GREAT ABDUCTION

Mr. Martin Fogg, almost inconspicuous, notwithstanding his tie, in such a maelstrom of variegated humanity, sat before a small marble table outside the Café de la Paix. He had a drink of some sort by his side and a packet of cigarettes upon the table. His immediate object, however, was not refreshment. He was seated in that precise spot because he had once been told that no person could remain in Paris for longer than three days, without passing at least once that particular corner of the Boulevard des Italiens. Martin Fogg was testing the truth of this statement and growing irritable under the strain. He was a stranger in Paris, ignorant of its language and only mildly tolerant of its institutions. Even its types, presented to him here in somewhat flamboyant fashion, failed to interest him. He was tired of the *midinnettes* with their bandboxes, the *gamins* of the streets, the ceaseless flow of sightseers, the exaggerated charms of itinerant femininity, and the solemn-faced artist with long black hair, Spanish hat and cloak and a portfolio of drawings under his arm, on his way to try his luck amongst the *nouveaux riche* of the other hemisphere at the Grand Hotel. Yet, in a single moment all his discontent and irritation vanished. If he could have met the didactic originator of that sweeping statement he would have grasped him by the hand and applauded his knowledge of the world, for suddenly, and when he was least expecting it, the man of whom he was in search came sauntering along the pavement. . . . The rest was easy; merely a reversion to the tricks and skill of his younger days, when he had first passed from the ranks of the Metropolitan Police to the lower division of the detective force. He had already paid his bill and scarcely anyone noticed him leave his seat and join the throng. His task was at no time difficult, for the man whom he followed made use of no subterfuges and, beyond the fact that he occasionally loitered outside a shop window, pursued a straight and unembarrassing course. Within a quarter of an hour of his passing the Café de la Paix, he had entered the portals of a very famous hotel in the neighbourhood of the Place Vendôme, and his pursuer, who had even watched him take a key from the *concierge*, had accomplished the first object of his visit to Paris.

With a sigh of satisfaction Martin Fogg crossed the Square, made his way to the enquiry counter of another scarcely less famous hotel, and sent his name up to Mr. Gilbert Channay. In a few minutes he was ushered into a somewhat ornate but comfortable salon; attractive enough in its way but a little too blue,

a little too white, and with a little too much gilt around the panels and cornices. Gilbert Channay, who had already started to make his evening toilette, came out from his bathroom in a dressing robe and greeted his visitor with some surprise.

"What the devil are you doing here, Fogg?" he demanded. "Sit down, won't you? Have a drink?"

"Thank you, no," was the firm reply. "I've been obliged to overdose myself with *apéritifs* already. I've been sitting outside the Café de la Paix for the last three hours."

"What on earth for?" Gilbert Channay asked, his eyes fixed in fascinated fashion upon his visitor's tie. "Have you been studying the modes in French neckgear?"

"The night I arrived," Martin Fogg confided, "in the American bar of the Grand Hotel, I heard a man say that once in three days every visitor to Paris passed in front of the Café de la Paix. I sat there to test the truth of the statement."

"Successfully?" Channay inquired. "I've passed there myself twice this afternoon."

"I saw you. I also saw the person of whom I was in search."

"And whom might that have been?"

"Where are you dining to-night?" Martin Fogg enquired, with apparent irrelevance.

His companion's eyebrows were slightly uplifted. He answered after a moment's hesitation.

"With a lady, whom I met on the night of my arrival here."

"The Marquise de Valborde?"

"Have you been spying on me?" Channay demanded.

"I have taken some account of your doings," Martin Fogg admitted slowly. "Just as well, perhaps. I offer no apology. You must remember that we are still partners."

"I do not for a moment deny it," Gilbert Channay assured him. "I hope that I shall never forget my indebtedness to you. At the same time I cannot see that there is any enterprise at present which calls for our co-operation."

"Do you know who the Marquise is?" Martin Fogg asked bluntly.

"I know that she is the widow of the Marquis de Valborde and has plenty of friends here," Gilbert Channay replied.

"She is also," his visitor declared, "the sister of Nicholas Euphratos."

"The devil she is!" Channay exclaimed, genuinely startled. "How on earth do you know that?"

"I've been rummaging about a little at Scotland Yard. You seem to have forgotten that there are still a couple of men who fancy that you owe them

thirty thousand pounds. I haven't. Nicholas Euphratos is one of them, and he is in Paris. I saw him not an hour ago. He is staying at the Hotel Albert, across the Square."

Gilbert Channay's eyes suddenly lightened.

"An adventure!" he murmured. . . .

The adventure, if one it was to be, was slow in developing. The Hotel Valborde was in one of the quiet but still fashionable streets of older Paris, and the dinner, as his hostess had promised, was a *tête-á-tête* one. They were served in a handsome but slightly sombre dining-room, and waited upon by an English butler and footman in the somewhat faded liveries of the House. The Marquise—a very beautiful woman; pale, with black hair and deep blue eyes, a figure of the Italian type, thin, yet retaining the charm of unexpected curves—was a delightful hostess, witty and vivacious, interested in her companion, perfectly natural, yet always dignified. After the meal was over, Channay was left for a few moments alone to try some burgundy which had been bequeathed to her by her grandfather. Later on he was shown, not into the formal salon, but into her boudoir, a room on the first floor with a balcony looking out over the gardens. The curtains were closed now, however, and the Marquise motioned him to seat himself on the sofa by her side. She handed him coffee and cigarettes, and a footman served him with brandy in a tall glass. When at last they were absolutely alone it seemed to Channay that the moment which he had been expecting was imminent. There was a subtle change in her manner. She leaned back in her corner of the divan with an air half weary, half of purposeful *abandon*. The smile of the hostess had left her lips. She was suddenly a little tired.

"Well," she announced, "I have finished with entertaining you. We are hostess and guest no longer. I am going to be very frank. What do you think of me, Mr. Gilbert Channay?"

"I can answer you best," he replied, "by pointing out that I am here. Yours is the first invitation I have accepted, except from very old friends indeed, since that unfortunate hiatus in my social career."

She smiled.

"Of which you took particularly good care that I should be informed," she observed. "You are like all men of honour, Mr. Channay—a little over-sensitive."

He made no reply. After a moment she went on.

"I like you very much. I hope that you have not been disappointed in your visit, that you have found some pleasure in my company. . . . No, do not attempt a compliment. Anything you said would, of necessity, sound obvious. Still, all Paris cannot lie. I suppose I retain in some measure my good-looks.

When I like people as I like you I certainly find pleasure in talking to them. I find pleasure in having them near me. And now, please be at your kindest, for I am going to make a confession."

So the moment was coming! The change in his face showed only in the lines about his mouth, the slight hardening of the eyes. She looked at him in silence, a very seductive little smile parting her lips.

"You are a man," she murmured. "I like you when you look stern. Really, I think I shall have to be very careful, Mr. Gilbert Channay. Women have always spoilt you, I suppose."

"Their opportunities," he began——

She waved him back into silence. Her fingers rested for a moment as though by accident upon his arm, and relapsed upon the divan almost with reluctance.

"Here is my confession, then," she continued. "It was not by accident that I met you on the night of your arrival. I asked your cousin for an invitation. I wished to know you. You are, in fact, a very important person to me—to us both."

"Both?" he repeated.

"To myself more, perhaps, and in a different way to any that I had imagined," she confessed softly, "and to my brother, Nicholas Euphratos."

He showed the proper amount of surprise. He was, as a matter of fact, taken aback by her candour.

"Nicholas Euphratos!" he exclaimed. "You really mean that you are his sister?"

"I am his sister," she acknowledged. "Nicholas lived in London for many years—went into finance there. My father always had an Hotel in Paris, but we lived in Buenos Ayres. I was married when I was quite young and then Paris engrossed me. I was always very fond of Nicholas though."

"You know, I presume," Gilbert Channay enquired, "that your brother was a business associate of mine?"

"I know it," she replied. "I know, also, that he treated you badly."

"Anything more than that?"

"I believe," she continued, "that you owe him something like thirty thousand pounds."

"From one point of view, that also is quite true," Channay admitted.

"I told you that I was going to be very frank," she proceeded, with a wistful little smile. "Nicholas and I are the only two of the family left. My husband, as you know, was killed in the war. His estates have gone, one by one. There is only this house left, and a château on the Riviera. Year by year the little he left me decreases. I keep up my position, but at times it is a struggle. Nicholas is practically a pauper. He has come back to Paris from a trip to Buenos Ayres

with scarcely a franc in his pocket. You are his one hope. I almost said ‘our’ hope.”

“Nicholas is in Paris, then?”

“He is in this house,” the Marquise confided. “He will come when I send for him—not before.”

Gilbert Channay was silent. The woman who watched him felt her concern grow. She leaned a little forward. Once more her hand rested upon his arm.

“Must you look so stem?” she pleaded. “Nothing that I can say for Nicholas would make any difference, because I do not understand—only that he behaved badly—but can’t you forget. Those days are over. You have still youth. You have everything that man needs for happiness. Can’t you be generous, Mr. Channay?”

Her voice had become a caress, the touch of her fingers a clasp of his hand, and with the realisation of her unspoken flattery he seemed to feel himself growing colder. He answered her lightly, however. There was even a smile upon his lips.

“Perhaps I had better see your brother,” he suggested.

“Now?” she asked, with a faint yet petulant frown.

“It is perhaps one of those things which are better finished with,” he replied.

She rose reluctantly.

“Afterwards,” she begged, “you will not hurry away—we can be friends, can we not, you and I and Nicholas? He has suffered so much. He thought so much of you.”

“I am a very selfish person,” he sighed, as he anticipated her movement towards the bell. “I had rather fancied that I was the one who had suffered most.”

“If I had known you in those days,” she told him softly, “I think I should have been more miserable than anyone.”

Nicholas Euphratos was unchanged. His likeness to his sister as he entered the room and came somewhat hesitatingly forward was sufficiently marked. He was still wonderfully good-looking in rather an oriental fashion, dressed with an almost over-scrupulous regard to the niceties and details of his toilette, smooth of speech, feline of movement.

“My dear Channay,” he exclaimed, “I hope that you are going to shake hands.”

“Shall we leave that for the moment,” was the colourless reply. “Your sister said that you would like to see me.”

The young man threw himself into an easy-chair.

“I have come back from Buenos Ayres for that reason,” he announced. “I

see that Nyasas are higher than ever. What a stroke of genius your purchase was!"

"Instinct," Channay commented. "I was always very convinced about them, you know. You remember the day, perhaps, when we decided that I should sign those Siamese Corporation balance sheets so as to be in a position to apply for the full number."

The young man moved uncomfortably in his chair.

"I remember everything," he admitted. "I am not going to try any bluff. It is a hard thing to say before my sister, but I willingly acknowledge, Channay, that I behaved like a blackguard. It was really Isham's scheme, but we were all equally to blame."

"Your sister understands the transaction?" Gilbert Channay asked quietly.

"More or less," the young man answered.

"Still, lest there should be any mistake, let me explain this to you, Marquise," Channay continued. "For the sake of dividing the whole of the Nyasa profits amongst themselves and getting rid of me, my business associates committed what I should term moral perjury, as a result of which I spent three years in prison. But," he went on, with a faint smile, "there is always a humorous side to every tragedy. The humour was that the Nyasa properties had been bought in my name—I being the only one able to raise the thirty or forty thousand pounds necessary at that moment—and the shares had never been transferred. The consequence was that when they came to divide the booty, there was none. The Nyasa shares belonged, not, as everyone thought they would, to the members of the Syndicate, but to me. They still belong to me."

"Every member of the Syndicate," Nicholas Euphratos said, hoarsely, "was entitled to a proportion of the shares by paying the par price. So far, not one of us has received an allotment."

Gilbert Channay leaned towards the bell, and made a low bow to his hostess.

"And not one of you ever will," he declared, as he took his swift and unexpected departure.

With the coming of Gilbert Channay there passed from Catherine's somewhat depressed consciousness the Paris of the great tourists' hotel, the horde of uniformed guides, the shops which advertised their English-speaking assistants, the Paris of *chars-à-bancs* and sightseers and superficialities. She found herself seeing the city with entirely different eyes. She penetrated into restaurants and cafés, many of them not in the least gorgeous or extravagant, where atmosphere reigned supreme and "roast-beef anglais" was not upon the menu. She saw something of French art and architecture from an individual

point of view. She was even inducted into the mysteries of the Rue de la Paix and of the inner circle beyond, where shops become temples of art and none but true disciples are welcome. The change was gradual enough, and culminated in the removal of her father and herself from the great hotel in the Boulevard to a smaller one near the Champs Elysées. Here, one evening, Gilbert Channay had a sudden revelation. He had called to take them out to dinner and was drinking an *apéritif* with the former in their small sitting-room. In the midst of their conversation an inner door was opened and Catherine appeared unexpectedly. Her father stared at her open-mouthed. Even Channay was frankly bewildered. She was wearing for the first time one of her new evening gowns. It was scarcely *décolleté* and yet the whole genius of the brain which had fashioned it seemed to have been devoted to the task of combining an absolutely adequate modesty with implacable and almost disturbing suggestions of the gracefully poised body and long limbs which it was its art to conceal. Channay, who had seen her standing bare-legged in the pools at Blickley, seen her more than once with the wind blowing her short skirts around her knees, had a sudden sense of shock, followed by a quick masculine appreciation of this amazing metamorphosis. Her courage in moments of danger, her singular honesty of speech and purpose, her clear, wholesome outlook upon life, had made her companionship a thing which he had missed more than he had cared to admit, but the Rue de la Paix had miraculously given her sex.

"My God!" her father gasped.

She looked away from Channay, on whom as though unconsciously her eyes had first rested.

"Is that all either of you has to say?" she asked.

"You look so damned different," her parent muttered.

"Monsieur Félix is a great artist," Gilbert Channay remarked, with a little smile across at her. "You must remember that your father and I are elderly people, and we had forgotten the possibilities. Félix has turned our little day by day companion into a very beautiful woman."

She turned quickly away but not before he had seen something in her eyes almost stupefying. She moved to the tray upon the table and took up the wineglass which had been left for her.

"Well," she said, "these are only externals, you know. Monsieur Félix, when he saw me this afternoon, was rather discouraging. He told me that I was at an awkward age, that he had more trouble in dressing an unmarried girl of twenty-five than a woman of fifty. Madame was even franker. She declared that it was impossible to dress *la jeune fille* after she had passed the age of nineteen. . . . Hadn't we better start?"

They dined at a restaurant in the Place Gaillon and afterwards went to the

Capucines to see a play, the story of which Channay told them over their coffee. Catherine was a little quieter than usual, fascinated by the intimacy of the tiny theatre and the personalities of the select audience. She leaned across once to their guide.

"Tell me who is the very beautiful woman in the box opposite who bowed to you?" she enquired.

Channay smiled.

"Her name is the Marquise de Valborde," he confided. "Your father knows her."

"The sister of Nicholas Euphratos!" she exclaimed.

Channay nodded.

"My leave-taking last time we met," he said, "was so abrupt that I wasn't quite sure whether I remained upon the list of Madame's acquaintances."

"You are even, I should imagine, in favour," Catherine remarked, a little dryly. "She is beckoning to you with her fan."

The curtain had just dropped and the various members of the audience were resolving themselves into a little stream of promenaders. Channay rose, after a moment's hesitation, to his feet.

"It seems that I must pay my respects," he murmured. . . .

The Marquise was alone when he entered the box. She withdrew at once behind the curtain and motioned him to a seat by her side.

"Who is your very attractive companion?" she asked abruptly.

"An English girl who is wearing her first Parisian frock," he replied.

The Marquise fanned herself for a moment.

"Who took her to Félix?" she demanded. "Someone who understood."

"It was, I," he admitted.

"My brother was here a few minutes ago," she went on, after a moment's pause. "He told me that the man with you is your watch-dog who never lets you out of his sight, whether you know it or not."

"He is a very faithful friend," Channay observed, "but I don't think that I need any special protection."

"There," she ventured, dropping her voice a little and glancing towards the door as though to be sure that it was closed, "I do not altogether agree with you."

"Your brother, perhaps," he enquired, "is weaving plans for my destruction?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"After all," she said, "why should I interfere? You are a man who has shown himself indifferent to me, and Nicholas is at least my brother. Yet if I dared I would give you a word of advice."

"I am very attentive," he assured her.

“To-night,” she asked, “must you remain with those people? Nicholas has deserted me. The sight of you and your watch-dog sent him off. Will you drive home with me?”

He hesitated.

“You are alone?”

“I have explained that Nicholas has deserted me. I am not used to being unescorted.”

“I will take you home with pleasure,” he promised.

Her face suddenly changed. A slight tenseness faded from it. Her dark blue eyes opened and her lips parted in a smile.

“You mean it?” she exclaimed. “But Mademoiselle?”

“Mademoiselle is not accustomed to look to me for companionship,” he replied. “You forget that I belong to another generation. Besides, it was agreed only at dinner-time that we should return home to-night after the theatre. We are supping out to-morrow night in the Montmartre and going on to the ball, and we were late last night.”

The smile faded.

“How fortunate!” she murmured. “I will wait for you here, then, at the close of the performance.”

“Are you in love with that girl?” the Marquise asked him a little abruptly, as he took his place beside her in the automobile an hour later.

Gilbert Channay sighed.

“Madame,” he protested, “you flatter me. If I were at the age when one was capable of such a primitive form of emotion——”

She stopped him with a little exclamation.

“Forgive me,” she interrupted, “I might know that you would not be natural. You will never be natural with me. Nicholas says that no man living has even been your friend, nor any woman either. You live for yourself and with yourself. Is that true?”

“Circumstances,” he admitted drily, “have certainly driven me to rely upon myself and my own society to rather an unusual extent.”

“I meant before that,” she explained. “And yet with you it is only a question of the right woman. You would have the gift of caring—for it is a gift. Listen, Mr. Channay. We have only a few minutes. I shall not offer to entertain you to-night, because I think if I invited you to enter my house, you would not come. Yet I want to say something to you. May I?”

“If you please,” he begged.

“I too have passed that age of primitive emotions,” she continued softly. “The worst of it is that when one passes it one only plunges into the deeper waters. We will leave that alone, however. I have a liking for you. In the story

of what transpired between you and my brother and those others, my sympathies are with you. We all want money—I, my brother and his friends. My brother would like to get it from you. I do not think that he will succeed. I have a sort of fancy that you are one of those men against whom schemes fail."

"You are going to tell me," he asked softly—

"Nothing," she answered. "I am simply warning you. I should like you to leave Paris."

"Where can one go?"

"Where every sensible person goes," she replied. "Go south. Now comes the selfish part of what I have to say. I have a beautiful château—an historical place—close to the sea, not very far from Nice. There are only a few servants there, it is out of repair, uncomfortable I dare say, but still magnificent and with a beauty which I think you would appreciate. It is 'to let.' Take it for three months."

"It is an idea," he murmured.

"You can entertain there," she went on. "If you invite me I shall certainly be your guest."

"Who are your agents?" he enquired.

"Meriton, in the Rue Scribe. It will cost you a hundred thousand francs or so for three months. It is nothing to you. It will pay a few of my bills and it will get you out of Paris."

They had arrived at their destination. Her hand was resting upon his. He raised it to his lips.

"To-morrow," he promised, "I shall call upon Monsieur Meriton."

In the moonlight, the country that lay between the château and the sea—a thin pencil of iridescent silver—seemed to have gained in charm where it lost in outline. It was like a blurred, fantastic garden, all jumbled together; the vineyards and the cornfields, the strips of meadowland, the half-dozen villages, all clustered around what seemed to be a grotesque, almost an artificial eminence; a hill rising from the plains without apparent reason, on the slopes of which only a few lights were left glimmering. Near at hand the ancient terrace was swept by overhanging branches of the mimosa trees, whose fragrance seemed all the more potent now that the sun had passed and the winds were still. At the further end of the terrace, sharply silhouetted against the clear sky, was the ancient part of the château—the keep, solemn and menacing. Catherine drew her shawl about her with a little shiver.

"It can't be real," she exclaimed suddenly. "I feel as though we had wandered into one of the scenes of a pantomime, and as though some hideous pasteboard ogre would appear on the terrace at any moment."

Channay smiled.

"It's a marvellous old place," he admitted. "I had no idea that the Valbordes were such an ancient family. François signed a treaty with the Genoese in that keep."

"Have the keys come yet?" she enquired.

"Not yet," he replied, with a momentary irritation. "I ask Pierre for them every morning and he replies in the same fashion. 'Not yet, monsieur, but perhaps to-morrow.' . . . How would you like to live here altogether, Miss Catherine?"

She shook her head, vaguely troubled.

"How could one live here comfortably amidst the ghosts of other people's grandeur?" she demanded. "I was born in Norbury—such a dirty insignificant-looking little street with neighbours on each side. Here, when I lie down at night and look at these tapestried walls and know that a Queen has slept in my room, I feel like an intruder. And besides," she went on—"don't think that I don't love it here, because I feel that it is the most beautiful thing that has ever happened, to wake and see the sunshine every morning and this glorious country and the mountains beyond—but at night, every night, I have the same feeling, as though there were something sinister about the place. Even the few servants, though they are so wonderfully polite, don't seem real somehow."

Gilbert Channay laughed softly.

"It is time," he decided, "that we took you out of this land of enchantment and gave you an opportunity of wearing some of your marvellous frocks. To-morrow we will go to Monte Carlo."

"Perhaps the keys may arrive," she reminded him.

"Then to-morrow we will explore the keep, and the next day we will go to Monte Carlo," he proposed.

She drew the lace wrap which she was wearing a little more tightly around her shoulders and leaned for a moment over the parapet, gazing down into the black gulf of the gorge below. Channay, pausing under pretext of lighting a cigarette, found himself, not for the first time, puzzled by some subtle, yet unmistakable change, not only in her appearance but in her expression. She reminded him less than ever of the girl whom he had first seen seated upon his boat at Blickley, when Martin Fogg had paid his second visit to the Grange. The easy confidence of sunbasking youth seemed to have given place to a more thoughtful, more nervous, more enigmatical expression. It was as though the week or two which they had passed in this wonderful château, with its beautiful setting, its rich historical associations, had awakened a new vein of imagination. Yet, even beyond that, there was something in her eyes which eluded him. . . . Martin Fogg from the further end of the terrace waved his arm. Through the trees on the hillside came faint splashes of light, and the hum of an approaching motor reached their ears. Channay listened without particular

interest.

"People returning to Grasse from Monte Carlo," he observed. "I thought we'd go there ourselves to-morrow, unless the keys of the keep come."

Martin Fogg grunted.

"I can't understand what that fellow Pierre says, of course," he declared, "but it is my belief he never means to let us see inside the place. . . ."

Martin Fogg was wrong. As a matter of fact he spent the night there.

Gilbert Channay returned to consciousness the next morning with a slight headache, a sense of dizziness, and that curious confusion of thought which comes from finding oneself in unfamiliar surroundings. He sat up and looked around him. The apartment in which he had awakened was barely half the size of his customary bedchamber. The panelling upon the walls was much older and the furniture entirely different. Furthermore, there was no carpet on what seemed to be a stone floor, and in place of the ample windows through which he had been accustomed to wander on to a spacious balcony there was nothing but a small slit in the wall and a great iron bar. He sat up and tried to collect his thoughts. All he could remember was a vague impression of waking a few hours previously to find three or four people in his room, a sickening odour of anæsthetics, the sound of a familiar voice and then sleep again. He swung himself out of bed and tried the handle of the door. As he had half expected it was locked. He looked round in vain for a bell. Gradually the situation began to dawn upon him. Rather to his own amazement his first impulse was to chuckle. There was a certain exhilaration in feeling that he was back again in the throes of an adventure. Without a doubt he was in the keep. His clothes and personal belongings were all scattered about the place; even his pocket-book was there on a table by the side of the bed. The only things missing were his revolver and his small automatic pistol. He wrapped his dressing gown around him, and sat down to await developments. Presently there was a curious noise in the wall opposite. A portion of the panelling swung inwards disclosing a small grille, through which a tray was pushed.

"Is that Pierre?" Channay demanded.

"At monsieur's service," was the response from the other side of the grille, now closed.

"Have you brought me plenty of rolls? I am hungry."

"Monsieur will find himself served as usual," was the grave reply. "There is also honey."

Channay inspected his breakfast and approved. He carried the tray to the table by the side of the bed.

"Don't go, Pierre," he begged. "Where are the others?"

"In rooms which correspond to yours, monsieur."

“Any trouble in their—removal?”

“None whatever, monsieur. The arrangements were excellent. Monsieur Fogg did not wake until I took him his breakfast. He has been talking a great deal. What he says I do not know, as I have no English, but he spoke very loudly.”

“And Mademoiselle?”

“Mademoiselle seems amused,” Pierre confided.

Channay poured out his coffee and began to butter his roll.

“Am I right in imagining that visitors arrived last night?” he enquired.

“Monsieur Euphratos and a friend,” Pierre assented. “Monsieur Euphratos desired me to present his compliments and he would wait upon monsieur at eleven o’clock.”

“Capital!” Channay approved. “Pleasant fellow, Euphratos! I shall be glad to see him. What about cigarettes?”

“Monsieur will find his own box in the top left-hand drawer,” Pierre replied.

“Is there a sitting-room to this suite?” Channay enquired. “It seems to me it would be jollier if one could see something of the others.”

Apparently Pierre considered the question frivolous and without further speech he took his leave. Channay finished his breakfast, discovered an unnoticed door on the left of his bed, leading into a small, bare bath and toilet room dressed in leisurely fashion and prepared to receive his visitor. At eleven o’clock the panel once more swung open and Euphratos looked through the opening.

“Good-morning, Mr. Gilbert Channay,” he said.

“Good-morning,” Channay replied politely. “Why stay out there? Come in and talk.”

Euphratos coughed.

“I think not,” he decided.

“It seems a very uncomfortable situation for a business chat,” his prisoner grumbled, dragging a chair across the floor. “However I’m better off than you are. I can sit down whilst you have to stand. . . . My dear fellow, you’re not looking well,” he went on, noticing the other’s unshaven chin and the lines under his eyes. “Motoring all night, I suppose.”

“Never mind about that,” was the curt rejoinder. “I am here on business.”

Gilbert Channay sighed.

“Dear me,” he said, “and I thought this was just a visit of courtesy—that your sister, perhaps, was anxious to know whether we were comfortable. Well, go ahead.”

“I understand,” Euphratos began, “that you have expressed your approval of the château.”

“Never so contented in my life,” Channay assured him.

“It has occurred to my sister and myself,” Euphratos continued, “that you might like to buy the property.”

“It’s quite an idea,” Channay agreed. “What’s the price.”

Euphratos coughed once more.

“Ten million francs,” he announced.

Channay whistled softly.

“Capital!” he exclaimed. “I wondered what the scheme was. It’s ingenious, Euphratos—it’s very ingenious indeed!”

“I have all the papers with me,” the latter went on. “I should require a cheque for five million francs, or its equivalent, down, and your signature to the deeds.”

“I see,” Channay assented. “And supposing I should by any chance not feel like burdening myself with landed property just now or that I should think the price excessive?”

“You like plain-speaking?”

“It’s been a weakness of mine all my life,” Channay admitted.

“Very well, then. Whilst you were making up your mind, every day here your position would be made a little less comfortable. Also the positions of Mr. Martin Fogg and Miss Fogg.”

Channay’s eyes flashed for the first time.

“Euphratos,” he said, “there is just one thing which must be understood between us. Whether we deal or whether we do not deal, Miss Fogg is to be treated with the utmost respect.”

Even through the grille there was something in the expression of Euphratos which brought red before Channay’s eyes.

“Miss Fogg’s treatment up to the present and for the immediate future is and will be everything that could be desired,” Euphratos declared. “You are taking this matter lightly though, Channay, and I want you to understand this. I know I’m taking risks but I’m taking them because I have to. I must have money and yours will do for me as well as anyone’s, especially as part of it is only my own back again. We won’t discuss that. I only want to say that I’m in earnest.”

Channay left his chair for a moment, crossed the room and lit another cigarette.

“Supposing I consented,” he mused, “wrote the cheque and signed the document, we should I presume, be at liberty to depart.”

“Immediately the cheque was cleared,” was the dry response.

“Do you imagine that I should then carry out the purchase?” Channay asked curiously.

“We have gone into that carefully. You see, your signature would be

attached to the documents necessary and your story as to the present situation would, I am convinced, be absolutely discredited. Everyone of the servants in this house would do more than commit perjury for my sake and my sister's. They will swear, one and all, that you never left your apartment, that you frequently discussed the purchase of the château and that they heard you come to the decision to give the price. No one will believe that any pressure of this—I must confess somewhat unusual—sort had been put upon you. They will simply believe that you have changed your mind and want to evade your bargain. As you know, your countrypeople are not particularly popular over here just now and I think that the French Court of Law would very soon decide in my favour."

Channay considered for a few moments.

"It is a fair gamble," he admitted. "Can I talk this over with my friend Mr. Fogg?"

"It is not necessary," Euphrates replied "Mr. Fogg is not your friend. He is simply an ex-private detective whom you employ as a kind of watch-dog. It is perhaps in his favour that he happens to have an attractive daughter."

"Euphratos!" Channay began warningly.

The other shrugged his shoulders.

"Spoken with the utmost respect," he observed.

There was a brief pause. Gilbert Channay sighed and looked towards the little slit in the wall.

"Beautiful day outside, isn't it?"

"Beautiful."

"And to think that I can't see it," Channay went on. "That wonderful garden of yours, with the masses of daffodils, and roses and violets I walk there for an hour after breakfast every morning Euphratos."

"You can walk there now if you sign these papers," Euphratos reminded him. "My lawyer is below, and plenty of witnesses."

"What a scoundrel your lawyer must be!" Channay observed.

"He is," Euphratos assented. "He would be of no use to me if he weren't. Shall I send for him?"

"Not at present. I want to talk to Martin Fogg."

"You can say a few words to him through the grille here in my presence," Euphratos suggested.

"Excellent!"

Euphratos departed and returned in a few minutes with Channay's fellow prisoner. Martin Fogg was unkempt and picturesquely blasphemous.

"It's all very well for you, Mr. Channay," he groaned. "I'm the man who ought to have been looking out for this sort of thing. To think that I should let you walk into a booby trap like this!"

“My fault entirely,” Channay declared politely. “Explain your offer, Euphratos.”

Euphratos explained. Martin Fogg listened with pursed-up lips and an air of rigid attention.

“How much is ten million francs?” he asked.

“About a hundred and thirty thousand pounds,” Channay replied.

“And what is the place really worth?”

Channay considered.

“I should think about forty thousand. I presume the farms——”

“The farms are not included. They are already disposed of,” Euphratos interrupted.

“Twenty-five thousand pounds then.”

Martin Fogg reflected for several moments.

“My idea is,” he said at last, “that Mr. Euphratos won’t care to run this risk for longer than he can help. We’re fairly comfortable. Hold out until to-morrow night. He’ll come down in price.”

“Your advice is bad,” Euphratos pronounced coldly. “The deeds are all made out. The figure will not be changed, and I beg to warn you,” he went on, “that your positions and the position of Miss Fogg will become less comfortable and less secure with every hour of delay.”

Euphratos was gazing fixedly at Channay. Martin Fogg took a stealthy step into the background. He too looked full at his partner and his eyelid quivered in a distinct and definite wink. The latter appeared to come to a decision.

“I am not, perhaps, so rich a man as you think, Euphratos,” he said. “I shall consider this matter for an hour or two.”

“I trust for all your sakes that it will not be more than an hour or two,” Euphratos replied. . . . “Pierre and André,” he went on, turning to the men who were standing a few feet away, “escort Mr. Fogg to his room.”

The grille rattled into its place. Euphratos pursued the circular corridor to the other side of the building, knocked at a door, and after a moment’s delay unlocked it and entered. Catherine, who was seated in an easy-chair, reading, looked up with a frown.

“You again,” she observed coldly.

He glanced round the room. It was furnished with a sort of ragged splendour and without the bareness of the other apartments. There were flowers, a basket of fruit, and books upon the table by her side.

“I have come to see that you are comfortable,” he announced.

“No one could be comfortable indoors on such a day as this,” she answered curtly.

“I mean as comfortable as possible under the circumstances,” he corrected himself. “You have received, I trust, a visit from your father.”

"Yes."

"And you have given him good advice?"

Catherine laid down her book.

"I have given him what I consider good advice," she declared. "I have said that if I were Mr. Channay I would not part with a single penny. You cannot keep us here indefinitely. Before long, people will begin to wonder what has become of us. Yours is a bad scheme. The world is not large enough nowadays —not this part of it, at any rate—for brigandage or comic opera abduction."

He came over and stood close to her. For a girl she was unusually brave, but there was something in his face which she hated, something from which she shrank.

"You may find that this is not a comic opera abduction," he warned her. "If I fail in the major part of my scheme, I at least may help myself to what, just at this moment, Miss Catherine Fogg, seems to me—and I love money—almost as important."

"Are you trying to terrify me?" she demanded.

"Does it terrify you to be admired? he rejoined.

"By such a person as you it annoys me!"

There was a little glint in his peculiar-coloured eyes.

"You must not talk to me like that," he said quietly. "At least remember that I am master here and that you are very much in my power."

"How chivalrous to remind me of it!" she scoffed. "Go away, please. It is dull enough shut up here, but I would rather be dull than have you annoying me."

He stood within a few feet of her, stolid, menacing, indescribably sinister, notwithstanding his slow speech and unhurried movements.

"Mademoiselle," he said, "you make a mistake in not being a little kinder to me. I admire you very much, Miss Catherine, and, though I do not mean this as a threat, I want you to understand that if I cannot make terms with your friend Mr. Gilbert Channay, if I find myself a loser in this little scheme of mine, I at least intend to carry one memory away with me which will be a reward, a compensation."

She felt her heart beating more quickly. She knew that he was in earnest. She shivered when she thought of what might happen even at that moment if it were not that he still hoped to carry through his scheme.

"I do not know," she admitted, "what sort of a man you are. Those whom I have met don't dare to say such things to women who dislike them."

"Dislike sometimes changes," he remarked, with an unpleasant smile. "With the first kiss other things are born."

She picked up her book.

"Even now," she assured him scornfully, but with a little quiver in her

tone, “I am not afraid of you.”

He leaned towards her.

“Why not be friends?” he begged. “Am I so terrible? Give me your hand. Let me at least kiss your fingers.”

“If you come an inch nearer,” she threatened, “I shall do my best to kill you.”

He hesitated. There were evil things in his face as she stood there, suddenly erect, tense, ready to spring. He turned away with an effort.

“To-morrow,” he compromised—“we shall see to-morrow.”

On the morrow, Euphratos remained in his own side of the château, and the three prisoners were unvisited. On the following day he thrust back the grille and looked in at Channay. He looked in on a very angry man.

“Good-morning,” he ventured.

“Go to hell!” was the blunt reply. “Do you realise that yesterday I had scarcely any lunch and no dinner at all. I asked for cigarettes in vain, and no wine.”

“To-day,” Euphratos observed, “you will have less.”

“You mean to starve us then?”

“Only you and the amiable Mr. Fogg. As for mademoiselle, my chef has done his best for her and my gardener has sent his choicest fruits. She is, I assure you, perfectly comfortable. To-night I intend to dine with her myself.”

Channay became suddenly very calm. He stopped in his furious walking up and down the room. He came close up to the grille and Euphratos was for a moment afraid.

“Have you been annoying Miss Fogg?” Channay asked, with perilous quietness.

“I do not find that my society annoys Miss Fogg,” was the insolent rejoinder. “The young lady is naturally a little bored. She is glad of my company. She is in better quarters than you and I think after to-morrow I shall arrange to take her for an automobile drive. We shall perhaps visit Monte Carlo, if all goes well.”

Channay laughed scornfully.

“To-morrow,” he threatened, “you will probably find yourself in prison.”

Euphratos frowned. More than once he had had an uneasy suspicion that there was something in the back of the mind of this prisoner of his.

“You expect a rescue?” he enquired ironically.

“At any time after midday.”

“From what direction?”

Channay smiled.

“You will know soon enough,” was the suave reply. . . .

Euphratos took summary leave of his prisoner and paid a visit to Martin Fogg. He found the latter standing upon his chair looking through the narrow slit of the window. He turned gloomily around at the noise of the opening of the grille.

"Look here," he began, "are you going to starve us? Do you know I had scarcely anything to eat all day yesterday?"

"You will have less to-day," was the savage retort.

Martin Fogg looked at his visitor curiously. There was a little twitch of the underlip, an absence of complete depression which was significant.

"Bet you I have as good a dinner as you do," he wagered.

Euphratos tugged fiercely at his little black moustache. Suspicion was merging into fear. Nevertheless he still bluffed.

"Would you mind telling me how you propose to get it?" he asked with unconvincing sarcasm.

"From you, if we haven't kicked you out," was the confident reply. "You'll be on your knees long before that time, assuring us that this was a joke."

"You are a fool," Euphratos exclaimed angrily.

"Fortunately for all three of us that's just what I'm not," Martin Fogg chuckled. . . .

Euphratos went on to visit Catherine. The pleasant sense of exhilaration with which he had previously approached her door had gone. He knocked and entered with a feeling almost of apprehension. She, too, was standing upon a chair looking through the window.

"What the—I beg your pardon—good-morning, Miss Fogg. Looking out into the gardens?"

She glanced at an old-fashioned clock in the corner of the room.

"I was a little too early," she observed, as she sprang down to the floor.

Euphratos gazed at her perplexed. Save in his presence not one of his prisoners had communicated with the other, yet each seemed to expect deliverance to-day, each was watching the road.

"You are expecting visitors, mademoiselle?" he enquired, with ill-assumed nonchalance.

"We shall certainly have visitors before the day has passed," she replied. "So will you."

"In case you should be disappointed," he said, "I have come to invite myself to dine with you to-night."

"Thank you. I anticipate having another engagement."

"You will be disappointed," he warned her.

She laughed at him almost naturally.

"I would rather have mine than yours," she declared.

He left her abruptly and paced the corridors for a few minutes, biting his

nails, confused and miserable. Then he made his way to the château proper, into the library where Monsieur Courvoiselle, the lawyer, sat writing letters. Monsieur Courvoiselle was a bald, elderly man with vulture-like features and eyes set a good deal too close together. He turned his head as his host entered.

"Well?" he exclaimed. "There is an agreement, yes? One cannot stay here for ever."

"There is no agreement as yet," Euphratos confessed. "They must come to their senses before long."

"What about the young lady?" the lawyer enquired with an unpleasant grin.

"There will be news of her presently," Euphratos declared. "She is difficult, but that will pass."

Pierre entered and whispered something in his master's ear. The slight uneasiness which had oppressed Euphratos all the morning was suddenly increased a thousandfold.

"What is it?" the lawyer demanded.

"Nothing serious," his client answered, "but it seems that ever since they came here the man Fogg has motored out, sometimes alone, every other day to Cannes. I have just been able to discover where he went to."

"And where was it?"

"The police station!"

"The police station at Cannes? What the devil did he want there?" Monsieur Courvoiselle growled. "Euphratos," he continued, "I never liked the look of that man Fogg—sly, he seemed to me. Supposing——"

"Well?"

"Supposing he was suspicious and he had arranged to report every other day at Cannes."

"All rubbish!" was the impatient reply. "Would they listen to him?"

Again Pierre—this time a message. A gleam of triumph suddenly shone in his master's face.

"Channay has sent for me," he announced. "Wait!"

He hurried up the stairs, along many corridors, through the great doors into the keep. Breathless, he pushed back the grille. Channay was seated with folded arms in his chair.

"Euphratos," he said, "I will buy your damned château."

"You are serious?" the other asked, trying to keep the excitement from his tone.

"I am serious," Channay assented. "These are my terms though. I will give you my parole and Mr. Fogg will give you his. We will make no attempt at violence, but we must be released at once. I will sign the document in your library as soon as you give me a bottle of wine and something to eat."

"I understand that you give me your parole," Euphratos repeated, "that

there shall be no violence and that you will buy the château."

"Agreed," Channay replied. "You can bring Fogg here and I will tell him my decision."

"You have done wisely," Euphratos declared. "Wait until I fetch the keys."

In ten minutes they were all seated round the study table—all except Martin Fogg who had wandered towards the window. Channay helped himself twice from the bottle of white wine, which had been placed by his side, and munched some biscuits. Then he glanced through the deeds which the lawyer stretched out before him.

"I understand," he demanded, "that this is an absolutely legal and binding conveyance of sale?"

The lawyer smiled.

"It is I who have taken care of that, monsieur," he rejoined.

Gilbert Channay took up his pen.

"Very well," he said, "there is only one slight alteration I am about to make. The price you have quoted for the château and its contents is ten million francs. I am making that one million."

The lawyer stared at him. Euphratos laughed contemptuously.

"Don't be absurd, Channay!" he exclaimed.

Channay was already busy with pen and ink. He pushed Euphratos away.

"Listen," he enjoined.

Martin Fogg suddenly turned around.

"They come!" he announced. "There is an automobile in the drive."

"Who come?" Euphratos demanded.

Gilbert Channay was busy making various alterations in the document before him. His pen spluttered over the paper. He signed the deed and leaned back in his chair.

"Euphratos," he said, "my friend here and I have been, perhaps, a little foolish, but we are not what we call in England 'damned fools.' We were very well aware that we ran a certain risk in coming to this place, and we provided for it. Martin Fogg, who was connected with the police in London for many years, had a letter of introduction to the *Chef de Sûreté* in Paris, who gave us another one to his colleague in Cannes. On the first day we arrived here, Martin Fogg visited that gentleman, and arranged to report regularly. If he should fail to do so, the *Chef de Sûreté* at Cannes undertook to send over to see that nothing was wrong. You see we failed to report yesterday."

"The car is coming up the drive," Martin Fogg announced. "There are three men outside; one looks like a gendarme in plain clothes."

The lawyer rose to his feet in obvious alarm.

"I am not concerned in this," he said sharply. "My visit is simply

professional."

"The whole thing was a joke," Euphratos declared hoarsely. "Any one would realise that it was a joke."

"I think," Gilbert Channay advised, "that you had better sign this deed of sale, Euphratos. You can have the cheque to-day. I rather fancy the château and contents for a million francs. We should have to get in fresh servants, of course. You will forgive me, I am sure, but I shall not be able to offer you the hospitality you have extended to us."

"A million francs is absurd," Euphratos protested feverishly. "We refused two million last year."

"One million francs is the price I have decided upon," Gilbert Channay observed. "I never change my mind. Listen, isn't that an automobile?"

A car passed the windows. They heard the brazen clanging of the front-door bell.

"If you sign," Gilbert Channay said, holding the pen towards Euphratos, "it was a joke. If you do not, you will return with our friends to Cannes."

Euphratos took up the pen. His fingers shook, but he signed. Gilbert Channay blotted the paper and thrust the parchment deed into his inner pocket. There was a knock at the door and the sound of voices outside. Pierre entered.

"Some gentlemen from Antibes, monsieur, to know if they can see over the château," he announced to his master.

CHAPTER IX
CHANNAY THE DELIVERER

The Princess—who was a Russian Princess, but quite genuine and very beautiful—suddenly brought her escort to a standstill. They were strolling through the crowded rooms of the Sporting Club at Monte Carlo, and the man was doing his best to point out a few of the notabilities to his companion who had only recently arrived.

"I wish," the Princess declared, "to know the name of him—the man who seets there. He has a face that does not move and he wins."

Major Egerton Warling, looked across at the person indicated, at first without any particular interest, then with a little start of surprise. At that moment Gilbert Channay glanced up. He looked steadily at Warling, but there was no shadow of recognition in his face. The latter, however, was not to be denied. He added to his nod of recognition an insistent smile and a little wave of the hand. Channay responded and continued his game.

"Who is?" the Princess demanded. "You know him?. . . That is good. You shall present him."

"If there is an opportunity," her companion promised a little evasively. "I know him all right. We were at school together and at college, but he has had a great deal of trouble and is a little difficult just now."

"Trouble?" the Princess repeated. "Have other people trouble besides Russians? What has he do? He has lost his money?"

"Not exactly that," was the hesitating reply. "He is, I believe, a wealthy man, but he was the victim of a conspiracy. As I think you know, I am the governor of a prison in——"

"He come to preeson?" the Princess interrupted eagerly. "He look to me the sort of man who would do what he chose, whatever the law might say."

"His was not a grave offence," Egerton Warling confided, "but he spent three years under my care."

"You shall present him," the Princess insisted. "He is the man for whom I search."

Egerton Warling looked doubtfully across the table.

"We cannot disturb him now," he pointed out. "He is playing, as you see, for high stakes, and he would not wish to lose his seat. Later on, perhaps."

The Princess frowned. She was unused to such evasions. Then she remembered that the world had changed, and that it was no longer a wonderful thing to be the Princess Variabinski.

"We'll have a look at the baccarat table," Warling suggested. "There has been some high play there this week."

She suffered herself to be led to the further room, and her companion at various intervals presented to her an English Duke, a great French actor, the English tennis champion, and the wife of an ambassador. The Princess was gracious to everyone, but her interest in notabilities seemed momentarily to have evaporated. As soon as she could find a reasonable excuse she induced her escort to return to the roulette tables. Once more she paused, this time at the back of Channay's chair.

"Cannot you make him get up?" she whispered to her companion. "I wish to speak with him—this man whose face do not move. That is how our Russian men gamble, but he is different."

Warling still hesitated, but at that moment Channay solved the problem for him. He swept his winnings into his pocket, handed a contribution to the *boite* which brought him the amazed thanks of the *chef* and rose to his feet. He came, almost at once, face to face with the two people who had been discussing him.

"How are you, Channay?" Warling said, holding out his hand. "You've been scooping it in I'm glad to see."

"I have won a little," Channay admitted.

"I want to present you to the Princess Variabinski," Warling continued. "Mr. Gilbert Channay—the Princess Variabinski."

Channay bowed. He murmured some polite commonplaces and would have moved on, but the Princess detained him with an arresting smile.

"I like to see you gamble, Monsieur Channay," she said. "Your face does not change. Captain Warling was taking me to the bar for some coffee. Will you come with us, please. I wish."

Channay's attempted excuse was overruled. Nevertheless it was obvious that he joined the little party with an air of reluctance. They found a corner in the bar, but before Channay took his place he drew Warling on one side.

"Have you explained to the Princess," he asked, "the circumstances under which we last met?"

"I have," was the prompt reassurance.

The Princess leaned forward. She had dark brown eyes, very beautiful and very expressive. She looked at Gilbert Channay and she made it clear that she wished him to stay.

"What do you mean?" she asked softly. "My English is not good. Captain Warling, he has tell me something about you."

"He has told you, perhaps, that I spent three years in prison?" Channay enquired.

"In preeson?" the Princess repeated. "But what of that? I myself have been

in preeson, over one year and then many months. So, we have something together, Mr. Channay. We are both what you call in English ‘jail birds,’ is it not?”

Channay took his chair with the faint beginnings of a smile about his lips.

“I am afraid, Princess,” he said, “that the world would not judge our misdemeanours equally. I was supposed to be guilty of fraud.”

“I, too,” the Princess confessed cheerfully. “Those men—those awful men who call themselves the government—they said I was trying to defraud the country because I wished to bring away my valuables. But we will forget that. We have both had shameful pasts—you and I, Monsieur Channay. We are not respectable people like Captain Warling, so we must be friends. You wish?”

“Nothing could give me greater pleasure, Princess,” was the polite reply.

The Princess smiled happily. They all three talked for some time of Monte Carlo, the people who were staying there, the changes during the last ten years. Presently the Princess rose.

“I go now,” she announced. “I live with an old aunt, Monsieur Channay, who has also seen much suffering but she cannot so easily forget. I tell her always if I am to be late. To-night I promised that I would see her before she slept. To-morrow, monsieur, I wish you to come and take luncheon with me. You have no engagement? No?”

“Princess,” Channay replied, “I have no engagement, but I do not think that you fully understand. Your own troubles have been wholly political. I do not mix with the people of my own country any longer upon equal terms. Few of those even who were my friends are as broad-minded as Captain Warling here. I do not, therefore, visit houses where I am likely to meet other English people. They might object.”

She smiled up at him.

“You are a very silly man,” she said. “For what you have done, I do not care. I wish you to come to luncheon. There may be others. That is how it happens, but they will not be English.”

Gilbert Channay bent low until his lips touched the fingers she held out.

“I find you, Princess,” he murmured——?

“At the Villa St. Pierre,” she replied. “It is on the Corniche road above Beau Soleil. At half past-twelve, if you please.”

After all the luncheon was a very pleasant function. Besides himself and Madame de Kragoff, the aunt of the Princess, there were present a young Italian, Count Pinesti, his sister, the Marchesa da Sienitivia and Warling. The conversation, which was mostly in French, was of the lightest possible order; the doings of mutual acquaintances in Monte Carlo, gossip as to their winnings and losings, rumours as to forthcoming arrivals, more than a little scandal

concerning some of the residents. After luncheon they took coffee upon a balcony over which the late mimosa still drooped, sheltered from the sun by a striped awning and looking out upon a garden filled with flowering shrubs, a few orange trees and many beds of roses. Beyond was the Mediterranean, blue and tranquil. The Princess established Gilbert Channay by her side, and as one by one her guests rose to go she accepted their *adieux* without protest. When, however, Channay attempted to follow their example, she held out her hand in protest.

"I wish you to stay, my friend," she insisted. "We shall have some little talk together. I wish."

Channay was puzzled, but was compelled to acquiesce. Madame de Kragoff departed for her siesta, and finally the Princess and Channay remained alone upon the terrace. The former gave a little sigh of relief. She lit another of the cigarettes she smoked endlessly, pushed the box towards her companion and stretched herself out in her chair; a graceful, almost voluptuous movement, but altogether natural. Channay, whose curiosity was more than ever excited, watched her closely during the next few moments of silence. She was without a doubt even more beautiful here, in the shaded sunlight, than she had seemed last night. Her complexion was pale, but it was the ivory pallor of health which defied cosmetics. Her mouth was a little large, but beautifully shaped, her nose delicate, her forehead high, but relieved by a short black fringe. She was dressed with the difficult simplicity in which the women of her nation excel. She wore no jewellery or ornaments of any sort.

"So now we are alone together, Monsieur Channay," she said at last. "You wonder why I make you stay. You think, perhaps, you have made a conquest, eh?"

She looked at him with a smile upon her lips, and a challenge in her eyes. He shook his head.

"Princess," he assured her, "I have no such vanity. For that reason, my curiosity is perhaps the greater."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Well," she remarked enigmatically, "one never knows. I have suffered very much and it would take much to make me feel. I am not easily attracted, either, but I like you and I have a feeling—shall I tell it to you this way? If I were a general and I needed from amongst my soldiers someone for a task very difficult, very dangerous, I think I should choose you."

"I am afraid, Princess, you flatter me," he sighed.

"You have the face that does not move," she insisted.

"That is, perhaps, because I have had rather a hard time and my own emotions are a little dulled," he told her.

"Who knows?" she replied. "Yet I would answer for it that you have

courage. I believe that you have chivalry. I tell you now a little story. You wish to hear?"

"Of course."

"Before the great trouble," she began, "there visited often at my husband's palace in St. Petersburg, an Englishman. He was what you call a great financier. He was engaged with many money interests in our country. He had, they said, great wealth. Now I shall speak quite plainly, for why be vain? He had the great foolishness to believe himself in love with me—I whose husband was then alive; a handsome, gallant soldier, and one of the great nobles of his country. It was foolish of this Englishman."

"Your husband is dead now?" Channay asked gently.

"He was killed in the war," she answered—"killed in the great push through Austria when we risked everything to lighten the pressure upon your western front. He died as a soldier; and it had to be. But whilst he lived I loved him, and this Englishman—he was well introduced, he was received, indeed, by our Tzar—but he was a man of commerce, a man whom no sane person would compare with my husband. So you may comprehend what happened. I had no need to say more than a few words. They were enough. I think he understood. He left off coming to the house. If I had spoken to my husband he would have lost his life, but I said nothing. It did not seem to me that the man was worth so much. Then, you see, the storm came. Paul was killed, my relatives were dispersed. I had some money but I had many calls upon it. I had, too, wonderful jewellery. This Englishman came to my palace. He was wise. He said nothing of the past. He came, he said, as a friend. I entrusted to him for sale the whole of my jewellery. It was safe with him, at any rate, I thought. He advanced me the merest trifle. In French money my jewellery must have been worth at least ten million francs. He advanced me a hundred thousand francs. With that I tried to bribe my way out of the country. The first time I failed. I was in what you call preeson for many months. Then at last I succeed. I write to this Englishman. I get no reply. I visit him in England. He is a very wicked man. He pretend that for that hundred thousand francs I have sold him the jewels. I have the papers. My husband for a soldier was a man of practical things. They were insured. I show him—insured for ten million francs. He only smile. He hinted that a better arrangement might perhaps be made under other circumstances. So I got up. I left his office. I thought to myself it is for a man to deal with this thing. I went to my cousin. Alas, he had sailed for New York. Then I go to my husband's uncle, the Grand Duke Peter. He and I were always enemies, but I thought for the sake of the family he would act. He promised to see this Englishman. Perhaps he did. He wrote me afterwards that the Englishman had assured him that the value of the jewels was greatly exaggerated, that in giving me a hundred thousand francs for them then, with

the risk of not being able to get them out of the country, he considered this man had done well. So I come out here and I have not my jewels and I have not the money."

"You have been to a lawyer?" Channay enquired.

"I went to him whom they told me in London was your best lawyer," she confided. "He heard my story and he just shake his head. There is nothing, he said, to prove that it was not a sale."

"It is a very distressing business," Channay admitted doubtfully. "I am sorry the man was an Englishman."

"He is English," the Princess continued, "but he is not like most other English. He is a coward. I know that he is a coward. I saw him go white when he thought that I would tell my husband. We were in our castle then, in the country where for many miles my husband was the lord of the land, and he knew—yes, this Englishman knew what would happen if I spoke. I wish now that I had spoken. Paul would have killed him and I might have kept my jewels."

"Has this man sold them?"

"Some, perhaps. But listen. This is the brutal thing. This is what make me wonder whether it would be worth my while to risk my own life to kill him, then rob him, even if again I go to preeson. He is in Monte Carlo at this minute and with him a companion. She is well-known in Paris—*La belle Clérode*. Listen, monsieur. She wear my jewels—wear them before my eyes—the emerald, which came from a Tartar ancestor six hundred years ago—the most famous emerald in Russia. She wear that."

"It seems incredible," Channay muttered.

"Now, my friend," the Princess continued leaning towards him. "Just now I ask you nothing. As yet my story is fresh to you. It is what you call the book of the story. To-night I will show you the picture. Then I will hear if you have anything to say. You are engaged to-night, perhaps? Say no, please. I do not wish you to be engaged."

"I am at your service, Princess," Channay assured her. "I have some friends who are coming to be with me here, but they do not arrive till later."

"You will be so kind as to invite my aunt and myself to dine with you very quietly at the Sporting Club?" she begged. "Your friend Captain Warling, too, if you like. Afterwards we go upstairs. They will be there. I show you."

"It will give me the greatest possible pleasure," Channay assured her. "But, Princess, once more I must remind you that in my own country I am a person *déclassé*. You understand that?"

She laughed.

"Monsieur Channay," she said, "because I am the Princess Variabinski I may be entertained by whom I will, and because I am a woman I should

choose always my own friends. . . . So you go now, if you will, and we meet—at nine o'clock at the Sporting Club."

It was not until he was half-way down the hill, on the way back to Monte Carlo, that Channay realised that he had forgotten to ask the name of the Englishman.

Warling's acceptance of Channay's somewhat diffidently proffered invitation was prompt and enthusiastic. The latter, who for all his bitterness was after all a very human person, was gratified but faintly cynical.

"You were my host for so long," he observed, as the two men met in the bar a few minutes before the hour fixed for dinner, "that it is time, perhaps, the conditions were reversed."

"Don't be an ass, Channay," the other protested, as he drank his cocktail. . . . "We had better go down and be waiting for the women now. The Princess is charming, but, like all these foreigners, punctilious."

The little dinner party of four was a great success, and not a word was spoken even bordering upon the serious until after they had made their way into the rooms. Then the Princess, who was walking behind with Channay, suddenly gripped him by the arm.

"Look," she pointed out—"just opposite!"

Two people were seated at the roulette table side by side, with great stacks of *mille* notes in front of them. It was the woman who first attracted Channay's attention—very beautiful, with masses of red-gold hair, a dazzling complexion, and wonderful dark eyes. She was *décolletée* with a chinchilla coat thrown back upon the chair. Her throat and arms were covered with marvellous jewellery. There were ropes of pearls about her neck, and an emerald, suspended by a thin platinum chain upon her bosom, which few women could see for the first time without a little gasp. Her arms were encircled by bracelets and the gems in her rings were of monstrous size. Channay's eyes passed on to her companion and, as he recognised him, he became suddenly very quiet. The man was thin and without an atom of colour. His face was drawn as though with illness. He was almost bald and what hair he had was white. In curious distinction to the pallor of his complexion his lips were unusually red, his under one turned outwards. He was intent upon the game; playing it, not like many of the *habitués*, with at any rate an affectation of indifference, but with cupidity in his eyes and anxiety in his manner. He did not once glance up during the moments that Channay watched him, except to whisper frowningly to his companion, apparently as to the illogical method of her stakes. She shrugged her shoulders and took no notice. Channay drew a long breath and stepped into the background. The story of the stolen jewels had for the moment passed from his mind. Once more he was back again,

living through those unforgettable moments of sordid drama. The Princess slipped from her place and joined him.

"Well?" she demanded.

"Do you mind coming outside with me for a moment?" he asked.

They found a little corner in the bar. Channay was still inclined towards silence, but the Princess was engrossed with her own emotions.

"You have seen!" she exclaimed. "Can you imagine what I feel? Those pearls are mine—that emerald—those bracelets—and she wears them—you see how she wears them!"

"It is a curious thing," Channay observed, a little absently, "that I never asked you the man's name."

"It is Anderton," she told him.

"Yes," he said. "I know—Giles Maurice Anderton. I might have guessed when you spoke of his great financial schemes in Russia."

"You know him?"

"I knew him once," Channay acknowledged bitterly. "He is one of the men who were responsible for my—trouble."

"That is very strange," the Princess reflected, "He is my enemy and he is also yours. Now, my dear friend—shall I call you 'my dear friend,' I wonder? I wish. . ."

He failed to respond to the question in her eyes—even to notice the music of her lowered voice. He seemed to be looking out through the walls of the room. Yet he had the air of listening, so she continued.

"What I would ask is this. Will you help me? You are a brave man and he is a coward. It may seem quite hopeless, and yet cowardice has yielded much sometimes."

"Princess," Channay begged, "please do not hope for too much because it may be that I can do nothing, but I promise you at least that I will try."

Her hand stole into his. He was suddenly conscious of a quaint perfume as she leaned towards him—a perfume which might have been of lavender and rose leaves embalmed in a sandalwood box. The touch of her fingers was warm and enticing.

"You are my dear friend?" she whispered. "Is it not so? I felt it when I saw you there only yesterday. If you fail, then no man can do anything. Of that I am sure."

Channay drew a little breath. For a moment he had felt himself carried off his feet.

"You must trust me," he said, in a tone which was almost matter-of-fact, "with a list of your jewels and the valuation. Then, if you do not mind, we will part here for this evening. For the moment it would be better that we are not seen together. What I can do I will. It may be nothing, but one thing you have

told me is certainly the truth. The man is, as he always was, a coward."

"You shall have the papers," she promised. "I trust you. I know that you will do what you can for my sake, and if you fail you shall still come to me for my thanks. I go back to my aunt. Escort me, if you please, to the door. Afterwards, for to-night, we will not speak. That is not pleasant, but I obey."

He rose to his feet. In the doorway she met some acquaintances and dismissed him with a pleasant word of farewell. Channay, obeying a very rare impulse, crossed over to the bar, demanded a liqueur brandy, and, seating himself upon one of the stools, drank it thoughtfully. When he turned to re-enter the rooms his eyes were clear and bright, his mouth was hard set; already a purpose was framing itself in his mind. . . .

Mademoiselle Clérode was in ill-luck; her numbers failed to turn up; the coterie of distant admirers, by whom she was usually surrounded, were less numerous and interesting than usual. With a little yawn she swept the money in front of her into a dainty sacque which matched her dress and rose to her feet. Her companion looked at her with a frown.

"You go?" he enquired.

"A short promenade," she replied. "I lose here. I try my fortune at another table."

The man watched her depart, and afterwards continued to play for a time without success. Presently he too rose, stuffing his money into his pocket, and looked around the room for his late companion. He discovered her harmlessly playing at a neighbouring table, and turned towards the bar. It was then he came face to face with Gilbert Channay.

Anderton had been an opportunist all his life and, although he was without doubt surprised, he recovered himself sufficiently to remember the line of action upon which he had long ago decided. His smile, if not genial, was gracious and welcoming. He would even have held out his hand if he had seen the slightest signs of any possible response.

"Channay!" he exclaimed. "Gilbert Channay! Why, I thought——"

He hesitated for a moment. Channay finished the sentence for him.

"You thought that I was not out until next month," he interposed. "You see, these remissions for good behaviour upset all calculations. I have, as a matter of fact, been a free man for some time."

"An extraordinary meeting!" Anderton pronounced. "I was on my way to the bar. Let us be true to our nationality and celebrate our reunion with a whisky and soda."

"I will not drink, if you don't mind," was the expressionless reply, "but I will sit with you with pleasure."

They found a retired corner. Channay refused a cigar and lit one of his own cigarettes.

“Channay,” Anderton began, proceeding according to his preconceived plan, “I don’t know what has happened to you since you—er—reappeared, or whom you have seen, but I suppose you know they are all furious with you. You certainly treated us rather badly, but I, for my part, am not going to complain. You thought, probably, that we ought to have rallied around you. I hold no brief for the others. I simply wish you to know that I was in Russia—no, worse than that, I was in Siberia at the time.”

“Were you, indeed,” Channay observed.

The other glanced at him keenly. He had been, as a matter of fact, in London during the whole of the trial, but it was scarcely likely that Channay could have known of this.

“My solicitors applied on my behalf, naturally, for the shares in the Nyasa Company,” he continued, “and received back the original amount of my subscription. The only shares allotted, I was informed, were those allotted to you.”

“Precisely,” Channay agreed.

“I am a business man,” Anderton went on. “So are you, my dear fellow, but after all there is such a thing as morality even in the keenest commercial transactions. I ask you this, as a man of honour: do you consider yourself justified in accepting our decision to buy a large number of shares in a mine, and then, because the shares soar up and they happen to have been all registered in your name, to stick to the shares? What about that, eh? Wouldn’t that seem sharp practice to you in anyone else’s case?”

“It might, perhaps,” Channay admitted.

“Of course your judgment as regards the mine itself was right,” Anderton continued, “although I don’t suppose that even you expected such an amazing result. I see by the papers that the one pound shares to-day stand at thirty. Therefore, for my thousand pounds I ought to have thirty thousand.”

“That is so,” Channay agreed. “If the shares had been registered in your name, or if I had been an honest man, that thirty thousand would certainly have been yours.”

Anderton’s hand trembled a little as he relit his cigar. He was a secretive man and few knew the extent of his wealth. Nevertheless, money was still his god, and thirty thousand pounds was a sum sufficient to awaken all his covetous instincts.

“Now, my dear Channay,” he proposed, “let us discuss this matter as men of the world. You chose to indulge in a little sharp practice against those who you thought had treated you badly. Now, I have heard it hinted that a sort of bond was signed by certain of those men who either went into the witness box against you or stayed out when they might have helped.”

“Quite true,” was the murmured assent.

“What I wish to point out,” Anderton proceeded earnestly, “is this: that my name does not appear upon that bond, if it does exist. I should never have signed it if I had been asked, but, as you know, I was in Siberia. Then, looking at the matter from the other point of view, I was not one of those who could have given any evidence on your behalf—even if I had been in the country. Now, upon these grounds, I might say that I expected to be treated a little differently to the others.”

“I hear what you say,” Channay observed.

“You are now,” Anderton continued, “a very rich man. You have had a rough time, but are now able to lean back and enjoy life.”

“You, too, I understand are in the same position,” Gilbert Channay remarked.

“You are right and wrong, my friend,” Anderton rejoined, dropping his voice a little. “On paper—and solid paper, too—I am several times a millionaire, but ready money is always valuable. I have been a heavy loser here, and there is a prospect of my expenses at home being enormously increased. As man to man, Gilbert Channay, I consider that you owe me the difference between the issued price and the present value of Nyasa shares, which amounts to about thirty thousand pounds. I should like to have the money.”

Gilbert Channay sat quite still for several moments, his eyes fixed upon the carpet. Then he rose to his feet.

“This matter requires thinking out,” he decided. “Where are you staying?”

“Hotel de Paris,” was the ready response. “Number 176.”

“I will call upon you,” Channay promised, “at eleven o’clock to-morrow morning.”

“You will be welcome,” Anderton assured him. “Don’t forget to bring your cheque-book.”

“In the meantime you had better return to mademoiselle,” Channay suggested drily.

Anderton coughed.

“So long, old chap, then!” he concluded, with a great effort at cordiality.

Mr. Giles Anderton did not appear to advantage at so early an hour as eleven o’clock in the morning. He was fully dressed and his *coiffeur* had done his best. Face massage had followed shave, and an empty glass upon the table indicated other efforts at recuperation, but there were dark lines under the man’s eyes and his manner as he greeted his visitor was nervous.

“Here I am, you see, my dear Channay!” he exclaimed. “It is an abominably early hour for this part of the world, but I’m ready, you see—seated at the receipt of custom—ready for that little cheque, eh?”

Channay drew some papers from his breast coat pocket, but there was no cheque amongst them. He had laid his hat and cane upon the table and he seated himself opposite to his host.

"Anderton," he said, "I could not trust myself to answer you last night in a crowded room. Here we are alone and what happens does not very much matter. In the first place I have to tell you that you are a liar; a clumsy and purposeless liar!"

He produced the dilapidated agreement with its shameful covenant, signed by every member of the Syndicate save one. His forefinger pointed to Giles Anderton's name. The man's jaw fell, his under-lip seemed to be more and more protuberant.

"I don't understand," he faltered. "I didn't sign anything."

"That will do," Channay interrupted. "You signed this document all right, and as to being in Siberia on the day of my trial, you were never out of London. That disposes of any chance you ever had of getting that thirty thousand pounds."

Anderton sat like a man who has received a blow. He could not find words for expostulation. There was his undoubted signature upon that infamous document. His bluff had failed.

"Now," Gilbert Channay went on, "we come to a different matter. You were one of those who played this foul trick upon me, who dishonoured the name of friendship, who, to put a few extra thousand pounds in your own pocket, and shelve responsibility for something which was only after all technically dishonest, entered into a secret understanding to break the man who was making your fortune."

"I was overruled," Anderton whimpered.

"Possibly," Channay replied, "but my score against you exists all the same. There are one or two of the old gang, Anderton, whom I have already dealt with. Chance has brought you to me. Very well, I am ready."

"What do you mean?" the other gasped.

"I mean this. Financially you are without doubt unassailable. I could not shake the faith of the Stock Exchange in your probity or wealth, if I were to try. But your ambitions have mounted with the years. You are a public man—a Member of Parliament. You have refused a baronetcy I understand, because you are negotiating for a peerage."

"I object to the term 'negotiating,'" Anderton declared harshly. "I subscribe largely to the funds of my party, but that is because I believe in their politics."

"That may be so," Channay replied, "but the fact remains, that at present the matter of your peerage is in the balance. A little scandal about Giles Anderton, M.P., in the society papers and repeated in the clubs, would make a

difference just now, I think."

"Scandal!" Anderton queried, with a great semblance of indignation. "What rubbish is this?"

"Years ago," Channay explained, "you were asked by a woman in a time of great distress to dispose of her jewels for her. Her husband and she had befriended you in a country where you had some difficulty in making your way. They had befriended you in the days of their prosperity. How did you behave when the storm came?"

"Who the devil are you talking about?" the startled man gasped.

"You know," Channay rejoined sternly. "I am talking about the Princess Variabinski and her jewels, which your little mademoiselle was wearing last night. Those jewels were worth ten million francs. You thought you might find a customer at seven millions. You advanced a matter of a hundred thousand francs. When the Princess applied to you for a settlement you had the outrageous impertinence to declare that you had bought them for that sum."

"Where did you get hold of this cock-and-bull story?" Anderton demanded.

"You can prove it a cock-and-bull story when you reply to the statement which I am issuing to the press on behalf of the Princess," Channay replied. "You see these papers. There is the insurance value of the jewels—ten million francs. Here, also, is your letter in which you say that you might be able to get seven millions and that you sent the hundred thousand francs asked for by messenger. An ugly business, that, Anderton, and there is something still more ugly behind. You were friendly with that government official they made a judge. Was it altogether a coincidence that the day after the Princess confided her jewels to you she was arrested?"

Anderton's face had become livid. He was struggling for breath. For several moments he was beyond the power of any coherent speech. His fingers tugged at his collar. Channay watched him with cold indifference.

"Look here," he gasped at last. "I can deny all this. I can bring witnesses."

"Rubbish!" Channay interrupted. "You can do nothing of the sort, and you know it, because the Princess's story can be proved up to the hilt. But if you still feel like fighting, Anderton, there's another little matter, which those of the financial papers which have not been bribed to silence might like to get hold of. There was a company once—the Capolo Rubber Company, it was called. A man announcing himself as a financial agent, of the name of Baton, sent out circulars—very glowing circulars they were—about that property. He signed himself James Baton, and he sailed just a trifle too near the wind. The police looked for that man Baton, Anderton. They had a suspicion as to who he was, but they could never prove it. I could!"

Anderton collapsed. He clutched for a moment at the air and then fell back in his chair. Channay rose unwillingly to his feet, unfastened his collar and felt

his pulse. In a moment or two the fainting man opened his eyes with a little shiver.

"Channay," he begged, "be careful. I have a weak heart."

"I guessed that," Channay replied, "or I should have started the proceedings by giving you a thrashing. That may come afterwards."

"What do you want?" Anderton asked feverishly.

"The Princess's jewels," was the stern demand. "Nothing for myself. Hand over the jewels and we will call it quits. Otherwise it was my intention to have broken you on my own account."

Anderton rolled from side to side of his chair. There were tears in his eyes.

"She will never forgive me!" he cried. "I shall lose her!"

Channay shrugged his shoulders.

"The thing has to be faced," he insisted. "I am going to smash your good name in the City of London, destroy you socially and as a man of honour, or else you are going to bring me those jewels before I leave this room."

"She will never give them up," Anderton faltered.

"From what I can surmise of the young woman's movements," Channay observed, "I should say that she was still in bed. You have an excellent opportunity to recover your jewels without a scene."

Anderton rose to his feet, stood breathing heavily for a moment or two, then staggered to the sideboard. With trembling hands he mixed himself a drink. Then he turned to the inner door.

"Wait!" he enjoined.

He was gone a matter of five minutes. When he returned he came in furtively, like a thief. He carried a jewel case in his hand. For a moment he paused to lock the door of communication. Then he opened the jewel case and turned out its contents, sweeping a few trifles on one side.

"The big emerald is the most important," he declared. "That was valued at two million and a half. These pearls, too, they all belong, and those four bracelets, these rings—the rest are mademoiselle's. Take them, stuff them in your pocket, anywhere, and get away. There'll be murder when she finds out."

"You didn't give them to her?" Channay asked, with menace in his tone.

For a single moment there was a gleam almost of cunning in Anderton's eyes.

"Not I," he answered. "I made her sign a paper that they were my property and only lent, before I let her wear them. I wanted to sell them, time after time, but I daren't. They said that the Princess was dead. I couldn't get proof. I was waiting for proof."

"The Princess is alive and was in the Rooms at the Sporting Club last night," Channay announced.

There was a sudden battering at the inner door. Channay filled his pockets

with the jewellery, picked up his hat and cane and turned towards his companion.

"Good-bye, Anderton," he said. "A pleasant quarter of an hour to you!"

Channay bought a plain morocco box for his booty, and with it under his arm and a cluster of roses drove up to the villa. Madame la Princesse, however, was out—had gone to Cannes for lunch and was not expected home until dinner-time. He left the roses, locked up the box for a few hours in the hotel safe and idled through the day until six o'clock, the hour at which he was to meet the Princess. She entered the little bar and, leaving Madame de Kragoff, who was talking to some acquaintances, came at once over to him.

"Well?"

"The best I could do," he replied, handing her the box.

She stood for a moment dumb with wonder. Then she tore off the covering and opened the lid. The great emerald flashed up at her, coils of pearls lay around it. There were rows of rings. She looked at him, still speechless, for several seconds.

"I do not understand," she faltered. "This cannot be true."

Once more she opened the box and gazed at its contents.

"It is quite true," Gilbert Channay assured her. "The man is, as we both know, a coward. I threatened him and he gave me up what you see. If there is anything missing——"

"There is nothing missing of any account," she interrupted. "Monsieur Channay—I—I have no words."

She had never looked more beautiful, even though that exquisite pallor of her cheeks was for a moment disturbed by a little flush. Her eyes were soft with excitement and unshed tears. Her lips were moist. She suddenly gripped his hands.

"Oh, you dear, wonderful man!" she cried. "What can I say? What can I do? What can I offer you?"

"Dear lady," he answered, and his own expression had become almost human, "one does not do these things for a reward. Besides, I was able to serve myself, for it chances that this man Anderton was an old enemy of mine.

"You ask for nothing?" she pleaded, her hands still resting upon his. "There is nothing I can offer? Is there a reason that you will not accept——"

She broke off with a little tremble in her voice. Channay looked around as though suddenly conscious that they were being observed. He rose to his feet. Mr. Martin Fogg, newly arrived from London, was peering a little diffidently into the alcove, and by his side stood Catherine—her first very delightful smile just fading from her lips, her brows a little upraised, her eyes full of question. She looked very sweet and wholesome in these somewhat exotic surroundings.

Channay bowed over the Princess's hand.

"Dear lady," he said, "the reason I hope I may present to you before the evening is over. You will forgive?"

He gave one hand to Martin Fogg and the other to Catherine.

"How I have missed you dear people!" he exclaimed.

The light came back to the girl's eyes. The Princess, who had been watching, gazed after them as they left the room and turned down the passage to the hotel. Then for a moment or two she affected to be busy, bending over her jewels, none of which she could see, however, through the queer little mist in front of her eyes. Presently, for she was a brave woman, she closed the lid with a snap and despatched a waiter for the commissionaire and the manager. "One must take care of what one has," she murmured.

CHAPTER X
HAROLD RODES HAS HIS CHANCE

Gilbert Channay, on his way down from a tramp amongst the hills above Beau Soleil, came to a standstill in one of the tortuous streets lined with small shops and cafés leading into the suburbs of Monte Carlo. A scene, sordid enough but unusual in the Principality, was taking place within a few yards of him. A young man, protesting in vociferous English, had been summarily ejected from a small café-restaurant by the brawny, shirt-sleeved proprietor, and was half standing, half crouching amongst the turned-up tables outside, from which loiterers had been driven by the descending mist. Channay, making a slight *détour* on the pavement, was in the act of passing by when something in the young man's face attracted his notice, and he paused. The proprietor, heated with his wrongs, turned excitedly towards him.

"An Englishman," he declared—"one of your countrymen, perhaps, monsieur, but what matters?—he comes in here, he eats of my best, he drinks my good red wine, my champagne, a coffee and liqueur. Afterwards, when the bill comes, he has no money."

"Might happen to anyone," the wrongdoer interposed sullenly, taking care to keep just beyond the other man's reach.

"Once, perhaps," the restaurant-keeper agreed, with unabated anger, "but never twice. Monsieur must understand," he went on, turning to Channay, "that this is the second time within three days. His only excuse was—the rascal!—that he did not know it was the same place. I am in the mind to send for a gendarme. Such wastrels spoil an honest man's chance of making a living."

Gilbert Channay looked once more at the young man. He was not very favourably impressed by him, but the resemblance which had startled him at first was even more marked upon closer inspection. He produced his pocket-book.

"After all," he decided, "the young man appears to be of my country. I will discharge his bill."

There followed an amazing transformation in the demeanour of the plump, furious man with the fierce moustaches, who had so volubly stated his wrongs. In a few seconds all traces of anger had passed. The bland smile of the perfect *maître d'hôtel* played round his lips. His tone became soft and ingratiating, his manner almost apologetic.

"If monsieur," he said, "chooses to do so kindly an action—well, it will be

good for all concerned. Monsieur will understand that it is not easy to make a living up here, where there come seldom those who have the money to spend. It is a thin affair, this living, and to lose the price of such a meal as monsieur there had ordered sets one back."

"What is the amount of the bill?" Gilbert Channay enquired.

"One hundred and eighteen francs, seventy-five, monsieur," the restaurant-keeper replied.

Channay handed him one hundred and forty francs.

"There is also the *pourboire*," he pointed out. "You can retire."

"Monsieur earns my most sincere thanks," the man declared, backing across the pavement. "If monsieur himself will honour my little establishment one evening, the best there is in Monte Carlo will be at his disposal. I myself will see to it."

Channay, with a civil word of acknowledgment, nodded his farewell, and the *restaurateur* disappeared. The young man stood upright now, straightened his tie, and accepted his hat and stick from a small boy who had come running out of the café.

"Awfully good of you, I'm sure," he said to his friend in need. "I couldn't make the fellow understand my French, and the more I tried to explain the angrier he got."

"What was the trouble?" Channay enquired.

"I forgot that I hadn't the money with me to pay my bill," was the not very convincing explanation.

Channay looked at the object of his generosity speculatively.

"You mean that you hadn't it with you, or that you hadn't it at all?" he persisted.

The young man's expression was for a moment almost surly. He hesitated.

"If you want the truth, I'm broke," he confessed.

They had commenced the descent towards Monte Carlo proper—the defaulter, his hat drawn over his eyes, swinging his stick with a somewhat defiant air. Channay, his hands behind his back, his gait leisurely as usual, seemed absorbed in thought.

"The tables?" he asked at last.

His companion nodded.

"I've had rotten luck," he complained. "I've only been here three days and I brought the best part of a hundred pounds along. Couldn't touch a thing! If I don't find my friends this evening, I shall have to try to cadge the price of a ticket home."

"Do you mind telling me your name?" Channay enquired.

"Rodes—Harold Rodes."

"Was your father by any chance on the Stock Exchange?"

"A jobber—Eric Rodes, his name was," the young man acquiesced. "He died whilst I was abroad. I went out to South Africa, like a fool, to try to find a job after the war."

"And your friends here?"

"The man I've been looking for is called Fogg—Martin Fogg. There was a daughter, too—used to be a great pal of mine. I've tried half a dozen hotels, but I haven't come across them."

"I expect you've spent most of your time in the Casino," Channay observed.

"I expect I have," was the regretful assent.

"Mr. Fogg and his daughter usually play at the Sporting Club," Channay confided. "They are staying at the Hotel de Paris. If you enquire there you will have no trouble in finding them."

"By Jove, you are a good Samaritan!" the young man declared. "What's your name, may I ask?"

"Channay—Gilbert Channay. Ever hear of it?"

The young man frowned.

"Sounds sort of familiar," he confessed. "Did you know the governor, by any chance?"

"I did. I knew your father in business quite well. It was on my behalf that Mr. Fogg has been trying to discover you."

"Well, I'm damned!" the young man exclaimed. "I thought it was the girl, of course. Catherine Fogg and I were to have been engaged before I went abroad."

"What's that?" Channay demanded abruptly.

"Cathie—that's the daughter—and I," Rodes explained. "We should have hit it up all right together, but the old man put his foot down. He insisted that I should have a settled job or some money before we were engaged, so I thought I'd have a shot out in South Africa."

"An unsuccessful one, I gather," Channay ventured.

"I had rotten luck all the time," the other admitted. "I had hard work to raise the money for my passage home. In the first newspaper I picked up, after I arrived in London, I saw old man Fogg's advertisement for me, so I found out where he was and followed him here. Can't imagine what he wants with me, all the same," the young man went on moodily. "Shouldn't think he's likely to want me for a son-in-law under the circumstances."

Channay was silent for a moment or two, apparently busy with his own thoughts. To a subtle observer—which his companion was not—there had been a distinct change in him during the last few minutes. The buoyancy had gone out of his footsteps, the light from his face. It was as though some premonition which had been hanging over him at odd moments for months had

suddenly become realised. After a while he turned and scrutinised his companion critically. The young man was handsome in his way, with rather a weak face, an insignificant nose, peevish expression and eyes, temporarily at any rate, dull and watery. He had plenty of dark brown hair, however, his build was good and he carried himself like a soldier.

"Where did you meet Miss Fogg?" Channay enquired presently.

The young man seemed a little surprised.

"Bit curious, aren't you?" he suggested. "I don't know that there's any secret about it though. I met her at a hospital in Hastings. I was there for a month—got a bullet through my left arm. Then I saw her again in town when I was home on leave."

"And you became engaged?"

"I suppose you might call it that," the young man assented. "She was expecting me to fix things up, but the war did for the governor, and when his affairs were wound up, there wasn't a bob for anyone. I was the only relative, but all I had out of the estate was about three hundred pounds. That I took with me to South Africa."

"You have corresponded with her?"

"I'm a bad letter writer," Rodes confided. "Still, I've sent her a line now and then."

"Did you let her know you were coming home?" Channay persisted.

"It didn't seem much use," was the gloomy reply. "I hated to say that I was coming home without having made good. I thought I'd take them by surprise—if they wanted to see me at all. Then, when I reached London, you know what happened?"

"I see," Channay murmured. "You are very much attached to Miss Fogg, I presume?"

"Damned nice girl!—what I remember of her," the young man declared. "No nonsense, mind you. Didn't altogether approve of me sometimes, I am afraid. She's all right, though. And someone left the old man a fortune a few years ago."

"Supposing you came in for, say, thirty thousand pounds," Channay asked, "should you marry Miss Fogg?"

His companion laughed a little bitterly.

"I haven't a relation in the world who has a bob to his name," he replied. "I have as much chance of coming in for thirty thousand pounds as I have of being gazetted back again into the army, and given a fat job at the War Office."

"Nevertheless, answer my question," Channay insisted, slackening his pace a little as they drew near the gardens.

"Why, of course I should marry her," the young man assented, "unless

anything's happened to her. You're taking a queer sort of interest in the affair," he went on curiously. "She hasn't lost her looks or anything, has she?"

"I should say not," Channay replied. "As for the thirty thousand pounds, it happens to be yours. I owed your father that amount of money. If you can prove yourself, as I have no doubt you can, to be the son of Eric Rodes, you can draw on me to what amount you please, and the balance shall be deposited with your bankers."

The young man clutched at the railing which they were passing, and came to a dead stop, his mouth open, his eyes protuberant.

"Look here," he exclaimed at last, "you're not—you're not getting at me?"

"Not in the least," Channay assured him patiently. "Mr. Fogg acts to some extent as my agent. His enquiries for you were made not on his daughter's behalf, but on mine. The only thing that strikes me as singular is that, knowing me interested in your father, he has never mentioned your existence."

Rodes appeared for a moment a little uncomfortable.

"You see, the fact of it is," he explained, "the governor had to go through the Bankruptcy Court, and my name was spelt in the hospital with an 'h,' and ——"

"I see," Channay interrupted curtly. "My room is number 64 at the Hotel de Paris. If you will come there in half an hour I will supply you with all the money you need for immediate purposes, and deposit the remainder according to your instructions. I have only one request to make: keep away from your friends the Foggs until after you have seen me."

"How much are you going to let me have now?" Rodes asked eagerly.

"Anything in reason—fifty *milles*, if you like," was the indifferent reply.

The young man moistened his lips with his tongue. His expression was an ignoble epitome of ecstasy.

"Number 64," he repeated. "I'll be there."

Catherine came hastily across the hall towards Channay. She was obviously disturbed, and her eyes sought his questioningly.

"What is the matter?" she demanded. "I have just seen father and he tells me that you are going away."

"For a few days only, to Cannes," he confided. "This place gets on one's nerves, I think. One is always glad to come back, but there are times when one has had enough."

"That doesn't sound like you," she said slowly.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"The rain has left off," he observed. "Walk with me a little way on the Terrace."

"I should like to," she acquiesced.

They left the hotel, crossed the road and made their way down the steps. Neither spoke until they were on the Terrace itself—almost deserted at that time of the evening. The remains of the reflected sunset lay upon the sea; glimmerings of pink, with here and there deeper touches of violet. Away westward was a solid mass of clouds. The faint wind was sweet, as though it had lingered on its way from the hills in the gardens of the villas.

"I don't understand your going away," she said at last.

"It is a very simple matter," he assured her. "I suppose it had to be some time."

"Yes, but—I thought we should have all left together," she concluded, a little awkwardly. "Of course I love the place, but it won't be the same without you. I should have been quite ready to go home if you had suggested it."

"You may find compensations for my absence," he remarked.

There was a perplexed frown upon her forehead as she turned to look at him, a whimsical, questioning smile parting her lips.

"What on earth do you mean?" she demanded. "What compensations could there be? We know scarcely anyone here. I am sure father won't stop without you."

"If he doesn't," he answered, "we shall meet again very soon. Your father knows where I am in Cannes."

She sighed.

"It is a horrid ending to a wonderful time," she complained. "I am very, very disappointed. Shall I tell you why?"

"Please do," he begged.

They leaned over the parapet for a moment, watching the colour die out of the placid sea.

"Ever since I knew you," she began, "there has always been something that I hated. There were those men—one by one—whom you were seeking to destroy. Some of the adventures were exciting enough, sometimes the thrill of them was wonderful, but beneath it all the time it was wrong. No one could blame you. On the other hand, no one could approve of you. I am not a very religious person, you know, but I think, ethically, Christianity is a marvellous doctrine."

"It wields indifferent weapons against sinners," he murmured.

"I don't believe it," she rejoined earnestly. "Forgiveness hurts, often, more than revenge. Don't think I'm trying to argue. I am simply trying to explain how I feel. Only last night you were saying that you had finished, that the only man left was one who was to find reward and not punishment."

"Reward," he repeated. "Yes."

"I can't tell you how glad I was," she went on. "I felt that you would be more yourself; that the shadow which comes over you at times would pass

away for ever. You were free of your burden, anyway. As to what you had done, I am not your judge—I didn't want to be your judge. I am very feminine, you see. I accept without question. But I hoped that it was all over now, and that gradually you would become happier and lighter-hearted, and that we should have some wonderful times here."

"I am sorry to disappoint you," he said, keeping his face turned away from her, for he had caught one glimpse of something in her eyes, and he was afraid of himself—"but even then, this had to come to an end, hadn't it? Your father is longing for the Thames and the Strand and his old cronies again."

"Yes, I suppose so," she acquiesced. "He hasn't said anything. He has seemed quite content. It is you who are seeking a change."

"I seek it for a reason," he confided. "I cannot quite tell you what that reason is, but I can tell you this: It is not because I want to leave you and your father."

"Then why go?" she murmured.

"You will understand very well before long," he assured her. "The situation as it exists at present is scarcely possible. When we meet again things will be different."

"I shall miss our talks," she sighed.

"So shall I," he agreed. . . . "Upon the whole," he went on, after a pause. "You are a wonderfully tactful person."

"Exactly why?" she demanded.

"Because during all the hours we have spent together," he replied, "you have never once let the conversation drift backwards. The future might lead anywhere. My past is scarcely a subject for pleasant discussion."

"I can promise you that mine is as bad," she laughed. "You can't imagine how drab and monotonous it was before father came into this money. I should probably have been a school-teacher by now, if he hadn't, and I should have hated it. I don't like doing things. I don't want a career. I'm an idle, good-for-nothing person. I love nice clothes and pleasant days and lots of fresh air."

"You would have married," he suggested.

"Married," she reflected. "Well, there was always that possibility."

"Have you ever been engaged?" he asked abruptly.

She hesitated.

"In a way I suppose I have," she admitted. "More than once I meant to tell you about it, and yet somehow it didn't seem important. It was a soldier whom I nursed at Hastings."

"You were very much in love with him?"

"I don't think that I was in love with him at all. I don't think that I ought to have let things go so far as they did, but just then life seemed turned upside down. One had lost hold of the real things. Anyhow when he came to see me

in London afterwards, father wouldn't have anything to say to it. He had no money. He went out to South Africa to try to make some."

"So you were never actually engaged then," Channay persisted.

She shook her head.

"Father wouldn't listen to it," she repeated, "and honestly I don't think I wanted anything definite myself. But there was always a sort of understanding if he came back in a reasonable time and if he had succeeded——"

"I see," Channay interrupted. "Have you heard from him lately?"

"Not for some time. Tell me why you asked about him."

"Well," he observed, as he turned away and led her homewards, "you know all about my dark and murky past. I wanted to delve a little into yours. I should like to ask you one more question, if I may."

"Any number," she invited.

"If he appeared at this moment, how would you really feel about his coming—about everything?"

She walked on in silence for several moments. Then she turned around and her eyes met his frankly.

"Honestly, I don't know," she confided. "He was quite good-looking; a decent person in an ordinary sort of way. I suppose there was no reason why one should not have been very fond of him. I might have been if I had seen more of him, but I didn't. And now that he has gone away I seem out of touch somehow. If I saw him coming along here, if I felt him take my hand in his, heard him speak, I should know, but——"

"Well?"

"If I found that I really did feel anything for him," she acknowledged quietly, "I should be amazed. . . ."

They came suddenly upon Martin Fogg with a group of acquaintances, and the little party turned and strolled back towards the hotel. Channay made his *adieux* in the lounge with half a dozen people standing around. Catherine tried to find an excuse to walk with him to the door, curiously, and almost feverishly anxious for some parting word; but a reception clerk, the porters, the commissionaire, formed their usual farewell gathering, and she herself was waylaid by one of her little court of admirers, which had been steadily growing during the last few weeks. She watched him drive off with a farewell wave of the hand, and stood for a moment upon the steps with a curious sense of emptiness all around her, an entirely novel feeling at her heart. There was something wrong, and she had not wit enough to discover what it was. . . . Then, before she quite realised what she was doing, she was crossing the Place, passing rapidly along through the Casino opening, down to the lift. She was filled with a vague feeling of excitement. She entered the station and crossed the line with a wonderful smile upon her lips, a conviction that she was very

near to something altogether new in life. And then she stopped short. Walking slowly along the platform, followed by his servant and her maid, were Channay and the Princess Variabinski—the Princess whose deliverer he had been, the Princess who only the night before in her hearing had told him that she was leaving Monte Carlo out of sheer boredom. The roar of the incoming train was scarcely loud enough to stifle the humming in her ears. She was almost dizzy, seeking now only for escape. She crossed the line a few yards in front of the advancing engine, regardless of angry shouts, and somehow or other found her way to the courtyard and into a little carriage. As they climbed the hill the train thundered out on its way to Cannes. . . .

Martin Fogg was not an observant man so far as such details were concerned, but even he noticed his daughter's pallor as they sat together in the lounge of the hotel drinking a cocktail before dinner. Her manner, too, was entirely listless.

"Headache?" he enquired.

"I am afraid," she confessed, "that I am getting a little bored with this place. I shall be quite content to go back to London when you wish."

"Wait a day or two," he advised enigmatically. "Something may turn up to change your views."

She shook her head and watched the people idly for a moment.

"I wonder," she speculated, "whether Mr. Channay was seriously attracted by the Princess?"

"Can't imagine Channay being attracted by any woman," her father declared, looking over the top of the newspaper he had picked up. "The Princess was all over him, and no wonder, considering what he did for her. Beautiful woman, too! Channay might do worse than settle down now that he has come to the end of his adventures. She'd marry him all right. I'm sure of that. By-the-bye, I didn't tell you Catherine, that we have a guest for dinner."

"A guest?" she repeated. "What a nuisance!"

"An old friend. . . . Ah, here he is! What do you think of this for a surprise, Catherine?"

She turned her head and saw Harold Rodes hurrying towards them. Somehow or other the thought of her words on the Terrace flashed into her mind, even in the midst of her very natural astonishment.

"Why, Harold!" she exclaimed, as they shook hands. "How amazing! I didn't even know that you were back in Europe."

The young man looked at her almost without recognition, stupefied by her increased attractions. So far as he was concerned, infidelities were a thing of the past.

"I made up my mind," he explained, "that I wouldn't write again until I could come home and tell you that I had succeeded, that I was bringing back

enough money to settle down with. And I've done it, Catherine. Your father knows!"

"I am so glad," she said doubtfully—"very glad for you, Harold. And how wonderful, too. Money isn't so easily made these days."

"Incentive means a good deal," the young man whispered.

Then they went in to dinner.

For a whole week, Catherine saw her old admirer every day and most of the day. They motored together, played golf and tennis together and took little excursions into the country for lunch and dinner. All the time she set herself sedulously to forget that such a place as Cannes existed, that there was anything more wonderful in life than that pleasant sense of companionship which she sometimes felt with Harold Rodes. His devotion grew with every hour, ministered to by the fact that even in this, the home of beautiful women, Catherine easily held her own. Her unaccustomed pallor had its own peculiar attraction and Rodes had not sufficient sensibility to appreciate the fact that her gaiety was sometimes a little forced. Every day he tried hard to persuade her to accept the ring which he carried always about with him, and every day she put him off.

"We must get to know one another better first," she insisted. "We have become quite strangers again."

"What is there more to know?" he grumbled. "It wasn't my fault I was away so long. I've kept the conditions anyway."

"Well, for one thing," she reminded him, after a moment's pause, "you have told me nothing about your life in Africa, of how you made money and where."

He frowned.

"What does that matter?" he replied. "I have it. Your father knows that. I am worth thirty thousand pounds. That is quite enough to start with. I can find something to do in London—some directorship or something."

"Thirty thousand pounds," she repeated thoughtfully. "What a strange sum!"

"Why?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh, I don't know. It just reminded me of something."

"Let me tell your father to-night at dinner-time that we are engaged," he urged.

"I couldn't, just yet," she answered. "Don't press me too hard, Harold. I know you have a claim—a great claim. You went out to Africa, and there was a sort of understanding that if you succeeded, if you came home in a position to marry—we'd talk about it."

“But aren’t I talking about it all the time,” he protested—“thinking about it too! The time’s come when I want something definite.”

“I know,” she sighed, “but I want to feel just the right way about myself. Don’t hurry me, Harold. We’re having a very pleasant time, aren’t we?”

“Not so pleasant as it might be,” he complained. “Do you know, that I haven’t kissed you yet? Not one kiss!”

“When I let you kiss me at all,” she promised, “I shall let you kiss me as much as you want to. I hope it may be soon, for my own sake. Believe me, I am not any happier than you are. If you are not satisfied, why don’t you flirt a little with some of these other young women. There are plenty of them.”

“You know very well I couldn’t do that with you around,” he protested, in an aggrieved tone.

“Then let us talk sensibly,” she begged. “Tell me about Africa—how you made your money.”

“It wouldn’t interest you,” he assured her. “It was just business.”

“Land?”

“Speculating—that sort of thing,” he replied vaguely. “I’ve got it honestly. Your father knows that.”

She was a little hurt.

“I didn’t doubt you,” she said. “It wasn’t that at all. I was just interested to know what work you had been successful in. After all, it takes brains nowadays to succeed in anything.”

He floundered along until she stopped him. That evening, when she was waiting in the lounge for her father before dinner, a General Breckenfield, an elderly admirer who had paid her many courteous attentions, strolled across the room and took the vacant place by her side. He looked around to be sure that they were alone.

“Miss Fogg,” he began, “I am old enough to be your father.”

“Does that mean I am going to be scolded for something?” she asked.

He shook his head.

“It means that I am going to be horribly frank,” he declared. “During the last week I have seen you about continually with a young man whose name I do not know.”

“Well?” she exclaimed, suddenly curious.

The General coughed.

“In Monte Carlo,” he continued, “one makes acquaintances easily—in the Casino, the Club—anywhere almost. It is all right for us men, but for our women-kind it is different. . . . You will allow me to proceed?”

“Of course,” she assured him.

“Then here goes! I take my courage in both hands. I do not think that that young man, to judge from the company he frequents at night, is a proper

associate for you. But, wait a bit! I shall tell you where I saw him first. It was at a little café-restaurant, the proprietor of which I know very well—he was once a waiter at the Metropole. I saw your friend turned ignominiously out of the place because he was unable to discharge his bill. The proprietor—whom as I told you, I know well—assured me that it was the second time. It was for that reason that he had no mercy."

"But there must be some mistake," Catherine declared. "Mr. Rodes has plenty of money."

"Has he?" the General commented drily. "Well, I saw your friend Mr. Channay, who happened to be passing, discharge the bill, or the young man would probably have been marched off between two gendarmes."

"Mr. Channay knew him! Mr. Channay paid his bill!" Catherine repeated breathlessly.

"I have told you the exact truth, my dear," was the grave reply. "Credit in Monte Carlo is cheap. No person who is temporarily short of money need go to one of those places on the hill to try to escape paying his bill, if he is of any account at all. . . . Here comes your father and my wife. You're not angry with me?" he added, as he rose to his feet.

"I am not angry," she assured him. "I simply don't understand."

In the middle of dinner, Catherine asked her father an unexpected question.

"Father," she enquired, "have you any idea how Harold made his money?"

Martin Fogg coughed. His dilemma was not wholly unanticipated, but at that precise moment he was scarcely prepared with a reply.

"Not exactly, my dear," he prevaricated.

"You are not telling the truth," his daughter insisted curtly. "This is a very important matter to me. Can't you see that? You ought to tell me everything, you know."

Evasion was useless and Martin Fogg had never promised to lie.

"It was an old debt," he admitted, "due to his father's estate."

An overwhelming light suddenly broke in upon Catherine. For a moment she was speechless. Then she leaned a little further across the table.

"Dad," she exclaimed, "Harold's father was the Eric Rodes who wouldn't sign the agreement, whose heir Mr. Channay has been looking for."

"No use denying it," her parent acquiesced. "I've done all that I promised."

"Promised whom?" she demanded. "Why wasn't I told the truth at once?"

Martin Fogg was conscious of a distinct sensation of uneasiness. There was a little glitter in his daughter's eyes which made him feel somehow or other like a guilty school-boy.

"It was a silly notion, my dear," he admitted. "You see Mr. Channay knew that there had been some sort of an understanding between you and this young

man. He discovered him here quite by accident, gathered that the only thing which stood in the way of your engagement was the matter of money, and persuaded me that it would be better, until you had made up your mind about him, to let you think that the thirty thousand pounds——"

"Thank you," Catherine interrupted, with tears in her eyes. "Perfectly rotten of you both, I call it!"

"Our motives," her father began humbly——

"I hate motives!" she interrupted once more, with added vehemence.

It was getting a little late in the season, but there were still many people seated at the small round tables with their striped umbrellas in front of the Casino at Cannes. Catherine and her father, occupying one of these, watched the guests arrive for luncheon and pass into the building.

"I think, my dear," the latter suggested, "that if you really wish to see Mr. Channay it would have been wiser to have let him know or to have called at his hotel. He is probably either there or playing golf. In any case it is no use being angry with him. There is no harm done so far as I can see."

"How do you know there isn't?" Catherine demanded severely. "Suppose I had fallen desperately in love with Harold during this last week and then discovered that he had been practically deceiving me?"

Martin Fogg, who was tired of waiting for the possible arrival of the man whom they had come to visit, made pantomimic signs to a waiter.

"I still don't quite see how you can blame Mr. Channay," he protested. "It is true he didn't tell you himself, but he naturally expected the young man would, eventually."

"He didn't know Harold then," she replied dryly.

"In any case it was a shameful conspiracy."

Her face suddenly lit up. Martin Fogg glanced over his shoulder. Channay, a little bored, had sauntered in from the harbour side and was hesitating as though undecided whether to seat himself at one of the small tables for an *apéritif* or to go straight in to luncheon. Before he could make up his mind, he recognised Catherine and came at once towards them, hat in hand. Catherine took very slight notice of his greeting.

"Sit down there," she directed, pointing to a vacant chair.

Channay obeyed with unaccustomed meekness. Catherine turned to her father.

"Father," she said, "those cocktails won't arrive for hours unless you go and look after them yourself, and, in case that hint shouldn't be obvious enough, I want to talk to Mr. Channay for two minutes quite alone."

Martin Fogg, like the dutiful parent he was, strolled off.

"Well?" Catherine began.

“Have you any news for me?” he enquired.

“I have something to tell you,” she replied firmly, “and something to ask you. I will begin with the questions. Where is the Princess?”

“The Princess who?”

“The Princess Variabinski. I saw you meet her at the station and get into the train with her.”

“We weren’t even in the same compartment,” he assured her. “She was going through to Paris and I got out here. We met at the station entirely by accident.”

Catherine was silent for a moment. It was surely a little corner of paradise, this. The sun was of a perfect warmth, and the wind almost like a caress.

“Question number two,” she proceeded. “Tell me exactly why you went off and left me to deal with Harold Rodes and his thirty thousand pounds.”

“He’s the right age for you,” Channay explained. “You were not sure whether you cared for him. I thought you ought to have a fair chance.”

“I see. Now please listen to me. You want to be forgiven?”

“What about Harold Rodes?” he asked abruptly.

“He is either on his way back to England,” she replied, “or consoling himself with one of his little dancing girls. I knew the real truth from the first moment he arrived and you ought to have known it before.”

He leaned forward in his chair.

“Yes, I want to be forgiven, please,” he decided. “What are the terms?”

“Will you return to Monte Carlo in the car with us this afternoon?”

“Of course,” he assented eagerly.

“Will you promise to walk along the Terrace just where we walked the other evening and say nice things to me?”

“I will promise to say just what I wanted to say—perhaps without knowing it all the time, since the moment I saw you sitting upon my boat at Blickley,” he answered.

“And when you have said it,” she concluded with a little break in her voice, “you will take me up to your sitting-room and let me have tea with you there?”

“Catherine!”—he began.

She waved to her father who was hovering in the background.

“You can come back, dad,” she said, “and he can serve the cocktails now. Mr. Channay and I——”

“Gilbert,” he interrupted softly.

“God bless my soul!” Martin Fogg gasped as he signed to the waiter.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.

[The end of *The Channay Syndicate* by E. Phillips (Edward Phillips) Oppenheim]