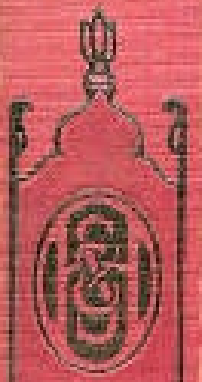


THE  
ADVENTURES  
OF  
Mr. JOSEPH  
P. CRAY



E. PHILLIPS  
OPPENHEIM



BODLEY &  
STURGEON



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*The Adventures of Mr. Joseph P. Cray*

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*THE NOVELS OF*

*E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM*

THE LESSER SIN

THE TERRIBLE HOBBY OF SIR JOSEPH LONDE, BT.

THE GOLDEN WEB

THE PASSIONATE QUEST

THE INEVITABLE MILLIONAIRES

THE MYSTERY ROAD

MICHAEL'S EVIL DEEDS

THE SEVEN CONUNDRUMS

THE EVIL SHEPHERD

THE AMAZING QUEST OF MR. ERNEST BLISS

NOBODY'S MAN

THE GREAT PRINCE SHAN

THE PROFITEERS

THE DEVIL'S PAW

JACOB'S LADDER

THE STRANGE CASE OF MR. JOCELYN THEW

AARON RODD—DIVINER

AMBROSE LAVENDALE—DIPLOMAT

THE DOUBLE TRAITOR

THE WICKED MARQUIS

MR. LESSINGHAM GOES HOME

THE PAWNS COUNT

HAVOC

THE OTHER ROMILLY

THE LIGHTED WAY

THE TEMPTATION OF TAVERNAKE

THE MISCHIEF MAKER

THE FALLING STAR

THE PLUNDERERS

PETER RUFF

THE BLACK WATCHER

THE BLACK BOX

THE KINGDOM OF THE BLIND

THE ILLUSTRIOUS PRINCE

*LONDON : HODDER & STOUGHTON LTD.*

THE ADVENTURES  
OF  
MR. JOSEPH P. CRAY  
  
BY  
E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

HODDER AND STOUGHTON  
LIMITED LONDON

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## *I The Donvers Case*

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The long Continental train drew slowly into Victoria Station, and through a long vista of wide-flung doors a heterogeneous stream of demobilised soldiers, nurses, "Wrafs," and other of the picturesque accompaniments of a concluded war, flowed out on to the platform. The majority lingered about to exchange greetings with friends and to search for their luggage. Not so Mr. Joseph P. Cray. Before the train had come to a standstill, he was on his way to the barrier.

"Luggage, sir?" inquired a porter, attracted by the benevolent appearance of this robust-looking, middle-aged gentleman in the uniform of the American Y.M.C.A.

"Checked my baggage right through," Mr. Cray replied, without slackening speed. "What I need is a taxi. What you need is five shillings. Let's get together."

Whether he was serving a lunatic or not, the five shillings was good money and the porter earned it. In exactly two minutes after the arrival of the train, Mr. Cray was on his way to the Milan Hotel. The streets were not overcrowded. The driver had seen the passing of that munificent tip and gathered that his fare was in a hurry. They reached the Milan in exactly nine minutes. Even then Mr. Cray had the strained appearance of a man looking into futurity.

He stopped the driver at the Court entrance, fulfilled the latter's wildest dreams with regard to emolument, and presented himself eagerly before the little counter.

"Key of 89, Johnson," he demanded. "Get a slither on."

"Why, it's Mr. Cray!" the hall-porter exclaimed, after a single startled gaze at the newcomer's uniform. "Glad to see you back again, sir. Here's your key, sent over half-an-hour ago."

Mr. Cray snatched at it.

"Any packages?" he demanded over his shoulder, as he made for the lift.

"A whole heap of them, sir," was the reassuring reply. "All in your room."

Mr. Cray slipped half-a-crown into the lift-man's hand, made pantomimic signs with his palm, and they shot upwards without reference to the slow approach of a little party of intended passengers. Out stepped Mr. Cray on the fourth floor, and his face beamed as he recognised the valet standing before number eighty-nine.

"Hot bath, James," he shouted. "Set her going."

"Certainly, Mr. Cray, sir," the man replied, disappearing. "Glad to see you back again."

"Gee, it's good!" the new-comer exclaimed, dashing into the bedroom. "Off with the ornaments."

No convict ever doffed his prison garb with more haste and greater joy than did Mr. Joseph P. Cray divest himself of the honourable though somewhat unsuitable garments for a man of his build which he had worn for the last two years. The absurd little tunic looked shorter still as it lay upon the bed, his cow-puncher hat more shapeless than ever, his ample breeches—they needed to be ample, for Mr. Cray's figure was rotund—collapsed in strange fashion as they sank shamelessly upon the floor. Naked as the day on which he was born, Mr. Cray strode unabashed into the bathroom.

“Get me some clothes ready out of those packages, James,” he directed. “Bring a dressing-gown and underclothes in here. Get busy.”

Then for a quarter of an hour Mr. Cray steamed and gurgled, splashed and grunted. His ablutions completed, he dried himself, thrust his legs into some white silk pants, drew a vest to match over his chest, and trotted into the next room. He was still in a hurry.

“Dinner clothes, James,” he ordered. “Slip over a white shirt. Speed's the one and only.”

“You're in a hurry, Mr. Cray,” the man observed, smiling, as he handed him his garments.

“I've been in a hurry for twelve months,” was the feeling reply.

Ten minutes later, Mr. Cray left the room. The strained expression was still in his face. He rang for the lift, descended like a man absorbed with great thoughts, walked through the grill-room, climbed the stairs, passed through the smoke-room, and stood before the bar before he slackened speed.

“Why, it's Mr. Cray!” one of the young ladies declared.

“Two dry Martinis in one glass,” Mr. Cray directed reverently. “Just a squeeze of lemon in, no absinthe, shake it till it froths.”

The young lady chatted as she obeyed instructions. Mr. Cray, though a polite man, appeared suddenly deaf. Presently the foaming glass was held out to him. He raised it to his lips, closed his eyes and swallowed. When he set it down, that look had passed from his face. In its place shone the light of an ineffable and beatific contentment.

“First drink in twelve months,” he explained. “Just mix up another kind of quietly, will you? I'll sit around for a bit.”

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“Mr. Cray! . . . Mr. Cray! . . . Mr. Joseph P. Cray!”

Mr. Cray, who was engaged in a lively conversation with a little group of old and new acquaintances, broke off suddenly in the midst of an animated chapter of

reminiscences.

“Say, boy,” he called out, “who’s wanting me?”

The boy advanced.

“Lady to see you, sir, in the hall,” he announced.

“Have you got that right, my child?” Mr. Cray asked incredulously.

“Mr. Joseph P. Cray, to arrive from France this evening,” was the confident reply.

“That’s me, sure,” the person designated, admitted, rising to his feet and brushing the ash from his waistcoat. “See you later, boys. The next round is on me.”

Mr. Cray made his contented but wondering way into the lounge. A tall and very elegant-looking young woman rose to her feet and came to meet him. Mr. Cray’s eyes shone and his smile was wonderful.

“Sara!” he gasped. “Gee, this is great!”

“Dad!” she replied, saluting him on both cheeks. “You old dear!”

They went off arm in arm to a corner.

“To think of your being here to welcome me!” Mr. Cray murmured ecstatically.

“And why not?” the young lady replied. “If ever any one deserved a welcome home, it’s you. Twelve months’ work in a Y.M.C.A. hut in France is scarcely a holiday.”

“And never a single drink,” Mr. Cray interrupted solemnly.

“Marvellous!” she exclaimed. “But was that necessary, dad?”

“Well, I don’t know,” he admitted. “I guess they don’t all know how to use liquor as I do. Some of the lads out there get gay on nothing at all. So the day I put the uniform on, I went on the water waggon. I took it off,” he murmured, with a reminiscent smile of joy, “an hour and a half ago. . . . Where’s George?”

“Sailed for the States yesterday.”

“You don’t say!”

Sara nodded.

“He’s gone out to Washington on a Government commission. He’d have been here—sent all sorts of messages to you.”

“Not ashamed of his disreputable old father-in-law, eh?”

“Don’t be silly, dad. We’re all proud of you. George has said often that he thinks it fine of a man of your age and tastes to go and work like that. What are you going to do, dad, now?”

“Order dinner for us two, I hope, dear.”

“Just what I hoped for,” she declared. “I think it’s wonderful to have your first evening together. What are your plans dad—stay over here for a time?”

“Why, I should say so,” was the prompt reply. “You’ve heard what’s got the old country?”

“You mean about Wilson?”

“Gone dry!” Mr. Cray exclaimed, in a tone of horror. “All the bars selling soft drinks. Tea-fights at the saloons, and bad spirits at the chemist’s. That’s what the old women we left at home did while we were out fighting.”

“I’m afraid mother was one of them,” Sara observed.

“Your mother’s crazy about it,” Mr. Cray acknowledged. “She’s president of half-a-dozen prohibition societies. She’s now working the anti-tobacco stunt.”

“She doesn’t say anything about coming over, I suppose?” the young woman asked, a little timidly.

“I should say not,” Mr. Cray replied, with a little shiver. “She’s too busy over there.”

Sara slipped her hand through her father’s arm.

“We’ll have a lovely time for a month or two,” she said. “You know how happy I am with George, but this English life is just a little cramped. I suppose I must have some of your wandering spirit in me, dad. Anyhow, for just these few months let’s see a lot of one another. You’re just as fond of adventures as ever, aren’t you?”

A slow smile parted Mr. Cray’s lips, a fervid light shone in his eyes.

“Sara,” he whispered, “after the last twelve months I’m spoiling for some fun. But you, my dear—you’re Lady Sittingbourne, you know. Got your husband’s position to consider and all that.”

She laughed in his face.

“You can cut that out, dad, for a time,” she said. “Come along, now. We’ll talk over dinner. I’m nearly starving, and I want to know if you’ve forgotten how to order.”

As they took their places at a table in the corner of the restaurant, Sara exchanged friendly greetings with a girl a short distance away, who was dining alone with a man.

“Lydia Donvers,” she whispered to her father. “Lydia’s rather a dear. She was at that wonderful school you sent me to at Paris. She’s only been married a year.”

“They don’t seem to be living on a bed of roses exactly,” Mr. Cray commented, glancing at the young man. “Seems all on wires, doesn’t he? Has he had shell-shock?”

Sara shook her head.

“I don’t think he did any soldiering at all,” she replied. “He volunteered once or twice, I know, but he couldn’t pass the medical examination. He was in one of the

Ministries at home.”

Cray’s interest in the couple evaporated. Without being a gourmand, he loved good cooking, civilisation, the thousand luxuries of a restaurant de luxe. He ordered his dinner as he ate it, slowly and with obvious enjoyment. Nevertheless, he happened to be looking across the room when a small page-boy in black livery approached the adjoining table and presented a note to Donvers. He saw the look in the young man’s face as he received the envelope, tore it open and glanced at the card inside. Mr. Cray forgot his dinner just then. It was as though tragedy had been brought into their midst. The young man spoke to the girl, hesitatingly, almost apologetically. She answered with pleading, at last almost with anger. Their dinner remained untasted. In the end, the man rose to his feet and followed the boy from the room. The girl stayed behind.

“Queer little scene, that,” Mr. Cray whispered.

Sara nodded.

“I can’t think what’s the matter with Lydia,” she said.

“Kind of annoyed at having their little feast broken into, I guess,” her father murmured soothingly.

Sara said nothing and for some moments her father sought and found oblivion in the slow consumption of a perfectly cooked sole colbert.

“Gee, this fellow is the goods!” he murmured appreciatively. “If you’d seen what they’ve been giving us over there, good solid tack enough, but after the first month everything tasted alike. Thought I’d got paralysis of the palate!”

“And nothing to drink, dad?”

“Not a spot,” declared Mr. Cray, with frenzied exaltation.

“I’m worried about Lydia,” Sara confided.

“She does look struck all of a heap,” Mr. Cray assented.

“I’m going across to speak to her, if you don’t mind.”

“Sure!” Mr. Cray assented, with his eye fixed almost reverently upon the grouse which the *maître d’hôtel* was tendering for his inspection.

“Don’t wait for me, dad,” she begged.

“I won’t,” Mr. Cray promised. . . .

Mr. Cray ate his grouse with the deliberate and fervid appreciation of the epicure, an appreciation unaffected by the fact that within a few yards his quick sensibility told him that words of tragedy were being spoken. It was obvious that Sara’s friend was confiding in her, and it was obvious that the confidence was of tragical interest. In the midst of it all, the young man who had been called away returned. He had the look of a man making a strong effort to control his feelings. Mr.

Cray, who had seen much of life during the last two years, recognised the signs. Not a word was audible, but when Sara, after her friend's husband had been presented to her, engaged him in earnest conversation, Mr. Cray began to understand.

"A little job for me," he murmured to himself, as he sipped his champagne. "Pity about Sara's grouse, though."

She returned presently, and it was obvious that she had much to say. Mr. Cray was firm.

"Not a word, Sara," he insisted, "until you have eaten your portion of grouse. Charles here has kept it hot for you. Not a word! I'm the stern father about that bird. What you've got to say will keep ten minutes."

Sara obeyed. She generally obeyed when her father was in earnest. It was not until she found herself trifling with a *soufflé*, a dish for which her companion had no respect whatever, that she was permitted to unburden herself.

"Lydia is in great trouble, dad," she confided. "There is something wrong with her husband. She doesn't know what it is, but he came home, a fortnight ago, looking as though he had received a shock, and has never been the same since. This is the third time he has been fetched away from a restaurant by a page in that same livery."

"I saw you talking to him when he came back."

She nodded.

"I asked him right out what was the matter with him, and I told him about you, dad, told him how clever you were at getting people out of difficulties, and how you didn't mind a little risk if there was an adventure at the back of it. I think I impressed him. He says he can promise you all the adventure you want, and they are coming here to take their coffee."

"If this isn't some little burg!" Mr. Cray murmured ecstatically. "Just two hours under the fogs and the wheel begins to turn!"

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The arrival of Gerald Donvers and his wife, just as coffee was being served, did not seem likely to contribute in any way towards the gaiety of Mr. Cray's evening. The young man at close quarters seemed more distraught than ever. He ignored his coffee, but drank two glasses of liqueur brandy quickly. His wife scarcely took her eyes off him, and Sara's attempts to inaugurate a little general conversation were pitifully unsuccessful. Mr. Cray took the bull by the horns.

"Say, Mr. Donvers," he began, "Sara here tells me that you're up against a snag somewhere. If there's any way I can be of service, just open out. You and I are strangers, but anything my daughter says goes, so you can count on me as though I

were an old friend.”

“You are very good,” the young man replied without enthusiasm. “I am in a very terrible position—through my own fault, too. I am to attend a sort of investigation to-night, and I am invited to bring any friend I like who isn’t connected with any of the Services. If you’ll come along, I’ll be glad, but I tell you frankly that I don’t think the shrewdest man in the kingdom would be of any service to me.”

“That sounds hard,” Mr. Cray observed, “but if I’m not butting in I’ll come along, with pleasure. What time is this show down?”

“We shall have to leave in five minutes,” the young man answered, with a little shiver.

Mr. Cray withdrew the bottle from his companion’s reach.

“Take my advice and leave the strong stuff alone,” he said. “If it’s as bad as it sounds, you’ll want your head clear.”

Donvers became no more communicative in the taxicab which drove them presently to a gloomy house in one of the southern squares. They were admitted by a soldier manservant, who ushered them into a sombrely-furnished library on the ground floor. A man who was seated at a desk—a grim, soldierly-looking person in the uniform of a Colonel—glanced up at their entrance and nodded curtly. Seated in an arm-chair was a pale-faced young woman in widow’s weeds, who turned her head away at their entrance.

“You have brought a friend?” the Colonel inquired.

Donvers nodded in spiritless fashion.

“Mr. Joseph Cray—Colonel Haughton. Mr. Cray is an American and has not been in England for two years.”

Colonel Haughton touched a bell by his side.

“Show the young lady in,” he directed the soldier servant who answered it. “How much of this affair do you know, Mr. Cray?” he inquired coldly.

“Not a diddle,” was the emphatic reply. “I wanted Mr. Donvers to put me wise on the way down, but he said he’d rather leave it to you.”

Colonel Haughton made no reply. There was a knock at the door and a young woman was ushered in. She was fashionably dressed, and her face was familiar enough to any one studying the weekly papers. Mr. Cray recognised a compatriot at once. The woman in the chair glanced up at the girl and then away. Every now and then her shoulders shook. The Colonel pointed to a chair.

“Will you be seated, Miss Clare?” he said. “You gentlemen, please yourselves. I propose to recapitulate this unfortunate case for your benefit, Mr. Cray. I have my own ideas as to the course which Donvers should adopt.”

“Go right ahead,” Mr. Cray invited genially. “I’m kind of cramped in the legs with travelling to-day, so I’ll take an easy-chair if there’s no objection.”

“A year ago,” Colonel Haughton said, speaking in sentences of sharp, military brevity, “Donvers here held an appointment in a certain British Ministry. It was his duty frequently to bring dispatches of great importance to a certain branch of the War Office over which I presided. On one occasion, Donvers appears most improperly to have broken his journey at Miss Clare’s flat in Clarges Street.”

“There was no breaking the journey,” Donvers interrupted. “My instructions were to deliver the dispatches into your own hands, and when I got to the War Office you were out for an hour. I came up to have tea with Miss Clare instead of waiting in the Office.”

“Mr. Donvers left his wallet of dispatches hanging in Miss Clare’s hall,” Colonel Haughton continued, “a disgracefully careless proceeding. When he found me at the War Office that evening, he handed me two envelopes instead of three. He said nothing to me about the third, but, realising the loss, returned to Miss Clare’s and searched his own rooms. Miss Clare knew nothing about the possibly missing dispatch, Donvers could discover nothing in his rooms. In the meantime, a prisoner in the Tower was shot at midnight that night. The contents of the letter which never reached me, would have saved him.”

The woman in mourning began to sob. Donvers wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

“Say, that’s bad,” Mr. Cray admitted.

“Owing to information patriotically tendered by Miss Clare,” Colonel Haughton continued, “a constant visitor to her flat was arrested soon afterwards and dealt with in the usual way. He admitted having opened the dispatches which he found in Donvers’ wallet, and made use of their contents. The one which he could not open he took away, and finding it of no interest to his cause, destroyed it. The situation, therefore, amounts to this. Owing to the criminal carelessness of Donvers, a young American whose innocence was beyond doubt, was shot for a spy.”

The woman in mourning looked up. Her eyes flashed fiercely across the room.

“My husband!” she sobbed, “All that I had in the world!”

Donvers looked at Cray as though pleading for his intercession. Cray turned to the young woman.

“Madam,” he said, “may I ask your name?”

“Ellen Saunderson,” was the tearful reply. “My husband was Joe Saunderson. He was as innocent as you or I. The letter which never reached Colonel Haughton would have proved it.”



Mr. Cray fingered his chin thoughtfully.

“Shot for a spy, eh,” he ruminated, “and that letter contained reports which would have saved him. Say, that’s hard! Has any official notice been taken of this matter?” he continued, turning to the Colonel.

“Mr. Donvers came to me a few days later,” the Colonel said, “and confessed that he had not delivered to me one of the dispatches entrusted to him, and explained that he was not in a position to trace it. A few days later, the contents of that dispatch reached me officially. I advised Mr. Donvers to tender his resignation, which he did. Communications have passed in secrecy between a certain department of the American Secret Service and our own, concerning this unfortunate mistake. It has been decided, for obvious reasons, that it shall not be made a Press matter. The question we now have to discuss is the amount of compensation which shall be offered to Mrs. Saunderson.”

The woman turned away wearily.

“Compensation!” she murmured bitterly. “That won’t give me back Joe.”

“I regret to say,” Colonel Haughton continued, “that I am not able to procure for Mrs. Saunderson any official recompense. On the evidence presented, the shooting of Joseph Saunderson was amply justified, and it is the official view that, if recompense be tendered to the widow, a mistake is admitted which might later have serious consequences. Mr. Donvers has made an offer which Mrs. Saunderson rejected with scorn. I will be perfectly frank to all of you. My interest in this matter is to see Mrs. Saunderson receive adequate compensation, and further, in the interests of my Department, to see that this matter is forgotten. If Mrs. Saunderson is not satisfied, she will probably drag into light a matter which, not for Donvers’ sake, but for the sake of the Department, it is my wish to conceal. Mr. Donvers has offered—what was the sum, Donvers?”

“Five thousand pounds,” the young man replied. “It is half the spare money I have in the world.”

The woman turned around with a sudden burst of passion.

“You and your spare money!” she exclaimed. “Do you think your spare money, as you call will bring back Joe—the husband I lost while you stayed flirting with this hussy here?”

Miss Clare frowned, and her fingers twitched nervously.

“No shadow of blame can be attached to Miss Clare in this matter,” the Colonel intervened coldly.

“Or to any one, I suppose?” the woman scoffed. “Look here,” she went on, facing Donvers, “I don’t want your money—I’d rather work my fingers to the bone

than touch a penny of it—but I want to punish you, and if you're a poor man, so much the better. Ten thousand pounds I want from you by midday to-morrow, and if I don't have it, my story goes to the newspapers for the world to read."

There was a silence. Donvers turned towards his companion.

"How are you fixed financially?" Cray asked him.

"That five thousand pounds is my limit," Donvers replied bitterly. "If I have to find the rest, it will break up the business I've just started and beggar me altogether."

"And why shouldn't you be beggared?" the woman demanded, her hands working convulsively and her eyes filled with hate. "That's what I want. That's why I say I'll have ten thousand pounds to-morrow if it means your last sixpence."

There was an uneasy silence. Mr. Cray gathered up the threads of the situation.

"It don't seem like there's any more to be said," he declared. "If you'll bring the lady along to my rooms at the Milan Court to-morrow at twelve o'clock, Colonel, I'll go into this young man's affairs in the meantime and give him the best advice I can."

The colonel glanced at his engagement book.

"I will come," he promised, "but it is the last minute I can promise to give to this unfortunate affair. It must be concluded then, one way or the other."

He touched the bell. His soldier servant opened the door. Cray and his companion hurried off. The latter groaned as they reached the street.

"Very kind of you to come along, Mr. Cray," he said, "but you can see for yourself how hopeless the whole affair is. Not only have I got to go about all my life with the memory of that poor young man's death on my conscience, but if I find that ten thousand pounds I shall be beggared. There's only one way out that I can think of."

Mr. Cray was leaning back in his corner of the taxicab which they had just picked up, his chin resting upon his folded arms. The young man watched him furtively. It was not until they neared the Milan, however, that Mr. Cray spoke.

"There may be another way," he ventured. "I promise nothing, but be at my rooms at twelve o'clock to-morrow to meet those people, and in the meantime don't make a fool of yourself. You'd better bring me a statement of just how much you've got, five minutes before that time."

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Mr. Cray retired early, thoroughly enjoyed his first night in his luxurious bedchamber, was up betimes, and spent a busy morning. At five minutes to twelve, Donvers looking ghastly ill, presented himself and handed over a folded slip of paper.

"I've put down everything I'm worth there," he said. "If I have to find a penny more than six thousand pounds, I'm done. I've come to the conclusion," he went on, "that the fairest way will be to divide all I've got between that woman and my wife, and—disappear."

"Sit down," Mr. Cray replied. "I'll make the bargain for you."

There was a ring at the bell, a moment or two later, and Mrs. Saunderson was ushered in. A single glance into her face robbed Donvers of any hope he might have had. She was still lachrymose, but her face was set in hard and almost vicious lines. Colonel Haughton arrived a few minutes later. He received Mr. Cray's welcome frigidly.

"I desire," he said, refusing a chair, "as speedy a conclusion to this affair as possible."

"Miss Clare not coming?" Mr. Cray inquired, with unabated geniality.

"There is no necessity for her presence that I am aware of," the Colonel replied. "The only question that remains to be decided is whether Mr. Donvers here is prepared to satisfy Mrs. Saunderson's claims."

Mr. Cray was suddenly a different man. The smile had left his broad, good-natured face. His tone was still brisk, but as cold as the Colonel's.

"Colonel Haughton," he said, "you want a show down. Here it is. The whole thing is a ramp. Joe Saunderson was never shot, and you know it. Neither was he ever married."

"What the devil——" the Colonel began.

"Chuck it!" Mr. Cray interrupted. "Miss Clare, as you call her, is married to one of the worst crooks in the States, although you, Colonel, seem to have ruined yourself trying to support her for the last few years. This woman was once her dresser, and a very fair actress still. Joe Saunderson was in charge of the coffee urn in one of my Y.M.C.A. huts for over six months, and I heard the story of his detention and release, a dozen times. Now what are you going to do about it, Donvers? It's up to you."

Donvers suddenly reeled and would have fallen but that Cray caught him and laid him upon the couch. He forced some brandy between his teeth. In a minute the young man opened his eyes, the colour came back to his cheeks. He looked around him. Save for their two selves the room was empty.

"Mr. Cray!" he gasped. "Is this true?"

"Bible truth," Mr. Cray declared cheerfully.

"But Colonel Haughton? He's a well-known man—a D.S.O.—head of his department."

“I guessed he was the goods,” Mr. Cray acknowledged. “They do give us the knock sometimes, you know, these men whom no one would suspect.”

Donvers was on his feet now, going through all the phases of a rapid recovery to sanity.

“And you actually knew this Joseph Saunderson?” he exclaimed wonderingly.

“One of my washers-up,” Mr. Cray explained with unabated cheerfulness, “who was promoted to the coffee urn two months ago. I’ve heard the story of his arrest half-a-dozen times. . . . What about going and looking for your wife, eh? I gave the ladies a hint that there might be something doing in the way of a little luncheon.”

Mr. Cray led the way to the lounge, where Sara and Mrs. Donvers were seated.

“You go and take your wife off somewhere, Mr. Donvers,” he said, “and don’t let us see you again for an hour or so. If you wish it, we’ll all dine together.”

“At eight o’clock, here,” Donvers declared enthusiastically. “I’m host, and I promise you Jules shall do his best. I’ll try and say the things I ought to say to you, then, Mr. Cray. I’m going to take Lydia right off home now.”

Mr. Cray nodded sympathetically, and drew Sara away.

“It’s a long yarn, my dear,” he told her, “but things are fixed up all right for young Donvers. He hasn’t a worry left in the world. You shall have the whole story over luncheon.”

Sara grasped her father’s hand.

“Dad,” she exclaimed enthusiastically, “you’re a marvel! And to think that we have three months together!”

That night, Colonel Haughton, D.S.O., shot himself in his study owing, it was stated, to financial troubles and general depression, and Miss Clare accepted a suddenly proffered engagement for the States. Gerald Donvers’ dinner-party however, was not postponed.

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## *II The Two Philanthropists*

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After two theatres and a music-hall on three consecutive nights, Mr. Joseph P. Cray and his daughter Sara decided to spend a quiet evening. They dined in the restaurant at the Milan, and selected two comfortable easy-chairs in the lounge afterwards. They watched the people for some time in silence. Mr. Cray in particular was a little distraught.

“Dad, I believe you’re planning something,” Sara remarked, as she lit her second cigarette.

“Not guilty,” Mr. Cray assured her.

“Then tell me just what you are thinking of?” she insisted.

Mr. Cray removed his cigar from his lips.

“I was just wondering,” he confessed, “whether it was possible to combine a little harmless excitement with a certain measure of—er—pecuniary benefit.”

“But you don’t want money, dad.”

Mr. Cray coughed.

“I’m not qualifying for the poor-house yet awhile,” he admitted, “but at the same time, if there were shekels about, I should be a willing collector.”

“Business is all right over in the States, isn’t it?” she inquired.

“Booming,” Mr. Cray acknowledged. “There’s more money coming to me over there than I should care to think about spending, but it’s like this, Sara. If I should be cabling for supplies just now, your stepmother would be wise to the fact that I’ve quit France. She’s a busy woman, but she might take it into her head to take a quick trip over.”

“Good gracious, dad, don’t suggest such a thing!” Sara exclaimed hastily. “You can have all the money you want, from me.”

“Nothing doing, my dear,” her father assured her. “I’m a bad hand at borrowing. All the same it would certainly add a little spice to any little adventure that might come along, if I were able to supply my immediate necessities out of it.”

Sara glanced through the glass partitioning at the opulent-looking crowd who dined, at the women in the lounge with their profusion of jewellery, the men, many of them with the hard, acquisitive expression of the day-by-day city man.

“There’s plenty of money about, dad,” she observed.

Mr. Cray thrust his hands deep into his trousers pockets and rubbed two half-crowns together.

“Sure!” he murmured. “Just a touch of inspiration’s all that’s needed.”

Sara left him for awhile, a few minutes later, to go to her room. She was staying at the hotel whilst her house in Charles Street was being renovated. Mr. Cray exchanged his cigarette for a fat cigar and ruminated.

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Towards him down the broad, carpeted way, came Mr. Sinclair Smith, erstwhile of the Stock Exchange, and the Honourable Charles Frinton, of no occupation. Mr. Sinclair Smith was of florid complexion, with a tight mouth, narrow eyes, and an *embonpoint* righteously earned. The Honourable Charles Frinton, whose capacity for enjoying the good things of the world was a trifle in excess of his companion's, was as thin and pale as a man may be. He, too, however, possessed that slight narrowing of the eyes and indrawn lips which betokened the professional money-getter. They were, in fact, birds of a feather.

"It seems a pity," the Honourable Charles Frinton sighed, as they looked around for a seat, "that we should be spending money on one another, Sinny."

"Your fault," was the terse reply. "The supply of mugs up west seems to be running out."

Arm in arm, they slowly approached the easy-chair in which Mr. Cray was seated. Frinton pinched his companion's elbow.

"There's the type I should like to get hold of," he said enviously—"easy, benevolent, opulent. Why can't you drop a few of those into the bag, Sinny?"

"Shut up, you fool," was the muttered reply. "Can't you see he thinks he knows us?"

Mr. Cray's welcoming smile was the bland expression of the lonely and gregarious man.

"Say, I'm not mistaken, am I?" he said, as the two men came to a standstill before him. "Met you about two years ago, sir," he went on, addressing Sinclair Smith, "at the American Bar with some of the boys. We had one or two together. Sit down, gentlemen," Mr. Cray continued, without waiting for any reply. "My daughter's chair, that, but we'll get another when she arrives. I remember now," he went on reminiscently, "it was the night before I put on my uniform."

"I remember perfectly," Mr. Sinclair Smith acknowledged, shaking hands. "Permit me to introduce my friend, the Honourable Charles Frinton—Mr.—er—dear me, I had your name on the tip of my tongue just now."

"Cray," was the prompt response—"Mr. Joseph P. Cray."

"So you've been serving, sir?" Frinton observed after they had settled down.

"American Y.M.C.A., sir," Mr. Cray confided—"a most uncomfortable uniform for a man of my figure, and at times a very miserable job, but I'm through with it. I

took off my uniform less than a week ago, I went right into that little paradise of a bar, and I drank my first cocktail for twelve months. Gee, I can feel the glow of it now!”

“You mean that you were on the water waggon, as I believe your country-people call it, for all that time?” Sinclair Smith inquired.

Mr. Cray was the epitome of stout and contented virtue.

“Not one drop of hard liquor passed my lips all the time I wore Uncle Sam’s uniform,” he declared.

Mr. Sinclair Smith summoned a waiter.

“An appreciative Englishman,” he declared, “is going to offer you as much as you can drink of the best brandy in London.”

As much as Mr. Cray could drink was a pretty tall order, as Mr. Sinclair Smith was presently to discover. The acquaintance, however, proceeded by leaps and bounds, and when Sara presently returned she found her father in his element. He rose to his feet with expansive pride.

“Gentlemen,” he said, “I’d have you shake hands with my daughter, Lady Sittingbourne—Mr. Sinclair Smith—the Honourable Charles Frinton. Gentlemen I met here, dear, before I went to France.”

The little ceremony was pleasantly performed. Mr. Frinton, as became his position, inaugurated the conversation.

“Any relation to Sir George Sittingbourne in the Blues?” he asked, deferentially.

“My husband,” Sara explained. “He was wounded in ’15, you know, and became military A.D.C. at Washington. He’s out there now.”

Secure in his temporary absence, Frinton magnified his slight acquaintance with Sara’s husband into an intimate friendship. The little party soon became on the best of terms. Long after Sara’s retirement for the night, they finished the evening in Mr. Cray’s sitting-room. When they parted, even the hard-headed Frinton, and Sinclair Smith, a past-master in the art of avoiding drink, were incapable.

“See you ’morrow, old sport,” Frinton declared, standing on one leg and balancing himself against the door as he shook hands with their host.

“If you don’t look me up in the city we all meet here at one o’clock,” Mr. Sinclair said, all in one breath.

Mr. Cray watched them on their tortuous way towards the lift, waved his hand in farewell, returned to his easy chair, and helped himself to a final whisky and soda.

“Smart chaps, very, and good company,” he ruminated, “but they take their liquor poorly for Englishmen.”

Luncheon that next day was a gay and festive meal. Sara was amiable and

brilliant. She spoke of city finance with the bated breath of an ignoramus, and she was perfectly prepared to accept her two hosts as prototypes of its genius. Once or twice the thought of what George would say if he had seen her in such company troubled her slightly, but on the whole she reflected that he belonged to a different side of her life, and that she was really only indulging for a very brief period that unquenched love of adventure in which she had revelled during her younger days.

"I wish dad would do something in the City while he's over here," she observed, with a little sigh. "Why don't you, dad? You know you always have what you call a flutter in Wall Street, when you're in New York."

Mr. Cray smiled.

"It's not so easy to get on to anything worth taking an interest in, over this side," he remarked. "Besides, I don't understand the English share market."

The moment appeared to have arrived for which Mr. Sinclair Smith and the Honourable Charles Frinton had been marking time.

"Do you think your father would really like a little flutter, Lady Sittingbourne?" Mr. Frinton asked. "Not a big affair, mind, but a thousand or two profit certain—perhaps a little more later on."

Mr. Sinclair Smith laid down his knife and fork.

"Charlie," he exclaimed, "you're not——"

"Yes, I am! Why not?" his friend interrupted, gazing admiringly into Sara's eyes. "Corton's no pal of mine, and I never gave him a word of encouragement."

"But I did," Mr. Sinclair Smith confessed doubtfully. "I promised to meet him to-night and let him know how far we could go."

"You can tell him the whole thing's off," the other declared ruthlessly—"that is to say if Mr. Cray here fancies the proposition."

"Say, gentlemen, put me wise about this," the latter begged eagerly.

Mr. Sinclair Smith shrugged his shoulders.

"Mr. Cray," he said, "you're a very good fellow, and I quite share Frinton's admiration for your charming daughter, but, as a rule, to be perfectly frank with you, we reserve our little side-shows for our older friends, especially when the plums are sticking out. However, Frinton's said the word and I won't go back on him. Ever heard of the Idabo Rubber Plantations?"

"We're not great on rubber, over the other side," Mr. Cray replied, "but I do just know that the Idabo is a sound concern."

"Ten thousand of the new issue are coming on the market this week," Mr. Sinclair Smith confided. "I don't know how you manage these things over on the other side, but the directors don't want the market disturbed, and they're handing



them out in big blocks. Frinton and I have five thousand each. There's another five thousand to be bought for prompt cash."

"And the price?"

"Thirty-seven and sixpence," Sinclair replied. "You can see what they stand on the market, in this morning's paper. Forty-one offered."

"I don't quite get the hang of this," Mr. Cray confessed. "Just why are you offering these shares at three and sixpence less than the market value?"

"Because the directors don't want the market price disturbed," Mr. Sinclair Smith explained. "They're taken nearly all the new issue themselves. These are just a few over which they've been handing out to their friends. If you take this five thousand, you'll have to pay prompt cash for them, but they'll stand you in a profit on to-day's price of over two thousand pounds. On the other hand, we shouldn't expect you to put them on the market, except in very small lots, for the next fortnight."

"And supposing they go down in the meantime?" Sara asked.

Mr. Frinton smiled.

"Your father can get all the information about Idabos he wants to," he suggested, "but as a matter of fact, if you like a little gamble yourself, Lady Sittingbourne, I'll bet you five hundred that Idabos are higher sooner than lower in a month's time."

"This sounds good to me," Mr. Cray confessed. "I'll have a look at the tape presently."

"That's right, no hurry," Mr. Frinton said. "Sinny, you're host. I think another bottle of this Chateau Yquem. And, Lady Sittingbourne, we really ought to apologise for talking shop."

"Indeed you needn't," Sara protested. "As a matter of fact, it is my fault entirely. It is nice of you to help dad to make a little money."

"Perhaps I wasn't thinking altogether about your father," the Honourable Charles Frinton ventured.

"It isn't money, of course," Sara went on. "Dad's got plenty of that. But it does give him something to do and think about. Men are so much better when their thoughts are occupied, don't you think so?"

"That depends," the young man replied, with an impressive sigh. "Sometimes a man's thoughts are rather a hindrance to his day's work."

Sara laughed gaily.

"I think you London men are terrible," she said.

"There's only one fault about us," Frinton declared—"we're too impressionable."

Sara looked modestly down at her plate. It was indeed a gala luncheon for the Honourable Charles Frinton and Mr. Sinclair Smith. After luncheon, they adjourned to Mr. Cray's sitting-room, where their host, with some pride, produced a small portable typewriter, stuck in a sheet of paper, and hammered out the following document:

*I, Joseph P. Cray, and we, Charles Frinton and William Sinclair Smith, agree severally, the former to purchase and the latter to sell, shares to the value of ten thousand pounds in the——*

"How do you spell Idabo?" Mr. Cray inquired.

"I-d-a-b-o," Mr. Frinton said.

"No 'r'?"

"No 'r.'"

*—Idabo Rubber Plantations. Payment in full to be made in cash on production of the share certificates, and two hundred and fifty pounds (£250) deposit to be paid by the said Joseph P. Cray on the signature of this document.*

"You Americans know how to tie a thing up tight," Mr. Sinclair Smith remarked, laughing, as he signed his name.

"Something of a lawyer, aren't you, Mr. Cray?" the Honourable Charles Frinton added, as he too appended his signature. "Do we want a copy of this?"

"I haven't any carbons," Mr. Cray replied, "but I guess my cheque will do for your half. I'll just put the document in the drawer here until we clean the deal up."

"That will be quite satisfactory," Mr. Sinclair Smith said, "but there's one rather important matter, Mr. Cray—when will it be convenient for you to clear this business up? Frinton and I paid for our shares yesterday."

"As soon as I've had time to walk down to the Bank of England, I guess things can be arranged," Mr. Cray promised. "I've a credit here for pretty well as much as I should care to draw."

Their eyes rested upon him almost hungrily. Both for a moment had the same feeling—they had touched him too lightly, and alas! in all probability they would have no other opportunity.

"What are you doing this evening, Charles?" Mr. Sinclair Smith asked his companion in an undertone.

“Dining at Doncaster House,” the other confided. “The Duchess—well, you understand.”

Mr. Sinclair Smith nodded.

“I promised Joel, too—but there, Charles, I think we ought to clear this business up. You know what Sir William said—that they might ask us for these shares back again if they weren’t cleared up within a few hours. Could you see us between six and seven, Mr. Cray?”

“Sure!” that gentleman replied, rising from the table where he had been writing a cheque. “Here’s your two hundred and fifty pounds. I’ll get down to the bank presently, and we’ll all meet and have a cocktail together, eh? You must let me come down and see you in the city some day, Mr. Smith. I guess I’d be interested in studying some of your English methods.”

“We’ll give you a city man’s lunch any day later in the week,” Mr. Sinclair Smith promised, as he thrust the cheque into his waistcoat pocket.

“I hope we’ll see your charming daughter again,” the Honourable Charles Frinton remarked, as they said good-bye.

“Why not fix up a little dinner for this evening?” Mr. Cray invited hospitably. “Sara’d be tickled to death. We might go to a music-hall afterwards.”

The Honourable Charles Frinton looked the picture of woe.

“Alas!” he regretted, “not this evening. I have some relatives who are apt to be a little exacting.”

“And I have an appointment with a very big financial man,” his friend confided—“a deal in property, I don’t mind telling you, that runs into a couple of millions or thereabouts.”

“Say, you boys do handle the stuff!” Mr. Cray said, admiringly. “Till six o’clock, then, and good luck to you. I’ll pay my respects to the old lady of Threadneedle Street. . . .”

Left to himself, Mr. Cray turned the key in the lock, lest by some chance one of his guests should return. Then he thrust the piece of paper once more back into the typewriter, and, adjusting it carefully, struck a single letter. Afterwards he placed the document in his pocket, caught up his stick and hat and sauntered out into the Strand. His journey citywards, however, extended no further east than Somerset House.

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After the *mise en scène* was set that evening, Mr. Cray’s heart misgave him.

“I guess you’d better not figure in this show, Sara,” he said to his daughter, who was occupying an easy-chair in his sitting-room. “There’s no telling how those two

skunks may pan out. They're soft stuff to look at, but you never can tell."

Sara showed not the slightest signs of moving.

"Dad," she said, "I've been with you in some tougher corners than you'll find yourself in this evening. And you know what I told you. If I can't gratify this morbid craving of mine for a few last glimpses into Bohemia, I shall never settle down and make George a respectable wife. Besides, you'll want me to mix the cocktails, and I want to see whether Mr. Frinton will remain the perfect gentleman."

Her father smiled tolerantly.

"I guess there'll be more tears than blows," he said. "Stay where you are if you're set upon it."

"I intend to," Sara declared sweetly. . . .

The two visitors were very punctual indeed. They arrived, indeed, five minutes before the time. Mr. Sinclair Smith made profuse apologies.

"The fact of the matter is," he explained, "both Mr. Frinton here and I are hard pushed this evening. We shall just have to finish our little piece of business as quickly as we can, and if you, sir," he added, turning to Mr. Cray, "and your daughter, will honour us by dining at the Ritz to-morrow night, we shall be charmed. We can then celebrate this occasion more adequately."

"It's a date, sure," Mr. Cray promised exuberantly. "No need to keep you gentlemen over this little business, either. I've a packet of notes here, and I see you've got the shares there. Spread them out upon the table, sir. Let's have a look at them."

Mr. Sinclair Smith reverently produced a thick pile of brand-new copperplate share certificates. They were very clean, very artistically executed and evidently of recent issue. Mr. Cray, with the notes bulging from his pocket, began to count. The two men stood over him.

"One hundred, two hundred, three hundred, four hundred——" Mr. Cray stopped short.

"What's wrong?" Mr. Sinclair Smith asked sharply, trying to keep the note of anxiety from his voice.

"It's this durned spelling again," Mr. Cray explained, with puckered brows. "These share certificates seem to be spelt without the final 'r'."

"That's the way the plantation's spelt," was the sharp reply. "I told you so when you made out the agreement."

Mr. Cray stopped his counting and felt in his pocket.

"I don't seem, somehow, to remember that," he said pensively.

He spread out the agreement, with its Somerset House stamp, upon the table.

The faces of the two men who stared at the spot to which Mr. Cray's fat forefinger pointed, were a study. Without a doubt, the name of the rubber plantation there was "Idabor," and below it were their signatures.

"It was spelt 'Idabo' when I signed," Frinton exclaimed at last.

"I'll swear it," Mr. Sinclair Smith echoed. "The agreement's been tampered with."

Mr. Cray returned it reflectively to his pocket.

"I guess you two gentlemen don't know how to spell your own property," he said pleasantly. "Now I'll just put you both wise as to what made me so plumb positive. It's this report from my stockbroker."

He held a sheet of paper before him and read out its contents:—

#### *IDABOR RUBBER PLANTATIONS.*

*Capital three hundred thousand pounds. A fine commercial undertaking. Full particulars in Rubber handbook, sent herewith. Present price of shares round about forty-one. Should recommend purchase.*

#### *IDABO RUBBER GROUNDS.*

*A derelict concern, nominal capital sixty thousand pounds, with a large number of unissued founders shares. Shares not quoted on Exchange as property considered valueless.*

"I got that from my stockbroker this afternoon," Mr. Cray explained. "That's why I knew for certain that it was Idabor shares and not Idabo we were dealing in."

Mr. Frinton had turned very pale. He sank suddenly into an unoccupied chair. For the purposes of any further controversy, he was down and out. Mr. Sinclair Smith made as good a showing as could reasonably have been expected.

"Mr. Cray," he confessed, "the shares we meant to plant you with were the Idabo Rubber Shares. Frinton here and I were had with them, cost us a cool ten thousand. We were the mugs that time. We made up our minds to pass them on if we could to another mug. We selected you."

"That seems to have been a little unfortunate," Mr. Cray observed, with a bright smile.

"You've tumbled to it and there's nothing more doing," Sinclair Smith continued. "Here's your two hundred and fifty pounds deposit," he added, throwing the cheque upon the table. "Come on, Frinton."

“Stop a minute,” Mr. Cray called out.

The two men, who were well on their way to the door, paused.

“I can’t see my way through quite to the end of this little matter yet,” Mr. Cray explained. “By this document here you seem bound to deliver to me five thousand Idabor shares at thirty-seven and six, to-day’s price forty-one, profit to me eight hundred and seventy-five pounds.”

Mr. Sinclair Smith stared at Mr. Cray for several moments without speech. Once he opened his lips, glanced at Sara and closed them again. Mr. Frinton’s rejoinder was on the weak side.

“Those were Idabos and you know it,” he muttered.

Mr. Cray shook his head and tapped his breast-pocket.

“Idabos doesn’t sound reasonable,” he protested gently. “They could be bought by the thousand for fourpence a share, and you were proposing to sell them to me for thirty-seven and sixpence. I feel sure that no one would believe it possible that you two gentlemen would make such a suggestion as that. Idabors my agreement says, and Idabors I want—or eight hundred and seventy-five pounds.”

Then both men forgot the presence of a lady and began to talk. Sara leaned back in her chair with the air of a pleased and gratified audience. Mr. Cray, too, showed not the slightest signs of wishing to interrupt the dual stream of eloquent abuse. When the two men were silent at last through lack of breath, he made his first remark.

“I am not a bargainer, gentlemen,” he said. “There seems to have been a little mutual misunderstanding in this deal, but the fact remains that I am entitled to the delivery of five thousand Idabor shares from you at thirty-seven and sixpence, or the profit on them—eight hundred and seventy-five pounds. I am not a hard man. I will take five hundred pounds cash.”

A secondary burst of eloquence was less original but more abusive.

“You’re a damned sharper!” Mr. Frinton wound up.

“A low confidence trick man,” Mr. Sinclair Smith finished, with a glance at Sara, “you and your——”

Mr. Cray took a step forward. Mr. Sinclair Smith did not finish his sentence. He took a step backwards towards the door. Mr. Cray threw it open and stood there. He was still smiling, but his smile had qualities.

“At nine o’clock,” he said, “my solicitor is looking me up for a friendly chat. A cheque for five hundred pounds any time before that hour will see you through this trouble. You’ll find the lift round to the right. So long, boys!”

Mr. Cray returned to the room with beaming face.

“Sara,” he invited, looking towards the sideboard, “give her a shake.”

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At a quarter to nine that evening, while Mr. Cray and his daughter were dining at a corner table in the grill-room, a note was brought to him. He tore open the envelope. Inside was a cheque for five hundred pounds. He thrust it into his waistcoat pocket, produced the one which he had written for two hundred and fifty pounds and passed it to Sara.

“Your share, my dear,” he said. “Let us drink the health of those two philanthropists.”

“You dear, clever father!” she murmured enthusiastically.

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### *III Pussyfoot in Mischief*

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The meeting between Mr. Cray and Mr. Edward P. Wallin of Seattle, was a touching and wonderful thing. It took place on the pavement of the Strand, about fifty yards from the entrance to the Milan, the occasion being a gentle stroll on the part of Mr. Cray towards one of the reopened hotels in Northumberland Avenue, which was reputed to possess a wizard in the art of cocktail mixing. They recognised one another about ten yards off, and their greetings were vociferous and idiomatic.

“If it isn’t Ed!” Mr. Cray exclaimed, in great excitement. “Welcome to the gay little burg!”

“Joe, old sport, if this isn’t bully!” was the prompt and hearty response. “Put it there, my son of the Stars and Stripes. Why, I thought you were handing doughnuts to the boys out in Cologne.”

“Demobbed two months ago,” was the cheerful reply. “I had twelve months of it steady.”

“Gee, but you’re a wonder! I guess the Milan’s the nearest.”

Arm in arm, the two men swung along the pavement, Mr. Wallin a somewhat smaller and plumper edition of his old friend. Their faces exuded good-humour and goodwill. Both were filled with the joy of meeting a friend and fellow-countryman in a strange city.

“Ed,” Mr. Cray observed, “they’ve hit it up for us on the other side.”

“It’s a sure Hell!” the other groaned. “You have to have a pain in your stomach and drop in at the drug store to get a drop of rye or Scotch, and even then you feel like hiding behind the show-case. And I tell you, Joe, to see the boys lapping up soft drinks and getting gloomier all the time is just one over the limit. No one’s gotten used to it yet. We go about kinder dazed.”

Mr. Cray glanced at his watch as they reached the Milan Bar. He led the way to two easy-chairs and beckoned to a waiter.

“Two Scotches and soda, Tim,” he ordered, “and in a quarter of an hour see that Coley hits us up two dry Martinis with some stick in. Afterwards we’ll have a bite of luncheon in the grill-room.”

The programme was approved and carried out. About half-way through the meal, Mr. Cray asked a momentous question.

“Say what’s brought you over, Ed?”

Mr. Wallin laid down his knife and fork and groaned. His eyes were fixed with an indescribable expression upon the figure of a woman a short distance away.



“That,” he replied,—“her!”

Mr. Cray turned in his chair. A smartly attired young woman, who had paused upon the threshold looking around the room as though in search of some one, was now approaching their table.

“Why, Mr. Wallin,” she exclaimed, as she shook hands, “I had no idea that you were staying here!”

“I’m not,” he replied. “I’m just having a bite with a friend. I’d like you to know Mr. Joseph P. Cray—Miss Nora Medlicott.”

Mr. Cray rose at once to his feet and shook hands with Miss Medlicott. She was very good-looking, her expression was pleasing and her manner friendly.

“I’m glad to know you, Mr. Cray,” she said. “Are you by any chance related to Mrs. Georgina Cray, the Vice-President of the Women’s Kill-the-Drink-League?”

“My wife,” Mr. Cray faltered.

Miss Medlicott shook hands with him again.

“I am proud to know you, sir,” she declared. “Your wife has done a great work in Oregon.”

“Sure!” Mr. Cray murmured, his tone singularly lacking in conviction. “I’ve been kind of out of things for the last two years.”

“Mr. Cray has been over in France, doing Y.M.C.A. work,” his friend explained.

“Exactly what I should have expected from Mrs. Cray’s husband,” the young lady declared approvingly.

“You’ll sit down and have some lunch with us, Miss Medlicott,” Mr. Wallin begged.

The young lady appeared to hesitate. She glanced once more around the room.

“I promised to lunch with some of the crowd,” she said “but——”

Her eyes suddenly fell upon the bottle of Scotch Whisky which Mr. Wallin had vainly tried to conceal behind a newspaper. Her manner stiffened.

“We’ll send this right away,” the offender promised eagerly. “I’m not accustomed to it in the middle of the day, but Mr. Cray here has a touch of rheumatism.”

“Touch of what!” Mr. Cray asked blankly, and received a kick on the shins for his obtuseness.

Miss Medlicott smiled gravely at him.

“You mustn’t think I’m over-prejudiced, Mr. Cray,” she said, “but I am a great believer in total abstinence. I have many friends, however, who do not share my views, amongst them Mr. Wallin here. I do not, however, sit down at a table, if I can help it, where alcoholic liquors are being consumed.”

"We'll soon make that all right if you'll join us," Mr. Cray promised, pushing the bottle heroically away.

"In any case," Miss Medicott replied, smiling, "there are my friends. Good-bye, Mr. Cray! You will come and call, won't you, Mr. Wallin?"

"Sure!" that gentleman assented eagerly.

"I'll be round to-morrow afternoon."

The young lady departed. Mr. Cray looked after her regretfully.

"Say, that's a pity, Ed!" he said. "A real stunner, if ever I spoke to one, and a bee in her bonnet like that!"

Mr. Wallin groaned.

"And I love her, Joe," he confided. "I've asked her to marry me six times, and I've come over here because I couldn't bear to think of her in London and these foreign places and me back in Seattle. Sometimes I think I'll have to take the pledge."

Mr. Cray coughed. He found advice difficult.

"It's a serious step, Ed. Men at our time of life ought to be careful how we trifle with our constitutions."

Mr. Wallin helped himself to whisky.

"You're right, Joe," he agreed, "but I do sure love that girl."

"How do you stand with her?" his friend inquired.

"All right, I guess, except for this craze of hers," was the doleful reply. "I can't see that it's her fault. Her father and mother are mad about it. She's been brought up in the atmosphere."

"She seems a nice girl, too," Mr. Cray sighed.

"If she'd only leave off trying to convert me," Mr. Wallin murmured.

Mr. Cray finished his whisky and soda, and displayed an interest in the waiter's suggestion as to liqueurs. The matter having been satisfactorily dealt with, he proceeded to the reconsideration of his friend's dilemma.

"Ed," he said, "have you ever tried to convert the young lady?"

"Will you tell me how to start about it?" Mr. Wallin asked drearily. "The poor girl doesn't know the taste of wine or liquor. Nothing of the sort has ever been allowed in the house since she was born. I'd as soon think of offering her a cocktail as of handing her poisoned chocolates, and I guess she'd feel the same about it."

"What sort of a crowd is she with over here?" Mr. Cray enquired.

"Why, there's her father and mother, a reverend gentleman, two elderly men, and Hiram Croft, the Senator. I guess he's in the same boat that I am."

"A rival, eh?" Mr. Cray observed.

His friend assented dolefully.

“And looks like landing the goods. There they all are, over at the round table.”

Mr. Cray studied them thoughtfully.

“Lot of dead-heads,” he declared. “Why, Miss Medlicott is the only live figure there. She don’t belong Ed.”

“It’s a cruel hobby, that water drinking,” Mr. Wallin remarked. “Seems to link them together, though.”

“You mean to tell me that sandy-haired, melancholy-looking dyspeptic is your rival?” his host went on. “Gee, Ed, you ought to put it over on him!”

“He’s the big noise when he’s on the platform.”

“Sure, but the girl isn’t going to live with him on a platform! What are they all doing over here, Ed?”

“Some fool’s stunt,” Mr. Wallin replied. “They’re collecting recipes of temperance drinks. The idea is, when they find one that goes, to form a company to manufacture it. Something that’s cool and thirst-quenching in summer, and warm and vitalising in winter—see the ads, that Hiram Croft is always drawing up.”

“A new soft drink, eh?” Mr. Cray said thoughtfully.

“That’s the idea. They’re going round the English manufacturers, and if they can’t find anything they’re going on the Continent.”

“A new soft drink, eh?” Mr. Cray repeated. “There’s money in that, Ed.”

“Sure,” Mr. Wallin assented, “or Hiram Croft wouldn’t be in it. He’s some water drinker, and he cuts out the hard stuff all right, but his nose follows the dollars all the time. Pa and ma Medlicott know that, too. My little pile isn’t much by the side of his.”

“Ed,” his friend said firmly, “if you let a whimple-faced, anæmic-looking weed like that rob you of a fine girl like Miss Medlicott, I’ve sure done with you.”

“Do you think I want him to have her?” Mr. Wallin asked almost indignantly. “Do you think I’ve followed her over here for nothing? Say, you always were a slick sort of chap, Joe. Do you think you could help me?”

Mr. Cray stretched a pudgy, but muscular hand across the table.

“I do think so and I will, Ed,” he declared. “Put it there.”

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The Hiram Croft-cum-Medlicott party occupied a large round table in a corner of the restaurant. Mr. Wallin and his companion paused before it on their way out.

“I want you all to know my friend Mr. Joseph P. Cray,” the former said, with his hand on Hiram Croft’s shoulder. “Mr. Cray has just returned from a year with the Young Men’s Christian Association out at the Front.”

Mr. Hiram Croft shook hands. The introduction was made general.

“Any relation, may I ask,” Mrs. Medlicott began, adjusting her pince-nez——

“My friend Mr. Cray,” Mr. Wallin interrupted proudly, “is the husband of Mrs. Cray, the Vice-President of the Kill-the-Drink-League.”

Mr. Hiram Croft shook hands with him again.

“This is a privilege, Mr. Cray,” he said.

Every one seemed pleased and happy. A chair was brought for Mr. Cray, who looked round at the table with its four goblets of iced water, with an inward shiver. There was a good deal of general conversation, which Mr. Cray dexterously brought up to a certain point.

“Mr. Croft,” he said, “I am one of those men who before the war had been used to use liquor in moderation.”

Mr. Cray in the eyes of everybody became a very black sheep indeed. Everybody’s manner stiffened perceptibly. It was hard to connect an even moderate use of strong drink with the husband of such an inspired dry prophetess as Mrs. Cray.

“When I took up my post for the Y.M.C.A.,” Mr. Cray continued, “I cut it right out. During my year in France not a drop of liquor of any sort passed my lips. Being naturally of a somewhat thirsty disposition, I developed a strong interest in temperance drinks.”

“Sure!” Mr. Hiram Croft murmured with returning tolerance.

“The subject of temperance drinks,” Mr. Medlicott announced, “is one which is at the present time engaging a large share of our attention.”

“So I understand from my friend Mr. Wallin, here,” Mr. Cray said. “I gathered that you were over here looking out for a thoroughly satisfactory recipe for a non-alcoholic beverage.”

“Do you know of one, Mr. Cray?” Miss Medlicott asked with a smile.

“Madam,” the gentleman addressed replied solemnly, “I do.”

“Say, this is very interesting,” the Senator remarked. “Can we be introduced to it, sir?”

Mr. Cray drew his chair a little closer up to the table.

“Mrs. Medlicott and gentlemen,” he said, “it is, in a sense, a most extraordinary thing that I should have come into touch with you. I claim to have discovered the most wonderful, refreshing, thirst-quickening, and exhilarating beverage the world has ever known. I hold the recipe of it, and I value that recipe at a good many million dollars.”

“Large figures,” Mr. Croft murmured.

“If the beverage,” Mr. Cray proceeded solemnly, “stood on the market according to my directions and sold at even a moderate profit, its sales throughout the world would be colossal. But,” he went on, “all this is talk. I am prepared to prove my words. I ask you, Mrs. Medicott and gentlemen, have you yet discovered a satisfactory non-alcoholic beverage?”

“We have not,” Mrs. Medicott admitted.

“We were inclined to favour a certain brand of dry ginger-ale,” Mr. Croft observed, “but we have come to the decision that its after-effects are deleterious.”

“A sense of inflation,” one of the old gentlemen murmured.

“A tendency towards pains in the lower regions,” Mr. Medicott admitted frankly.

“In short,” Mr. Cray summed up, “you have not yet found what you are looking for. Now I have brought my recipe back from France, and although I have not yet sold a single bottle, been near the advertisers, or mentioned it to a soul, I have a plant near London and I shall be starting out shortly to manufacture on a very small scale. I invite you, ladies and gentlemen, to dine with me at the restaurant of this hotel at eight o’clock next Wednesday night, when my daughter, Lady Sittingbourne, will be proud to be your hostess. You shall then test my beverage, and if you find it what you are looking for, there shall be no question of dollars between us. I will give you the recipe.”

Mr. Hiram Croft shook hands with Mr. Cray for the third time.

“Sir,” he said, “if you are not led away by the enthusiasm of the discoverer, you are one of the world’s benefactors.”

“You have spoken, sir,” Mrs. Medicott declared, “as the husband of Mrs. Cray should speak.”

“In short,” Mr. Medicott declared, “we accept your invitation.” . . . .

Mr. Cray received his guests on the appointed day, in the sitting-room of his suite. He presented them to his daughter, and as soon as they were all assembled he stood by his little sideboard and addressed them all.

“Mrs. and Miss Medicott and gentlemen,” he said, “I can assure you that I feel it a very great honour to entertain you all to-night, but I do not want you to lose sight for a moment of the fact that in a sense this is an educational and I trust you will find it a deeply interesting gathering. I am going to disprove everything that has ever been written about alcohol.”

“Hear, hear!” Mr. Hiram Croft murmured.

“Now,” Mr. Cray continued, smiling, “you are all doubtless aware of a long-established habit amongst our country-people of taking a cocktail before dinner.

However one looks upon it, the habit itself is without doubt a pernicious one.”

“Deplorable!” Mrs. Medlicott murmured.

“Unhygienic,” one of the old gentlemen echoed.

Mr. Cray signified his unqualified assent.

“Still,” he continued, “one function of this cocktail is on the surface a pleasant one. A little party of friends, such as this, meets, tired with the day’s toil, shy, perhaps, from an imperfect acquaintance with each other, depressed with business worries, physically and mentally weary. Alcohol in the shape of a cocktail has its functions upon such an occasion. We have heard the hearty laugh, we have seen the lightning change, the smile of relief, a spirit, perhaps, of good-fellowship, incited by this evil means. Now, my friends, I propose to show you how something of the same sort can be incited without recourse to this bane of our days, alcohol.”

Mr. Cray lifted a napkin from the top of a dozen or so of glasses which stood upon a silver salver upon the sideboard. The glasses were filled with a pale amber liquid, on the top of which was floating a small piece of lemon. Very proudly indeed Mr. Cray handed a glass to each of the little company. They all accepted it with a smile of pleased interest.

“Now this,” Mr. Cray announced, “is the subject of my first recipe. It is, I claim, pleasant to the taste, stimulating, refreshing and entirely harmless. It is quite inexpensive to produce, and if you share my enthusiasm for the beverage of which you will presently partake, the recipe for this slight appetiser shall also be yours, Mrs. Medlicott . . . Miss Medlicott . . . gentlemen!”

They all tasted critically, tasted again, and set down their glasses empty. Then they all looked at one another. Mr. Wallin was the only unenthusiastic person.

“I’m afraid I’m all for a Dry Martini, Joseph,” he admitted, “although I must admit that this is a pleasant little appetiser so far as soft drinks go.”

“Your taste, sir,” Mr. Hiram Croft said severely, “is vitiated. The beverage of which we have just partaken, Mr. Cray,” he added, looking hard at the sideboard to see if there was any more, “represents, I consider, a remarkable discovery. I find it exceedingly pleasant, and, if I may say so, stimulating, without the noxious after-taste of alcohol.”

“I think it is perfectly delicious,” Miss Medlicott pronounced.

“Most soothing,” Mrs. Medlicott agreed.

“Mr. Wallin’s criticism,” Mr. Medlicott said, looking hard at him, “only proves how a taste for the really good and pure beverages of life may be destroyed by reckless indulgence in alcohol. I consider this beverage which you have offered us, Mr. Cray, a most marvellous discovery. I offer you my congratulations. I am

impatient to become acquainted with your other and main discovery.”

“I am most gratified,” Mr. Cray declared, beaming. “If you will follow me, then, we will now get along to the restaurant. . . .”

The little party made their way down the corridor to the lift and thence to the restaurant. There was not the slightest doubt that the truth of Mr. Cray’s contentions was already becoming evident. The two old gentlemen, who brought up the rear arm in arm, looked a great deal less like college professors, and surveyed the gay scene in the foyer with critical and appreciative eyes. Mr. Hiram Croft talked the whole of the way. He was even genial to his rival, Mr. Wallin.

“It is my belief, sir,” he said, “that your very interesting friend Mr. Cray has made a marvellous discovery. I have suffered from dyspepsia all my life. Meals have been a trouble to me instead of a pleasure. I have seldom anticipated the partaking of food except with dread. To-night I have quite a new feeling. I am hungry. I am looking forward to my dinner. If this sensation lasts, I shall hail Mr. Cray as one of the benefactors of his generation, and I shall make it my business, too, as a Senator and a man of some note, Mr. Wallin, in our great country, to see that your friend’s discovery brings him the fame to which he is entitled.”

Mr. Wallin listened with respect to his companion’s eulogy. Mrs. Medlicott, who walked at Mr. Cray’s right hand, talked to him all the time with marked graciousness. She did not once raise her pince-nez to gaze with disapproval at the somewhat exotic evening dresses of the other guests in the foyer. Her mouth had lost its severe curve, and she, too seemed full of pleasurable anticipation. Miss Medlicott, who walked on the other side of their host, was inclined to be a little thoughtful. She, too, however, was in the best of spirits, and a little cry of admiration escaped her lips when, escorted by many bowing waiters, they were ushered to a private room opening out of the main restaurant in the centre of which was a large table, beautifully decorated with great clusters of red roses, and with a little American flag rising from a fancy edifice in the middle. There was a general murmur of interest when, as they sat down, gold-foiled bottles, one to every two persons, were discovered around the table.

“So this is the great discovery?” Mrs. Medlicott said, smiling. “The bottle presents a most attractive appearance.”

“I am glad that it meets with your approval,” Mr. Cray replied. “I have instructed the waiter not to open any of it until after the soup, as the contents are slightly aerated.”

Mr. Hiram Croft looked a little disappointed. He ate his oysters and swallowed his soup with almost tumultuous eagerness. A little murmur of deep interest escaped

from every one when, with the serving of the fish, a dark-visaged potentate dexterously opened one or two of the bottles, and glasses were filled.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” Mr. Cray said, “this may be an epoch-making dinner in the history of American temperance. If you approve of this beverage, as I trust you will do, there may soon come a time when it will become a familiar feature upon the sideboard and dinner-table of every self-respecting American citizen. My best wishes to all of you!”

Glasses were clinked all round the table. Mr. Cray drank with Mrs. Medlicott and Miss Medlicott, Mr. Wallin drank with Mr. Medlicott, the two old gentlemen drank with one another, Mr. Hiram Croft drank with everybody. When he set down his glass, it was empty. His words reflected the expression of pleasure on every one’s face.

“Mr. Cray,” he pronounced, “there can be no manner of doubt about the qualities of this remarkable beverage. I hail you, sir, as one of the greatest discoverers of the age, one of the greatest friends American temperance has ever had.”

“Let us drink,” Mrs. Medlicott purred, “to Mrs. Cray. What would she not give to be with us to-night!”

“To Mrs. Cray,” the Senator assented, waving his refilled glass, “Vice-President of the Kill-the-Drink League. Also to her worthy husband, Mr. Joseph P. Cray,” he added, bowing to his host.

The toast was duly honoured, and the conversation continued on cheerful and optimistic lines. After his first glass, Mr. Cray turned to Mrs. Medlicott.

“Madam,” he said, “I trust that it will not offend your susceptibilities in any way if Mr. Wallin and I, who you know are not abstainers, take a glass of champagne?”

Mrs. Medlicott shook her head at him, but her expression as well as her tone was kind and genial.

“Why, you must please yourself, Mr. Cray,” she replied. “I am thankful to say that I am not a prejudiced woman.”

Mr. Cray bowed, and the waiter filled his glass and Mr. Wallin’s with champagne of a well-known vintage. Mrs. Medlicott sighed.

“Every one to his taste,” she said, “but it does astonish me, Mr. Cray, that when you have a harmless and non-alcoholic beverage of such marvellous properties as the one which we are now drinking, that you should prefer to drink wine and face the after-consequences.”

“Wine doesn’t disagree with me, madam,” Mr. Cray declared mildly.

Mrs. Medlicott squeezed his arm in friendly fashion.



“Joseph Cray,” she said, “I take an interest in you because I know your wife.”

Mr. Cray sighed.

“I suppose Amelia has to be in it,” he murmured.

Mrs. Medicott shook her head playfully.

“Why, Mr. Cray,” she exclaimed, “you are getting me all confused! Now listen to me, there’s a dear man. Statistics——”

Mr. Hiram Croft’s sonorous utterance suddenly descended upon them like a mill-stream, sweeping away the froth of lighter conversation. One hand fondly embraced the stem of his wine-glass, with the other he beat time upon the table.

“Statistics,” he interrupted, “have proved to the conviction of every thinking man the evil and the horror of indulgence in alcoholic beverages of any sort. Mr. Joseph P. Cray here has swept away the last excuse of the wine-drinker. He has provided us with a beverage generous in its qualities, exhilarating in its after-effects, delicious to the palate. This beverage,” he continued, looking earnestly at the bubbles in his glass, “has none of the thin acidity of most temperance drinks. It has none of fish—I beg your pardon,” he said, holding his hand before his mouth and correcting himself with preternatural gravity. “It has none of the thin limpidity of the aerated waters in general use. If I were to search through my vocabulary for a single adjective, or, rather, epithet, to apply to this wonderful refreshment, I should call it—inspired.”

“Bravo!” exclaimed the two old gentlemen from the other end of the table.

“How eloquent you are, Mr. Croft!” Miss Medicott murmured.

Mr. Croft dived for her hand under the table and very nearly lost his balance. The young lady drew a little further away.

“What I should like to know,” Mr. Medicott demanded, “is what can alcohol give us that we do not find in this simple beverage?”

“What indeed?” Mr. Cray murmured, under his breath.

The Senator straightened his tie, which he was surprised to find had gone round to the back of his neck.

“Mr. Cray,” he declared, “is the world’s greatest benefactor. He has dug a grave for alcohol, he has signed the doom of hard drinks. You agree with me, gentlemen?” he asked, leaning over and addressing the two gentlemen with strained politeness.

“Sure!” they exclaimed with one breath.

“I am glad to hear that,” Mr. Croft said severely. “For a moment I fancied that you were not in sympathy with our enthusiasm.”

“That’s where you were dead wrong, then, Croft,” one of them replied.

Mr. Croft looked round the table.

“If any one has anything to say against this beverage,” he continued, with the air

of one spoiling for a fight——

“I thought it a little insipid,” Mr. Wallin commented. “I was glad to get a glass of champagne afterwards.”

“Inshipid?” Mr. Croft repeated severely. “Mr. Wallin, you surprise me.”

“Not nearly so much as you’re surprising me,” that gentleman replied. “I haven’t seen you look so well or talk so well for ages.”

Mr. Croft smiled. He looked steadily at Miss Medicott’s hand, as though meditating another dive. She promptly withdrew it, and moved her chair a little nearer to Mr. Wallin’s.

“It was a pleasing custom in my younger days,” Mr. Croft said presently, as the wonderful repast drew to a finish, “to—er—shing shongs . . . I beg your pardon . . . to sing songs at the conclusion of a feast of this description—college songs generally. Can any one oblige?”

Every one seemed willing to oblige at once. Mr. Cray struck the table with his fist, however, and demanded silence for Mrs. Medicott, and Mrs. Medicott, interrupted with little bursts of laughter which necessitated her stopping sometimes to wipe the tears from her eyes, warbled a strange ditty in which the moonlight, a coloured gentleman of amorous propensities, and a chicken, seemed inextricably mixed. Mr. Cray roared a buccaneering ditty, and Mr. Croft, in a reedy falsetto, essayed a well-known darkey melody. Presently Mrs. and Miss Medicott retired into the little withdrawing-room opening out from the suite, Mr. Croft, supporting himself by the back of the chair, throwing amorous kisses at the latter’s retreating figure. His eyes returned to the sideboard and rested there with marked satisfaction.

“Two more bottles,” he declared. “We’ll give thish beverage a thorough tesht, Mr. Cray.”

Mr. Cray signed to the waiter. Then he rose to his feet. Miss Medicott was standing on the threshold of the withdrawing-room, beckoning imperatively to him.

“If you will excuse me for one moment, gentlemen,” he begged.

“For one moment but never a life-time,” warbled Mr. Croft. “Come back shoon, old dear.”

Mr. Cray approached Miss Medicott with some apprehension. She drew him inside the little room. Mrs. Medicott was lying on the couch with her eyes closed, and snoring melodiously.

“Dear host,” Miss Medicott began.

Mr. Cray saw that the young lady’s eyes were dancing with humour, and he felt relieved.

“Will you give me the recipe of your temperance beverage, please?” she said.

“I will if you promise to marry Mr. Wallin,” he replied.

She laughed softly.

“He hasn’t asked me lately,” she said.

“If he asks you to-night?” Mr. Cray persisted.

She looked back into the room. The two old gentlemen were sitting arm in arm, telling one another stories. Mr. Medicott, with a cigar in the corner of his mouth and a beatific expression upon his face, was leaning forward in his chair, listening to Mr. Hiram Croft telling a story in a confidential and suggestive undertone. Mr. Wallin, pink and white and wholesome, was looking a little bored.

“I agree,” she whispered.

Mr. Cray drew a paper from his pocket.

“You take four bottles of old champagne, one pint of brandy,” he began——

“No more,” she interrupted. “Take my advice and tear it up. Fetch Mr. Wallin.”

“Ed,” Mr. Cray called out softly, “will you step this way?”

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## *IV The Reckoning with Otto Schreed*

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Mr. Joseph P. Cray followed the usual routine observed by members of the "Americans in London" Society on the occasion of their weekly lunches. He left his coat and hat in the cloak-room, and deposited the ticket which he received in exchange in his waistcoat pocket. Afterwards he slipped into the ante-room, where a little crowd of men were thronging around a narrow counter, exchanging hearty greetings, and indulging in various forms of pre-luncheon nourishment. Mr. Cray, who had a mesmeric way of getting served over the shoulders of waiting throngs, disposed of a small cocktail in a matter of seconds, made his way to the reception-room, where the guest of the day stood by the side of his host, exchanging platitudes and handshakes with the little streams of arrivals, and a few minutes later wandered into the luncheon-room, where he discovered the round table for four at which he was placed, exchanged friendly greetings with the two men who were already in their seats, recognised the fact with a little sigh that they were not kindred spirits, and glanced with curiosity at the vacant place on his right hand, no claimant to which had as yet arrived.

It was a crowded gathering, and it takes some time for six hundred men to take their places and be seated. Mr. Cray studied the menu with mild approval, glanced through the wine list, and decided to postpone for the moment his decision as to liquid refreshment, and finally, yielding to an impulse of not unnatural curiosity, he raised the card which reposed upon the table-cloth opposite the vacant chair on his right, and read it:—

*Mr. Otto M. Schreed.*

The four walls of the banqueting-room faded away. The pleasant hum of voices, the clatter of crockery and the popping of corks, fell upon deaf ears. Mr. Cray's blue eyes were set in a steady stare. Gone his morning-coat, his irreproachable linen and carefully-tied tie, his patent boots and well-creased trousers. He was back in the tight, ill-fitting khaki of months ago, a strange, sober figure, in the midst of the bustle of life, yet living under the shadow of death. He stood at the door of the canteen and he saw them marching by, a long, snake-like procession, some singing, some shouting cheery greetings, some pale and limping. Back to the opening in the hill he could trace them, the hill which had once been a forest and now seemed as though a cataclysm had smitten it, a nightmare of bare stumps, of shell and crater holes. The whole horizon seemed streaked with little puffs of smoke. The sound of the guns was incessant. There were times when even the ground beneath his feet shrunk. The boys

were on their way to the mess tents after a stiff twelve hours. Mr. Cray stepped back into the canteen, tasted the coffee in the great urn, ran through the stock of extra provisions, looked carefully round to see that all was ready for the hordes of his customers who would presently throng the place. . . . They came much sooner than they should have done, a little sullen, many of them cursing, pushed and struggled for a place at the counter, swept him clear of the whole of his stock of extra provisions. He could hear their voices.

“More of that filthy tack!”

“Say, there’s some of those chaps at Washington deserve to swing!”

“What is it to-day, boys?” Mr. Cray asked.

There was a string of lurid adjectives. Mr. Cray looked as concerned as he felt.

“More of that stinking beef, eh?” he asked sympathetically.

He was met with a chorus of groans. A score or more had left the counter already, ill before they could swallow their coffee. He heard the curses of further hordes struggling to get in. Then the scene faded away. He walked down the great impromptu annexe to the hospital and spoke to one of the doctors. The doctor’s adjectives made the words of his patients sound like the babbling of children.

“More cases of that bad beef,” was the plain English of what he said. “We are just in the one corner of the line, too, where we can’t rely on stores for a few days. Curse the man whoever made the stuff, and the Government inspector who passed it.” . . .

There was a little movement by Mr. Cray’s side. He glanced up. A tall, well-built man of early middle-age was taking his seat. The two men exchanged greetings.

“Mr. Otto Schreed?” Mr. Cray observed.

The man winced a little but acknowledged his identity.

“And your name?” he asked.

“Mr. Joseph P. Cray,” Mr. Cray replied. “We seem to be neighbours, Mr. Schreed. Will you join me in a bottle of wine?”

“That’s a great idea,” was the hearty response.

So Mr. Cray did what those few months ago he would have deemed impossible—he fraternised with Mr. Otto Schreed of Chicago, exporter of tinned beef. They talked together of many subjects. Their conversation was the conversation of two patriotic and high-minded Americans, with the obvious views of the well-meaning man. Mr. Schreed, encouraged towards the end of the meal by his companion’s friendliness, and warmed a little by the wine he had drunk, became confidential.

“Say, it’s a hard question I’m going to put to you, Mr. Cray,” he said, lowering his voice a little, “but does my name suggest anything to you?”

Mr. Cray took up the card and looked at it.

“Can’t say that it does,” he replied, “except that your front name reads German.”

“That ain’t it,” the other observed. “My father was a German all right, but I was born in Chicago and I am a good American citizen. It isn’t that. I was one of the unlucky devils that got into some trouble with the Government contractors.”

“And I was one of those,” Mr. Cray mused, “who spent a hundred dollars cabling to the head of the Y.M.C.A. in the States exactly my opinion of you.” But aloud, Mr. Cray’s words betrayed nothing of this fact.

“Say, that was hard luck!” he admitted. “How did it happen?”

“Just as those things do happen,” the other explained, “however almighty careful you may be. We were canning night and day, with Government officials standing over us, and Washington wiring all the time—‘Get a move on. Get a move on. We want the stuff.’ I guess some of the foremen got a bit careless. I was worn out myself. The weather was moist and hot, and a load or two of stuff got in that shouldn’t. Not but what I always believed,” Mr. Schreed went on, “that the complaints were exaggerated, but any way the Y.M.C.A. busybodies over yonder took it up, and they got me before the Court.”

“Did it cost you much?” Mr. Cray inquired.

“They fined me fifty thousand dollars,” the other replied, “and I had to sell out. Just at the time, too,” he went on gloomily, “when one was making money just so that you couldn’t count it.”

It was precisely at this moment that Mr. Cray was on the point of raising his voice and of speaking words which without doubt would have led to his neighbour’s precipitate ejection from the room. And then something struck him. There was something more than the natural humiliation of a punished man in Mr. Schreed’s drawn face and furtive expression. There was something beyond the look of the man who has done wrong and has borne an unacceptable punishment. There was still fear, there was still terror of some unnamed possibility. Mr. Cray saw this and he held his peace. He took his thoughts back a few months to the little conversation he had had with the doctor in that impromptu hospital. He recalled the latter’s impassioned words and he choked down certain rebellious feelings. He decided to offer the right hand of fellowship to the unfortunate Mr. Otto Schreed.

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Mr. Otto Schreed was alone and friendless in a strange city, with the shadow of disgrace resting upon his unattractive name. He was more than disposed, therefore, to accept the advances of this genial and companionable new acquaintance. He was

not by disposition a gregarious person, but he was too uncultured to find any pleasure in books or pictures; the newspapers of London were an unknown world to him, and a certain measure of companionship became almost a necessity. It appeared that he was staying at the Milan Hotel, and it was quite natural, therefore, that he should see a great deal of his new friend during the next few days. He was not at first disposed to be communicative. He said very little about his plans, and he asked a great many personal questions, some of which Mr. Cray evaded, and others of which he answered with artless candour. Mr. Cray's connection with the Y.M.C.A. and his work in France was not once alluded to.

"Say, what's keeping you over here?" Mr. Schreed asked one day. "You've nothing against the other side?"

"Haven't I!" Mr. Cray replied. "That's where you're making the mistake of your life. I am not a drunkard," he went on, warming to his subject, "but I am a man who loves his liberty, and I hate a country where the bars are crowded out with soft drinks, and where the damned waiters wink and jerk their thumbs round the corner towards the apothecary's shop when you want a drop of Scotch. I am over here, Schreed, my lad, till the United States comes to its senses on the liquor question, and over here I mean to stop until then. . . . What about yourself?"

Mr. Schreed had been exceedingly close-mouthed about his own movements, but this morning he spoke with more freedom of his plans.

"I am not so strong as you on the liquor question," he admitted, "but I feel I have been hardly done with over there by the Government, and I'm not hurrying back yet awhile. I thought some," he went on, after a moment's pause, glancing sideways at Mr. Cray as though to watch the effect of his words, "of taking a little tour out to the battle-fields of France."

"That's quite an idea," Mr. Cray admitted with interest.

His companion looked around to make sure that they were alone.

"I don't mind confiding to you, Cray," he said, "that I have another reason for wanting to get out there. When the Stores Department discovered that something was wrong with those few thousand tins of beef of mine, they burnt the lot. They sent a certificate to Washington as to its condition, upon which I was convicted and fined, although I was well able to prove that the week the defective canning must have been done, I was taking a few days' vacation. However, that's neither here nor there. I made inquiries as to whether any of it was still in existence, and I was told that before any had been opened, a matter of fifty tins or so had been doled out in some French village where the peasants hadn't got any food. Nothing was ever heard about these."

"I see," Mr. Cray murmured, and there was nothing in his face to indicate that he had found the intelligence interesting.

"I kind of thought," Mr. Schreed continued, "that I'd like to look around over there, and if any of these tins were still in existence I'd buy them up and destroy them, so as to avoid any further trouble. You see, they all have my name and trade-mark on the outside. The Government insisted upon that."

"Rather like looking for a needle in a hay-stack," Mr. Cray remarked.

"Not so much," the other replied. "I know the name of the place where our men were billeted when they opened the stuff, and the name of the village to which they sent fifty tins. I thought I'd just look around there, and if there are no traces of any—well, I've done the best I could. Then I thought some of coming home by Holland."

"Business in Holland, eh?" Mr. Cray inquired.

"Not exactly business—or rather, if it is, it wouldn't take more than an hour or two," Mr. Schreed announced.

"When did you think of going?"

"Next week. They tell me they're running some tours from Paris out to the battle-fields. The one that goes to Château Thierry would serve my purpose. The worst of it is I can't speak a word of the lingo."

"It's dead easy," Mr. Cray observed. "I've been going to Paris too many years not to have picked up a bit."

"You wouldn't care about a trip out with me, I suppose," Mr. Schreed suggested, "just in a friendly fashion, you understand, each paying his own dues?"

"I don't know," Mr. Cray replied cautiously. "Next week did you say you were going?"

"I'm fixing it up to leave on Wednesday."

"It's some trip," Mr. Cray said thoughtfully.

"A day or two in Paris wouldn't do us any harm," Mr. Schreed remarked, with a slow smile which degenerated into a leer.

"We'll take a bite together at seven o'clock to-night," Mr. Cray decided, "and I'll let you know. I don't know as I can see anything to prevent my going, providing I can get accommodation. I might be able to help you with the language, too. Finish up in Holland, you said, eh?"

"I don't know as you'd care to go up that far with me," Mr. Schreed said, doubtfully. "I shan't be stopping there, either. You might wait in Paris."

Mr. Cray smiled beatifically.

"Paris," he murmured. "Gee, I think I'll go, Schreed!"

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Mr. Otto Schreed was both surprised and gratified at his companion's proficiency in the French language, and his capacity for making travelling endurable. Their journey to Paris was accomplished under the most favourable circumstances, and by dint of a long argument and great tact, the very inferior accommodation which had been secured for them was cancelled, and rooms with a small *salon* and bathrooms *en suite* provided at a well-known hotel. As a guide to Paris itself, except to the American bars and the restaurants pure and simple, Mr. Cray was perhaps a little disappointing, but his companion himself, during those first few days, was restless and eager to be off on their quest. On the third day, Mr. Cray announced their imminent departure.

"Say, I've done better for you than these Cook's char-à-bancs," he announced triumphantly "I've engaged a private car, and we can get out to Château Thierry, see the whole of that part of the line, visit the village you were speaking of, and get back before nightfall. Some hustle, what?"

"Fine!" Mr. Schreed declared, showing every impatience to depart. "Does the man speak any English?"

"I don't know as he does," Mr. Cray admitted, "but that don't matter any, I guess, as long as I'm around all the time."

Mr. Schreed seemed a little disappointed.

"How about making the inquiries in these small grocers' shops or what you call them?"

"I shall be along," Mr. Cray reminded him. "You can stand by my side and hear what they say."

So the pilgrimage started. Mr. Cray felt a great silence creep over him as he stood once more on well-remembered ground. It was a bright day in early October, and the familiar landmarks for many miles were visible. Behind that remnant of wood, a thousand Americans had been ambushed. On the hillside there, a great mine had been sprung. Down in the valley below, the corpses of his countrymen had lain so thick that Mr. Cray found himself remembering that one awful night when every spare hand, he himself included, had been pressed into the stretcher-bearers' service. He grew more and more silent as they neared their journey's end. Mr. Schreed appeared to be a trifle bored.

"Lutaples is the name of the village we want," he announced, as they began to pass a few white-plastered cottages.

Mr. Cray nodded.

"I know," he said reminiscently. "Our canteen was in the hollow, just at the bottom there."

“Our canteen?” Mr. Schreed repeated.

“The American canteen,” Mr. Cray explained. “I’ve been making inquiries for you. So far as I can gather, there was only one shop in Lutaples at the time and it’s up at this end of the village. However, we’ll soon find out all about it now.”

They stopped at a small *estaminet*, and here trouble nearly came, for no disguise could conceal from the warm-hearted little landlord, the kindly, absurd fat man in tight uniform, who had fed him and his wife and children and left them money to make a fresh start. Fortunately, however, Schreed had lingered behind, making a vain attempt to converse with the chauffeur, and Cray had time, in a few rapid sentences, to put a certain matter before his friend Pierre. So that when Schreed returned and took his seat by Cray’s side before the marble table in the village street, Pierre was able to serve them with liqueurs and speak as though to strangers. Mr. Cray conversed with him for some time.

“Well, what does he say?” Schreed asked eagerly, when he had gone in.

“There was only one grocer’s shop in the village at the time we were in occupation,” Mr. Cray explained, “and the majority of the stores presented by the Americans were handed over to him for distribution. There’s the place, plumb opposite—*Henri Lalarge. Epicier.*”

“That mean ‘grocer’?” Otto Schreed asked.

“Some of it does. Let’s be getting along.”

Mr. Cray led the way across the cobbled street. Monsieur Lalarge was short, fat, and black-whiskered. As they entered his shop, the landlord from the *estaminet* opposite issued from the back quarters.

“What’s he been doing over here?” Schreed demanded suspiciously.

Mr. Cray shrugged his shoulders.

“I suppose these fellows all live on one another’s doorsteps,” he observed.

The result of the landlord’s visit, however, was that although the tears of welcome glistened in the eyes of the warm-hearted Monsieur Lalarge, he greeted the two men as strangers. Mr. Cray, having satisfied himself as to his companion’s absolute ignorance of the language, talked fluently to the grocer in rapid French. Presently he appeared satisfied and turned to Schreed.

“He says he had fifty tins,” he explained, “but they were distributed half an hour after he received them. The complaint was made from some of the villagers, and the unopened tins were returned and burned. There is a chemist’s shop at the further end of the village where it would be as well to make inquiries. The chauffeur might take you there, and I will explain to him what you want to ask for. Meanwhile, I will see the *curé.*”

Mr. Schreed saw nothing to object to in the arrangement, and drove off with the chauffeur. Monsieur Lalarge, with the tears streaming down his cheeks, threw his arms around Mr. Cray and kissed him.

“Heaven has brought you back!” he exclaimed. “Our deliverer—our Saint! But how thin—how wasted!”

“Simply a matter of clothes, Jean, my boy,” Cray assured him. “Uncle Sam used to pinch us a bit tight about the loins. And now how goes it, eh?”

“Thanks to the benevolence of monsieur, everything prospers,” Monsieur Lalarge declared. “His little loan—but give me time to write the cheque—it can be paid this moment.”

“Not on your life,” Mr. Cray replied vigorously. “Not a franc, Jean. We both did good work, eh, when those guns were thundering and dirty Fritz was skulking behind the hills there. Finished, Jean. I am a rich man, and what you call a loan was my little thank-offering. We did our best together for the poor people, you know.”

“But, monsieur,” the little grocer sobbed—

“About those tins,” Mr. Cray interrupted. “You have two?”

“I kept them, monsieur,” the man explained, “because I read in the paper that some day inquiry might be held into all these matters.”

“And an inquiry is going to be held,” Mr. Cray declared. “What you have to do, Jean, is to pack those two tins securely and to send them to me by registered post to the Ritz Hotel, Paris.”

“It shall be done, monsieur.”

“Were there any who died after eating the stuff?” Mr. Cray inquired.

“Two,” the grocer answered. “They are buried in the civic cemetery. One has talked but little of these things. The Americans came as saviours, and this was an accident.”

Cray glanced down the street. His companion was still interviewing the chemist.

“One *petit verre*, Monsieur Lalarge,” he said, “for the sake of old times.”

Monsieur Lalarge threw aside his apron.

“And to drink to the great goodness of monsieur,” he responded.

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Mr. Otto Schreed was in high good-humour that evening, on the way back to Paris. He insisted upon paying for a little dinner at the Ambassador’s, and a box at the Folies Bergeres. He spent money freely, for him, and drank far more wine than usual. As he drank, he expanded.

“It is like a nightmare passed away,” he confided to his companion. “I know now that no one else in the world will ever suffer because of that terrible mistake. There is

not a single tin of the condemned beef in existence.”

“A load off your mind, eh?” Mr. Cray murmured.

Mr. Schreed smiled a peculiar smile.

“For more reasons than you know of, my friend,” he confided. “Now my little trip to Holland, and after that I am a free man.”

“When are you off there?” his companion inquired.

“The day after to-morrow—Thursday,” was the prompt reply. “And, Cray——”

“Something bothering you?” the latter remarked, as Schreed hesitated.

“Just this, old fellow. My little trip to Holland is unimportant in its way, and in another sense it’s a trip I want to do alone. Do you get me?”

“Sure!” Mr. Cray replied. “I am no butter in. There are some of the boys in this gay little burg I haven’t had the time to look up yet. When shall you be back?”

“Monday,” was the eager reply—“Monday sure. I’ll go alone, then, Cray. I guess it would be better. But look here. Get together a few of your friends, and we’ll have a little dinner the night of my return. At my expense, you understand. You’ve been very useful to me over here and I should like to make you some slight return. Ask any one you please, and take a couple of boxes for any show you fancy. It isn’t the way I live as a rule, but I’ve a fancy for making a celebration of it.”

“That’s easy,” Mr. Cray declared. “It shall be some celebration, I can tell you. We’ll dine in the hotel here, and I promise there shall be one or two people you’ll be interested to meet.”

So on the following morning Mr. Otto Schreed started for Holland, and Mr. Joseph P. Cray, with a brown paper parcel under his arm, set out to pay a few calls in Paris.

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When Mr. Otto Schreed made his punctual appearance in the hotel *salon* on Monday evening at a few minutes before eight, he found Mr. Cray and three other guests awaiting him. Mr. Cray was busy mixing cocktails, so was unable to shake hands. He looked around and nodded.

“Glad you’re punctual, Schreed,” he said. “Pleasant trip?”

“Fine!”

“Business turn out all right?”

“Couldn’t have been better. Won’t you introduce me to these gentlemen, Cray?”

“Sure!” Mr. Cray replied. “Gentlemen, this is Mr. Otto Schreed of Chicago—Colonel Wilmot of the American Intelligence Department, Mr. Neville of the same Service, and Doctor Lemarten.”

“Delighted to meet you all, gentlemen,” Mr. Schreed declared.

His outstretched hand was uselessly offered. Neville and Colonel Wilmot contented themselves with a military salute. The Frenchman bowed. Mr. Schreed from the first moment was conscious of a vague feeling of uneasiness. He turned towards Cray, who was approaching with a little tray upon which were four cocktails.

“Hope you’ve ordered a good dinner, Cray,” he said, “and that these gentlemen are ready to do justice to it. Why, you’re a cocktail short.”

Colonel Wilmot, Mr. Neville, and Doctor Lemarten had each accepted a wine-glass. Mr. Cray took the other one.

“And dash it all, the table’s only laid for four!” Schreed continued, as he gazed with dismay at the empty silver tray. “Is this a practical joke?”

Mr. Cray shook his head.

“One of us,” he confided, “is not having a cocktail. One of us is not dining. That one, Otto Schreed, is you.”

Schreed was suddenly pale. He moved a little towards the door, gripping the back of a chair with his hand.

“Say, what the devil does this mean?” he demanded.

“You just stay where you are and you shall hear,” Mr. Cray replied, setting down his empty glass. “I worked out at that little village of Lutaples for the last year of the war—ran an American canteen there for the Y.M.C.A. I was there when your filthy beef was unloaded upon the boys. I saw their sufferings.”

“God!” Schreed muttered beneath his breath. “And you never told me?”

“I never told you,” Cray assented, “although I came pretty near telling you with an end of my fist that day at the luncheon club. Glad I didn’t now. When I tumbled to it that you were scared about any more of those tins being in existence, I began to guess how things were. I came over with you to be sure you didn’t get them. I got two tins from Monsieur Jean Lalarge, and a nice tale he had to tell me about the rest. Doctor Lemarten here analysed them and prepared a report. He’s here to tell you about it.”

“The beef was poisoned,” the Frenchman said calmly. “My report has been handed to Colonel Wilmot.”

“It’s a lie!” Schreed declared, trembling. “Besides, this matter has been dealt with. I have paid my fine. It is finished.”

“Not on your life,” Mr. Cray replied. “Ten thousand tins of your bully beef, Otto Schreed, contained poison. No wonder you were glad to get out of it, as you thought, with a fine. Now we’ll move on a step. You’ve just come back from Holland.

“You may not have known it, but Mr. Neville, here, of the American Intelligence Department, was your fellow-passenger. You cashed five drafts at the Amsterdam Bank, amounting in all to something like five hundred thousand dollars of American money. Half of that went to your credit in London, the other half you’ve got with you. Blood money, Otto Schreed—foul, stinking blood money!”

Schreed was on the point of collapse.

“You have employed spies to dog me?” he shouted.

“We don’t call the officers of the American Intelligence Department spies,” Mr. Cray observed coldly.

“Otto Schreed,” Colonel Wilmot said, speaking for the first time, “I have a warrant for your arrest, and an extradition warrant from the French Government. You will leave for Cherbourg to-night and be taken back to New York!”

“On what charge?” Schreed faltered.

“Political conspiracy—perhaps murder.”

Colonel Wilmot walked to the door and called in two men who were waiting outside. Schreed collapsed.

“I’ve two hundred and fifty thousand dollars here,” he shrieked. “Can’t we arrange this? Cray! Colonel Wilmot!”

The two men were obliged to drag him out. Mr. Cray moved to the window and threw it open.

“What we want,” he muttered, “is fresh air.” Colonel Wilmot smiled.

“He was a poisonous beast, Cray,” he said, “but you’ve done a fine stroke of business for the United States Government, and we’re anxious to drink your health.”

Two waiters, followed by a *maitre d’hôtel*, were already in the room. The latter came forward and bowed.

“*Monsieur est servi*,” he announced.

Mr. Cray, newly arrived from Paris, sat in the lounge of the Milan, talking to his daughter, Lady Sittingbourne. The latter was a little distressed.

"I am worried about George, dad," she confided. "When did you say the *Mauretania* arrived?"

"Docked in Liverpool midday yesterday," Mr. Cray replied. "The special arrived in London last night."

"George cabled me from New York that he was sailing on her," Sara continued, "and I have heard nothing since. I sat at home all last night, and all to-day up till four o'clock. Then I telephoned the Cunard Steamship Company, and they told me that he was on board. They knew nothing else, of course."

Mr. Cray admitted to being a little perplexed himself.

"I suppose he'd have to go to Downing Street first," he observed.

"I thought I'd allowed plenty of time for that . . . Why, Dad——"

Mr. Cray was leaning forward in his chair. He, too, was staring in some bewilderment at the tall, good-looking man who had just descended the steps, and with a companion by his side was making his way towards the restaurant. There was not the slightest doubt that the man was Sir George Sittingbourne, or that his companion was an extremely good-looking woman of somewhat flamboyant type.

"George!" Sara exclaimed breathlessly. "What on earth does this mean?"

She rose impulsively to her feet. Her husband turned and glanced in their direction. He took not the slightest notice either of his wife or his father-in-law. The woman by his side plucked at his arm to ask him a question, and he smiled into her face as he leaned down.

"Gee!" Mr. Cray murmured. "This is bad!"

"It's disgraceful—horrible!" Sara cried. "So this is why George hasn't been home!"

Mr. Cray pulled himself together.

"George isn't that sort, my dear," he declared. "There's something queer about it. Let's sit and think for a moment."

"I shall do nothing of the sort," Sara declared. "I shall go straight in and confront him. I will let him know that I saw him with my own eyes."

"If your ladyship will excuse me!"

Both Mr. Cray and his daughter turned round. Standing behind their settee was a small, dark man of unobtrusive manners, dressed in an unobtrusive dinner-suit, and

with a faintly deprecating smile upon his lips.

“I regret so much,” he went on, “being compelled to make my little explanation here. I called in Curzon Street but found that your ladyship had just left. I wish to have a word with you in reference to your husband.”

“My husband?” Sara repeated blankly. “Who are you?”

“My name is King,” the young man replied. “I am connected with the Intelligence Department.”

Neither Sara nor her father felt capable of any comment. The situation so suddenly disclosed had taken their breath away.

“Your husband,” Mr. King continued smoothly, “after a very successful visit to the States, has met with one of those misadventures on his homeward journey to which we are all of us sometimes subject. An autograph letter which he was conveying from a certain person in Washington to the Prime Minister, and to obtain which was the object of his mission, was stolen from his person during the last day of his voyage home.”

“What has that to do with my husband’s presence here with that—that woman?” Sara demanded.

“Sir George sought the aid of my department by wireless,” Mr. King replied. “I boarded the steamer in the Mersey and at once realised the probable thief. The woman whom he is dining with to-night, sat at his table and occupied the next stateroom to his. She is an Austrian. It will be sufficient if I tell you that if she had been found in any of the allied countries during the war, she would have been shot at once as a spy.”

“What is her name?” Sara demanded, a little irrelevantly.

“She has many,” Mr. King answered. “She calls herself at present Mrs. Jacob Wieller from Chicago.”

“And why is she dining alone with my husband?”

Mr. King smiled inscrutably.

“Even the most successful Secret Service agents in the world,” he said, “have their weak point. Mrs. Wieller, although she must be forty years old, preserves a romantic disposition. From my inquiries on the ship, I learned that she has pursued your husband with attentions from the day the steamer left Sandy Hook, attentions which I might add were obviously undesired. It was my advice at once that your husband should not lose sight of the lady. I may tell you that while he engages her attention at dinner, her rooms are being thoroughly searched by our agents.”

“Say, this affair becomes interesting!” Mr. Cray declared, his natural instincts asserting themselves. “I guess you are satisfied now, Sara?”



"I suppose so," she admitted, with a shade of doubt still in her tone.

"Then let's just have a word or two more about this matter," Mr. Cray went on. "Searching the lady's rooms is all very well, but can't she have sent the letter away somewhere?"

"It is impossible that she should have parted with it," Mr. King pronounced. "I myself left the steamer by her side, I travelled in the same compartment from Liverpool. I did not move a yard away from her on Euston platform. Sir George escorted her here in a taxicab, from which I watched her myself alight in the entrance hall of the Milan, and went up in the lift with her to her room. Since then she has been surrounded by a cordon of our best agents. She has posted three absolutely harmless letters to personal friends, each of which has been read."

"What about her person?" Mr. Cray demanded. "Surely she would carry a letter as important as that about with her?"

"An agent of ours," Mr. King explained, "at once took the place of the chambermaid on her floor, and has rendered her since her arrival the most intimate personal services. The letter is not concealed upon her person."

"How large a thing is it?" Mr. Cray inquired.

"It is a bulky document," Mr. King replied. "There are eighteen pages of ordinary letter paper enclosed in a long envelope. It is altogether a packet of some bulk."

"The stewardess on the ship——" Mr. Cray began.

Mr. King smiled.

"We make our mistakes," he interrupted, "but in our way we are thorough. Every person with whom she came in contact during the last day of her voyage has been dealt with. Excuse me for a moment."

Mr. King sauntered across the foyer to where a recently-arrived prototype of himself had lit a cigarette and was ordering a cocktail. There was a few minutes' casual conversation between the two men, after which Mr. King returned.

"The search of Blanche Wieller's room," he announced, "has revealed nothing. I think, under the circumstances, Lady Sittingbourne, disappointing though it may be to you, the best thing you can do is to return home. We will send your husband after you as soon as we can spare him."

Sara made a little grimace.

"I don't see what good he can do if your agents have failed to discover the document," she observed, rising reluctantly to her feet, "and in any case I haven't had any dinner yet."

Mr. Cray took his daughter by the arm.

“We’ll go straight into the grill-room and have a bite, Sara. Afterwards, if I could have a word with you, Mr. King, I’d be glad,” he went on. “I am naturally interested in this affair, and it is just possible that I might be of some slight assistance.”

King looked a little doubtful. Mr. Cray pushed back his coat, revealing a small medal attached to his waistcoat. The other’s manner altered at once.

“For services rendered the American Intelligence Department,” Mr. Cray explained. “I’ll look for you about here, eh, in three-quarters of an hour?”

“I shall be very glad of your help, sir,” was the quiet reply.

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The dinner in the grill-room was rather a dull meal. Sara was several times on the verge of tears, and her father, although fully sympathetic, was inclined at times to let his attention wander a little.

“It seems positively hateful,” the former declared, “to think that I should be up here dining alone with you, and George, who has been away from me for months, is in the Restaurant, dining with another woman! Of course, I am sorry that the letter was stolen from him, but I’m sure he took every care of it. I don’t see what he can possibly do now towards getting it back.”

“It’s hard luck,” Mr. Cray murmured soothingly, “but I guess you’ve got to remember this, Sara. In diplomacy and all intelligence business, judgment goes only by results. George was entrusted with that letter, and he allowed it to be stolen from him. The fault might not have been his. On the other hand, if he don’t get it back again the black mark’s there.”

“I call it unfair,” Sara protested. “He was so successful with all the rest of his business. They ought to take that into account.”

“We’ll soon fix that up all right,” Mr. Cray promised.

Sara sighed.

“I know how clever you are, dad,” she said, “but I really don’t see what you can do here.”

“What I should like to do,” Mr. Cray remarked thoughtfully, “is to turn a slight disaster into an absolute triumph. Blanche Wieller, eh? Well, well! The wife of Jacob N. Wieller of Chicago, eh?”

“Do you know something about her, dad? Have you ever seen her before?” Sara inquired.

Mr. Cray smiled mysteriously.

“I think I know as much about the lady as our friend, Mr. King,” he said. “I was at Amiens when she was in charge of a French field-hospital. She was asked to leave, the day after she arrived—no excuse—not a word of explanation—just her

railway pass to Paris, and a hint. She simply faded away. I knew her before that, though. I remember when she had what they call a *salon* in Washington, some seven years ago.”

“You really are rather a wonderful person,” Sara observed.

“Nothing wonderful about it,” Mr. Cray replied modestly. “I have a good memory and I never forget a face.”

Sara sighed as her father paid the bill.

“Well, I suppose I’d better go home,” she said. “Will you put me in a taxi, dad, and let me know as soon as there’s any news?”

“Sure!” Mr. Cray promised. “I’ll telephone.”

Mr. Cray found his new friend studying the tape in the upper hall.

“Say, I’d like to be presented to this Mrs. Wieller,” the former said, after they had stood side by side for several moments, both apparently deeply interested by the news.

Mr. King shook his head.

“I am keeping under cover,” he replied.

“Shan’t be butting in,” Mr. Cray asked, “if I find my own way there?”

Mr. King considered the point for a moment.

“Not at all,” he decided. “You’re Sir George’s father-in-law. Quite natural for you to speak to him.”

Whereupon Mr. Cray descended into the foyer, and after glancing around for a moment as though in search of someone, approached Sir George. His right hand was held out in cordial recognition to Mrs. Wieller. She looked up at him pleasantly but evidently puzzled.

“George my boy, glad to see you safely back again,” Mr. Cray said. “And—surely I’m not mistaken—aren’t you Mrs. Jacob N. Wieller of Chicago?”

“That is my name,” the lady admitted, “but——”

“Why, my dear lady,” Mr. Cray interrupted, “your husband and I were at school together, same class at Princetown, and before his marriage we roomed together in New York. Kinder shame I only met you once—out at the Country Club—the Shore Country Club, you know. Luke Hamer was there, and all the crowd.”

“Of course I remember,” the lady acknowledged, with a sweet smile.

“Is Jacob along?” Mr. Cray asked eagerly.

“Not this time.”

Mr. Cray remained for a few more minutes chatting on general subjects. Then he took a somewhat hurried departure, recognising an acquaintance in a distant part of the foyer.

“A dear, friendly person,” Mrs. Wieller murmured, toying with one of the stones of her long amber necklace. “To tell you the truth, though, I don’t remember him in the least. . . .”

Mr. Cray touched King on the arm as he passed him in the upper hall, and led him into the bar. He ordered two Scotch whiskies and sodas and shook his head gravely at his companion.

“Say, Mr. King,” he began, “I don’t want to seem to be rubbing it in, but you fellows ain’t all that smart. You can reckon on handling that letter any time you choose.”

Mr. King started a little. His eyes narrowed. He looked at his companion appraisingly. He could not make up his mind whether this was a bluff or whether there was something underneath.

“Where is the letter, then?” he asked.

Mr. Cray smiled.

“I’ve had a few words with the lady,” he went on thoughtfully. “I talked to her of her husband who never existed, and of a meeting which never took place. She fell to it admirably, and while we talked I looked for that letter. It wasn’t so difficult to locate, either.”

“Look here,” Mr. King said, “that letter consists of eighteen sheets of rather thick note-paper, secured in a long legal envelope. It must weigh at least six ounces. Now one of our own women attended Mrs. Wieller from the moment she stepped out of the bath, helped her on with her garments, and never left her for a single second. From the moment she left the room she was shadowed by one of our men, and I took the business up at the bottom of the lift. Now how can you make out that she has a packet of that description concealed upon her person?”

“Dead easy,” Mr. Cray replied. “The only question is do you want to help yourself to the letter at once, or——”

“Or what?”

“Do you want to find out whose game she’s playing? In other words, do you want to find out who’s paying her to get that letter?”

Mr. King drew a little breath. He was beginning to be impressed.

“There isn’t much doubt about that, I fancy, Mr. Cray,” he said.

“Think not?”

“Why, the woman’s an Austrian by birth,” Mr. King pointed out. “She was under suspicion many times during the war. We had evidence only the other day,” he continued, dropping his voice a little, “of the renewed activities of the German Secret Service. This woman is directly connected with one of the new chiefs.”

“Ah!” Mr. Cray murmured.

“I am treating you with every confidence, you see,” his companion proceeded. “It would naturally be of the utmost importance to Germany to know exactly how America stands with reference to the ratification of the Treaty. The matter is urgent, too. I have been expecting her to make some attempt to dispose of her information this evening. That is why we are here in such force. That is why we want to keep Sir George by her side as long as we can.”

“The game seems clear enough, certainly,” Mr. Cray observed.

“Now tell me where that letter is?” Mr. King asked eagerly.

Mr. Cray knocked the ash from his cigar.

“That wouldn’t do any good,” he declared. “When I say that I know where the letter is, you can figure it out that I’m making a pretty strong guess. If I tell you and I’m wrong, you may lighten up on the job and let the blamed thing go through. You keep her in the net until she attempts to leave the hotel or send a parcel away. We’ll have her both ways then. We’ll find the letter and we’ll find out the agent with whom she is dealing.”

“I think I can lay my hands on him,” Mr. King observed calmly. “We’re watching him, too, just as closely as we are the woman. If anything passes between those two without being detected—well, I’d resign my post to-morrow.”

“Capital!” Mr. Cray murmured approvingly. “Well, I guess I’ll turn in. I like my eight hours when I can get ’em.”

“You’re not going to tell me where the letter is, then?” Mr. King asked.

“Do you believe I know where it is?” Mr. Cray answered.

His companion smiled.

“To tell you the truth,” he admitted, “I don’t.”

“Then I shan’t disappoint you if we let things stay as they are until to-morrow,” Mr. Cray decided.

Mr. Cray found his son-in-law waiting for him in his rooms. Sir George was standing on the hearthrug with his hands in his pockets, whistling moodily.

“Where’s Sara?” he asked eagerly.

“Gone home an hour ago. We had a bite together in the grill-room.”

“She understood, I hope?”

“More or less,” Mr. Cray assured him. “You know what these women are. She may make a bit of a fuss for the sake of making it up afterwards. Are you off duty now?”

Sir George nodded.

“I’ve done the best I can,” he confessed. “The woman’s too clever for me. If

she's really got the letter, she must have swallowed it."

"Did you suspect her at all during the voyage?" Mr. Cray inquired.

"I suspected everybody," his son-in-law replied. "I made no friends. I didn't speak a dozen words to anybody—until that last day. I had some coffee in the smoking-room which made me feel drowsy, and afterwards I dozed in my steamer-chair. When I woke up, she was in the next chair to mine and the packet had gone from the inner pocket of my coat, where it was sewn in. All the stitches had been cut."

"You didn't feel like having her arrested and searched?" Mr. Cray asked thoughtfully.

"That was my first thought," Sir George confessed. "Then I looked at my watch and saw that I'd been asleep for an hour, so she'd had plenty of time to hide it. I sent the wireless to King, but otherwise I pretended not to have discovered the theft."

"And you can't make anything of her?" Mr. Cray queried.

"Nothing at all," Sir George replied. "I've given the job up and I'm going home. The rest of my mission," he went on, "was completely successful, and I am not the first man in the Intelligence Department who has been robbed. I saw you talking to King," he continued. "Have you any theories?"

"Sure!" Mr. Cray assented cheerfully. "We'll get that letter back all right, and before any mischief's been done. Not only that, but we'll carry the war into the enemy's camp. We'll find out for whom she was working."

Sir George looked at his father-in-law with something of that wondering admiration he had more than once in his lifetime felt for him.

"Are you in earnest?" he asked breathlessly.

"Sure thing," Mr. Cray replied. "I'll lay ten to one I could put my hand on the letter to-night. You get home to Sara now. By-the by, are you seeing Mrs. Wieller again?"

"I promised to lunch to-morrow," Sir George replied moodily. "I don't see that there's any use in it, and I'm a clumsy hand at this sort of flirtation."

"Good boy," Mr. Cray murmured approvingly. "Get along with you now, then. I'll telephone Sara that you're coming."

Whereupon Sir George departed and his father-in-law went to bed.

At eleven o'clock the next morning there was a slight stir amongst the silent army of watchers who were gathered around the purlieu of the Milan Hotel. Messages came from upstairs, and, somewhat to Mr. Cray's surprise, Mrs. Wieller descended from the lift, talked for a moment with one of the reception clerks, and, passing

through the swing doors, asked for a taxi. She was on the point of driving off when King sauntered across to where Mr. Cray had risen from his seat in some perturbation.

"It's all right," the former announced smoothly. "She was dressed again by our woman, who also packed that wooden box she is carrying with her."

"What's in the wooden box?" Mr. Cray asked.

"Only the amber necklace she was wearing last night. Something wrong with the clasp. She is taking it to the goldsmith's and silversmith's."

"Any one following her?" Mr. Cray, who was half-way towards the door, demanded.

King shook his head.

"She hasn't got the letter with her," he replied. "We don't want to make her suspicious if we can help it . . . Here! Where are you off to?"

Mr. Cray had already accosted a taxicab driver waiting in the courtyard. He whispered a word or two to the man and jumped in.

"Come along if you want to be in at the death," he invited King.

The latter obeyed with a little protest.

"I don't see what's the use of following her," he declared. "We know where she's gone."

"Gee, but you're dead off it this time!" Mr. Cray remarked pityingly. "Bet you a dime she doesn't go near the goldsmith's and silversmith's, and I bet you another dime she's got the letter with her."

King was dubious, but his companion's confidence somewhat perturbed him.

"Mr. Cray," he said, "couldn't you be a little more explicit?"

"Well, I'll show you one thing, at any rate," was the calm reply. "There's Mrs. Wieller's taxi ahead of us, and, as you observe, we're in Piccadilly, not Regent Street."

"That's so," King observed uneasily.

"Don't bother me for explanations for a moment," Mr. Cray advised. "I want to keep my eye on that taxi. . . . Yes, I thought so!"

They turned into a well-known thoroughfare, and stopped at a comparatively small jeweller's about half-way down. The traffic was somewhat blocked, and she had entered the shop while they were still some distance behind. Mr. Cray half rose in his seat. He was a little anxious.

"Say, has she spotted you yet?" he asked his companion.

King shook his head.

"No, I've been in the background all the time."

“Follow me into the shop, then,” Cray directed. “You can ask for something or other. We can’t afford to hang about.”

Mr. Cray stepped on to the pavement, crossed it with incredible swiftness, and entered the shop. Mrs. Wieller was the only customer present. Before her on the counter was stretched her amber necklace, just drawn from the box. The shopman appeared to be examining the catch.

Mr. Cray passed on to the further end of the shop, but suddenly seemed to recognise Mrs. Wieller and came towards her cheerfully.

“Say, you’ve soon begun to set the Chicago dollars spinning, Mrs. Wieller!” he said with a broad smile. “How are you feeling after the trip, eh?”

Mrs. Wieller was not enthusiastic in her response.

“I am very well indeed, thank you, Mr. Cray,” she said. “As a matter of fact, I am not here to buy anything at all. I was just having the catch of my amber necklace examined. I have rather a quaint fancy for this sort of thing,” she added, touching the beads carelessly.

The jeweller, who had been examining the catch through a magnifying-glass, made his report just as Cray inquired of his assistant for some plain gold safety-pins. King, too, entered at that moment and waited at the further end of the place.

“The catch, madam,” the jeweller announced, “is in perfect order, and will stand any reasonable strain. If, as you suggest, it slipped, it must have been imperfectly fastened. If you take care to drive it home, so,” he added, “you will never have any difficulty.”

Mrs. Wieller smiled and picked up her gold bag. She bought some trifle of jewellery while Cray was selecting his safety-pins.

“Can I send the necklace anywhere for you, madam?” the man asked.

“If you wouldn’t mind, a gentleman will call for it in about half-an-hour,” she answered. “I am going shopping and it is really quite bulky to carry about.”

“Certainly, madam,” the man assented. “What name will it be?”

“Mr. Gerald Thomassen.”

Mrs. Wieller received the change from her purchase, looked around as though to nod to Mr. Cray, but found him absorbed in the examination of some waistcoat buttons. She left the shop and passed out into the street. King for the first time spoke.

“You are letting her go?”

Mr. Cray smiled.

“The letter is here,” he said.

A little exclamation broke from King’s lips. Mr. Cray moved down to where the



jeweller was packing up the necklace.

“May I be allowed to have a look at that?” he asked. “Very fine amber, isn’t it?”

“The necklace does not belong to us,” the jeweller replied, proceeding with his task. “We cannot allow clients’ property to be examined.”

Mr. Cray turned towards his companion, and King leaned against the counter. He whispered a word or two to the jeweller, who was suddenly pale.

“I—I really don’t understand,” he stammered.

“Don’t try,” was the brusque reply. “I have told you who I am. If you doubt my word, you can ring up the Department or call in the two plain-clothes officers who are outside by this time. Here is my warrant.”

Mr. King drew a small gold medal from his pocket. The jeweller bowed.

“I am quite satisfied, sir,” he said. “Pray proceed as you think fit.”

Mr. Cray took up the necklace in his hands and felt each of the stones. A beatific smile parted his lips.

“It is as I supposed,” he murmured. “See here.”

He pressed a hidden catch amongst the links, and one of the stones flew open upon a concealed hinge. There was a small hollow space, about an inch long and half an inch deep. In it was folded a wad of paper.

“The letter,” Mr. Cray observed, “has been cut into symmetrical pieces, each one numbered, and can of course be easily put together.”

King nodded apprehendingly.

“We will examine it more carefully in a few minutes,” he said. “In the meantime,” he added, “wrap the nearest necklace you have to it into this box, tie it up, and address it to Gerald Thornassen, Esq. The other necklace I will take care of.”

“You are aware that this is a great financial responsibility, sir?” the jeweller observed nervously.

“My department will secure you from any loss,” King assured him, with a slight smile. “Better hurry. This man may be here at any moment.”

The jeweller obeyed orders. Cray and his companion postponed the examination of Mrs. Wieller’s necklace and entered into an exhaustive scrutiny of the whole stock of waistcoat buttons. In about twenty-five minutes the shop door was pushed open and a tall, dark man, wearing a single eyeglass, and fashionably attired, entered the place. King, with the celerity of a cat, disappeared behind a screen.

“I have called for a parcel for Mrs. Jacob Wieller,” the man announced.

A package was handed to him and nonchalantly received.

“Anything to pay?”

“Nothing at all,” the jeweller replied. “No repair was necessary.”

The man left the shop. King glided out of his concealment. His eyes were bright with excitement.

“This is more interesting than I thought,” he muttered. “Come along, Cray.”

The jeweller leaned forward.

“If this is a criminal affair,” he said tremblingly, “I trust that you will see we are entirely innocent of complicity of any sort.”

King scarcely glanced towards him.

“I shall make up my mind about that,” he replied, “when I see whether Mr. Thornassen, as he calls himself, has been warned.”

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Sir George Sittingbourne and his wife arrived at Mr. Cray’s sitting-room at a few minutes before one. They found their prospective host with a gum brush in his hand and a number of sheets of paper before him. He welcomed them triumphantly.

“George,” he announced, “your letter, a little damaged, I am afraid, but there it is—quite readable, signature and all. It’s taken me over an hour to piece it together.”

“My dear man!” Sir George exclaimed thankfully. “Where in God’s name did you get it from?”

Mr. Cray smiled, opened a drawer, and threw a necklace upon the table.

“From Mrs. Wieller’s amber necklace, of course.”

“Dad,” Sara murmured, throwing her arms round his neck, “You’re wonderful!”

“Sir,” Sir George exclaimed, in a voice choked with emotion. “You’re a brick. . . .”

They were still lingering over their cocktails before descending to luncheon, when King was ushered in. He closed the door behind him. For such an unruffled person his appearance was almost remarkable. His eyes were bright, there was a look of concern in his face.

“You’ve pieced it together? Has it come out?” he asked.

“Absolutely,” Mr. Cray replied. “You can read it for yourself—that is if Sir George gives permission. What about Thornassen?”

King drew in a little breath. For a moment he made no reply.

“A German emissary, eh?” Mr. Cray asked.

King shook his head gravely. Already, in his agile brain, the great problems of the future were shaping themselves. He saw the new danger.

“Thornassen,” he said gravely, “deposited the sham necklace—at an embassy—which I must not name.”

“An Embassy?” Sir George exclaimed.

“The Embassy of one of our allies,” King groaned. “May I assume that that last

cocktail is for me, Mr. Cray? Your very good health. Will you allow me to express my acknowledgments, and to say that I am only sorry that that little symbol which you carry was not struck at our mint instead of at Washington.”

Mr. Cray smiled benevolently.

“That needn’t trouble you any, King,” he said. “I guess we’re all pulling in the same boat.”

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## VI “Satan and the Spirit”

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There was not the slightest manner of doubt but that Mr. Joseph P. Cray was thoroughly enjoying himself. He sat on the ledge of his box at Covent Garden, his legs dangling in mid-air, a paper cap with streamers upon his head, and the full joy of living in his blood. At times he played weird ditties upon a tin whistle. At others he threw with unusual skill, streamers of gaily coloured paper half-way across the floor. His cheery good-natured face aglow with happiness. He exchanged greetings right and left with perfect strangers. He was at once a notable and a popular figure.

“Yankee Doodle bought a poodle,” shouted the Shah of Persia, as he passed with the Queen of Sheba.

“Har, har, har! Var, var, var! Rah, rah, rah!” yelled Mr. Cray.

A little peal of musical laughter close to his ear, startled him so that he nearly lost his balance. A filmy grey figure, masked so that only her eloquent dark eyes were visible, was leaning by his side. She seemed to be enveloped by floating billows of misty tulle which at no place betrayed the dressmaker’s art—a human body moving in a filmy cloud. Her eyes, upturned to his, gave the only clue as to her age and sex, and Mr. Cray found them wonderful.

“I beg your pardon, ma’am,” he asked, “were you laughing at me?”

“Of course I am,” a soft mysterious voice answered.

“Guess I’m making some noise,” he reflected.

“I like it,” was the whispered reply. “Are you very happy?”

Mr. Cray was a little taken aback.

“Just trying to make the thing go a bit,” he explained, with a wave of his hand. “Nothing like a noise at a show of this sort. I’m a dandy hand at throwing these streamers. Have a try.”

The figure shook her head slightly but crept a little nearer to him. Mr. Cray was both attracted and intrigued.

“What might you represent?” he asked diffidently.

“I am a spirit,” she confided. “This moment you see me—a moment later I shall have vanished.”

“Don’t hurry,” Mr. Cray begged anxiously. “What about a bite of supper?”

“Spirits never eat,” was the reproachful reply.

“Or drink?” he suggested. “I’ve got a few bottles of Mumm 1906 in here. There’s some *pâté*, too.”

Mr. Cray’s attention was momentarily distracted by the passing of some

temporary acquaintances, with whom he indulged in a few vociferous amenities. When he had finished, he found to his dismay that his companion had vanished in a most mysterious fashion. He was conscious of a momentary pang of disappointment.

“Some voice, that,” he ruminated, “and gee, her eyes! Guess I’ll get down and look for some of the crowd.”

He was on the point of descending when a soft tapping at the door of the box caused him to change his mind. Somehow or other, the tapping seemed to him as distinctive as the voice. He swung around and opened the door eagerly. The Spirit stood there.

“Come right in, ma’am,” he invited cordially. “Say, this is fine! Take a chair and I’ll open some champagne.”

She floated in and seated herself, looking more than ever like a grey mist. Her eyes remained upon him while he served her with supper. There was a sort of subdued rapture in her expression, as though she found something almost worshipful in the portly and corpulent figure of her host.

“How’s that seem, young lady?” he asked finally. “A wing of chicken, *pâté* and biscuits on the small plate, and a glass of the boy, eh?”

“It is very kind of you,” the Spirit replied. “I did not come here to eat. I came to be near you.”

“Say, that sounds good,” Mr. Cray murmured, a little embarrassed—he was scarcely used to such complete conquests.

“You are so full of life,” she sighed, “so full of splendid and actual vitality. You remind me—Ah!”

She broke off and attacked her chicken. She also sipped and apparently approved of her wine. Mr. Cray cheered up. The Spirit business had been getting a little upon his nerves, and he welcomed these signs of indubitable humanity. He filled his own glass and raised it.

“Here’s health, wealth and happiness!” he ventured, in the words of a popular song. “Chin-chin!”

The Spirit sighed but drank. Then she toyed pensively with her empty glass, which her host promptly filled.

“Health, wealth and happiness!” she repeated, her eyes becoming mistier than ever. “I will drink with you because you wish it, but these things are not for me.”

Mr. Cray, adopting the rôle of a man of respectful gallantry, possessed himself of her hand. He was ashamed to realise how relieved he was to find it warm and soft and human.

“See here,” he remonstrated, “aren’t you overdoing this Spirit business a little?”

This is a dance, not a funeral. What about a turn on the floor when you've finished that? I'm not a great performer, but I guess there are others."

She looked at him sadly. Her fingers still rested in his comfortable hand.

"I can only dance with one," she sighed, "and you are not he."

"That's too bad," he protested, "especially on a night like this. Husband, eh? Lover?"

She shook her head more mournfully than ever.

"It is some one who claims me," she declared, "who seldom lets me wander far out of his sight. He terrifies me—but I belong to him. Listen!"

Mr. Cray obeyed.

"I don't know as I can hear anything unusual," he confessed. "Music and laughter and popping of corks sounds a pretty good chorus to me. Come," he went on glancing at his watch, "it's close on midnight—what about taking that mask off, eh?"

He stretched out his hand but she eluded him, flitting away into a corner of the box. Once more she was listening.

"Can't you hear—a sound like the rushing of the angry wind, like footsteps upon wool up in the hills? A voice—listen! Seboa! Seboa!"

There certainly was a voice, although what it was saying was undistinguishable. A masked Satan, in brilliant scarlet, was standing in front of the box. Mr. Cray addressed him affably.

"Were you looking for a Spirit, sir?" he inquired. "She's in here. Step right up and have a glass of wine. I guess this is your friend," he added, turning round to his guest.

Satan made no reply. His eyes were fixed upon the shrinking figure in the corner of the box. As though in obedience to his unspoken command, she passed out and joined him. A moment later they were gliding across the floor, their feet moving to the music—a strange almost sinister combination. Mr. Cray mopped his forehead, poured himself out and drank another glass of wine, and, stepping out on to the floor, passed his arm round the waist of the first disengaged damsel he came across, and plunged into the revels. But nowhere could he see any signs of Satan and the Spirit.

It was one of the most successful masked balls of the season, and after midnight the fun waxed fast and furious. Mr. Cray found many friends and entertained hospitably. His curiosity concerning his acquaintance of the early part of the evening, however, remained unabated, and he scanned in vain every one of the boxes and searched every corner of the dancing floor for a sign of her smoke-grey draperies or

the more easily distinguishable scarlet of her companion. He came to the conclusion at last that they must have left early and he was puzzled to find that side by side with his disappointment was mingled a certain feeling of relief. Mr. Cray was an ardent materialist and he had no faith in spirits. Her soft voice, with its strange suggestion of coming from some greater distance, and the aroma of mystery by which she had contrived to surround herself, repelled just as much as it had attracted him. He could not make up his mind, therefore, whether he was relieved or disappointed when, during his first period of rest for some hours in the temporarily deserted box, he heard her voice just below the ledge.

“Are you alone?” she asked softly.

“Sure!” Mr. Cray replied. “Come right up.”

Once more she disappeared for a moment and then drifted through the doorway, curiously impersonal, her draperies concealing with matchless art all suggestion of the human figure. She still retained her mask.

“Say, that’s against regulations!” he declared, pointing to it. “Masks should come off at midnight. Just let me fix it for you.”

She shrank away.

“My mask must not come off,” she murmured.

He made a pretence at insisting. She pushed him back. She seemed nervous and terrified, her eyes shone.

“I am in earnest, please,” she begged. “Just let me sit here and be near you. Don’t speak to me. Don’t take any notice of me.”

She sank into a secluded corner, and Mr. Cray poured out a glass of champagne, after which he scratched his chin and sat watching her thoughtfully. Her partiality for his society coupled with her aloofness, puzzled him. Mr. Cray hated to be puzzled.

“I don’t quite get you,” he admitted. “You don’t seem looking for any fun like all the others. What made you come to such a place as this, any way?”

“Don’t ask me, please . . . If you must know, I came because another wished it.”

“Chap in scarlet?” he suggested genially.

She shook her head.

“It was not he—it was Seboa,” she told him, in a whisper which scarcely reached his ears.

“Don’t know the lady—or gentleman,” Mr. Cray admitted, “but, any way, what made you come back to me again? It isn’t the wine, because you’re not drinking it. You don’t seem to want to talk, either.”

“It’s your vitality,” she told him nervously. “You are full of life—strong human life.”

It warms me.”

Mr. Cray edged a little further away.

“I guess this is a stunt I’m not up in,” he murmured weakly.

“Of course you don’t understand,” she went on after a moment’s pause. “I seem to you like other women, because I eat and drink and dance—but I am not. My life all ebbed out long ago. I belong—somewhere else.”

Mr. Cray moved to the further end of the box. He thrust one leg over its ledge.

“Guess I’ll go and collect some of the crowd,” he muttered. “You make yourself quite comfortable and stay just as long as you like.”

“Don’t go,” she begged. “Don’t leave me.”

Mr. Cray hesitated. He was a good-natured man, and the little quiver in her voice sounded very human.

“I’ll stay if you take your mask off,” he suggested, “and leave off getting at me.”

“You shall see me without my mask within a few hours,” she promised, “but not here—not now. Please—please stay. This is my dangerous hour.”

“Is it!” Mr. Cray murmured, making this time for the door. “If you’ll excuse me, I’ll just——”

“Dangerous to me, I mean—not to you,” she interrupted. “Please do not go. I am afraid of drifting off—of losing myself. My hold upon this frail body is so slight.”

“Drink up your wine,” Mr. Cray suggested a little helplessly. “Let me give you a sandwich.”

“Oh, you don’t understand!” she moaned.

“I’m with you there,” he assented heartily. “I don’t.”

“How can I explain!”

“I’m not particular how you do it,” Mr. Cray replied, “but I’ve kinder got the idea that you’re playing some game on me and if you’re not feeling like putting me wise, I’d just as soon without wishing to seem inhospitable, that you quit it.”

She began to tremble.

“But I don’t want to go,” she protested.

“Then stay right where you are,” he replied, “and I’ll take an amble round myself and see how things are looking.”

“Would it help you to understand,” she asked “if I told you who I really am?”

“I guess so,” he assented. “My name’s Cray—Joseph P. Cray of Seattle, when I’m at home—and I don’t take any stock in spooks.”

She leaned a little forward. Her eyes glowed as though with wonder of her words.

“I am Seboa,” she whispered,—“Christine Seboa. . . . Ah, how horrible!”



The box was suddenly and riotously invaded by a horde of a dozen or more revellers. The duties of hospitality for a few moments absorbed Mr. Cray's whole attention. When he looked around, the chair in the corner was empty.

"Hello! Anyone seen my little cloud drift out?" he demanded.

There was a peal of laughter.

"He means his little sunshine," a fluffy-haired Columbine declared, passing her hand through his arm. "I'm here, dear. No cloud shall ever come between us."

"Say, that's a comfort, anyhow," Mr. Cray acknowledged. "But honest, didn't you see anyone here when you came in—a small person in kind of grey, billowy muslin, or floating stuff of some sort?"

There was a moment's blank silence, then a roar of laughter.

"Cray, old bean, you're seeing things," hiccoughed a young scion of the Stock Exchange, temporarily gorgeous in ruffles and lace.

"The box was empty save for your gracious self," a flushed and bedraggled Hamlet declared, with his mouth full of sandwich. "To that we can all attest."

"Anyone ever hear the name of Christine Seboa?" Mr. Cray enquired, keeping a tight hold upon himself.

"Christine Seboa?" a monk, who had hitherto been silent, repeated. "She was a wonderful Danish medium, who nearly sent New York crazy last year."

"And where is she now?" Mr. Cray asked.

"She died last November," the monk replied.

Mr. Cray poured himself out a glass of wine, spilling a few spots upon the table cloth.

"Here's confusion to all spooks!" he exclaimed, drinking it off. "Now," he added, snatching up his trumpet, "let's get outside and make a noise."

They sallied out. The monk, however, detained his host for a moment after the others had departed. He looked around as though to be sure that they were alone in the box.

"Mr. Cray," he said, "you flatter my disguise."

"Not for one second, Inspector," Mr. Cray replied, with a smile. "I'm not quite fresh enough, though, to go bawling 'Scotland Yard' all over the place."

"I apologise," the monk declared.

"Anything special on?"

The monk shook his head.

"There are always one or two of us at these affairs," he said. "I've spotted a couple of well-known thieves already, but there's nothing particular doing. They know we're here all right. I was interested in that name I heard—Christine Seboa."

Mr. Cray looked uneasily around.

“She kinder got me guessing,” he confessed.

“Christine Seboa,” the monk went on, “was not only a very wonderful medium, but she was also a great collector.”

“Of what?”

“Jewellery—anything she could lay her hands on,” the inspector replied. “It was not until after her death that she was even suspected. They say that she must have got away with a quarter of a million pounds’ worth of diamonds from New York alone.”

“You’re not taking any stock from the fact that she called herself a medium, I suppose?” Mr. Cray inquired.

The monk scratched his chin.

“Men like you and me, Mr. Cray, sir,” he said, “who take an interest in crime, are bound to be materialists. Still, I’ve learnt in my profession never to be obstinate about anything. There are a good many intelligent and well-informed people who believe in spooks, and I am telling you frankly that this Christine Seboa had, without doubt, some exceptional gifts. They say that she could hypnotise a strong man in three minutes.”

“You’re sure she’s dead,” Mr. Cray asked.

“So far as our information goes,” the monk replied, “she died in New York last November.”

“Then I don’t mind telling you,” Mr. Cray confided, “that this little bit of grey cloud, who’s rather got on my nerves this evening—some eyes she’s got, but she kept on behaving like a half-baked spook—told me just before you all came in that her name was Christine Seboa.”

“That’s interesting,” the monk acknowledged. “Let’s have a stroll round and see if we can see anything of her.”

Three times the two men made the circuit of the hall, in vain. The Spirit had disappeared.

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Mr. Cray stood on the steps of the Albert Hall at four o’clock that morning, paused for a moment to take a breath, and sent a mighty volume of raucous sound quivering through the early stillness.

“Rah, rah, rah! Hah, hah, hah! Rah, rah, rah!”

There was a little commotion amongst the unfortunate bystanders. A pleasant-faced officer in uniform, who was standing on the step below Mr. Cray, with a muffled-up form upon his arm, started as though he had been shot and nearly

dropped the kit-bag which he was carrying.

“For God’s sake,” he exclaimed, looking over his shoulder, “what are you making that noise for?”

“I want my automobile,” Mr. Cray explained, cheerfully. “I’ve got an American chauffeur who knows the old college call. I guess he’s heard me.”

“I should say he has if he’s this side of the Strand,” the officer commented drily.

“He’s not only heard it but here he is,” Mr. Cray observed complacently, as his limousine stole through the tangle of vehicles and drew up to the steps. “That’s worth a shout, eh?”

There were many in the waiting crowd who looked wistfully at the car, for a drizzling rain was falling and taxicabs were scarce. Mr. Cray looked round at the officer and his companion and addressed the former.

“Can I give you a lift anywhere, sir?” he asked. “I’m going to the Milan Hotel, but I don’t mind a bit out of my way as long as it isn’t entirely in the opposite direction.”

The officer stepped forward almost eagerly.

“If you could give my wife and me a lift as far as Moon Street, Chelsea,” he said, “it would be awfully good of you. I ordered a taxicab, but I’m afraid he’s gone off with some one else. My wife’s terribly tired, too.”

“Step right in,” Mr. Cray invited hospitably. “Tell the chauffeur your number, Captain. Let me give you a cushion ma’am. Pretty tiring—My God!”

They were all three in the car now, the officer with his head out of the window, directing the chauffeur. A black domino had up to the present concealed the whole of the lady’s form, but the eyes, glowing so steadily into his through the folds of her black lace mantilla were unmistakable. The faintest of weary smiles played upon her lips as she gazed into Mr. Cray’s thunderstruck face. The officer withdrew his head from the window.

“Major Hartopp my name is, sir,” he said. “I can’t tell you how grateful my wife and I are.”

“Joseph P. Cray is my name,” the other rejoined. “I’ve come across your good lady before this evening.”

“Yes,” the Spirit murmured sleepily from her corner, “Mr. Cray was very kind to me. He gave me wine and let me sit down in his box.”

“And I understood you to say that your name was Christine Seboa,” Mr. Cray observed, too eager for some measure of elucidation to be anything but ruthless.

“I am Christine Seboa,” was the reply, spoken in a dull hollow tone. “The whole world knows that.”

Mr. Cray glanced across at his male vis-à-vis. Major Hartopp sighed slightly and shook his head, with a warning glance towards the figure at his side, and Mr. Cray, understanding his gesture to mean that his wife was to be humoured, relapsed into silence. The car turned southward, passed down Sloane Street, and plunged into the purlieus of Chelsea, finally pulling up at what was apparently a pleasant, little frequented thoroughfare.

“You must come in and have a whisky and soda,” the young soldier insisted hospitably.

Mr. Cray shook his head.

“I guess it’s too late,” he replied. “Besides, I’m just as well without any more liquor.”

His new acquaintance, however, would take no refusal, and eventually they all descended from the car and passed through a cheerful little hall into a small morning room, where a bright fire was burning in the grate. Decanters of whisky and brandy and several syphons of soda water, were arranged upon the sideboard. The Spirit came no further than the threshold of the room. She stood looking at Mr. Cray with strange and mournful intensity.

“Good-night,” she said. “You have been very kind to me.”

“Say, won’t you take off that mask for a moment before you go?” Mr. Cray begged. “I’d like to be able to recognise you when we meet again.”

She shook her head very slightly. Her husband frowned across at her in good-natured annoyance.

“Look here Mina,” he protested, “why don’t you do as Mr. Cray asks? I’m pretty sick of the damned thing myself.”

“I cannot,” she answered simply. “I have promised.”

“Rubbish!” her husband answered testily. “There isn’t anyone to promise.”

“Good-bye, Mr. Cray,” she said.

“Good evening, Mrs. Hartopp,” he replied, with a bow. “I’d like it first-rate if you and your husband could fix it up to take dinner with me at the Milan one night.”

“You are very kind,” she murmured, and drifted away.

Major Hartopp drew a little breath of undisguised relief at the closing of the door. He drew up an easy chair to the fire and almost pushed his guest into it. Then he mixed him a whisky and soda of generous proportions, served himself also with liberality, and sank down upon a couch opposite to his guest.

“Mr. Cray,” he confided, “I feel that I owe you an explanation.”

“I wouldn’t go so far as that,” his vis-à-vis replied, “but I must admit that your good lady puzzled me some.”

“Do you know anything about spiritualism?” Major Hartopp asked.

“Not one darned thing,” Mr. Cray acknowledged.

“Neither do I, but it seems that my wife, before I married her, was a medium.”

“Holds converse with spirits, and that sort of thing,” Mr. Cray ventured dubiously.

“Worse!” his companion groaned. “Spirits actually take possession of her, enter into her body, speak with her tongue, crush out her own personality and obtrude their own.”

“You don’t say,” Mr. Cray murmured.

“It seems that she has a personality or spirituality which very few human beings in the world possess,” his companion went on. “Hers, they tell me, is one of the few bodies in the world accessible to the sympathetic dead. They seem to have a taste for revelry too. One of them always weighs in if we are going to a dance or anything of that sort. Christine Seboa turned up at eight o’clock this evening, just as we were settling down to dinner. Completely spoilt the whole pleasure of the dance for me. I hate spooks.”

Mr. Cray studied his vis-à-vis for several moments with half-closed eyes. Major Hartopp was to all appearance the perfect prototype of the well-bred, simple-minded, moderately intelligent young British soldier. He had a slight ruddy moustache which went well with his sunburnt cheeks, blue eyes, and fair hair inclined to curl. He looked rather like a spoilt boy who has been defrauded of his evening’s entertainment.

“Do you seriously believe what you are telling me?” Mr. Cray demanded.

“Damn it all, man,” was the irritable reply, “you don’t suppose I should joke over such an infernal business! Until that dreary Christine hops it, my wife will be half asleep and as cold as an icicle. To-morrow she’ll telephone to some of these spooks lunatics, and they’ll haunt the house then for days until Mina is herself again. I tell you I hate the whole damned business.”

Mr. Cray turned his cigar round and round in his fingers, sipped his whisky and soda and pondered. Just inside the room, the kitbag which they had brought from the Albert Hall, had burst one of its fastenings, and a glitter of red, the same colour as the flaming costume of Mephistopheles, showed itself. He opened his lips to ask a question, but decided to postpone it. Major Hartopp was not in the least the type of a Mephistopheles. His florid complexion, his ingenuous, if a little peevish expression stamped him as belonging to a different order of being altogether. Everything about him proclaimed the sports-loving young officer, who has done well enough in the army to have attained his majority and stopped there.

"I can't make out why Mina seems to have attached herself to you so much this evening," her husband ruminated. "She came to see you several times, didn't she?"

"She came twice," Mr. Cray admitted. "She had some supper the first time."

"You aren't psychic or anything of that sort, are you?"

"Not that I know of," was the cautious reply.

"Says you saw her dancing with Satan—What?"

"I saw that all right," Mr. Cray admitted. "A weird looking couple they made, too."

"Well, no one else did," her husband declared. "There wasn't a Satan there, as a matter of fact."

Mr. Cray's eyes rested upon the gaping kit bag. He stroked his chin. His whole interest in the evening's adventure was reviving.

"That's so?" he murmured.

"Not a sign of one," the young man continued. "According to Mina, that proves you to be possessed of negative psychic attraction. I don't know what it means, old fellow, but you've got it. She declares that she was drawn to you as a trembling leaf blown by the wind."

Mr. Cray surreptitiously patted his breast pocket, where a slight protuberance indicated the continued presence of his somewhat bulky pocket book.

"She did kinder stay round in a weird sort of fashion," he admitted. "I thought she was trying to play some joke upon me. I couldn't seem to tumble at what she was driving at, half the time."

"My wife's all right when she's herself," the young man declared. "It was this infernal Christine Seboa who was trying to rake you into the spook business. Between you and me, I hate the whole thing. Half of it's bunkum, and the other half's unwholesome. . . . Just one more small whisky before you go?"

"Only a spot, then," Mr. Cray assented, holding out his glass. "Not quite so strong this time."

"It's pretty nearly pre-war," his host remarked, as he resumed his seat. "Good God!"

Both men glanced towards the door. The Spirit was standing there—a singular apparition. A white dressing-gown hung loosely about her, she was still wearing her black mask. Her eyes were fixed upon Mr. Cray.

"You must come," she begged, speaking very softly yet with almost singular distinctness. "You must please come. They will not let me sleep. They call for you all the time."

"I am sorry," was the hasty response, "but I'm just off home. I should have gone

before now but your husband's whisky was too good to leave."

Mr. Cray rose to his feet with determination. His host followed his example.

"Mina," the latter protested, "you really must not worry Mr. Cray now. You are quite mistaken in him. He's as much outside all this business as I am."

She shook her head. Her eyes still pleaded with Mr. Cray.

"If you are not happy you shall not stay," she said, "but you must come or they will give me no peace."

"I guess there's some mistake," Mr. Cray declared coldly. "You'll have to excuse me."

Her distress became almost a paroxysm. She clutched the framework of the door with either hand, barring their egress. Hartopp drew his guest on one side.

"Look here, Mr. Cray," he begged apologetically, "be a good chap and humour her for two minutes. Just put your head into her little sanctum. She calls it her temple. Maybe that'll satisfy her, and you needn't stay a minute."

"Has she got it into her mind that there are spooks there waiting for me?" Mr. Cray queried.

"Of course, it's all damned nonsense," the other rejoined, "but she'll never rest now unless you do it. I'll come along as far as the door anyway."

Mr. Cray shrugged his shoulders, and the little procession, led by the Spirit, passed down the passage by the side of the staircase until they reached a door at the far end.

"Come," she whispered, opening it softly.

Mr. Cray stood by her side. There was no light, and the darkness was impenetrable. It was also very cold, as though the windows were open. The only visible object was the Spirit standing by his side, a pillar of white, her eyes like points of fire.

"Say, what's doing here?" Mr. Cray asked, a little uneasily. "Do your visitors need to come in through the window? I guess——"

"Please be quiet," a low voice begged him. "Be silent for one moment. Listen."

Mr. Cray listened, and it seemed to him that he heard the door close behind him. He half turned around. The curtains were shaking as though a sudden wind was blowing into the room. Then he felt fingers upon the pulses of his wrist, and immediately it seemed to him that they were beating as though they would break through his flesh; fingers upon his temples, and immediately the sense that sledge hammers were beating there, beating against the nerves of his life. His whole sense of being had become pandemonium. The roaring of a furnace was in his ears. He felt himself sinking down and down into space, falling—lower and lower. . . .

Mr. Cray opened his eyes. There were splashes of daylight in the sitting-room, which made the electric lights look feeble and dim. On the lounge opposite, Major Hartopp was still reclining, although he had changed his uniform dress-coat for a dressing-gown and removed his collar. He welcomed Mr. Cray's opening eyes with a little sigh of relief.

"Feeling the better for your nap?" he asked, glancing suggestively at the clock.

"My nap?" Mr. Cray repeated vaguely.

His vis-à-vis nodded and stifled a yawn.

"You dropped off like a child," he said. "I don't want to seem inhospitable, but I think you had better wake up now. Your chauffeur has been in twice and he doesn't seem in the best of tempers."

Mr. Cray looked at the extinct cigar which had apparently slipped from his fingers and lay upon the hearthrug, brushed the cold ashes from his waistcoat, and rose to his feet.

"What happened to me in that room," he demanded.

"Which room?" his host asked.

"The one at the end of the passage, where you and I and your wife went together."

Major Hartopp looked at his guest, then smiled.

"You've been dreaming," he observed. "You haven't left that easy-chair since you arrived, and you certainly haven't seen anything of my wife. She went straight to bed directly we got home."

"Straight to bed?" Mr. Cray repeated, in a dazed tone. "You mean to tell me that she didn't come down here in a white dressing-gown and still wearing a mask, and talk about spooks who were clamouring for me in the room at the end of the passage?"

Major Hartopp frowned.

"She most certainly did not," he declared, a little testily. "You'll forgive my hurrying you, old chap, won't you?" he went on, leading the way towards the door. "To tell you the truth, I'm dying to get to bed. If I'd had any idea that you were dreaming things, I'd have woke you up."

"Dreaming!" Mr. Cray muttered.

"Sounds like some sort of nightmare," the other observed. "You seemed to be sleeping so peacefully, though, that I hated to disturb you."

Mr. Cray felt suddenly for his pocket-book. It was there in its accustomed place, just as bulky and capacious as ever. Neither had the kitbag, with its incriminating gleam of scarlet, been removed.



“Not your bag, is it?” Major Hartopp asked carelessly.

“I hadn’t any grip at all,” Mr. Cray answered. “Isn’t it yours?”

Major Hartopp shook his head.

“Mine was practically empty. All I took in it was a couple of bottles of champagne. I set it down on the steps of the Albert Hall, while we were waiting and must have picked up this one by mistake. I’ll send it back presently. . . . Jove, isn’t the air good!” he added, as he opened the front-door and let in a little of the cool morning breeze. “So long! Look us up some day. You’ll find us in the telephone book.”

“Sure!” Mr. Cray promised. “Sorry to have kept you up,” he added mechanically.

The chauffeur darted a reproachful look at his master as he scrambled down to the starting handle, and in a few minutes they were gliding through the wet and empty streets. Mr. Cray sat back in the corner of the car, no longer in the least sleepy, and probably the most puzzled man in London. He had no headache nor any other sign of ill-being such as might reasonably have been expected to remain with a man who had been drugged or otherwise maltreated. The roll of notes remained in his pocket-book untouched. He knew better than any one else could that he was and had been all the time perfectly sober. What explanation was there for the strange experience through which he had passed? Mentally he tabulated the various questions as they had occurred to him.

1. Was Mrs. Hartopp simply a foolish and hysterical woman who had imposed even upon her husband, and who had attached herself to him out of caprice?
2. Was she really a medium and in direct communication with the world of spirit land, in which up till now he had had no—faith?
3. Was she a clever adventuress with fraudulent designs upon him? Against that, his pocket-book and jewellery were still untouched.
4. What was the position of Major Hartopp?
5. Had he really slept in his easy-chair and only dreamed of that brief period of unconsciousness?

There was something in the early morning atmosphere which encouraged common-sense. One by one Mr. Cray discarded the suspicions which had grown up in his mind. By the time he had reached his rooms at the Milan Court, he had almost forgotten them. With a pleasant sense of anticipatory luxury, he undressed and

plunged into a steaming bath, lying there for a few minutes with half-closed eyes before stretching out his hand lazily for the sponge and soap. Suddenly he sat bolt upright, gazing at the first finger of his right hand. At exactly the spot where he was in the habit of grasping his fountain-pen, was a deep smudge of ink. He stared at it in blank and complete amazement, with a host of new ideas rushing into his brain. For of one thing Mr. Cray was absolutely and completely certain—there had been no such blemish upon his finger when he had left his box at the Albert Hall.

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Precisely two minutes after the front-doors of the South Audley Street branch of a well-known bank had been opened, Major Hartopp, smoking a cigarette and attired in immaculate *mufti*, descended from a taxi, strolled across the pavement, and, after some fumbling in his pocket, produced a cheque which he handed across the counter. The manager glanced at it, glanced at another customer a few feet away, who was apparently adding up a list of credits, and, leaving the cheque upon the counter, moved a couple of yards to a position from which he could command a view of a small private office. He made some undistinguishable sign, and a moment later Mr. Cray strolled in. Major Hartopp, still lounging nonchalantly against the counter, greeted him affably.

“Morning, Mr. Cray! Up and about early, what?”

“I might say the same of you,” Mr. Cray remarked pointedly.

“This gentleman has just presented a cheque for a thousand pounds, drawn by you,” the manager announced. “May I ask if it is in order?”

“It most surely is not,” was the forcible reply.

The customer who was counting the credits, and who bore a strong resemblance to the monk of the night before, moved a little back from the counter, standing between Major Hartopp and the door. That gentleman, however, seemed in no wise embarrassed.

“Cheque for a thousand fiddlesticks!” he scoffed. “Look at it again, my dear sir.”

The manager glanced at the cheque, frowned in a puzzled manner, and stood for a few seconds with his mouth open, with the air of one stricken dumb with astonishment.

“Have a look at it yourself, Mr. Cray,” Major Hartopp continued. “It’s a silly business, I admit, but my wife got the idea last night that you were a strong unbeliever. As you know, I’m a bit that way myself, but if that’s really your signature, this Christine Seboa is a dangerous sort of a spook.”

The three men gazed together at the cheque. It was clearly enough a cheque for one sovereign, made out to Christine Seboa or bearer.

“It can’t be my writing,” Mr. Cray declared, “because I never remember writing it, but it’s the most wonderful imitation I ever saw. Come to think of it, too,” he went on, in a puzzled manner, “the only thing that brought me here was some ink on my fingers.”

“Oh, you wrote the cheque all right,” Major Hartopp affirmed. “It’s a trick of one of her spooks. My instructions were to cash this and to ask you to dinner.”

The manager for the first time recovered his power of speech. “The most amazing part of the whole matter is,” he declared, “that I could have sworn this gentleman presented a cheque for a thousand pounds.”

Major Hartopp smiled.

“I should scarcely have entered into a joke of that sort,” he observed. “What about that pound?”

“You signed the cheque all right.”

Mr. Cray nodded. His eyes were still fixed upon his indubitable signature. At a sign from him, the manager passed a pound note across the counter, which Major Hartopp folded and placed in his coat pocket.

“Dine with us at the Carlton to-night at eight o’clock, Mr. Cray,” he invited, “and I promise you shall have your pound back with interest.”

“I shall be delighted,” Mr. Cray murmured.

“See you later, then,” the young officer concluded, nodding to the manager and taking his leisurely departure. “Good morning.”

Major Hartopp left the bank and they heard his taxi drive away. The manager stood on one side of the counter and Mr. Cray on the other. The inspector strolled up to them. They all examined the cheque for a sovereign.

“This gets me,” Mr. Cray confessed. “If that isn’t my signature, I’ll eat the cheque.”

“And if the cheque he showed me three minutes ago wasn’t for a thousand pounds, I’ll eat it too,” the manager declared.

The inspector was called into the inner office to answer the telephone. He was out again in thirty seconds.

“We’re spoofed somehow!” he exclaimed. “Major and Mrs. Hartopp are on the Continent. Their house in Chelsea has been taken furnished for a month by a man and woman wanted very badly by the American police. The man is a great sleight-of-hand thief and one of the most dangerous adventurers in America. The woman has robbed them in New York of over fifty thousand pounds on this spook stunt.”

The manager suddenly stooped down, picked up a strip of paper from underneath the counter, and held it out.

“A cheque for a thousand pounds!” he exclaimed. “I knew it!”

“Simple as A.B.C.” the inspector exclaimed. “Our man saw at once there was something wrong. He’d got the other cheque ready, changed it, and slipped the thousand pound one through the hole in the counter there for pass-books. I’ll lay odds, too, he’s the man who got away with ten thousand pounds’ worth of jewels last night in the costume of a scarlet Mephistopheles.”

“I saw him with it,” Mr. Cray groaned.

“Where were the cheques?” the inspector asked.

Mr. Cray produced his pocket-book.

“I always have two or three loose ones with me,” he explained, “although I’d this roll of notes, as it happened, last night.”

The inspector glanced at the notes and turned towards the door.

“I’m off,” he exclaimed. “Lost too much time already. Ask Mr. Thomson there to look at your notes.”

Mr. Cray produced them. The manager held one up to the light.

“Faked,” he exclaimed. “They changed your notes, Mr. Cray, and took out your cheques, but what I can’t understand is—how did they ever get you to sign them?”

“I’m worrying some about that myself,” Mr. Cray confided.

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## *VII Mr. Homor's Legacy*

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Mr. Joseph P. Cray, wandering around the world in his pleasant quest of adventures, harmless or otherwise, found himself one March morning on the terrace of the Golf Hotel at Hyères. By his side stood the young man in irreproachable flannels whom he had just intercepted on his way to the tennis-courts. It was a somewhat amazing meeting.

“Is it Major Hartopp this time?” Mr. Cray inquired.

The young man signified assent.

“It is only bunglers who keep changing their pseudonyms,” he said. “I am not a bungler.”

Mr. Cray for once in his life was a little taken aback.

“You are taking this pretty coolly, young fellow, aren’t you?” he observed. “I suppose you know that for several months the police have been looking for the man who tried to cash a cheque for a thousand pounds on my account, and for the scarlet Mephistopheles who scooped up about ten thousand pounds’ worth of jewels at Covent Garden?”

The young man shook his head gently.

“You exaggerate the position, my dear Mr. Cray,” he expostulated. “In the first place, the cheque for one thousand pounds you signed, in the second place, it could never be proved that it was presented, and with regard to the jewels, not one of them has ever been traced, and there is not a shred of evidence to connect the scarlet Mephistopheles with these robberies, or, if it comes to that, me with the scarlet Mephistopheles.”

“There is the matter of your past record in America,” Mr. Cray murmured.

“There I grant you a trick,” the young man interrupted. “If you care to communicate with the police, I will admit that I might find my position untenable. Somehow I do not think that you will do so.”

“And why not?” Mr. Cray inquired.

“Come this way and I will show you.”

The pseudo Major Hartopp led his companion along the front of the terrace to where a little recess formed a shelter secure from the lightly-moving wind, and where the sun came pouring in, soft and warm and genial. An invalid chair was drawn up against the wall, and lying in it at full length was a woman. Mr. Cray felt a little thrill of pity as the pale, wasted face was turned towards his, and the dark, hollow eyes lit up for a moment with mingled fear and recognition.

"This is the reason why we are here," Hartopp explained. "The doctors told us that nothing but the sun could keep my wife alive. That is why I accepted the risk."

Mr. Cray leaned over the chair.

"I am very sorry to see you so ill," he said.

She smiled at him—a very mirthless effort.

"It was Christine Seboa," she faltered. "She seems to have torn my heart to pieces. Now she has gone and I am myself again. She went too late."

"You must never say that," Mr. Cray enjoined cheerfully. "This place has cured more invalids than any spot in the South of France."

She looked at him mournfully.

"Are we allowed to stay here?" she said.

"So far as I am concerned, yes," Mr. Cray replied. "I've no call to remember anything I don't choose, and I won't. But before we close up the subject, will you tell me how you got me to sign those cheques?"

"I didn't do it," she assured him. "It was Christine Seboa, and she has gone."

"No chance of her turning up again, I suppose?" Mr. Cray inquired.

The figure in the chair shook her head wistfully.

"My body is not strong enough to hold her," she answered.

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Mr. Cray settled down to live the everyday life of the little community. He played golf in the morning, dozed with a cigar in the sunshine in the afternoon, and played bridge in the evening. All the time he kept his eye upon the Hartopps, and by degrees a conviction sprang up in his mind. Although, to all appearance, Hartopp, who was a fine athlete, was engrossed by the care of his invalid wife and the sports of the place, he was in reality at Hyères for some other purpose. He had a habit of absenting himself sometimes for the whole day, of taking long walks into the country and returning with moody, downcast expression. He was *persona grata* amongst the younger guests, but he took little pains to ingratiate himself with any one. And just as Mr. Cray watched him, so he seemed at times to be watching Mr. Cray. But for that wan figure, which only the sunlight seemed to keep alive, there were times when Mr. Cray regretted that he had not obeyed his first instinct and sent a wire to Scotland Yard.

"Say, what's your husband got on his mind?" he inquired one morning of Mrs. Hartopp.

She turned her great sunken eyes towards him.

"He is worried about financial matters," she told him solemnly.

"Hm! I should have thought he'd been set up for a bit," Mr. Cray observed.

She shook her head slowly.

“He has some securities,” she explained naïvely, “but it is too early to realise upon them yet. You wouldn’t care, I suppose, to make an advance upon them?”

“God bless my soul, no!” Mr. Cray declared, a little pettishly. “I’m trafficking with my conscience some, ma’am, if I keep my mouth shut, but you mustn’t try to rope me in as a partner.”

“You look at these things so unreasonably,” she murmured. “You have never lost anything worth speaking of by us.”

“Personally, perhaps not, ma’am,” Mr. Cray acknowledged, “but I have a conscience.”

Then she suddenly saw a bent figure approaching.

“You are a dear thing,” she said, “although sometimes you can be very hard. Please go now. Here comes Mr. Homor. He wants to speak to me about his wife.”

“His late wife,” Mr. Cray observed, raising his hat.

“That is a foolish term,” she answered reprovingly.

Mr. Cray glanced at the gaunt, bent figure approaching, noticed the eager gleam which shone for a moment in the lustreless eyes, and turned away.

“Hm!” he muttered. “I suppose Mr. Homor can look after himself. . . .”

On the golf links he found Hartopp practising iron shots, and challenged him to a few holes.

“See here, Hartopp,” he said, as soon as they got started, “I kind of take an interest in you and your wife, although the Lord knows why. I guess it’s because she seems sick. What’s the game with Mr. Homor?”

Hartopp was a little irritable.

“My dear friend,” he replied, “there is no game at all. Mr. Homor is interested in spiritualism and has just lost his wife. Mina is able to console him.”

“Anything doing in the way of séances?”

Major Hartopp sighed.

“I believe that something of the sort has been arranged for this evening,” he admitted. “There are two or three women in the hotel, and one other man, who belong to the cult.”

“Are you going?”

“I am not,” was the firm reply. “I am very much opposed to the whole business. Besides, I don’t think Mina is strong enough.”

“Why don’t you stop it, then?”

Major Hartopp glanced at his companion almost contemptuously.

“If you know as little of Mina as that,” he said, “you’ve been wasting your time.”

“I sometimes wonder,” Mr. Cray rejoined, “whether I know as much about either of you as any person with an ounce of common-sense ought to.”

Major Hartopp played a wonderful approach and watched his ball run to the hole. Then he turned towards his companion, the flicker of a smile upon his lips.

“These flashes of super-intelligence, Cray,” he declared, “convince me that you are really a great man. Do you realise that I am three up to bogey?”

That afternoon there was only one topic of conversation in the lounge and on the terrace of the Golf Hotel. It had been privately announced that a small séance would take place after dinner in Mrs. Hartopp’s suite, to which various people who had professed themselves interested had been invited. Mrs. Hartopp herself was invisible, resting for the exertions of the evening. Major Hartopp, when spoken to upon the subject, was abrupt and almost rude. It was at this period of his stay at the Golf Hotel that Mr. Cray first came into contact with Mr. George Pomfrey, a middle-aged, quiet-looking man of studious habits and a marked propensity for solitude. He paused before the former’s chair on the terrace.

“Are you helping your friends this evening, sir?” he inquired.

Mr. Cray was in rather a bad temper and the question annoyed him.

“How in thunder should I be helping them?” he retorted. “I don’t take any stock in spiritualism, and the Hartopps are only hotel acquaintances of mine.”

“Is that all?” the other asked quietly.

Mr. Cray felt the keen grey eyes upon his face and found himself at a disadvantage.

“I met them once in town,” he acknowledged.

“Ah!”

Mr. Pomfrey passed on, stooping a little, as was his wont leaning upon his stick, and with a general air of introspection which had been recognised as one of his chief characteristics. Mr. Cray smoked on for some time and then strolled round the front to the side of the hotel. The suite allotted to the Hartopps was on the ground-floor for the convenience of Mrs. Hartopp. Mr. Cray studied it thoughtfully. There were windows opening on to the gardens in each of the bedrooms and the sitting-room, and on the other side of the bathroom was a small door, through which Mrs. Hartopp’s invalid chair generally issued. There were one or two suggestions which occurred to him as he stood there in a ruminative frame of mind.

“Maybe,” he decided finally, “I’ll see something of that séance.”

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Mr. Cray challenged his friend, Major Hartopp, to a game of billiards that evening after dinner. The latter, after one game, in which he gave his opponent a



hundred and twenty-five out of two hundred and fifty, and beat him by sixty, put up his cue and declined to play any more.

“I am going to bed,” he said shortly.

Mr. Cray glanced at the clock.

“Won’t you find the séance a little disturbing?” he asked. “Besides, the only pleasant thing about these shows is that they are silent. Spooks don’t seem to care about a noise.”

The two men parted. Mr. Cray also went to his room, but he emerged a few minutes later by the back entrance and found his way into the grounds. The night was dark and a slight mistral was blowing from the hills. He crept silently round until he reached the walk in front of the Hartopps’ suite. Here he made a careful examination of his surroundings. So far as it was possible to tell, he was the only person who was seeking this illicit means of obtaining information as to the séance. From the chinks in the gaily-lit windows of the main building of the hotel came the sound of the orchestra playing dance-music in the lounge. Every now and then he could even distinguish fragments of conversation from the numerous bridge parties. Inside the room, through the inch or two of gaping blind which was his only means of observation, everything at first seemed shielded by a wall of deep black. Presently, however, one by one the white faces of those who sat round the table, blurred and unrecognisable in detail, still became faintly recognisable. Every now and then there was a low murmuring, which he had learnt to tabulate in his mind as the spirit voice of the medium. Every one seemed deeply stirred, tragically interested. He heard Homor’s raucous, trembling voice.

“If I am to have comfort, I must see her. . . . Let me see her for one moment.”

Again there came Mrs. Hartopp’s voice, faint and weary, yet always with its suggestive, unearthly note.

“I will try. Look away from me, every one, while I try.”

It was at this point that Mr. Cray became vastly interested. From the direction of the voice, he gathered that Mrs. Hartopp had been lying upon a couch drawn up close to a screen. Without being able to trace any movement, the white blur of her face seemed to disappear. An intense silence followed. The window of the bedroom on the other side of the door, was softly pushed open. Almost immediately the door itself opened several inches. Mr. Cray in those moments forgot his wariness. Through the window stepped an undistinguishable form bearing a bundle on its arm. Through the door came a shadowy figure. And just then, on the top of his head, Mr. Cray received a soft, resonant crack. It was considerably later when he found himself lying on the gravel terrace, looking up at the stars. . . .

Very slowly he scrambled to his feet. His head was still aching and was remarkably sore. From the sitting-room window, a few yards away, lights were now burning, although most of the lights in the hotel had been extinguished. He struck a match and looked at his watch. It was eleven o'clock, which meant that he had been lying there for nearly an hour. He staggered to his feet, shook the dust from his clothes, re-entered the hotel, and made his way to his room.

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It was a very grim Mr. Cray, however, who strolled out on the terrace the following morning and made his way with a certain ominous deliberation to the little sunny corner where Mrs. Hartopp usually held her court. The corner was more crowded than usual, but the lady in question herself was absent. Mr. Homor was sitting there, however, surrounded by a little bevy of women. Mr. Homor, without a doubt, was a very changed man. On the outskirts of the little gathering, the newcomer paused to regard him with wonder. The hopeless, almost pathetic, misery of his face was gone. That wistful fear of impending death, which was always with him, had also passed. He was like a man who on the threshold of the grave had found new hope. He sat there in the sunshine with a serene smile upon his lips.

"Where's the lady this morning?" Mr. Cray asked.

"She is utterly exhausted with the efforts of last night," one of the women told him. "It is very doubtful whether she will be up to-day at all."

"What sort of a show did you have?" Mr. Cray proceeded curiously.

"It was wonderful," the woman murmured.

"Marvellous!" another echoed.

"It was without doubt one of the most amazing demonstrations I have ever seen," a man declared.

Mr. Cray opened his lips to speak, and at that moment Mr. Homor leaned a little forward in his chair. He looked straight across at Mr. Cray.

"It was more than anything which has been said," he insisted. "It was just a miracle. Mr. Cray, I saw my wife, my dear wife whom I lost many months ago."

Mr. Cray held his peace for a moment. Then he ventured a single question.

"Are you quite sure of that, Mr. Homor?" he asked.

"I am absolutely and entirely sure of it," was the confident answer. "She came to me out of the shadows of that room, dressed as I remember her best, her hair, her little articles of jewellery, the light in her kind eyes—they were all there. It was unmistakable, and though it sounded a long way off, I heard her voice."

"Do you carry any picture of her with you?" Mr. Cray inquired.

"There is a picture of her in my room," Mr. Homor replied, "but no one has ever

seen it. You are perhaps one of those," he went on, "who find it hard to believe. Heaven knows I found it hard enough until last night! For months I have been carrying with me always the loneliness which is almost worse than death, and the fear of things to come which grows with those who have only a short time to live. And now—look at me. I am a new man. I am content to live or to die. There is no fear left in me."

Mr. Cray stood for a moment gazing at that thin streak of the Mediterranean shining below. All thoughts of exposing the trick which he felt sure he had seen, passed away. He said nothing of his own accident, nor did he hint at his own convictions. He nodded his head reverently.

"Say, Mr. Homor, I congratulate you," he declared, as he moved on. "Yours was a wonderful experience. It should be helpful to many others."

"I mean to make it so," was the enthusiastic reply. . . .

On his mechanical way down to the golf links, Mr. Cray was accosted by Mr. Pomfrey, his acquaintance of the previous afternoon.

"Been hearing about the manifestation last night?" the latter inquired.

Mr. Cray nodded but kept his own counsel. He would have passed on but the other detained him.

"I have been wondering, Mr. Cray," he continued, "whether you could spare me a moment to discuss a matter of some little importance?"

"Sure!" Mr. Cray assented. "I'm doing nothing. Get right on with it."

Mr. Pomfrey drew him towards the hotel.

"If you would be so kind," he begged, "please take me to your room. We can speak there without any possibility of being overheard."

Mr. Cray was surprised but acquiescent. Together the two men ascended in the lift and entered the spacious and very pleasant room which had been allotted to Mr. Cray. His guest looked around it appreciatively.

"Very nice quarters," he observed. "Very nice indeed. Now, Mr. Cray, have you any idea what I want with you?"

"Not the slightest in the world," was the truthful reply.

Mr. Pomfrey unbuttoned his coat and showed a small medallion on the inside of his waistcoat.

"In case that does not make things clear to you," he said "will you allow me?"

He handed over a card, which Mr. Cray read in amazement:—

*Superintendent George Pomfrey  
Scotland Yard*

“Well, you amaze me,” Mr. Cray acknowledged. “That’s your job, however. What can I do for you?”

“I am here,” the detective explained, “in search of certain jewellery stolen from Covent Garden on the night of the ball in November last.”

Mr. Cray nodded.

“I was there.”

“You were there,” the other continued, “with your friends Major and Mrs. Hartopp.”

“I don’t know about being with them,” Mr. Cray objected. “I met them there for the first time.”

Mr. Pomfrey’s fingers caressed his chin thoughtfully.

“For the first time,” he repeated. “Mrs. Hartopp spent a great part of the evening in your box, and my information is that you left the ball together.”

“Sure!” Mr. Cray admitted. “I gave them a lift. If you make inquiries at your headquarters, you will find a little further information concerning the events of that evening.”

“My immediate business is to do with the jewellery,” was the cautious reply. “Acting upon certain information, I may tell you that in the first place I have searched the suite and luggage of Major and Mrs. Hartopp.”

“Any luck?”

“Not up to the present. With your permission,” the man went on, his eyes travelling curiously about the room, “I will now proceed further with my duty.”

A light began to dawn upon Mr. Cray. He gazed at his visitor in amazement.

“Let me get this,” he exclaimed. “Do I understand that you are here to search my apartments, that you think I am mixed up in any way with the Hartopps?”

Mr. Pomfrey smiled.

“We don’t need to go into that,” he said. “You were with them on the night of the robbery, and you are here staying at the same hotel. I admit that I have no search-warrant, but if I might offer you my advice——”

“Search, by all means,” Mr. Cray interrupted, throwing himself into an easy-chair. “When you’ve finished, I’ll tell you a yarn about the Hartopps, which you can verify for yourself when you get back to town.”

The detective did not reply. He made a prompt and methodical search of the whole of Mr. Cray’s baggage. When he had finished he pointed to a cupboard.

“What is in there?” he inquired.

“Some empty bags,” was the prompt reply. “The door isn’t locked.”

Mr. Pomfrey rummaged about for some minutes. Finally he dragged out into the

room a kit-bag.

“Have you the key of this?” he asked.

Mr. Cray stared at the bag with a puzzled frown.

“That’s not my bag,” he declared.

Mr. Pomfrey’s manner became a little more constrained.

“There is the same label upon it as the rest of your luggage,” he pointed out, “and written in the same handwriting. Also, as you perceive, your initials.”

Mr. Cray rose to his feet and examined it in detail. Finally he handed his keys to the detective.

“You can try,” he said simply, “but I don’t believe I have one which fits that bag.”

The surmise was correct. After a few minutes manipulation, however, the detective managed to open it with a master-key which he produced from his own pocket. Inside was a black tin box at which Mr. Cray stared in ever-increasing astonishment. Mr. Pomfrey lifted the lid and closed it again almost immediately. A hurried glimpse was quite enough. The box was half filled with a miscellaneous assortment of jewellery, in the midst of which flashed some very fine diamonds.

“Well, I’m damned!” Mr. Cray exclaimed.

“Have you any explanation to offer?” the detective asked.

“None,” was the bewildered reply. “The bag isn’t mine, and I never saw the jewels before.”

The detective smiled faintly. It was obvious, however, that he, too, was puzzled.

“Mr. Cray,” he confessed, “I’ll tell you frankly that I came into this room in the execution of my duty but without the slightest suspicion that I should find here what I was in search of. I must send in my report to headquarters and reconstruct the case in my mind. In the meantime, I don’t wish to do anything which might seem disagreeable. You have a very comfortable room here, with a pleasant balcony where you can take the air. If you will give me your parole not to leave it for twenty-four hours, you shall remain undisturbed.”

“On consideration that you let me send a telegram of my own to Inspector Johns of Scotland Yard,” Mr. Cray replied, “I agree.”

“I will send off personally any message with which you may entrust me,” the detective promised.

He left the room, carrying the kit-bag with him. Mr. Cray sat down at his writing-table and wrote a telegram. After luncheon he wrote more telegrams. Somehow or other, the day dragged away. On the following morning, he rose at the usual time, breakfasted, and afterwards walked restlessly up and down the room, smoking a cigar. There had come for him no word or message from Mr. Pomfrey.

Five minutes after the twenty-four hours had elapsed, he left his room and descended on to the terrace. He went at once to the bureau and asked for Mr. Pomfrey.

“Mr. Pomfrey left by the afternoon train yesterday, sir,” the man told him.

Mr. Cray was dumbfounded.

“Did he leave any note or message for me?” he inquired.

The clerk searched the pigeon-hole and produced a note which Mr. Cray carried out into the sunshine. Its contents were brief and to the point:—

*Dear Mr. Cray,*

*I hasten to let you know that, according to instructions received from headquarters, the matter referred to between us yesterday will not be further proceeded with.*

*Faithfully yours,*

*George Pomfrey.*

Mr. Cray wandered mechanically on to the corner where Mrs. Hartopp’s invalid carriage was usually to be found. There were several people seated there, but no sign of the person of whom he was in search. An acquaintance welcomed him.

“Thought you’d left, too, Mr. Cray. Didn’t see anything of you yesterday.”

“I had a slight headache and stayed in my room,” was the somewhat grim explanation.

“You haven’t heard the news, then?”

“Nary a thing!”

“First of all, then, the Hartopps left yesterday by the same train as Mr. Pomfrey.”

“God bless my soul!” Mr. Cray exclaimed.

“She looked terribly ill,” his informant went on. “They had almost to carry her into the omnibus. . . . Then you haven’t heard about Mr. Homor, I suppose?”

“Not a thing.”

“His lawyer arrived from London last night. They say that he is much worse. The doctor announced this morning that he could not live through the day.”

“Say, that’s bad!” Mr. Cray murmured. “Anything else?”

“There’s a great golf match on this morning—the Costabel pro and a visitor from Costabel, against Dell and Scott.”

“I’ll stroll down and have a look,” Mr. Cray decided, lighting a cigar and turning away.

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It was very nearly two months later when full elucidation of many perplexing happenings came to Mr. Cray. Newly arrived in Monte Carlo, he made his first appearance at the Sporting Club and mingled for some time with the smartest crowd in Europe. In the act of trying to approach close to one of the roulette tables, he was suddenly aware of a tall and elegant woman who had risen from her place at the tables, with her hands full of notes and plaques which she was carelessly stuffing into a gold bag. Something about her expression puzzled him. Their eyes met, and a charming smile of welcome parted her lips.

“Why, Mr. Cray!” she exclaimed. “How delightful!”

Mr. Cray shook hands dumbly with this very beautiful apparition. She wore a smart afternoon costume of black and white, a wonderful hat—black with white ospreys. In that very exclusive gathering, her slim elegance, her air of gracious distinction, singled her out for universal notice.

“This is quite delightful,” she murmured. “Guy!”

Major Hartopp extricated himself from a little crowd and shook hands affably. Mr. Pomfrey followed suit.

“Haven’t forgotten me, I hope, Mr. Cray?” he asked, smiling.

Mrs. Hartopp laid her hand lightly upon Mr. Cray’s coat-sleeve.

“Let us all,” she suggested amiably, “go and have a cocktail. If this is your first visit, Mr. Cray, you must be introduced to Charles.”

They discovered four seats in the little bar. Mr. Cray found himself seated between Major and Mrs. Hartopp. Mr. Pomfrey strolled away and gave impressive orders to the white linen-clad celebrity behind the counter.

“I always felt quite sure that we should meet again,” Mrs. Hartopp continued smilingly.

“I guess I was counting on it, too,” Mr. Cray, who was beginning to recover himself, remarked. “What’s that fellow Pomfrey doing here with you?”

“Guy, dear, you explain,” Mrs. Hartopp suggested amiably. “Tell Mr. Cray everything.”

Major Hartopp scratched at his stubbly little moustache.

“I expect Mr. Cray has puzzled things out for himself long before this,” he observed.

“What about that jewellery?”

“Perhaps we took rather a liberty with you,” Major Hartopp went on. “We got those few trifles out to Hyères quite safely, but Mina and I weren’t feeling quite comfortable, so we thought they would be safer in your rooms, in a bag that—er—might have belonged to you.”

Mr. Cray muttered something under his breath and swallowed hard.

“But what about Pomfrey?”

“Ah, yes—Pomfrey!” Major Hartopp repeated. “Good fellow, George Pomfrey.”

“One of our oldest friends,” Mrs. Hartopp murmured.

“You see, when we made up our minds to leave,” Major Hartopp explained, “we naturally wanted the jewels back again, the coast being clear, and all that sort of thing. Pomfrey’s done a few stunts with us before, and he undertook to get the jewels back and keep you out of the way in case you were inquisitive at our leaving.”

Mr. Cray held himself back with great difficulty.

“I gather, then,” he said, “that Mr. Pomfrey is not connected with the detective force?”

“Great Scott, no!” was the emphatic reply. “On the contrary!”

“Just let me get this,” Mr. Cray persisted. “Now that’s a police commissioner over there, isn’t it?”

“Of course it is,” Mrs. Hartopp assented, with a sweet smile. “He’s a dear friend of ours. Should you like to meet him?”

“I may presently,” Mr. Cray replied significantly. “Where are the jewels?”

“Safely disposed of long ago,” Mrs. Hartopp assured him.

“This is—er—one of the best markets in the world,” her husband observed, “for—delicate transactions of that sort. Lump sum down and no questions asked, you know.”

“I see,” Mr. Cray murmured. “And you are now engaged, I presume, in spending the proceeds?”

Mrs. Hartopp laughed delightfully.

“My dear man, we don’t need to do that,” she said. “Didn’t you hear about Mr. Homor?”

“I’ve heard nothing,” Mr. Cray assured them. “I’ve been in Algiers.”

“The dear man left me fifty thousand pounds in order that I might pursue my marvellous investigations. Wasn’t it perfectly sweet of him?”

Mr. Cray sat quite still. Mr. Pomfrey strolled up, followed by a waiter bearing on his silver tray four tall glasses, filled with cloudy, amber-coloured liquid.

“There are only six men breathing,” he announced impressively, “who could mix this. It’s the finest welcome we could give you to Monte Carlo, sir.”

Mr. Cray mechanically accepted his glass but made no response. His attitude remained negative. Pomfrey leaned a little towards him.



“Mr. Cray,” he said, “may I speak a plain word to you? You are one of those shrewd, amiable gentlemen of independent means who have a natural taste for adventure and who go muddling about the world, sometimes interfering a good deal in other people’s business. You get lots of fun out of it, and from what I know of you, you generally come out on top. From what I know of you further, I believe you to be a latitudinarian. The law isn’t always just. The criminal is sometimes a good fellow. Our friends here have been up against you a bit, but you haven’t come to much harm. Anything you know that you don’t care about, forget. Be a sportsman, and don’t look at that glass as though you saw poison inside.”

Mina Hartopp leaned a little towards him. Her eyes were dancing with amusement, her smile was irresistible.

“You are really such a dear, Mr. Cray,” she murmured. “You won’t refuse to drink with me?”

Mr. Cray raised his glass. All four were solemnly clinked together. The moment of tension had passed. As he set his glass down empty, a beatific smile parted Mr. Cray’s lips. He made telegraphic signs to the functionary behind the bar.

“You’ll repeat that with me,” he invited.

“It’s *pax*, isn’t it?” Mina Hartopp whispered in his ear.

“Sure!” Mr. Cray promised.

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## *VIII The Past Life of Mr. Senn*

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### PART I.

Mr. Joseph P. Cray was engaged in the wonderful task of absorbing sunshine. He sat upon a remote seat of the terrace at Monte Carlo, his hands folded in front of him, his rakish grey Homburg hat a little on the back of his head, his eyes half closed, steeped in the pleasant inertia of the moment. The sky above was cloudless. The sea which spread itself out at his feet, glittered with a million points of silver. An oleander and mimosa perfumed air hung lazily about him. He was extraordinarily well-content with himself and his surroundings.

A vaguely familiar figure amongst the stream of occasional passers-by, recognised and sought him out. Mr. Cray sat up and began to take notice.

“My friend the Monk!” he exclaimed.

“Johns, at your service,” the other remarked, as they shook hands.

Mr. Johns seated himself, and the two men exchanged the usual banalities. There was nothing about the newcomer to denote in any way his profession. He was dressed in neat English tweeds, and his shoes and gaiters had a touch of the elderly Englishman who spends his spring at Bath, the summer at Aix, and the winter on the Riviera. Only the sharp, incisive mouth and keen eyes gave any indications of a more extensive mentality.

“Business?” Mr. Cray inquired, after a brief pause.

Mr. Johns shook his head slightly.

“This is my annual holiday,” he declared. “Except during the war, I have spent a month down here for many years. A happy hunting-ground for you, Mr. Cray, I should imagine.”

Mr. Cray gave vent to a slight grimace.

“Guess I’m on the retired list,” he replied. “They’ve been walking round me some. A muddling old fool with my mouth open for adventures, was the last thing I heard of myself, and, by gosh, the woman was right, too!”

“You can’t land a winner every time,” Mr. Johns said consolingly.

“Sure!” Mr. Cray murmured. “By the by, Johns, anything ever come of that jewel robbery at the Covent Garden Ball?”

“Nothing,” was the terse reply. “I can guess who had the jewels, but we never had the slightest clue. You seen anything of your military friend and his wife since?”

“Ran up against them a few months ago,” Mr. Cray assented, a little vaguely.

The two men exchanged cigars. There was a brief silence. Mr. Johns was

ruminating over the fact that his companion had evidently had another encounter with his friends of the Covent Garden Ball, and Mr. Cray, perfectly aware that the other's story of an annual holiday at Monte Carlo was a fiction, was speculating as to the real cause for his presence. Then, as they sat there, a very distinguished-looking trio came sauntering along the promenade. . . . Mrs. Hartopp, very beautiful, dressed in the latest *mode*, elegant and gracious; Hartopp, in his flannels and panama, the prototype of a young English soldier on holiday, and a third man, of similar appearance but somewhat older. Mrs. Hartopp waved her hand towards Mr. Cray, who rose to his feet to accept her salute. They came to a standstill. Major Hartopp introduced his friend—Colonel Carruthers of his regiment. Mr. Cray begged permission to present his friend Mr. Johns. Everybody was pleased and happy and courteous. Before they passed on, Mr. Cray had promised to lunch at Ciro's in an hour's time. Mr. Johns watched their disappearance with a twinkle in his eyes.

"A little up in the world, our friends," he remarked. "They'll never know how nearly New York got an extradition warrant against them."

"I guess they're making things hum a bit," Mr. Cray acknowledged. "Homor, the Glasgow shipbuilder, left Mrs. Hartopp fifty thousand pounds, a few months ago."

Mr. Johns pursed his lips, but his companion shook his head.

"No scandal," he continued. "It appears that Mrs. Hartopp is a marvellous medium, as you may remember. There is a spirit going round the world called Christine Seboa, who sometimes takes possession of her body and enables her to perform miracles. Mr. Homor, it appears, was granted a sight of his late wife, and, unlike some men, was grateful for it. Hence the fifty thousand pounds. They brought off a wicked bluff on me," Mr. Cray continued, "but I'm not squalling."

Mr. Johns glanced at his watch.

"If you're lunching at half-past twelve——" he observed.

"Quite right," Mr. Cray assented, jumping to his feet. "We'll try Ciro's bar. Charles is a perfect wizard on a dry martini."

They strolled off together, mingling with the gay throng of promenaders, greeting a few acquaintances, enjoying to the full the spectacle of this conglomeration of pleasure-seekers from every part of the world. After their cocktail, they sat for a few minutes at a small, round table on the terrace. By chance, there was no one else within hearing.

"Mr. Cray," his companion said, dropping his voice to that smooth yet perfectly distinct undertone which indicated the discussion of an important subject, "I should like, if I might, to take you a little into my confidence."

"Go right ahead," Mr. Cray replied.

"It is true that I come to Monte Carlo every year," Mr. Johns went on, "but there has always been a certain method in my coming. Do you remember the Holdsworth murder case?"

"I guess so. The girl was found dead in the man's room, but he got away."

"That is as much as came out in the press," Mr. Johns assented, "but as a matter of fact, in the course of our investigations we came across some very startling and sensational facts. No less than five women who had been seen at different times in Holdsworth's company, had disappeared and have never been heard of since."

"Gee!" Mr. Cray murmured. "As bad as that French chap."

"I sometimes wonder," Mr. Johns went on reflectively, as he lit and smoked a cigarette, "whether the members of our profession are getting more stupid, or the criminal classes are getting more astute, but it is certainly a fact that during the last two years three of the greatest criminals of the day have slipped through our fingers and escaped. Mind you, the public doesn't know this. No need to publish our information when we can't catch the man. But confidentially I might tell you that there are at present eleven undiscovered crimes of a hideous character, the particulars of which have never been published because we have been unable to trace the criminal."

"My theory is," Mr. Cray declared, "that crime has been taken up to a greater extent by a more highly educated type of person. Given exceptional intelligence, above all—nerve, and the odds seem to me three to one on the criminal every time. You see, he can lay his plans beforehand, and the detective can't."

"Holdsworth seems to have proved your theory," Johns pronounced. "The man is a gentleman by birth; public school and university, and educated for the Bar. Then he went out to the East, dabbled in drugs, came back a strange, misanthropic sort of creature, and commenced his terrible life. I spent six solid months on the case, and at the present moment I have only two clues, neither of which have been of the slightest use to me. Yet," Mr. Johns went on slowly, looking down on the white, dusty road, "I would be willing to retire from the profession and count my life's work done—if I could lay my hands upon this one man."

Mr. Cray felt a vastly increased interest in the subject. Johns was an unemotional person, hard-lipped and slow of speech, yet at this moment he was moved, and moved deeply. His eyes were shining like points of steel. His lips were a little parted, showing his firm, white teeth. He looked like a man possessed of an overmastering desire.

"Tell me," Mr. Cray asked, "did you ever cross this man's path personally?"

"Not personally," was the stern reply. "One of his victims, though, was my niece,

my sister's only child. She was found dead in an empty flat in Mayfair, dead and worse."

"Brute!" Mr. Cray muttered.

"The man is a fiend," Johns declared. "Most of our lot prefer to look upon him as dead. It saves our dignity. Personally I don't believe it. I have a feeling that somewhere on the earth he still lives, biding his time, hoping that the years will bring forgetfulness."

The hour for luncheon was now approaching, and little groups of people came strolling along the arcade, the sound of their light laughter and pleasant murmur of conversation filling the sunlit air. Johns drew a sigh and became himself again.

"I have not yet told you," he said, "what my two clues are. Dine with me to-night at the Café de Paris. Who knows—you may have more luck than I."

"At seven-thirty?" Mr. Cray asked eagerly.

"At eight o'clock," Johns replied. "I like to stay in the rooms till seven-thirty. . . . Here come your friends. Satan and the Spirit, I remember you called Hartopp and his wife. The other man, I don't know."

"His name is Pomfrey," Mr. Cray announced. "I tell you, Johns, the nerve of these people passes belief. That fellow Pomfrey put it over on me the other day that he was an officer from Scotland Yard."

"A serious offence," Johns observed, "but he looks the part. I know you can take care of yourself, Mr. Cray," he went on, "but don't let these people draw you in too far. Sometimes when one has the craving for adventures that you have, one is tempted to wander across the border-line just a little distance. Your friends live upon the tight-rope. You might not be able to keep your balance as well."

Mr. Cray smiled.

"I guess there'll be nothing doing that way with them for some time," he opined. "Fifty thousand pounds in hard cash is a nice little windfall, to say nothing of the jewels. So far as I can see, too, they are not extravagant. They just like the best of everything and that's all there is to it."

"No need to let them know who I am," Johns remarked, picking up his hat and preparing to depart. "These things get about fast enough as it is. . . ."

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Mrs. Hartopp received her luncheon guest with a wonderful smile.

"Colonel Carruthers you met this morning, did you not, Mr. Cray?" she said. "Mr. Pomfrey you met, I believe, on the night of your arrival in Monte Carlo, and before that at Hyères."

Mr. Cray smiled. The situation appealed to him.

"I certainly did," he acknowledged. "Mr. Pomfrey can claim to be one up on me, I think."

"I held the cards," the latter conceded magnanimously. "That little affair is finished, however. You bear me no malice, Mr. Cray?"

"Not the slightest," that gentleman declared. "We finished all that on the night of my arrival here."

An obsequious *maître d'hôtel* conducted them to their table. A very excellent lunch was served, which every one thoroughly enjoyed. Mina Hartopp was in the highest spirits. Hartopp himself seemed a little weary.

"Poor George," she exclaimed, calling attention to his air of fatigue. "He's playing the Labouchère system with minimum stakes. You know what that means? He plods along for two hours for a maximum win of thirteen pounds, fifteen."

"The winning's a certainty, any way," Major Hartopp reminded her.

"That's what makes it dull from my point of view," she observed carelessly. "However, George would never make a gambler."

"Not at the roulette table," Mr. Cray remarked drily. "I've known him take his chances elsewhere."

"I wonder who this is," Mina Hartopp remarked a little abruptly, raising her lorgnettes. "Rather a distinguished-looking man."

The newcomer was advancing towards an empty but zealously-guarded table within a few yards of them. He was a man apparently of between fifty and sixty years of age, dressed in dark brown clothes, a little shiny with wear, with a black satin stock, fastened with a diamond pin. His patent leather boots were cracked in places, but shone like mirrors. His black-grey hair was brushed back from an impressive forehead, his horn-rimmed monocle seemed permanently fastened in his eye. His manner was gracious, but the manner of one accustomed to command. His features were heavy, his complexion curiously pallid, almost waxlike. He had not the air of a man in good health.

"I've seen him about a good many times," Major Hartopp remarked.

"So have I," his wife assented, "but never anywhere else but here."

He ordered his luncheon with the air of one issuing a Royal command, writing the dishes down with a heavy gold pencil, and aided in his choice by the head-waiter himself and two other *maîtres d'hôtel*. A small carafe of red wine was on his table as soon as he sat down. His habits were evidently known and appreciated. Mina Hartopp took the opportunity, a few minutes later, of calling the head-waiter to her side.

"Tell me the name of that gentleman?" she whispered.

“He is known as Mr. Senn,” the man replied.

“He is perhaps a person of consequence?”

“He is the head of a noble French family,” the man told her, “who escaped to Russia at the time of the Revolution. They bought estates on the Black Sea, and lived there until the war. He was on the staff of the Grand Duke until the disintegration of Russia, and narrowly escaped with his life.”

“He is still wealthy?”

The waiter shrugged his shoulders.

“One fears not. He has a little flat at the back of the town, he denies himself little, but he seldom plays now, he who was once a great gambler. He comes here but once a week. Madame will excuse me.”

He hastened away to greet some new arrivals. Mrs. Hartopp was intrigued.

“He is a figure of romance,” she declared. “One often wonders what has become of many of these noble French families.”

“Queer sort of life to spend four months in Monte Carlo and not to gamble,” her husband reflected. “He hasn’t the air of a poor man, either.”

The meal drew pleasantly to an end. It was not until they were all strolling down the arcade together, and on the point of separating, that Hartopp asked the question which his guest had been expecting all the time.

“Your friend Johns’ face was familiar. Where have I seen him before?”

“In the disguise of a monk at the Covent Garden Ball,” Mr. Cray replied, “and afterwards in the Bank at South Audley Street.”

Major Hartopp appeared pleasantly interested.

“Of course,” he murmured. “Really, it’s wonderful how some of these Scotland Yard men turn out, nowadays. Looks quite like a retired Service man, or something of that sort. Is he still worrying about the unfortunate loss of that jewellery?”

“I don’t think so,” Mr. Cray replied. “I am quite sure, at any rate, that that is not what brought him to Monte Carlo.”

“For his own sake, I am glad,” Major Hartopp declared carelessly. “The jewellery is now unrecognisable, and the links of evidence can never be fitted together. Besides, after all, it was a small affair for a man like Johns.”

They stood talking for a few minutes opposite the Jardin des Plantes. Mr. Senn, leaning rather heavily upon his ivory-topped stick, came slowly down the arcade. In the bright sunlight, one realised more completely the cracks in his shoes through frequent varnishing, the distinct shininess about the seams of his coat. His Homburg hat, although of the best make, was last year’s shape. The cuffs of his shirt, though spotlessly clean, were frayed. At the corner he hesitated. For several moments he

stood looking across towards the Casino. Mr. Cray, watching him more closely than the others, saw perhaps what they failed to see, appreciated the wistful intentness of his gaze, the sad, restless longing which eventually made him turn abruptly away and climb the hill into the little town. Mr. Cray bade adieu to his friends and walked thoughtfully back to his hotel. He found something curiously absorbing in his thoughts of the man who gazed towards the Casino.

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Neither Mr. Cray nor his host seemed greatly disposed towards conversation at their dinner that evening. The latter was in travelling clothes, and was leaving an hour or so later by the Rapide for Paris.

“Guess you’re sorry to quit, eh?” Mr. Cray remarked sympathetically. “It’s a great place for a vacation, this.”

His companion smiled.

“You’ll think I am an obstinate man,” he said, “but I never leave Monte Carlo without a deep sense of disappointment. For years I’ve fancied that some day or other I should lay my hand upon the man I want in this place, and year after year goes by and ends in failure.”

“You haven’t a lot to go on, have you?”

“I have very little to go on indeed, but on the other hand it is always easy to work backwards, and I have a very valuable fact to start upon. These things come to one’s knowledge in a curious way. Holdsworth could not have the slightest idea that any one in the world knew of his partiality for backing number fourteen. If he were here and had the money to play with, I am perfectly certain that he would back it and nothing else. That is why I have spent the greater part of my afternoon and evening, this year and for many preceding years, watching for a man who is backing number fourteen. Once or twice I have fancied that I have been on the track. I have followed several men’s antecedents quite hopefully up to a certain point. The end, however, is always the same.”

“Have you any description of him?” Mr. Cray inquired.

“The very vaguest, and that is twelve years old,” the other acknowledged. “We know that he was of rather over medium height, inclined to be thin, and that he spoke always with a curious drawl, almost like a foreigner. He had a deformity on the third finger of his left hand, a wart or something of the sort, which he always kept concealed under a broad gold ring. Here’s his police description,” he went on, drawing a paper from his pocket and passing it across the table. “You have to remember, though, that it is twelve years old. Its only real use might be a negative one.”



"I see," Mr. Cray murmured. "Any fingerprints?"

"None. You see, the man has never been even under the supervision of the police."

"You've set yourself rather a hard nut to crack," Mr. Cray remarked.

"I have indeed," his host assented. "On the other hand, I have always looked at it in this way. The man got clear away, his crimes are twelve years old, and he might reasonably suppose them to have been forgotten. What is to prevent him, therefore, from beginning them again?"

"I see."

"I doubt," Johns continued thoughtfully, "whether I should ever be able now to get enough evidence to justify a warrant, but if we once got a hold on him for a new misdemeanour, I think we might possibly be able to work backwards. However, I confess that I am beginning to lose heart. He is probably in South America. I think there is no doubt that he went there some time or other after his escape from London."

They drank their coffee outside, during what was, perhaps, the most beautiful half-hour of the day. The whole place seemed alive with the soft, thrilling call of the coming night. The Casino was a blaze of illumination. The electric lights shone mystically amidst the green of the trees and shrubs. The still, warm air was fragrant with perfumes, the perfumes of flowers and shrubs, the scent from the women's dresses and hair. A red-coated orchestra was playing light-hearted music. A few tables away sat Mr. Senn smoking a cigarette and drinking a glass of absinthe. Every now and then he looked towards the Casino. Mr. Cray pointed him out to his companion.

"There is a man who rather interests me," he said, and added the few scraps of information which he had gleaned from the waiter.

Johns scrutinised the silent figure of the man, and nodded.

"A type," he admitted. "Monte Carlo is full of them."

He said no more, neither did Mr. Cray. But an hour later, when the latter returned from seeing his friend off, the rather melancholy figure was still seated in his chair, his face a little whiter in the gathering darkness. He was no longer alone, however. Seated by his side was a little French girl, who was chattering to him gaily, and whose peals of laughter rose often above the murmur of voices. Mr. Cray seated himself near and called for another liqueur. With wonderful patience he remained there for an hour. The girl apparently began to get bored with her undemonstrative companion. Once or twice he leaned towards her and said something, and his eyes gleamed strangely in the blue twilight. The girl, however,

shook her head. Towards eleven o'clock he rose, took a somewhat abrupt farewell of her, and disappeared, climbing the hill. Mr. Cray waited until he was out of sight. Then he calmly rose, took the vacant seat opposite the girl, who seemed on the point of departure, and raised his hat.

"You will do me the honour, perhaps, mademoiselle," he invited, "of taking a liqueur with me?"

Mademoiselle hesitated. She was *petite*, charming, and apparently very young.

"Monsieur is very kind," she said. "I do not like to drink so much. I will take some coffee. I would rather," she added, laughing up into his face, "that monsieur gave me a hundred francs for luck to go and play with."

Mr. Cray took out his pocket-book and slipped a hundred-franc note into the little bag which she was carrying. She gave a cry of delight.

"Monsieur is generous!" she exclaimed. "Ah, but I see monsieur is American. You have all so much money that you cannot spend, eh?"

"I can't allow that," Mr. Cray replied, "but some of us are fortunate enough to have some to spare for a pleasant occasion like this. Tell me about the man who was talking to you? He is a resident here almost, isn't he?"

She nodded carelessly.

"I suppose so. One sees him all the time. The girls call him the Marquis. He has very beautiful manners and no money."

"What was he asking you," Mr. Cray went on, "when you kept on shaking your head?"

"Oh, la, la!" she exclaimed. "The same old thing! There is Suzette and Amie and I. I am called Ninette. He is always asking us to go and take supper with him at his flat. But why should we go, I ask you?" she went on, with an expressive shrug of the shoulders. "He has no money—that, or he is a miser—and he is very serious. . . . Besides, I do not know why, but I do not think I like him very much. Why should one go and eat a poor supper in his little flat? I ask you, monsieur?"

"My advice to you," Mr. Cray said, a little impulsively, "would be never to go."

She looked at him in surprise.

"But monsieur knows him, perhaps?"

"I never saw him before this morning. I just had that kind of feeling. Where did you say his flat was?"

"In the Rue des Marguerites," the girl replied, "number seventeen. It is up the hill, a long climb. . . . Now if you, monsieur, were to ask one to take a little dinner," she went on, "or even a little supper at the Carlton, it would be a different thing. Monsieur knows well how to amuse himself, is it not so?"

Mr. Cray smiled. He realised that, notwithstanding her politeness, which forbade her to leave so generous an acquaintance, she was longing to be off to the Casino.

“You go in there and try your luck,” he said, good-naturedly. “We’ll have that little dinner, sure.”

She slid away into the darkness, waving her hand in a gesture of farewell.

Mr. Cray ordered another *fin champagne* and lit a long cigar. Gambling appealed to him very little, and the thought of the hot, crowded rooms, with their strange atmosphere of patchouli and sombre hysterics, left him very well content to remain where he was, listening to the music and the light chatter of the gay crowd. Suddenly he was aware of a menacing figure before his chair. Mr. Senn had returned, and apparently in anger. His eyes were filled with resentment, the pallor of his cheeks seemed almost ghastly, his eyebrows were drawn together in a threatening frown.

“Sir,” he said, “I have to demand why you choose to make me the subject of conversation here in a public place with a *fille de joie*?”

“I don’t quite get you,” Mr. Cray replied, taken aback by this man’s sudden reappearance.

“What I say is simple enough,” the other continued, struggling to control his voice. “This morning at Ciro’s you, or one of your party, asked questions concerning me from the head-waiter. That in itself is an impertinence. To-night I overhear you again discussing me with a chance acquaintance to whom you gave money. For what purpose did you give her money?”

“See here,” Mr. Cray declared ingratiatingly, “you are taking this matter too seriously. As for money, I gave it to the little one to gamble with. Why not? Sit down and take a *fin champagne* with me, sir.”

Mr. Senn hesitated and fell. He eyed covetously the old brandy with which a waiter almost immediately appeared.

“Monsieur,” he said, “I drink to your good health and to a better understanding between us.”

“Sure!” Mr. Cray replied heartily. “That won’t be difficult.”

Mr. Senn sipped his brandy with the air of a connoisseur. His companion motioned the waiter to leave the bottle upon the table.

“I plead guilty,” the latter confessed, “to the vice of curiosity. There is never a day passes when I do not ask a question about someone, as I asked the head waiter at Ciro’s to-day. Your appearance interested me.”

“May I inquire what information you gathered?” Mr. Senn demanded with the remnants of a frown still on his forehead.

“That you passed as Mr. Senn,” Mr. Cray replied promptly, “but that you were really the head of an old French family, settled before the war in Russia. You served on the staff of the Grand Duke and you have lost your estates. You live here on slender means, but you have the misfortune to preserve, naturally enough, the expensive tastes of your upbringing. You lunch once a week *chez* *Ciro*.”

“And the rest of the week nowhere at all,” Mr. Senn remarked bitterly. “Your information is correct. . . . And now as regards the little Ninette?”

“Sir,” Mr. Cray acknowledged, “my curiosity here was perhaps less pardonable. I gathered only that you had invited her to supper, but that her knowledge of your finances had rendered the invitation unattractive.”

Mr. Senn drained the contents of his glass, which his companion promptly refilled.

“This seems harmless,” the other muttered; “but the money?”

“I simply gave it to the child to gamble with,” Mr. Cray explained. “I do not play much myself but it gives me pleasure to see others who enjoy it.”

There was a strange intensity in the gaze of the man, who sat for a moment as though shivering with emotion. He looked at his companion as at some unfamiliar thing.

“You do not gamble!” he said in a low voice. “You do not feel the lure of that strange paradise yonder! The click of the ball, the limitless wealth to be gained there, mean nothing to you! You have never felt the thrill of watching with straining eyes, watching while the wheel runs down and the little ball sits there in your number, your beloved number, and there comes to you across the table the sheaves of bills, the pile of golden plaques, the price of a thousand luncheons at *Ciro*’s, the price of Ninette’s white arms and pouting lips, the price of all the elegance and softness and luxury of life. . . .”

Mr. Cray shook his head.

“That don’t cut any ice with me,” he confessed. “I have all the money I require in life.”

“Ah!”

The monosyllable was electric, amazingly expressive. Mr. Senn let the old brandy travel slowly down his throat while he looked across at his host with envious, hating eyes.

“You have already all the money for these things,” he said.

“And then some,” Mr. Cray assented.

“You have the advantage of me,” his companion observed presently. “You know the name under which I choose to live. And yours?”

Mr. Cray produced a card. His companion read it out in the uncertain light, peering through his horn-rimmed glass:—

*Mr. Joseph P. Cray,  
Manufacturer,  
Seattle,  
U.S.A.*

“It sounds opulent,” was his envious comment.

“I am comfortably off,” Mr. Cray told him.

Mr. Senn put the card in his waistcoat pocket. Whatever suspicions he might have entertained, they had apparently disappeared.

“I once was wealthy,” he confided. “Every penny of which I was possessed in the world, has been lost to me in Russia. You wonder how I live, then, eh?”

Mr. Cray watched the ash on his cigar for a moment.

“Sir,” he said, “I have pleaded guilty to an unjustifiable amount of personal curiosity. I do wonder how you live.”

Mr. Senn drew his chair a little nearer. He leaned over the little marble-topped table.

“There is an old lady,” he said, “who keeps a café in one of the back streets up on the hill there. It is a café not as you or I would understand such a place, but a place for the *cochers* and chauffeurs. She does a good business and she is alone in the world. I keep her books. I get there occasional food and drink. I pay the rent of my apartment—a simple, ugly room. Once a week I lunch at *Ciro’s*.”

“It is a tragedy,” Mr. Cray declared.

“My life,” the other assented, “has been a thousand tragedies rolled into one.”

Mr. Cray gazed across at the Casino.

“And yet,” he murmured, “that attracts you still?”

His companion’s face was suddenly Satanic.

“It tears at my heart-strings,” he confessed. “To-night I turned my back upon it. At the top of the hill I turned around, and down I came like a brainless moth. It was thus that I heard my name.”

There was another silence, rather a longer one this time. Mr. Cray threw away the end of his cigar and lit a fresh one. Then he uncrossed his legs and leaned over the table.

“Mr. Senn,” he said, “I am in the broadest sense of the word an adventurer. I go up and down the world, looking for places and people that interest me. Would you accept from me the loan of five thousand francs and try your luck behind the lights

there?"

There are expressions even of joy which are horrible. Mr. Cray shivered, and he had a queer fancy that he sat hobnobbing with a wolf, leaping at its prey.

"You mean it?" his companion demanded raspingly.

"Certainly!"

Mr. Senn's right hand was upon the table—the hand of an aristocrat, but lean at the knuckle and talon-like at the finger-tips.

"Give me the money," he begged fiercely.

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## IX The Past Life of Mr. Senn

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### PART II.

It was a few minutes after ten o'clock when the two men entered the Casino. From the moment they crossed the threshold of the Rooms proper, Mr. Senn seemed to become absolutely oblivious of the presence of his companion. He watched a spin at each of the tables by the door, and then passed on into one of the further rooms. At the most remote table he paused to whisper to the croupier for information as regards the *voisins* of the last number. The reply apparently did not please him, for he turned back to a table which he had previously passed, hesitated for a moment, and then grudgingly drew out his roll of notes. For the first time he seemed to become aware of Mr. Cray's proximity.

"If you watch me," he enjoined in a hard tone, "do not criticise. I play in a method of my own. There is no logic in it, but neither is there any logic in fate. Chance and inspiration are first cousins. I play a game of chance, and inspiration alone directs me."

"Sure!" Mr. Cray murmured encouragingly. "Don't you worry any about me. I'll just watch a spin or two and be off."

"If you watch two spins," was the reply, "I shall know whether you bring me luck or not. If I lose—go."

Mr. Cray nodded. His companion had leaned over the table, obtained some change in plaques, and sank into a vacant place near the head of the board. Mr. Cray, who was watching with only simulated indifference, felt a little throb of his pulses. His *protégé* was backing fourteen, *en plein, carrés, and chevaux*. He arranged his stake with deliberate care. Again Mr. Cray became aware of that broad band of gold upon his third finger.

"*Vingt-quatre, rouge, pair et passe,*" the croupier murmured, a moment or two later.

Mr. Senn watched his stake swept away with unmoved countenance, repeated it, and sat nervously attentive. Again he lost. This time he looked round and waved his companion to depart.

"To-morrow," he muttered, "at midday."

Mr. Cray nodded and turned away. He left the rooms and strolled across to the Sporting Club. He found Hartopp yawning in the little bar, and took a seat by his side.

"You seem bored," he remarked.

Hartopp acquiesced.

“To tell you the truth,” he admitted, “a little of this life goes a long way with me. I love adventure more than most people, but I hate gambling.”

“And your wife?”

“Mina would play roulette from the moment the place opened until it closed, if I would let her,” he replied. “She’s in there now, piling up the shekels.”

“Hartopp,” Mr. Cray asked a little abruptly, “how old are you?”

A slight smile parted the man’s lips. He looked at his questioner keenly.

“Just why do you ask me that question?”

“Never mind about that. I’d like to have you answer it.”

Major Hartopp stroked his chin.

“Cray,” he said, “we’ve seen quite a good deal of one another during the last six months, and I’m bound to say you have behaved like a sportsman. I don’t see how my age interests you, but as a matter of fact it’s the one thing that’s been an enormous asset to me. What’s your rough idea?”

“Somewhere about thirty-one,” Mr. Cray suggested.

“Precisely! Well, I’m forty-six. I’ve got out of one or two pretty tight corners in my life, from the simple fact that every sin I committed between the age of thirty and thirty-five was presumably committed by a raw stripling.”

Mr. Cray nodded.

“The reason I asked you was this,” he said. “Do you remember Holdsworth, the Sydenham murderer?”

Hartopp nodded.

“A perfect fiend,” he remarked. “I read every word of the case. Criminology in those days was almost a passion with me. This fellow Landre would seem to have been an angel of kindness compared to Holdsworth. He must have been the most cold-blooded brute that ever crawled upon the earth.”

Mr. Cray nodded.

“Holdsworth,” he said, “is supposed to be still alive.”

“His was the most wonderful escape in the history of crime,” Hartopp declared. “It goes to prove what I have heard you say yourself. Mr. Cray, that, given brain and nerve, the odds are vastly in favour of the criminal.”

“Your own position,” Mr. Cray said thoughtfully, “in the world of human society, is, if you will forgive my saying so, a little undefined. In any ordinary case, I might well believe that your sympathies would be hard to classify. In the case of Holdsworth, however, let me put a question to you. If this man were proved to be still alive, and you had a chance to aid in his capture, would you do it?”



“Without a second’s hesitation,” Hartopp replied promptly.

“And your wife?”

“She would be entirely with me. You’re not suggesting that there’s a chance \_\_\_\_\_”

“I just wanted to know,” Mr. Cray interrupted. “There’s nothing doing for the moment. There may be. . . . I’ll stroll through the rooms.”

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It was just before noon on the following morning when Mr. Cray, approaching the cheerful little company who were dotted about at the round tables outside the Café de Paris, heard himself addressed by name. Seated only a few yards away was a transformed Mr. Senn, with Ninette on one side and her friend on the other.

“My benefactor!” the former exclaimed graciously. “Sir,” he added, “if I do not at once restore your five thousand francs it is merely a matter of superstition.”

“You won, then?” Mr. Cray observed, raising his hat to the young ladies and drawing up a chair.

Mr. Senn smiled the rapturous smile of a man whose brain is flooded with pleasant memories.

“I played, so far as I can remember,” he said, “thirty coups. Out of these, fourteen turned up nine times, thirteen eleven, twelve and sixteen once each, and fifteen twice. I won a matter of a hundred thousand francs. Mr. Cray, you will do me the honour of drinking with me.”

Mr. Cray hesitated, but refusal was an impossibility. While his prospective host gave orders to the waiter, and Ninette chattered, telling him that she, too, had been fortunate in a small way, Mr. Cray studied him thoughtfully. Something of the man’s dignity seemed to have vanished with his shabbiness. His new patent boots were almost too glossy, the brown clothes, although in the best taste, and miraculously well-fitting considering that they must have been bought ready-made, still lacked the distinction of his older habiliments. The man seemed new and glossy all over. His amiability, too, sat upon him like an unusual garment. The saturnine attraction of his ill-humour had departed.

“Monsieur is truly wonderful,” Ninette declared, edging her chair a little nearer to Mr. Cray and a little further away from her new patron. “His money carries charm. Many long days have passed since I gained anything, but last night I, too, won—well, nearly a thousand francs. And monsieur never plays himself?”

“Very seldom,” Mr. Cray acknowledged. “If you are going to the Rooms this morning,” he added, “I shall be delighted to try my fortune with you.”

Mr. Senn intervened with a flamboyant gesture.

“Mademoiselle Ninette,” he announced, “does me the honour to take luncheon with me shortly. I have ordered a table in the café. We shall lay our plans for the afternoon.”

Ninette pouted a little.

“Would there not be time to accompany monsieur first for a few minutes?” she ventured.

“Impossible!” Mr. Senn pronounced. “I am a man of regular habits. I lunch at half-an-hour after midday. It is now within twenty minutes of the time. We will take a small apéritif, dear child. This afternoon we may visit the tables together.”

She laid her finger upon Mr. Cray’s sleeve.

“I think that he is a mascot,” she said, “this big American gentleman.”

Mr. Cray looked at her with a kindly though rather a doubtful smile.

“I wonder . . .” he murmured.

The Hartopps passed by, exchanging greetings with Mr. Cray. Senn turned round in his chair and gazed after Mina. There was a little sparkle in his eyes.

“That woman,” he exclaimed, as soon as they were out of earshot, “you knew her! How does she call herself? What is her name?”

“She is a Mrs. Hartopp,” his companion told him. “That was her husband, Major Hartopp, on the left.”

Senn shook his head.

“No, no!” he protested, with an air of superior knowledge. “She has another name. I saw her in New York. Her pictures were in the paper. She called herself then Christine Seboa.”

Mr. Cray nodded.

“That’s right,” he admitted. “What do you know about her?”

“Not enough,” the other muttered. “She is a very wonderful woman. I attended one of her séances in Brooklyn. It was amazing.”

“Are you a spiritualist?” Mr. Cray asked curiously.

Mr. Senn picked up his ivory-topped walking stick and rose to his feet.

“It is time we took luncheon, little one,” he said to Ninette. “As to that,” he added, turning towards Mr. Cray, “who knows? I have seen strange things in my life, things which have made me wonder. Who knows?”

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Late that afternoon, Mr. Cray came across Ninette, seated on one of the cushioned benches in the Casino. She was looking dejected and a little forlorn, but she cheered up at his approach.

“Ah, monsieur!” she exclaimed, “I looked for you all the time this afternoon.”

Mr. Cray smiled.

“Been losing, eh?”

She shook her head.

“No, I have gained a little, yet I have not the heart to play. I am nervous. Look, monsieur.”

He followed the motion of her head. Exactly opposite, seated at the nearest table, was Senn. The electric light threw a strange shade upon his colourless face, his hard black eyes, his indrawn lips. He sat in his usual place, as near by as possible opposite fourteen, and there was something arresting in his immovability.

“Senn,” Mr. Cray muttered. “I wonder how he’s doing.”

“Winning,” she answered tremulously. “He wins now all the time. But I do not know. More and more I grow afraid of him. Who is he? You knew him before?”

Mr. Cray shook his head.

“I saw him for the first time yesterday.”

“I am foolish, perhaps,” the girl went on. “He is generous, he has the manner, he speaks of serious things. And yet I am afraid. I do not understand myself. To-night he has asked me to go to supper with him, not at the Carlton or the Café de Paris, but up at his apartment, up on the hill. And I do not know. Something tells me that I am foolish, and yet I do not wish to go.”

Mr. Cray sat down by her side.

“My child,” he said slowly, “I know nothing of Mr. Senn, but I’d like to tell you this. There may be something in that instinct of yours. If you will take the advice of an old man, lunch with him, dine with him, sup with him where he pleases, entertain him in your own flat, if you will, but do not visit his apartment.”

“An old man! Oh, la, la,” she mocked. “Yet,” she went on, suddenly serious, “it is strange that you should advise me thus. You know something, is it not so?”

“Nothing at all,” Mr. Cray assured her. “By the by,” he went on, “you have noticed the very broad gold ring he wears on the third finger of his left hand?”

“Beyond a doubt,” she assented. “It is strangely shaped.”

“I have an idea,” Mr. Cray went on, “that he wears it to conceal some disfigurement. If you should discover that to be so, will you tell me?”

She laughed gaily.

“What vanity! I will tell you, of course. But see—he rises. That means that he has lost for three coups following. He changes his table always then. Look at him, monsieur, and tell me why I am afraid.”

Mr. Senn came towards them, erect, distinguished, with a curious air of abstraction which seemed to enfold him as in a dream. He passed them by as though

he never saw them, studied the tables in the further room for a moment, took a vacant seat and began to play. Ninette shook her head.

“He is uncanny,” she decided. “I shall be his friend no longer.”

“Find out for me,” Mr. Cray said, as he rose to his feet, “what is underneath that ring, and I will start you on your way to fortune with a thousand-franc note.”

She looked up at him with petulant gratitude.

“If you were only he!” she murmured.

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Mr. Cray had the fancy to retire early that evening. At eleven o’clock, however, a little note was brought into his *salon*, a note enclosed in a mauve envelope which smelt of perfume, and addressed with characteristic and scratchy indistinctness. He opened it and read:

*Cher monsieur,*

*I have seen underneath the ring. There is a brown mole or wart, very ugly. No wonder he conceals it!*

*Cher monsieur, his luck is wonderful. He has now half a million francs. To-night I have promised to sup with him in his apartment, but still I fear it, but still I tremble at the thought.*

*Till to-morrow, dear friend,*

*Ninette.*

Then Mr. Cray began to see visions. Slowly the hideous story which Johns had told him, began to unwind itself once more before his eyes. He saw the little house in Sydenham with its tangled waste of garden, its cheerful lights inside, masking the horror that dwelt there. He heard the laughter of unsuspecting mirth, changing into the stifled cry of death, saw Ninette striving to drown her vague fears with tumblers of champagne, heard her throbbing, pitiful little cry come down to him from somewhere behind. Mr. Cray abandoned all hope of an early night. He thrust something hard and ugly into his hip pocket, took up a cane with a heavy malachite knob, and descended once more into the vortex of life. . . .

At Ciro’s he found Pierre, busy, but willing enough to spare a moment to so good a patron.

“Say, I’m in some difficulty, Pierre,” Mr. Cray explained. “The gentleman whom I asked you about the other evening—Mr. Senn you called him—invited me up to his apartment this evening but forgot to tell me his address. I wonder whether you know it?”

Pierre smiled with the ready pleasure of one able to oblige.

“There is a saddler’s shop, the last building in the Rue des Marguerites,” he said. “Monsieur Senn has rooms above it and behind. It is a very small place, but Monsieur will find it without trouble.”

Mr. Cray gave the *maître d’hôtel* occasion to congratulate himself upon his memory, and sallied out once more upon his quest. A carriage took him to the corner of the Rue des Marguerites, a vehicle which, upon reflection, he left to await his return. It was a small, outflung thoroughfare, some of the buildings of which were as yet unfinished. The saddler’s shop at the end was closed and dark, but by the side of the door leading into the shop itself was another, evidently used by the tenant. Mr. Cray paused for a few minutes with his fingers playing around the bell. There was no sound from within, no light above. The *salon* was without doubt upon the ground floor behind the shop. Mr. Cray decided upon strategy. The street ended abruptly at the outside wall of the saddler’s shop, and he stepped over a low paling into what appeared to be a small violet farm, turned to the left at the corner of the house, stooping underneath an iron railing, and found himself in a trim little garden, in which were several chairs, some statues, and a small fountain. Opening out upon the strip of lawn were the French windows of Mr. Senn’s *salon*, closed now and concealed by a heavy curtain, through the chinks of which, however, came a gleam of light. The intruder drew nearer and nearer. Then he heard a sound which filled him at first with immense relief, but which a moment afterwards made him feel like a fool. It was the shrill yet not unmusical laughter of Ninette, followed by the popping of a cork and the sound of Mr. Senn’s measured tone. . . .

Mr. Cray stood with his back to the wall and deliberated. Before him, the quaint little strip of garden stretched into the blackness of a pine wood, and high above gleamed unexpected lights from the small villas and peasants’ dwellings dotted about on the slope. The smell of the violets from the field close at hand was almost intoxicating, the beauty of the night itself seemed to rebuke his purely superstitious fears. It was still early. The girl might very well remain where she was for hours to come. Mr. Cray sighed and glanced at his watch, which he was easily able to discern by the light of the yellow moon. It was barely half-an-hour after midnight. He decided to wait until one o’clock. . . . The minutes passed with incredible slowness. From the curtain of hills in front came the occasional tinkling of a sheep bell, the barking of a dog in one of the far-off farms, from down below, the honk of a passing automobile, the faint music of an orchestra playing in one of the cafés. A slight breeze crept down from the hills, discovering the presence of a little grove of cypresses on the border of the violet farm. There was something soothing in the pleasant

tranquillity of the night. The breeze, as it lazily bent their tops, brought him little wafts of odour from the pine trees. So, after all, the watcher decided, Mr. Senn was not so badly lodged.

For the last time Mr. Cray glanced at his watch. It was five minutes past one. He had already outstayed his appointed time. Reluctantly he turned to depart. The voices inside were still careless and light-hearted. Still Ninette laughed, and still her companion apparently echoed her light-heartedness. Mr. Cray reached the corner of the house and had barely turned around when he heard the curtains drawn back and the little French windows opened. He stood still, out of sight though only a few feet away.

“Look, little one,” he heard Senn say in his deep voice, “you see here my little demesne, where it is pleasant to sit when the sun shines. And beyond, the wood is asleep.”

“I do not like it!” Ninette exclaimed querulously. “Let us go in. The night air is cold.”

Mr. Senn laughed softly, and when the listener heard that laugh, he was glad he had come. He heard something which was almost like a sob from Ninette.

“You frighten me,” she muttered. “Leave go my wrist. I shall go away if you are not kinder.”

Again the laugh.

“But, little one, I might not choose to let you go,” Senn went on. “I might choose to keep you here always. You do not love my wood. That is perhaps because of its name. They call it, you know, the cemetery wood. You would not wish to be buried there?”

Ninette’s little cry seemed to come with a curiously muffled sound.

“You must not make a noise, little one,” Senn went on. “There are no neighbours near, but those on the other side of the road might be curious. A man living alone, entirely alone, must be careful.”

It took Mr. Cray precisely three long paces to get once more back into the street, and a matter of a couple of seconds for his finger to find the bell. With his other hand he undid one of the studs of his shirt, thrust his hat on one side, ruffled his hair, dragged his tie a little on one side, and listened intently. The throbbing of the bell drowned all sounds, yet he had fancied when first he had pressed it that he had heard something—a stifled cry, or was it a shriek? Still the bell pealed and throbbed.

There were footsteps, soon enough, really, although the time had seemed long to Mr. Cray. The door was thrown open. Mr. Senn stood looking out, a sinister figure indeed. And behind him the visitor could see, stealing down the passage, her great

eyes shining with terror and hope, Ninette.

“What the devil do you want?” Senn muttered.

Then it became apparent that Mr. Cray was very drunk. He smiled fatuously, and endeavoured to pat Mr. Senn on the back.

“Fourteen!” he exclaimed. “Eleven times at the centre table! The croupier—friend of mine, that croupier—he whispered to me. ‘Monsieur,’ he said, ‘if fourteen comes up, centre table, within an hour fourteen comes up eleven times last table on left. The one great superstition of the place—always comes out right. So here I am. Got a little fiacre at the corner. Come along down and break the bank.’”

Mr. Senn was very still, but there was a strange light in his eyes.

“How did you know where to find me?” he demanded.

Mr. Cray tapped his forehead and shook his head.

“Sorry,” he confided, “fact is I met a few of the boys. Can’t remember anything as clearly as I’d like. . . . Why, bless my soul,” he added, “there’s little Ninette!”

Ninette came running out, as pale as death. Senn, however, still blocked the way.

“You’d better come in and have a drink,” he said to his unwelcome visitor.

“I’ll drink while you make a fortune,” Mr. Cray replied. “We’ll all three go down together. Come along, Ninette.”

So the three walked down together towards the fiacre at the corner of the street, and both Ninette’s hands were clasped round Mr. Cray’s arm. She clung to him like a child, and Mr. Cray’s one little downward smile of encouragement was not in the least the smile of a drunken man. . . .

They drove to the Casino, and without taking the least notice of his companions, with the light in his eyes of a man who goes to great things, Senn hastened in. Mr. Cray pretended to be some time finding money for the *cocher*. When he had paid him, he drew Ninette away and made her sit down with him at one of the tables. She was still white, almost to the lips.

“That awful man!” she sobbed. “It was the good God that sent you.”

Mr. Cray patted her hand.

“Listen, little one,” he said, “there has been no run on fourteen, as he will soon find out. Your note frightened me. I have a grave suspicion concerning that man so I followed you up the hill. You understand?”

“Yes,” she faltered. “Oh, thank you . . . thank God!”

“Listen again,” Mr. Cray went on. “Can you be a brave little woman for the sake of others who are not so fortunate as you?”

“I will do everything that you tell me,” she promised, sipping the brandy which

the waiter brought. "Down here I am not so afraid. But up there—it is a horrible thought, but there was murder in his eyes."

"Continue to listen, my child," her companion begged. "Show no fear of the man. Follow him into the Casino. Forget your terror in his apartment. Laugh at yourself. Speak of me as very, very drunk. Go nowhere alone with him, but humour him. You understand?"

"But is it that you are of the police, then?" the girl whispered.

Mr. Cray shook his head.

"I am a friend of one who is," he told her. "He is on the way here. He arrives tomorrow morning. You will do all that I have asked? You will say that you have seen me to the hotel."

"Rest assured of it, my benefactor," she promised, as they parted.

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Mr. Cray on the following morning showed every sign of having recovered from his debauch. He was pink and white and healthy, clad in a grey suit, wearing well-polished brown shoes and immaculate gaiters. He swung across the Square to where he saw Senn sitting in grim solitude.

"My friend," he said, pausing in front of him, "I have come to present my apologies."

Mr. Senn scowled.

"There was no run on number fourteen last night," he declared. "You came to me with a lie."

"Say, that's a little hard," Mr. Cray protested soothingly. "I don't know whether I showed any signs of it, but I was soused. I was, in fact, compelled to submit to the indignity of being put to bed by the hall-porter."

Mr. Senn made inarticulate sounds which might have been taken to mean that he accepted his friend's explanation.

"It cost me twenty-five thousand before I found out," he muttered.

"I am heartily sorry," Mr. Cray replied. "Where is the little Ninette? I fear that she, too, has cause for anger with me."

"You broke up my supper-party, confound you!" Senn grumbled. "Ninette's all right, but she wouldn't come back again. You brought me down here on a fool's errand."

"I shall atone," Mr. Cray promised. "To-day you will lunch with me. I have a table at *Ciro's*. I shall challenge Pierre to produce of his best. There is Burgundy, not in the wine list—Chambertin; brandy—Armignac. Pierre will produce his treasures."

"I will lunch with you," Senn agreed, a little mollified.



“At twelve-thirty precisely,” his prospective host enjoined. “I go to take a little promenade.”

“At twelve-thirty I shall be there,” Mr. Senn promised.

Mr. Cray called at the Hotel Metropole, where he had half an hour to talk with his newly arrived friend, Mr. Johns. Afterwards he took a little walk. At twelve-thirty, he stood upon the terrace, and when Senn made his appearance, he found himself one of a party of guests.

“Mrs. Hartopp, allow me to present my friend, Mr. Senn,” Mr. Cray said genially. “Senn, shake hands with Major Hartopp and Mr. Pomfrey. To-day I am not insulting you with a cocktail. We are going to drink wine.”

Senn, after a moment’s hesitation, accepted the presence of other guests with equanimity. From the first he attached himself to Mrs. Hartopp. They sat side by side, and soon their conversation became more and more earnest. Every now and then they drew apart and joined in the general conversation, an obvious concession to good manners, for at the first opportunity Senn in particular turned back to his neighbour, eager to renew their more intimate *tête-à-tête*. Towards the close of the meal, he leaned a little back in his chair, drinking his wine with the slow appreciation of the gratified epicure. For the first time there was a faint flush in his cheeks, the brightness of his eyes became almost inhuman. To his neighbour he talked with rapidity, apparently with eloquence. His contributions to the general conversation, however, were scanty. It was only just towards the end, after the arrival of that dust-covered bottle of Armignac, that he seemed to abandon his reserve and throw light upon the subject of that secret conversation.

“Whether in fear or hope,” he pronounced, “the greatest desire mortal man has is to see the other side of the veil. There are some to whom the very thought must be agony, some who must dread the thought of a hereafter. Yet their thirst for knowledge is at least equal to the thirst of those who have preserved hope.”

“Say, I’m all out against that view,” his host declared. “I can understand the white man, who has nothing to fear from a hereafter, longing for some assurance concerning it. But take the case of a great criminal, now. What has he to gain? If there is a hereafter, it is governed by supernatural laws, and it isn’t reasonable to suppose that the criminal is going to be accepted on the same basis as the righteous man.”

Senn leaned eagerly forward.

“You miss the point,” he declared. “Can’t you see that the fear of the criminal and the hope of the just man both result in the same emotion—curiosity. One desires to solve the matter of his hopes, the other the matter of his fears.”

Mr. Cray shrugged his shoulders.

“You may be right,” he admitted. “Personally, I am well-content to wait.”

“I am not,” was the muttered reply.

Major Hartopp swung the brandy reverently around in his huge glass.

“If you take my advice, all of you,” he said, “you’ll abandon all serious conversation and devote yourselves to the brandy. Mr. Cray, I salute you as a prince of hosts.”

They drank Mr. Cray’s health, and in due course the party broke up. Senn and Mrs. Hartopp, however, wandered away together.

“We are going for a little walk along the promenade,” the latter observed, as she nodded farewell to her host. “I shall be in the Club presently.”

The three men sat down together outside. Mr. Cray fanned himself with his hat, for the day was warm.

“I suppose the idea’s all right,” Major Hartopp observed, “but it seems to me a little melodramatic. Why can’t you go the straight ticket, Cray?”

Mr. Cray shook his head.

“There are eleven impenetrable years,” he pointed out, “a great gulf, on the other side of which the clue disappears. To attempt to bridge that over in a court of law would mean a simple repetition of the Landre business.”

“What you are aiming at is a confession, then?” Pomfrey observed.

Mr. Cray nodded.

“The man is in a highly emotional state now,” he declared, “added to which he is without doubt insane.”

“But the little lady here whom you rescued?”

Cray went over to where Ninette was sitting and brought her back to the other two men. She was still very pale and subdued.

“Ninette,” he begged, “will you tell these gentlemen about the other night when you were alone with Mr. Senn?”

She shook her head.

“There is nothing to tell,” she said, “except—except that I know he meant to kill me.”

“Did you see any weapons?” Pomfrey asked. “Did he threaten you at all?”

She shook her head.

“What I know, I know,” she said firmly. “I saw it come into his eyes, the thought that he would kill me. They went red, and he looked at me like a wild beast. I tell you that I saw murder.”

Major Hartopp moved uneasily in his chair. Pomfrey, notwithstanding the warm

sunshine, shivered.

“You see, gentlemen,” Mr. Cray observed, “here is evidence which is no evidence. I think that our way is the best.”

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The end of these things contained certain phenomena which, notwithstanding his robust materialism and his intimate acquaintance with Major and Mrs. Hartopp, nevertheless left a queer impression upon Mr. Cray’s mind. For the three days following his luncheon party, Mina was an altered woman. Gradually she seemed to lose that air of superb health, that cheerful woman-of-the-world poise, which had come upon Mr. Cray as a revelation. She relapsed with extraordinary rapidity into the invalidism of Hyères. Her cheeks seemed to grow thinner and her eyes larger. She abandoned her visits to the Sporting Club just as Senn abandoned the Casino. They sat together in quiet places and talked, and when she was invisible he took long walks into the country and came back covered with dust, and with black rims of fatigue under his eyes. He too seemed to be drawing off into a world of his own, and hour by hour he haunted the more the places which she was in the habit of frequenting. He was like an uneasy shadow about the place, waiting for the hour to come.

In the end, the *mise-en-scène* was changed. They met one evening in the large *salon* occupied by the Hartopps at the Hotel de Paris, but three minutes after they had taken their places, Mina had turned on the lights.

“It is impossible,” she declared. “There is an atmosphere here which is like a wall. Nothing can go out from me or can come to me. We must find a small, plain room and open space.”

The next night they drove up the hill and trooped silently into Senn’s strange apartment. Mina stretched herself upon a sofa behind a screen, and the French-windows were thrown open to the cloudy night. Pomfrey, Hartopp, and Cray were seated around the table, and, facing the window, Senn. They sat on in darkness. Outside a wind was blowing and there was the occasional patter of rain. Time passed and then a voice from behind the screen.

“There is someone coming. There is someone coming for a man here whom no one knows, whose name—but no, I cannot hear his name. . . . Wait. There are more than one. There are seven. One comes first. Wait.”

This is where Mr. Cray began to lose hold of himself, for out of that windy darkness it seemed to him that a shape approached towards the window. By his side, he heard the breath of agony come whistling through the lungs of the man next to him, a sound like a sigh, and then a low voice.

“Is it you who have dared to call me back, William Holdsworth, I, the first of your victims? I am here. The others are coming.”

Mr. Cray could have sworn that there was the vision of a white face, a sob, and disappearance. The man by his side had risen, had stood for a moment with hands outstretched towards the window, and then suddenly the whistling of the breath ceased. They saw him through the darkness, his face as white as ashes, his eyes glaring and transfixed with horror, his fingers clawing the air. Then he sank down in a crumpled heap.

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“Tell me, Ninette,” Mr. Cray asked, three days later, “you spoke of that moment once when you saw murder come into his face. It was in the little *salon*?”

She sipped her brandy and nodded.

“He was seated at the round table facing the window. Suddenly he rose to his feet, he looked across at me, and I seemed to see his fingers coming.”

Mr. Cray took off his hat as though by accident, and rested it upon his knee.

“He died like that,” he muttered.

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## *X Mr. Cray Returns Home*

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Mr. Cray leaned back in his deck-chair and watched the last blur of land fade away into the mist. He was not at all in a happy frame of mind. Behind him lay the world of adventures, London with its juggernaut of life, its complex colours, its mystery, its everlasting call. There was his year, too, of grim self-sacrifice upon the battle-fields of France, the year of his life given splendidly and cheerfully, a fine and wholesome tonic, the stimulus of which still remained. Behind, too, lay that land of pleasure only lately left, the Riviera with its sensuous joys, its flowers, and its perfumes, its Ninettes, its bland incarnation of the whole philosophy of joy. And before him lay a new America, an America which somehow or other he dreaded. Mr. Cray was neither a greedy man nor a drunkard, but he felt a sad conviction that much of that glad spirit of comradeship and good-fellowship must have passed away, withered in the blight of this strange new legislation. It was an unfamiliar land to which he returned, an unwelcome call which he had grudgingly obeyed. The Cray Plant, glutted with dollars made by the manufacture of munitions, required his help in its reorganisation. It needed the brains of its founder to open up new avenues of industry. So Mr. Cray was on his way home.

It was the pleasantest month of the year for crossing—the end of May—when the sun was warm but never blistering, when the green seas tossed and murmured before the west wind, which sang him to sleep at night and brought the fresh colour to his cheeks in the early morning. The bar-tender was an old friend of his, there were plenty of acquaintances on board, his place at the Captain's table was flattering. Yet Mr. Cray was melancholy because the sun sank in the wrong place and the bows of the steamer were pointed in the wrong direction.

It was on the second afternoon out when Mr. Cray, turning carelessly enough to glance at the installation of a fellow-passenger in the steamer-chair by his side, received a distinct shock, a shock which was apparently shared by the fellow-passenger in question. She stared at Mr. Cray and Mr. Cray stared at her. The words which finally escaped from his lips seemed inadequate.

“Say, this is some surprise! I had no idea that you were thinking of making this trip.”

The slim woman with the brilliant eyes showed distinct signs of embarrassment. She tried to carry off the awkwardness of the meeting with a nervous little laugh.

“We made up our minds quite suddenly,” she said, “or rather, I suppose I ought to say that our minds were made up for us.”

“Major Hartopp is on board, then?” Mr. Cray inquired.

She nodded.

“He is over there, leaning against the rail, talking to the dark, clean-shaven man.”

Mr. Cray glanced in the direction indicated and nodded.

“Well, well,” he said, “this seems kind of familiar. I had an idea, though, that you two had had enough of the States for a time. Why, it was only three days before I sailed that your husband told me he never intended to return.”

She smiled sadly. Her eyes seemed to be watching the glittering spray which leaped every now and then into the sunshine.

“Our journey was undertaken at a moment’s notice,” she confided. “Here comes Guy. He will be glad to see you.”

If such was the case, Major Hartopp certainly managed to conceal his gratification. He received his erstwhile acquaintance’s cordial greeting with marked diffidence. Mr. Cray’s good nature, however, was not to be denied. He insisted upon an introduction to their friend—a Mr. Harding of New York—and did his best to dissipate the distinct atmosphere of embarrassment which he could scarcely fail to notice. He was only partially successful, however, and presently, when Hartopp and his companion had strolled away, he drew his chair a little closer to Mina’s.

“Mrs. Hartopp,” he said, “your husband and you and I have come up against one another pretty often during the last three months. It seemed to me that we parted in Monte Carlo pretty good friends. What’s wrong with your good man, and you, too, for the matter of that?”

Mrs. Hartopp turned her sorrowful eyes upon her companion.

“Mr. Cray,” she sighed, “you are one of those men who find out everything. I really don’t see that it is of any use trying to keep it secret from you. Guy and I are in a very strange position. You can’t imagine what has happened, I suppose?”

“I cannot,” Mr. Cray acknowledged. “You’ve got me fairly guessing.”

She looked around as though to be sure that no one was within hearing. Then she leaned towards her companion.

“Mr. Cray,” she whispered, “that man—that horrible man Harding—is no friend of ours. He is an American detective taking us back to New York. We are under arrest.”

“You don’t say!” Mr. Cray gasped.

“Guy never thought that they would apply for an extradition warrant,” she went on. “They did it quite secretly. We were arrested the moment we got back to London.”

“Pretty tough,” Mr. Cray murmured. “Of course, I always understood,” he

ventured, a little dubiously, "that there had been some trouble in New York, but I didn't think it was anything they could get him back for, unless he chose to go."

"The only trouble there," Mina declared, "was that he got into a set of people who were bent on making money anyhow, and he was too clever for them. However, I will not weary you any more by talking of our misfortunes. You had better take no notice of us. The truth might leak out, and it would not be pleasant for you to be associated with criminals."

"You can cut that out," Mr. Cray assured her warmly. "If there's anything I can do during the voyage count on me."

Mina furtively dabbed her beautiful eyes with her handkerchief.

"You are very kind," she sobbed, "but nothing can help us now. Our pictures will be in all the p—papers, Guy will be branded as an adventurer and I as a fraud. You had better take no more notice of us, Mr. Cray. We are not worth it."

Mr. Cray gave a great deal of thought during the next few days to the matter of the Hartopp's predicament. So far, no one seemed to have surmised the truth of the situation, although the man Harding was never for a moment apart from one or the other of them, and the fact that he was a person of obviously inferior social station, made the close intimacy a little remarkable. Towards the close of the second day, Mr. Cray deliberately sought Harding out during the half-hour before dinner when he was generally alone. Harding, who did not dress for that meal, was lounging on the promenade deck, and Mr. Cray drew him insidiously towards the smoking-room.

"Nix on cocktails for me," the detective pronounced. "I've had some. I'll take a drop of Scotch whisky with you, though."

They took several drops. The smoke-room was empty and Mr. Cray very cautiously approached the subject he wished to discuss.

"See here, Harding," he inquired, "is this a serious job for Hartopp?"

Harding became taciturn.

"I don't know what you're talking about," he declared cautiously.

"You needn't worry about me," Mr. Cray rejoined. "I'm in the secret. Mrs. Hartopp told me all about it."

Harding chewed his cigar for a moment and sipped his whisky-and-soda.

"I guess he'll get five years, perhaps more. She'll probably get a spell herself."

"I'm sorry to hear this," Mr. Cray said. "They're friends of mine."

"That don't alter their being crooks," the other replied drily.

"Does New York know that you've got them?"

"Not a word. They didn't believe I'd get the warrant through."

"They don't know that you're on this steamer, then?"

“Nary a one of them. I’m going to give them the big surprise.”

“What’s the charge?” Mr. Cray inquired.

“Against him—selling dud bonds. Against her—robbing the old ladies of Brooklyn by pretending she brought spooks to them. They’ve done some slick things between them, but they’re booked for Sing-Sing this time, or my name ain’t Silas Harding. . . . Not a drop more, Mr. Cray. I’ll be getting a wash before dinner.”

Mr. Cray walked the deck moodily. He was a kind-hearted man, and the plight of his companions distressed him greatly. After dinner that evening, whilst Harding was playing poker in the smoking-room, he sat between husband and wife.

“I guess there’s nothing to be done about this matter with Harding, eh?” he queried.

Mina’s eyes became suddenly bright.

“You’re so wonderful, Mr. Cray,” she murmured. “I’m sure you have something at the back of your mind.”

“Nothing that amounts to anything, I’m afraid,” Cray acknowledged. “Harding tells me, though, that he hasn’t communicated with New York in any way.”

Hartopp looked up eagerly.

“He told us that. I wondered at the time whether he was trying to make an opening for a little negotiation. The trouble of it is that we haven’t the stuff handy.”

“What about your wife’s legacy?”

“They paid five thousand pounds down,” Hartopp groaned, “and left the rest in case the relatives disputed the will. If this matter comes out in New York, and Mina’s name is mentioned we shall never see that forty-five thousand pounds. It’s the devil’s own luck.”

“It doesn’t seem hopeful,” Mr. Cray admitted, “but we’ve had some fun together, and if I can make Harding see reason, I’ll talk business to him.”

Mina’s eyes shone and her soft fingers clasped his hand. Mr. Cray reciprocated her pressure gently. A little later in the day he approached Harding.

“See here, Harding,” he began, “how is it you and your friends the Hartopps are not down in the passenger list?”

The detective produced a particularly black and objectionable-looking cigar, lit it and stuck it into the corner of his mouth.

“You seem mighty interested in the Hartopps,” he observed.

“In a kinder way, I am,” Mr. Cray admitted. “They’re the sort of wrongdoers I’ve a fancy for. They’re sports through and through, and another thing they’re clever.”

“Well, between you and me,” the detective confided, “I’ve a sort of sneaking



sympathy for them myself, and the reason they're entered on the ship's list as Mr. and Mrs. Brown, and I figure as one Perkins from Chicago, is that I didn't want it to get about all over the ship that they were a couple of criminals whom I was taking back to New York."

"I see," Mr. Cray murmured. "Very considerate."

It was about an hour after dinner-time and a dark evening. The deck, however, was still crowded with promenaders. Mr. Cray inveigled his companion into a more retired spot.

"See here, Harding," he began, "I'm a plain man and I want to ask you a plain question. Had you heard of Mrs. Hartopp's legacy when you started out on this trip?"

The detective rolled his cigar round, pinched it and expectorated.

"I sure had," he admitted. "How do you figure that comes in?"

"Just in this way," Mr. Cray explained. "You found your warrant granted a little unexpectedly, and you found the Hartopps amenable to reason. You've got them on board here without any fuss, and I take it there isn't a soul on the other side who knows that you're bringing 'em along. In fact you've fixed it so that if you were to turn up in New York empty-handed, no one would be disappointed or surprised."

"Well?"

"Now let me ask you as man to man," Mr. Cray went on, "didn't it enter into your head that a little deal with the Hartopps might be made, some little arrangement by which they could mingle with the other passengers and slip away at New York and you could make a small deposit at your bank against a rainy day? How's that, Mr. Harding?"

"I get you," the latter said calmly. "You're suggesting that I might be bribed to let them go."

"See here, Harding," Mr. Cray argued in his most persuasive tone, "I figured the matter out this way to myself. Harding's a man of, say, forty-five to forty-six years of age, he draws a salary that don't permit of much saving, and when they retire him, in a few years' time, the pension isn't going to keep him in luxury. I take it that it's a man's business as he walks along through life to try and put a bit by when he sees a chance. Here's just one of these chances. The Hartopps ain't criminals at all. They're just easy-living, pleasant adventurer and adventuress, who live by their wits and other people's folly. I haven't got a grouch on 'em, although they nearly cost me a cool thousand. They're not malicious, they're not out to do any one any particular harm in the world. . . . Are you travelling along with me, Harding?"

"Sure!" was the terse reply.

“Therefore, I say that they’re your chance,” Mr. Cray wound up.

The detective considered for some minutes.

“Supposing I was willing to talk business,” he said, “what would be the price?”

“Two thousand dollars,” Mr. Cray pronounced.

“Nothing doing.”

“Name your own figure, then.”

“It’ll cost you five,” Harding declared firmly, “not a cent more or less. We’ll call it twenty-five thousand dollars.”

Mr. Cray sighed.

“It’s a lot of money,” he declared.

“It’s a big risk,” was the terse reply.

“How long can you give me to think it over?”

“Twenty-four hours.”

“I’ll meet you here at this time to-morrow night,” Mr. Cray promised.

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Mina was looking very wan and delicate, the next day. Her soft, luminous eyes called Mr. Cray to her side as soon as he appeared on deck. She questioned him anxiously.

“Is there any chance, do you think?”

“The man can be bought,” Mr. Cray replied. “The trouble is that he wants a great deal of money.”

“How much?”

“Five thousand pounds.”

Her face fell.

“It is terrible, that,” she murmured.

“Have you anything at all towards it?” Mr. Cray asked bluntly.

“You had better ask Guy,” she answered. “I never know exactly how we stand financially. Of course, if only the legacy had been paid we should have been all right.”

“Supposing the money was found, have you any place in New York you could get to quickly and lie hidden until you catch a steamer home?”

“We have a certain hiding-place,” she assured him. “There would be no difficulty about that. There is Guy over there. Will you go and talk to him?”

Mr. Cray obeyed orders. Major Hartopp took a gloomy view of the situation.

“Harding didn’t give us a moment to look around,” he explained. “We had barely twenty-four hours’ notice before he marched us on to this infernal steamer. All the money Mina and I have between us is about ninety pounds in cash, and about a

hundred and forty at a bank in London. What's so damned annoying is," he went on, "they'll never pay over the rest of the legacy if this gets into the papers. They haven't a chance of holding Mina for anything she's done—she's been too clever for that—but the exposure will be quite sufficient. Those Scotch lawyers will fight the case inch by inch, sooner than pay over a shilling, if Mina's bona fides are once questioned."

"Supposing the money was forthcoming," Mr. Cray said, "your wife says she knows where you could find shelter in New York for a few days."

"Not only that," Hartopp declared eagerly, "but I could get a passage back on this ship without any questions asked. The purser's a very decent fellow, and I've been having a talk to him about it."

Mr. Cray returned to Mina. She looked at him with very pretty hesitation.

"Does Guy think we could do anything?" she asked.

"The state of your exchequer, unfortunately, seems to place that out of the question," he said.

She leaned forward. Her hand rested upon his, and the pressure of her fingers became more marked. There was something about the haunting way she looked at him which reminded Mr. Cray of the first time he had seen her at the Albert Hall.

"Dear friend," she whispered, "I am very fond of Guy, in his way. He is a dear, of course, but—I am fonder still of liberty. The charge against me is really a foolish one. The only trouble is that it may spoil my chance of getting that legacy. Couldn't you pay him a little less and get him to leave me out? You could take me back to England with you, and I should be there when Guy's trouble was over."

Mr. Cray, being only human, returned the pressure of her fingers, but he shook his head.

"I guess I'll see you both through this," he promised, "it won't ruin me, any way."

Mr. Cray was met on the dock by Mr. Nathaniel Long, the treasurer of his Company, and hurried away into a private room of one of the mammoth hotels. There, with great pride, the latter drew from a small grip a bottle of Scotch whisky. Tumblers and soda-water were speedily forthcoming. Mr. Cray asked the obvious questions concerning this great change which had come to his native land.

"I tell you, Joseph," Mr. Long said sorrowfully, "it's just as though some silent blight had fallen upon the country. The clubs aren't worth going into. Everybody snaps and snarls and quarrels at the least opportunity. The dinner-parties at the restaurants seem frost-bitten, and it's one of the most painful sights in New York to see Francis serving out temperance drinks behind the bar of the Waldorf."

"Any decrease in crime?" Mr. Cray inquired.

“Slightly worse, and more suicides. Besides, this drinking in corners is making us seem like a furtive nation. A drink that used to be a mark of good fellowship is now a vice. The doctors have never had so many cases of indigestion, and there’s a wave of melancholia going around. I tell you,” Long went on, gazing affectionately at the contents of his tumbler, “it seems a small thing to be driven from one’s native land for, but the day I get across to England, sit down in a restaurant, order my cocktail and my bottle of champagne, well, it will be great, that’s all there is to it.”

“How’s business?” Mr. Cray inquired.

“That’s what’s brought me here,” the other replied. “Joseph, the Seattle Power Works have offered to buy us out as we stand, before we start reconstruction, with five million dollars for good-will and a premium on the stock. I’ve brought all the figures, and I’ve got a seat on the Limited to-night. My idea was that you might go right back with me, talk it over on the way, and go into things down there. It’s a big chance if you’ve any fancy for cleaning up.”

“It sounds great,” Mr. Cray murmured. “Say, Nat, I’ve given an open cheque for twenty-five thousand dollars on the Merchants’ Bank here—lost it at poker on the way over. I guess it’s all right, eh?”

“Sure!” was the prompt reply. “We’ve never less than a hundred thousand dollars there. Did you get amongst pikers, or were you pushing some?”

“I guess the game was all right,” Mr. Cray declared. “What time does the Limited start?”

“Seven o’clock.”

“I’ll look after my baggage and meet you at the depôt,” Mr. Cray promised.

It was exactly ten days later when Mr. Cray, accompanied again by Mr. Nathaniel Long, returned to New York. They spent a solemn but inspiring day at the lawyer’s and banker’s. When the whole thing was over, Mr. Cray for the first time in his life was a very rich man. His programme for the evening, although sadly affected, alas! by circumstances, still showed a sense of celebration. After a wonderful Turkish bath, a visit to the barber’s and the manicurist, a whisky-and-soda in his room—an act of debauchery which was entirely flavourless—he met his friend and late business partner, and the two men made their way to the most select restaurant in New York, where a table had been reserved for them. With elaborate care, Mr. Cray wrote out a wonderful menu, ordered with a prodigious sigh, a large bottle of mineral water, and, closing his eyes for a moment, drank an imaginary cocktail.

“Joseph, my boy, what are you going to do about it?” Nathaniel Long inquired. “You’re in the prime of life and a very rich man. You can acquire a post in one of our great commercial undertakings over here, or you can wander out into the world as

you have done during the last few years, looking for adventures. Mrs. Cray don't seem to make any particular claim upon you, especially since this anti-tobacco league was started. You're a free man, Joseph. That's what you are."

"And you?" Mr. Cray asked. "What about you, Nathaniel?"

Nathaniel Long shook his wizened little head.

"I guess that sort of thing doesn't exist for me," he replied, sorrowfully. "I have a wife and eight children. I am trustee of the chapel where my wife worships; secretary of our golf and country club; Commodore of the sailing club. I shall just rent a slightly larger country house and take my ease. It is fortunate that I have not your restless spirit."

Mr. Cray was suddenly transfixed. He sat watching with sheer amazement a little party of three who were taking their places at an adjoining table—Major Hartopp, in his unmistakable English clothes, spruce and debonair; Mina, looking ravishing in a wonderful gown of filmy grey; and Mr. Harding—only a somewhat transformed Mr. Harding—in the long dinner-coat and flowing tie affected by the American diner out. The head-waiter himself saw them to their places, an obsequious *maitre d'hôtel* passed on their order to attentive myrmidons. Nathaniel Long followed his friend's earnest gaze with some interest.

"Joseph," he inquired, "do you know the man in the dinner-coat—not the Englishman? You seem to be staring at him hard enough."

"He was on the steamer with me," Mr. Cray acknowledged.

"That fellow's seen the inside of Sing-Sing more than once," Mr. Long declared. "Some crook he is, I can tell you. I don't know what name he goes by now, but they used to call him Slick Jimmy. He seems to have got in with a swell crowd."

"He's never been a detective, by any chance, I suppose?" Mr. Cray asked.

Nathaniel Long smiled.

"I should say not," he replied. "I don't think even on the principle of 'set a thief to catch a thief,' they'd stand Slick Jimmy in the force."

At that moment Mina caught Mr. Cray's eye and bowed in a somewhat constrained fashion. Hartopp nodded affably. Mr. Harding contented himself with a furtive grin. Mr. Cray drank a glass of water with great solemnity.

"Nathaniel," he declared, "I guess that taste for adventure is fizzling out. I've got to hire a dog and a guardian and live amongst the poops."

"Been stung?" Nathaniel Long inquired kindly.

Mr. Cray met Mina's tantalising eyes and looked away.

"Some," he groaned.

THE END



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*TRANSCRIBER NOTES*

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Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.

[The end of *The Adventures of Mr. Joseph P. Cray* by E. (Edward) Phillips Oppenheim]