



**SINNERS
BEWARE**



E·PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

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SINNERS BEWARE

By
E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM



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Sinners Beware

I

THE CAFÉ RÉGAL, THE MISTRAL AND THE LADY

Peter Hames, who had pushed open the door of the café and made abrupt entrance, paused within a yard or two of the threshold to shake the rain from his dripping mackintosh, and gazed about him with indifferent curiosity. The interior of the place was like the interior of many of the other Beausoleil bars. The staging, however, was unusual. For some reason or other, the electric supply in the immediate vicinity had failed. The lights were dim and inconstant, and, to amplify them, some one had lit an oil lamp which stood upon the edge of the counter. In the whole place there were only four people. Toby, the popular barman, was seated on

the low stool onto which he sometimes subsided when waiting for clients, completely out of sight, except for the top of his head. Old man Délous, the crazy saddler from across the way, coatless and collarless, sat in a distant corner, mumbling to himself. A drunken man sprawled upon a bench on the opposite side, and on a high stool at the end of the bar remote from Toby, was perched a girl whose too lavish use of cosmetics and lipstick disguised her so effectually that one could only say she was young and had good features. She wore a hat which was between a béret and a jockey's cap, slouched low over her forehead, and she was smoking Caporal cigarettes from a holder of unusual length. She scrutinised the newcomer wearily and apparently without interest.

“Wake up, Toby!” the latter enjoined, advancing a step or two nearer the bar. “My car is broken down at the bottom of the hill and I am wet through tinkering with it. A glass of the best brandy, quickly!”

Toby, who appeared to be sleeping, made no reply, nor did he attempt to rise to his feet. From the old man in the corner came a long, mirthless chuckle. Peter Hames, who had recovered his breath, took even closer note of his surroundings. The place was like some horrible study in still life. Some one had recently spilt liquor across the boarded floor; a chair was overturned; the sickly and indistinct illumination of the place became absolutely ghastly with the glimmering of a steely twilight, which found its way in through the uncurtained window, precursor of the leaden dawn.

“What's wrong with this place to-night?” the newcomer demanded. “Wake up, Toby! I want some brandy, I tell you.”

The young man made no movement. He seemed to have fallen asleep, leaning forward on his stool. The girl knocked the ash from her cigarette and gazed down the length of the counter in insolent silence. Peter Hames lifted the lamp above his head with one hand and with the other shook the recumbent figure. Again the old man in the distant corner chuckled.

“What's the matter with you, Toby?” the would-be customer enquired sharply. “Are you drunk, or what?”

Almost as he spoke, Peter Hames was conscious of that queer sensation about his fingers. He snatched his hand away and held it under the lamp. The blood was dripping from his fingers on to the counter. He stood staring at it, the horror sealing his lips, paralysing even his nerves. The lamp slipped from his grasp and fell crashing on to the floor.

“Fool!” the girl exclaimed, as she flung a mat upon the thin flames. “Have you never seen a dead man before?”

A spiral of thick, black smoke was mounting to the low ceiling. With the extinction of the lamp, the sole illumination now was the streak of grey, forbidding light from that parting between the lowering clouds. The drunken man, snoring on his bench, old man Délous chuckling hideously in his corner, and the girl, back again on her stool with the cigarette holder once more between her lips, were all alike grotesque and vaguely realised figures, phantasies in some foul nightmare. The smoke recoiling from the ceiling filled the place with an evil-smelling vapour. Through it, Peter Hames stepped swiftly to the door, recrossed the threshold, and vanished into the lampless night.

A very dignified-looking manservant, of Franco-Italian extraction, entered his master's studio one afternoon a few days later, with an announcement upon his lips. Peter Hames, in blue jean overalls, and the flowing tie of his professional confrères, was standing with his back to the window, painting rapidly in oils upon a small canvas.

"A young lady desires to see Monsieur."

Peter Hames went on painting.

"You know very well, Vittorio," he said reproachfully, "that I do not see strange young ladies."

Vittorio was apologetic and fluent.

"The young lady is not of the type of Monsieur's undesired visitors," he declared. "She is chic and a young lady of the world. I will undertake to promise Monsieur that she is not a model."

"Is she by chance possessed of a name?" Peter asked, still painting.

"It is to be expected, Monsieur," the man agreed, "but not knowing that I was Monsieur's servant of many years, and a person of discretion, she preferred to keep it to herself."

His master, after stepping a little way back to inspect his work, continued to paint.

"I am intrigued, Vittorio," he admitted, "but I do not wish to see the young lady. Use all your arts of diplomacy and get rid of her for me."

Vittorio's cheerful face became clouded.

"It will be a difficult matter, Monsieur," he confessed.

"It will be impossible," a very lazy, but pleasant feminine voice intervened. "I owe you all the apologies in the world, Mr. Hames, for this intrusion. Still, I had to see you, and I thought it might save time to follow your servant."

She came slowly forward across the rush-carpeted studio with its simple, almost

primitive furnishings. Peter Hames stood for a moment watching her in silence—a slim, elegant figure in severely cut coat and skirt of some dark material. She was fair, with grey eyes, which, from the moment of her entrance, held his, and the faint insolence of which marched with the lines of her mouth. Her complexion was innocent of all cosmetics; her lips were untouched. Even the fierce sunlight which surrounded her, streaming through the high windows, could show her no disfavour save for the slightest lines of fatigue or sleeplessness under her eyes. Peter Hames accepted fate, but first he wheeled his canvas around and turned it to the wall.

“What can I have the pleasure of doing for you, Mademoiselle?” he asked, pushing a chair into an adjacent corner of the studio, where the light was a little less penetrating. “Will you sit down?”

Vittorio, in response to a gesture from his master, left the room, his head high and full of the beatific consciousness of having done the right thing. The young lady sank into the chair and smiled up at her host.

“Well, to begin with,” she said, “you can tell me why you left the Café Régál so abruptly the other morning?”

He looked at her in puzzled fashion.

“The Café Régál?” he repeated. “I was afraid when I was informed of your visit, Mademoiselle, that you were making some mistake. I know of no such place.”

She nodded slowly.

“And I thought,” she murmured, “that Anglo-Saxons only lied—forgive the melodramatic touch—for the honour or the safety of their lady friends.”

“Are you so far removed from the Anglo-Saxon race?” he asked.

“*Touché*,” she admitted. “You can fence with me just as long as you wish, though. I like your studio and I am quite content to pay you a long visit. May I smoke?”

“By all means,” he assented. “I am afraid I can’t offer you anything very choice in the way of tobacco,” he added, producing a case.

She shook her head.

“Please don’t trouble,” she begged, “I smoke my own.”

From a plain suède bag, with a very beautiful clasp, she drew out a holder of exceptional length, fitted a cigarette into it, accepted a light from her host’s briquet, and leaned a little farther back in her chair.

“So you did not call for a glass of brandy at the Café Régál that night,” she murmured, “and stumble upon a tragedy? I rather envied you your entrance. An almost Rembrandtesque interior, wasn’t it?”

“Some day, when you have discovered your mistake,” he suggested, “I shall ask

you to take me there. Then I may be able to answer your question.”

She studied him pensively. Then an idea seemed to strike her and she leaned towards the wall. Easily anticipating his attempt at interference, with a swift turn of the wrist, she swung around the easel. They both looked at the picture together—at the sordid café, with its sombre, melancholy lighting effects, the girl, typical *cocotte* of the region, sprawling on her stool, the drunken man in his corner a shape only, old Père Délous, with his idiot but terrible face, showing his yellow fangs in that meaningless laugh. Behind the counter—nothing.

“A marvellous effort, from memory only,” she declared. “Did I really look like that?”

“Worse,” he answered tersely. “For all I know, you are. Appearances either way are deceitful. In any case, what do you want with me?”

She sighed.

“You are annoyed,” she complained, “and that is unreasonable. I was quite content to leave you out of it until it became impossible. Why did you steal away from that place? Didn’t your chivalry prompt you to stay and see me through it?”

“It certainly did not,” he assured her. “When I recognised you, I knew that you had the case in hand and I probably wasn’t wanted.”

“A certain amount of common sense in that,” she admitted, with uplifted eyebrows. “But are you sure that you recognised me?”

“Perfectly. You looked like a vulgarly attractive little *cocotte* of the poorer regions—as you intended, I suppose. Your real name, I believe, is Miss Sybil Christian, once of Daly’s Theatre, London, later a very important personage for a brief period at that sinister building upon the Embankment, from which I think you—er—disappeared, for a short time, to do your duty by society; and now a free lance, with a taste for interfering in other people’s business.”

“Not so bad,” she acknowledged. “Miss Sybil Christian.”

“That is your correct name, except that, as the younger daughter of a peer, I presume that you could claim to be addressed as the Honourable Sybil Christian if it afforded you any satisfaction.”

She knocked the ash from her cigarette.

“What a horrible disillusion,” she sighed. “I thought that I was a creature of mystery to you. In fact, I rather hoped for overtures the other night, connected with my bogus profession.”

“I couldn’t have looked at you for five minutes without wanting to wash your face,” he rejoined.

She laughed almost naturally.

“You have always hated the sound of my name,” she remarked, “and I don’t know why. I have never interfered with you in any way. Now for my retaliation. Your name is Peter J. Hames. You are an American, born in New York, educated at Harvard and Oxford, and swallowed up in the War. You emerged penniless. Your people were ruined, weren’t they?”

He nodded. “Amazingly correct.”

“You had to earn your own living and you didn’t know how,” she went on. “Your only friend was the then Police Commissioner of New York, and he gave you a job. You were transferred almost at once to the detective service, where you did remarkably well, until the Fraser fiasco.”

“Don’t,” he begged.

“I shall finish,” she insisted ruthlessly. “You worked that out all right on the facts that you had. The trouble arose because your subordinates had deceived you. They wanted to see Fraser in the chair and there was a certain amount of ‘framing’ the case against him, of which you had no knowledge. The man escaped by a miracle, and the rumour is that you very nearly killed one of the detectives who committed perjury. At any rate, you threw up your job, marched out of the place, and woke up the next morning to find that you had inherited a million dollars. Some people have that kind of luck. I haven’t.”

He was intensely interested now. His eyes were eagerly questioning her.

“This is marvellous,” he declared. “Go on, please.”

“You were temporarily fed up with your country,” she continued, fitting another cigarette into her tube, “and you came over here. You painted a little, you gambled a little, you explored this country as I should think it has never been explored before, and you probably flirted a little, although of that I know nothing. Then the old passion reasserted itself. Two undiscovered crimes were elucidated by you and the results handed over to the local police on condition that you remained anonymous. I know you, though. The thing is in your blood. You follow crime like a bloodhound, just because you can’t help it. You don’t want any credit; you are regardless of money. You just love the work. The call was in your blood when you swung open the door of the Café Régéal that night and found that murder had been done. You were very harsh, though, to the poor little *cocotte* who sat upon the stool, waiting for your favours.”

There was a long and pregnant silence—to Peter Hames, the silence of humiliation.

“Mademoiselle,” he began at last, and his tone was almost humble—

“Please don’t,” she interrupted impatiently. “We are in a foreign country, but you

are American and I am English. Don't let's forget it. And please don't bear me any ill will because I really have the knack of finding out about things—what you call the detective instinct, I suppose.”

“I think you are wonderful,” he confessed. “I have heard of you, of course. I had never dreamed, though, that you had such sources of information or could use them so intelligently. Having admitted that, do you mind telling me why you came to visit me?”

“I want your help,” she confided.

“My answer to that is quickly given,” he replied, with a certain almost passionate stiffness. “Do you mind going away, as soon as you have finished that cigarette?”

It was many a long day before she looked at him again as she looked at him at that moment. Her eyes were soft with the tears which never came.

“You will think that I am showing off,” she observed. “Indeed, I know why you say that. You say it because the people who were responsible for your failure on the Fraser case, and who nearly brought that poor fellow to the chair, were women—two women—vampires. I know all about them. You have been a woman-hater ever since. In your heart, I know that you have sworn that you would never work again with a woman. Very well, keep your word. Only help me this time. I want to save a man's life and it is better done through you.”

He looked at her steadfastly. Somehow or other, sheer amazement had creased out the lines of his face. He was almost a boy again, full of wonder and repressed admiration.

“You were right in what you said just now,” he declared. “Women are the callous, archliars of the world. I have sworn—”

“It is to save a man's life,” she pleaded—“an old man.”

It was then he yielded.

It was an hour before dawn and a stormy night. Rain streamed down the mountainous streets of Beausoleil and here and there fell hissing on the still warm pavements. The darkness was intense, wayfarers few. A short, stout man, wrapped from head to foot in a black cloak, with his feet encased in goloshes, and holding a capacious umbrella over his head, mounted one of the most precipitous of the side alleys and pushed open the swing door of that café of dubious repute—the Café Régal. He shook the rain from his clothes and glanced around with an affectation of carelessness. Behind the bar was Toby, the popular young nephew of the proprietress, Madame Hauser. Somnolent in a chair against the window was Père Délous, the saddler from over the way. Mademoiselle Anna, sprawling upon a stool

at the bar, broke off in her conversation with Toby to stare insolently at the newcomer.

“A terrible night,” the latter remarked amiably, as he approached.

“Terrible indeed,” the girl assented. “One comes out only of necessity. I am waiting for the brave gentleman who will escort me home.”

“That will arrive, my dear; that will arrive,” the stout little man chuckled.

He leaned over the counter.

“You wish to speak to me privately, Toby,” he said, in a low tone. “Well, I have come. It is inconvenient. What have you to say?”

At Toby’s first eager words, the stranger stopped him.

“Be careful,” he enjoined. “Père Délous there counts for nothing, but the young woman—send her away.”

“She is always here,” Toby expostulated. “She is a customer.”

“She knows nothing of me,” was the acid comment. “Do as I bid or keep silent.”

Toby disappeared through a low door into the rear premises. Simultaneously with his return, a bent old woman, with unkempt grey hair, which seemed to have spread all over her face, untidily dressed in a soiled black gown, pushed her way through the side door. She looked at the stranger at the bar, whom she had known for fifty years, but she took no notice of him.

“Mademoiselle,” she croaked, “you are wanted on the telephone. Bring your drink. We will have a cordial together.”

Mademoiselle slipped from her stool and, without remark, obeyed the summons. With the closing of the door, Toby became eloquent. A stream of words broke from his lips. Now and then he banged the counter. He pointed to the street outside and the ceiling above. The stranger listened, and his face, which one might have judged to be rubicund and cheerful, became as hard as granite. He did not once interrupt; he waited until words melted into sobs.

“I have finished!” was the boy’s last coherent utterance.

His auditor stroked his chin and reflected.

“You may lose your place, Toby,” he warned him.

“I would give my soul to lose it,” was the passionate reply.

“One must consider,” the stranger murmured. “Give me a fine, Toby, and another for Père Délous.”

Toby obeyed, and, with both glasses in his hand, his customer crossed the floor. Père Délous chuckled.

“For me!” he exclaimed, holding out his shaking hand. “Ah, it is the medicine I need, but work is scarce and cognac is dear.”

“Wait!” his visitor admonished good-naturedly. “Let me feel your pulse. Are you strong enough for cognac, I ask myself?”

“It is strength I need,” Père Délous gasped.

The man in the long cape felt his pulse and nodded gravely.

“I will give you free medicine, Père Délous,” he promised, “for I know that you will never pay for it.”

His prospective patient mumbled. With greedy eyes he watched the pastille dropped into the glass of brandy; with greedy fingers he raised it to his lips and drained its contents. He sank back in his chair, crooning to himself, and closed his eyes. . . .

His benefactor sipped his own brandy and, recrossing the room, shook the apparently drunken man, and whispered in his ear. Then he returned to the bar.

“I will have another fine, Toby,” he ordered. “After all, you are perhaps right. You are scarcely old enough for such an important affair. Why do the lights burn so ill to-night?”

“The storm. Soon I think they will be out altogether. Monsieur is not angry with me?”

“Not I,” was the genial reply. “Fetch an oil lamp before darkness comes.”

The young man obeyed with alacrity. It was a great joy that this noble patron was not angry. The latter moved over to examine the switch. By the time Toby returned with the lamp, he was back in his place, however. One by one, the electric lamps failed. A thin pencil of light, creeping through the window from outside, seemed to wake the drunken man. He staggered to his feet and lurched over to the counter, leering at Mademoiselle, who had just made her reappearance and was climbing on to her stool.

“A good sleep!” he declared. “It is excellent!”

“Go and sleep some more then,” she advised him. “You’re still drunk.”

He held on to the counter with one hand; with the other he drew a handful of hundred-franc notes from his pocket.

“Who would not be drunk!” he exclaimed. “I have made wonderful business. I will walk with thee to thy door, little one.”

She laughed at him scornfully.

“What an invitation!” she mocked.

He thrust five hundred francs into her hand. She looked at the notes with meticulous curiosity, opened her bag, and dropped them in. Then she finished her drink and slipped from her stool.

“To the door,” she warned him.

The man grinned.

“There are more of the notes,” he whispered, as they left the place together. . . .

The dawn was late in coming and little was to be seen by the feeble light of the lamp. The stranger felt in his pocket and produced a folding black case.

“Another brandy from the large bottle, Toby,” he ordered.

The boy turned around to the shelf. His patron leaned over, and, even in that weird light, the thread of steel in his hand glittered. He knew exactly where to strike, and Toby sank on to his low stool with scarcely a moan. . . . Then, for a few minutes, his assailant was very busy indeed. First he bent over Toby, drew keys from his pocket, and emptied several drawers. Afterwards he listened attentively to the stertorous breathing of Père Délous in his corner, and finally passed through the swing doors. For a few minutes the place was empty except for Père Délous, who woke up once to gaze with surprise at an unexpected stain upon his coat sleeve. Then the door swung open. The drunken man lurched in, stumbled to his bench, and lay there. The silence of the café was reëstablished. Outside, the rain had lessened, but the wind was moaning down the narrow streets. Again the door was opened. Mademoiselle Anna swaggered in. She looked across at the drunken man and laughed, made her way to her favourite stool at the bar, climbed on to it, and glanced downwards. Toby, in that uncertain light, might seem to have been sleeping, but perhaps she guessed. Once again, and for the last time that night, a customer pushed open the door, letting in a faint streak of leaden daylight and a gust of the wet storm. Peter Hames paused to shake the rain from his dripping mackintosh.

“Wake up, Toby,” he enjoined, advancing a step or two nearer the bar. “My car is broken down at the bottom of the hill and I am wet through tinkering with it. A glass of the best brandy, quickly!”

Afternoon tea was served in the studio of the villa upon the slopes of La Turbie and seven o’clock cocktails followed. The footsteps of Peter Hames’ temperamental butler fell upon the air. Undoubtedly he had done well to admit the importunate lady.

The mistral had passed, and Beausoleil was justifying its very beautiful name. Down the sunlit thoroughfare walked Monsieur Charles Dutroyen, the prosperous and enterprising chemist, the fame of whose business had carried so far that visitors even from the most aristocratic parts of the Principality climbed the hill to buy his wares. Beausoleil is the poor relation of Monte Carlo, and very few of its tradespeople could afford that daily promenade of Monsieur Charles Dutroyen. Every morning, with the midday closing of his ever-increasing establishment, he

discarded the overall which protected his sombre professional clothes, accepted a well-brushed hat from the hands of his housekeeper, selected a cane, and made his way down to the Café de Paris. Every morning he took his apéritif in the closed Brasserie, or out in the sunshine, according to the weather, and nearly every morning he ordered his luncheon from an attentive *maître d'hôtel*, and, in due course, was to be found seated at a corner table in the restaurant, doing full justice to it.

On this particular morning his St. Rafael Quinquina had never tasted better, and the menu was to his liking—a delicious *truite bleue*, ribs of veal cooked in the Italian fashion, a trifle of cheese, and a pint of Turpin Monopole. It was the luncheon of an epicure! Monsieur Charles Dutroyen glanced impatiently at the clock. It wanted still five minutes of the hour at which he was accustomed to seat himself. This morning, he decided, rising to his feet, he would anticipate a little. There was to be an interruption, however. The *vestiaire* came hurrying through to him.

“There is one who wishes to speak to Monsieur on the telephone,” he announced. “It is from the establishment.”

The chemist frowned. The circumstance was unusual, but not unprecedented. He made his way to the box and held the receiver to his ear. The agitated voice of his chief assistant answered his call.

“Monsieur,” he confided, “things are happening here which one cannot explain. Monsieur had better return at once.”

Monsieur Dutroyen was, to use a phrase which has no existence in the French language, flabbergasted.

“But, my good Henri,” he protested, “I have this moment ordered my luncheon.”

“It is a disaster,” the anxious voice acknowledged, “but no one save yourself can deal with the situation.”

Monsieur Dutroyen postponed his lunch, received his hat from the *vestiaire*, mounted into a little *voiture*, and climbed the hill. He was a man of easy conscience and still no thought of misfortune haunted his way. When he arrived, however, at that famous establishment, so well known far beyond the limits of Beausoleil, the shock arrived. Three motor cars were drawn up by the side of the curb and a gendarme stood at attention at his door. It speaks well for the courage and presence of mind of Monsieur Charles Dutroyen that he descended promptly from the little carriage and manfully crossed the threshold of his emporium. Worse things, however, awaited him. There were more gendarmes guarding a number of packets laid out upon the counter, and his friend, the Commissaire of Police, who turned a very grave face upon him.

“What ails the world this morning, friend?” the chemist demanded, advancing

with outstretched hand.

The commissaire shook his head.

“A great deal ails the world, Friend Charles,” he replied, pointing to the long rows of packages upon the counter. “Here is cocaine enough to stupefy every human being in the Principality and heroin sufficient to poison a city. These have been discovered upon your premises. It is a disaster!”

“My assistants must have trafficked in them without my knowledge,” Monsieur Dutroyen declared bravely.

“The statements of your assistants have already been taken down,” the commissaire deplored. “Prepare yourself, Dutroyen, for that which comes is more serious still. I have to arrest you for the murder, last Thursday, of Toby Dachener, barman at the Café Régéal.”

Imagination sometimes plays strange pranks with a man. For a moment, Dutroyen’s thoughts flashed regretfully backwards to that succulent, but never to be eaten lunch. Then he leaned across the counter, and it was very much to the discredit of the commissaire himself, and the surrounding gendarmes, that they let his hand tamper with the drawer on the other side and reappear, clutching a very formidable-looking revolver.

“Paul Levadour,” he said, addressing his friend the commissaire, “I have always been a man who is fond of company. My tastes have leaned that way in life. They follow suit in death. To die alone is to me an aggravated misery.”

The commissaire dodged behind a portly gendarme, but his erstwhile friend shook his head reprovingly.

“Have no fear, Paul,” he concluded. “You are a married man, with a charming wife. I should know, for she has been my mistress for the last ten years. A family too! Have no fear. This journey I shall adventure alone.”

Monsieur Charles Dutroyen blew out his brains with the neatness of an artist, and, though it was his business in life to cure, he succeeded even better in destruction.

In a tucked-away café at the top of one of the most crooked streets in Beausoleil, where manicurists of the virtuous variety, who pay for their own luncheons, chauffeurs, coiffeurs and shop assistants form the principal clientèle, Peter Hames and Sybil Christian dined together one evening at a corner table. Chemist Charles Dutroyen was buried, his business disposed of, and that vast stock of drugs had disappeared—no one knew exactly where. Père Délous was at liberty and drinks were free for him at every café within reach. Old Mother Hauser, the

proprietress of the Café Régál, had died of heart failure, but as she was reputed to be ninety-three years old, the incident was not to be considered of importance. Several hundreds of exceedingly well-informed people knew the whole story of Chemist Dutroyen's traffic in drugs and his suicide, and of the tragedy in the Café Régál, and were telling their story at every bar between Beausoleil and Nice. To Peter Hames, however, until the night of that dinner, there remained an atmosphere of mystery about the whole business.

"Tell me," he begged, leaning towards his companion, "you weren't in the place at the time—why were you so certain that Dutroyen had killed Toby?"

She smiled.

"I suppose even in that very prolonged visitation I paid you, I couldn't tell you everything," she said—"especially as you kept on interrupting. Listen! I knew that Dutroyen was supplying certain bars, including the Régál, with drugs which the barmen were selling. I knew that Toby had made up his mind to be quit of the whole business and that he had sent for Dutroyen to tell him so. I knew that that man who pretended to be drunk was an accomplice of Dutroyen, there to watch who came and went, and I knew, when he made his clumsy effort to get me out of the way, it was at Dutroyen's instigation. The next morning, I purchased, at Dutroyen's shop, a second-hand leather roll of surgical instruments for home use. One, a long, dagger-like implement, corresponding exactly with the weapon with which Toby was stabbed, was missing. Added to all this, I knew that Dutroyen, whose drug traffic I was out to stop, was a bad man, a murderer at heart more than once. In a court of law, perhaps, it might have been difficult to obtain a verdict against him, but there was quite enough anyhow to warrant an arrest."

"Why did you drag me into it?" he asked bluntly.

"Because," she answered, "for reasons which I may tell you some day, I did not wish to go to the Commissaire of Police myself."

The restaurant was almost deserted. Peter Hames paid the bill and they strolled outside together. A little *voiture* came lumbering up, with the waiter, who had been sent to fetch it, inside.

"You will let me drive you home?" he begged.

She shook her head.

"I will tell you a strange thing," she confided. "There is not a soul in the Principality who knows where I live, or how."

"Then, am I never to see you again?" he asked.

She smiled at him pleasantly enough, but there was no response in her eyes to his own eagerness.

“I have a conviction,” she confessed, “that when either of us has need of the other, something will happen.”

She waved her hand. The *voiture*, in obedience to her gesture, drove off along the crooked street. Peter Hames lit a cigarette and went on his no longer untroubled way.

II

“ANON. £1000.”

If Peter Hames had not chanced to remove his hat and deposit it upon the magazine-strewn table devoted to the use of clients and callers upon Martin's Bank, it is probable that the mystery of the great robbery which was one of the most dramatic shocks the Principality of Monaco had experienced for many years would have gone unsolved. As it was, Hames, standing bareheaded before one of the blackboards, upon which were chalked quotations from the money market of the previous day, had somewhat the air of an official. He found himself courteously accosted by a young man who was a complete stranger to him.

“Can you tell me where I should be likely to find Mr. Pontifex, the manager, and if he is disengaged?” the latter enquired. “I should be glad to see him for a few minutes if possible.”

Peter Hames turned to inspect his questioner—a fair, thin young man, with flaxen hair, curiously sandy complexion, and wearing a rimless monocle. He was correctly dressed in Riviera flannels. His tone was pleasantly modulated and his speech itself rendered almost intriguing by a slight stutter.

“I haven't seen Pontifex for the last quarter of an hour,” Peter Hames replied, “but I fancy he is in his room there. I am not an official of the bank,” he explained, as he noticed the young man's hesitation, “but they don't stand on ceremony here.”

“Thanks very much,” was the amiable rejoinder. “Sorry I made a mistake. I'll go and knock at the door as soon as I've seen the price of Canadian Pacifics.”

Peter Hames pointed to one of the lines upon the blackboard. He noticed, however, that his companion's attention seemed to have wandered. He was looking around the interior of the bank with the air of a man taking meticulous note of trifles under the guise of indifference. Suddenly aware of the other's scrutiny, however, he turned back to the board.

“Two hundred and forty,” he murmured. “Sound stock, but disappointing. Do they close here punctually, do you know?”

“On the stroke. But if you're here they don't throw you out into the street. All the same,” Peter Hames added, glancing at the clock, “if you want to see Pontifex, you had better look him up now. It's five minutes to twelve.”

The young man nodded.

“I'll beard the lion,” he declared. “I don't know why, but I'm always in a funk

with bank managers and dentists.”

He turned away without undue haste, knocked at the door of the private office and was evidently bidden to enter, for he opened it and disappeared, closing it behind him. Peter Hames remained staring after him, a slight frown upon his face. The stranger had somehow or other created a very curious impression. Hames had the feeling that he had been talking to a dummy. There had been no indications of the fact, but he had an idea that the flaxen hair was false, that the eyeglass and stutter were the eccentricities of an amateur actor, the complexion unnatural, the easy manners a pose. He felt that at a single touch they might have all fallen away and disclosed an utterly different personality. It was an idea at which he found himself laughing a moment later. There was nothing in any way definite to justify this queer fancy. The young man, except for his vividly flaxen hair was, in fact, almost of a type—as much of a type in his way as the red-cheeked, bustling millionaire yacht owner, Sir Richard Branksome, who had just come hurrying in.

“God bless my soul, Peter, I’ve run it fine, haven’t I?” the latter exclaimed, as he drew out a capacious pocketbook and laid a satchel upon the table. “I’m going to touch ’em for a bit this morning too.”

“I hear you’re off on Saturday,” Peter Hames observed.

“Off to Athens and Constantinople,” Sir Richard assented. “Afterwards to Port Sudan and overland to Khartoum. I’ve got a dahabeah waiting there for me. If you want any money out of this old bank, you’d better get it quick. I’m going to suck ’em dry. I don’t trust these Eastern banks. I like a full money chest. What do you think of that, eh?”

He held out two cheques. Peter Hames whistled. One was for a million francs; the other for ten thousand pounds.

“You don’t suppose they’ll have that ready for you?” he demanded. “They might have the francs, of course, but they are scarcely likely to have that amount of sterling handy.”

Sir Richard smiled.

“I gave them a week’s notice,” he confided. “I’ll go and collect. Wait for me and we’ll go and have a cocktail together at the Royalty.”

Sir Richard picked up his satchel and turned towards one of the paying grilles. Peter Hames lit a cigarette, and, seated on the edge of one of the writing tables, awaited his friend’s return. He glanced with indifferent curiosity around the place, from which very nearly all the clients had now departed, except for a man supporting his head in his hands and apparently worrying over a letter at the next table. A fussy old lady hurried towards the exit, which she barely reached before the great doors

swung to and the clock struck twelve. Almost at the first chime, Mr. Urquart, the genial sub-manager of the bank, stepped from behind the counter and came hurrying forward to meet his distinguished client, Sir Richard, with a great pile of notes in his hand. He changed them from his right hand to his left to offer the customary greeting to his client. Precisely at that moment several things happened. The man who had been seated at the writing table, with his head bent forward out of sight, suddenly sprang to his feet, disclosing the fact that he was wearing a small black silk mask. A swing of his right arm and a dig in the back, which Urquart, who was an old football player, recognised, and the latter lay gazing at the ceiling with both hands empty. The stranger, who appeared to be a man of average build, but light-footed, and wearing tennis shoes, gave one spring to the lift, flung out the gasping attendant, snatched his keys, and rattled down below. Peter Hames and Sir Richard simultaneously leaped forward, but before they were through the swing gates the lift had gone to its resting place, the emergency door leading into the street under the main entrance had been opened, and the stranger had disappeared. They tore down the steps and tried the front door, only to find it locked. They rushed up the stairs again into the bank.

“Pontifex has a key,” Urquart, who was crawling across the floor, doubled up with agony, called out. “Get down the private way.”

Sir Richard made a dash towards the private office. Peter Hames instead strode over to one of the long windows, flung it open and leaned out. Along the Boulevard des Moulins there was only one car to be seen which could possibly be connected with the robbery—a small two-seater, racing around the corner by Lloyd’s Bank. In it were seated two men, indistinguishable at such a distance, but it was significant that both were bareheaded. Peter Hames turned away to find Sir Richard pummelling at the panels of the office door with one hand and trying the handle with the other.

“Door locked on the inside,” he shouted.

The three other cashiers, having got over their first bewilderment, now came into action. One of them assisted Urquart to his feet; another disappeared into the back regions, made his way by a circuitous route into the private office, and, without waiting even to look around him, unlocked and threw open the door leading into the bank. Seated in his chair, with a vicious-looking gag in his mouth, his arms bound together, and his legs tied to the desk, was Pontifex, the manager, pale and exhausted with his struggles. Opposite him, a significant sight, was the safe, with the door open. Peter Hames, who was accustomed to thinking quickly, wasted no time in demanding useless explanations. He dashed to the door which led into Pontifex’s private house. Here again, however, there was a check. It was locked. Urquart, who, supported by the other two clerks, had been dragged in, drew from his pocket

a Yale key, and flung it across.

"I know the way they went," Peter Hames declared, stooping to pick it up. "Telephone the police and tell them to make for the frontier."

He tore down the stairs, pushing to one side an astonished parlour maid, and heedless of the cries of Mrs. Pontifex from the other staircase. A moment later, he was out in the street and in his two-seater. A *gendarme*, noticing his disturbed appearance, sprang forward.

"Bank robbed!" Peter Hames gasped. "They're making for the frontier."

"*Attendez!*" the man began—

"You go to hell!" Peter Hames interrupted, and dashed off as though he had some idea of seeking the same destination. . . .

Peter Hames did well, inasmuch as he wasted no time in needless enquiries, but drove straight through to Mentone and up the hill to the customs. A civil official detained him scarcely a moment, but as he reached the French passport office, he saw a car crawling away. He shouted madly but ineffectually. The two men—both dressed in linen dusters, motoring caps and glasses—looked around nervously, but appeared to pay no particular attention. They drove their own car to the side of the road and mounted a huge touring Mercedes, with a long bonnet, which was drawn up in the shade of some trees. In less than a minute they were out of sight.

Here perhaps was where Peter Hames failed. In rapid French, he essayed to explain the situation, but no one is so obstinate at times as an official Frenchman, and he made little progress. The law was the law and no person without a passport could cross the frontier. A message was sent to the Italian side. The same reply was received. For half an hour, Peter Hames stormed and argued. At the end of that time, a carload of gendarmes came tearing up behind him and the way to Italy was free. Peter Hames, however, made no attempt to follow the chase. He stood up in his car and cursed in robust Anglo-Saxon every French and every Italian official who had ever been born. After which he sat down, lit a cigarette, and drove back to Monte Carlo.

As he had need of sustenance, he motored straight to the Royalty Bar and found pandemonium. The morning gossip at this fashionable rendezvous usually consisted of mild speculations as to the amount of progress which so and so, the errant husband, was making with so and so, the flirtatious wife, as to the new admirers collected by the famous courtesan just arrived from Paris; fabulous stories as to the winnings and losings of the night before, and sage but somewhat trite observations as to the wisdom of those who had forsaken the grey skies of England for the sunshine of this slightly flamboyant paradise. To-day, however, all was changed. Here was

something well worth talking about. The principal and most popular bank in the Principality had been robbed in daylight by two men, one of whom never even appeared upon the scene. Even though this little world had been cheated of the excitement of bloodshed, the sheer artistry of the thing was thrilling. The lift man was in the hospital, but his injuries were only superficial. Mr. Pontifex had an exceedingly sore jaw and was reported to be locked in a private room of his house with the Commissaire of Police and his doctor. His coadjutor, Urquart, however, formed the centre of one of the little parties, with his arm in a sling, and complaining of pains in the body, but otherwise perfectly willing to demonstrate to any one the particular artifice of jujitsu by which he had been thrown.

Peter Hames was seized upon immediately on his entrance. He was hustled to a chair and surrounded by a curious group of enquirers. He looked from one to the other, a little dazed. Inspiration came to his aid.

“I refuse to answer a single question,” he declared, “until I am served with a double Martini cocktail—dry. I have visited the Italian frontier. I have been in conflict with the Italian soldiery. My throat is parched.”

In an incredibly short space of time, the bribe was offered and accepted. Peter Hames drew a deep sigh of content.

“There is very little I have to tell you,” he confided, toying with his cigarette case but not daring to open it until he had spoken. “I got a line on the fellows, or I thought I did, because I rushed to the window and saw a car with two men in it, who looked to me to be likely birds, racing down the boulevard. I guessed they were off to the frontier, so directly I got clear I followed them. When I arrived there, I was held up, as of course I hadn’t a passport with me. They had just slipped through. I saw them drive away, in fact, on the Italian side, jump into a huge car which was waiting for them, and disappear around the bend. The gendarmes came up five minutes too late. If they’ve ordinary luck and telephone to all stations ahead, they ought to pick them up.”

“What were they like?” some one asked eagerly.

“One of them might have been the man who threw Urquart,” Peter Hames reported, a little doubtfully. “The other I couldn’t even catch a glimpse of. He was a smaller man and he seemed the more terrified of the two. He was up into the tonneau of the big car like a rat and he never appeared again. . . . I say, let me ask a question now. What did the young man who got into Pontifex’s office clear up?”

“Half a million dollars’ worth of American bearer bonds,” was the portentous response. “Pontifex hadn’t had them in the safe an hour.”

“Any other news from this end?” Peter Hames enquired.

“How could there be?” one of the party rejoined. “You saw the last of the robbers trekking through Italy.”

“If they were the robbers,” Peter Hames meditated.

Sir Richard came stalking across the little square of garden. His complexion was more rubicund than ever. He had drunk a great many cocktails, but the excitement of the morning had rendered him impervious to their subtle effect.

“So there you are, young fellow!” he greeted Hames. “Where’s my money?”

“No luck,” was the regretful reply. “I caught up with the two men I was after, though. I watched them drive off, but I was on the wrong side of the frontier.”

Sir Richard lifted his hat and wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

“Gad!” he exclaimed. “That was a close shave! Do you realise, you fellows, that if Urquart hadn’t stopped to shake hands with me, those notes would have been in my possession, and then I should have been the loser—a million francs and ten thousand pounds! Another few seconds and I should have been the poor victim.”

“Not much choice between you and Martin’s Bank, so far as that is concerned,” a somewhat pessimistic old general, who had lost most of his savings at the Casino, muttered. “You could both of you have afforded it.”

“Martin’s Bank could afford it a great deal better than I could,” Sir Richard declared. “I feel like a thank-offering. Gentlemen, the waiter is here. I have been spared the loss of a million francs and ten thousand pounds. Order anything in the world you fancy.”

So it went on, but after a time Peter Hames backed away towards the steps. As he elbowed his passage through a little crowd, he suddenly felt a piece of paper thrust into his hand. He looked sharply around. There was no one with whom he could connect the action. At the first turn of the steps, he paused and unrolled the half sheet of notepaper. There were a few words scrawled in pencil:

“Please dine with me at the same place at eight o’clock to-night.”

There was no signature nor any address, and the handwriting was unknown to him. Nevertheless, Peter Hames descended the rest of the steps with a smile upon his lips.

It was Sybil Christian who handed him his cocktail that night in the bourgeois little restaurant at the end of the shabby street. She passed him also the menu which she had written out herself. Somehow Peter Hames was disappointed. He would have preferred Anna of the Café Régál, and a trifle more humanity. Sybil was

exquisite, but there was a faintly cynical flutter about her eyelids and her curving mouth.

“After your strenuous day,” she said, “you deserve even better food than they can offer you here. Still, they have done their best, and you perceive that we are permitted to drink champagne.”

“Food is a good thing,” he replied; “champagne is an excellent drink, but more than anything else in the world I was looking forward to seeing you again.”

She sipped her consommé without change of expression.

“Don’t begin by disappointing me,” she begged. “We are above that—you and I. We have our one consuming hobby which we happen to share and which is more interesting than any sort of philandering folly.”

“I am no philanderer,” he declared indignantly.

“Don’t you often pose as one?” she rejoined. “Now be serious. Tell me—as man to woman—why did you turn back from the frontier and abandon the chase?”

His expression was one of blank bewilderment.

“What else could I do?” he demanded. “I have more respect for the Italians than I had. I do not think that any single man could bluff or fight his way across that frontier. They address you with loaded rifles, those *carabinieri*. I have no fancy for being on the wrong side of an argument with a man who carries a loaded gun.”

“So you watched the prey escape,” she reflected. “You could think of no arguments, no words, to melt those uniformed puppets? You stood like a good little boy, obeyed orders, and watched the criminals drive off to safety.”

“I am not of the police,” he reminded her. “The affair was not mine. The gendarmes arrived even whilst I was there. It was for them to beg or fight their way through. They could learn the truth as easily as I.”

“Good fish, this,” she remarked, sampling her salmon trout.

“Excellent,” he agreed.

“With it,” she confided, “I have ordered half a bottle of this hock. Try it. I believe it is good. The champagne is to follow.”

“I admire your taste,” he applauded. “*Liebfraumilch* ’21—you have given me of the best. Let us talk of food and wine. No fish, for instance, has such curious habits as the salmon.”

“Thank you,” she said coldly. “I did not order you an expensive dinner to discuss the domestic habits of a fish. I wish to talk about the robbery.”

“You could scarcely choose,” he told her, “a more fascinating subject. Notwithstanding what you seem to consider my cowardice at the frontier, the affair on the side of the criminals, at any rate, was a triumph in technique. A bank robbery

without a shot fired, no roystering villains, no pale-faced thugs shooting holes into defenceless citizens. A huge effort at humour, that is what it might have seemed, with Sir Richard chuckling himself into an apoplectic fit because by a matter of two seconds the bank lost the money, and not he. That vision, too, of Pontifex tied to a chair and Urquart kicking his heels upon the floor. Monte Carlo, when it has got over the shock, will laugh at this for years.”

“I am a woman and I am deficient in a sense of humour,” she declared. “My mind is still engrossed with the details of this amazing outrage. Now tell me what was your honest opinion of the young man whom you directed to Mr. Pontifex’s room?”

He was a little taken aback. It was a matter to which he had already given considerable thought.

“How the devil did you know I did that?” he demanded. “You weren’t there.”

“When anything happens in Monte Carlo,” she explained calmly, “I am always there.”

He brooded for a moment. Then he remembered that there had been only three other persons in the room—Urquart, the lift man and Sir Richard. He gave his attention to the duck which was just being served.

“My dear hostess,” he protested, “I am rather weary of this robbery. The rascals are either altogether too clever for us or else they are well away over the frontier, and it rests between the gendarmes who are following them and themselves whether they are caught. Let us talk about roast duck. Apple sauce, I see, too. You are a heavenly provider.”

“Of food,” she remarked drily, “and you a stingy one of information.”

“Are you ambitious,” he asked, “to bring to justice the plunderers of Martin’s Bank?”

She watched the *maître d’hôtel* carve the duck. After the service, she leaned forward.

“I think it ought to be done,” she acknowledged, “and you seem—pardon me—a little lukewarm in the matter.”

“Lukewarm?” he remonstrated. “I was the first to see them in the car and realise that they were off to the frontier. If I had happened to have my passport in my pocket, I should probably have caught them. When the gendarmes arrived, the matter naturally rested with them. We can’t be always butting in, in a foreign country. Except that their local detective system is slow and clumsy, the French aren’t so bad at clearing up matters of this sort.”

“The commissaire is a friend of yours, isn’t he?” she asked, a little abruptly.

“I know him.”

“Will you do something for me?”

“I will do anything in the world for the hostess who has provided me with such a dinner,” he assented. “And,” he went on, leaning across the table, and lowering his voice—

“That will do,” she interrupted. “Please go to the telephone, ring up the Gendarmerie and ask if any arrest has been made.”

Peter Hames rose to his feet at once, executed his commission, and returned almost immediately.

“No arrest has been made,” he reported, “but the Italian and French police are both watching two men at San Remo.”

Her face remained inscrutable, but he fancied that her lips twitched as though with the desire to smile.

“I suppose,” she reflected, “that there is no doubt that those two men who escaped across the frontier were the robbers?”

“Ah!” he murmured. “I wonder!”

She showed some faint signs of irritation.

“Do you know, I believe that you’re bluffing me all the time,” she declared. “I believe that you were only bluffing when you followed those two men. You have something else in your mind.”

Peter Hames closed up the matter finally.

“Miss Sybil Christian,” he said firmly, “you are making a mistake. As a sleuth hound, I am entirely at fault. I don’t know which way to turn. I will confess that I have lost a little faith in those two men who crossed the frontier. They were lacking in finesse for artists who had brought off so wonderful a coup. Nevertheless, I don’t know where else to look for the criminals.”

She toyed with her wine, leaning back in her chair and studying him thoughtfully. Suddenly she broke away from the subject.

“Why are you so resplendent to-night?” she asked, looking across at his spotless white waistcoat, with onyx buttons matching his links. “Was this all in honour of a poor little incognito at a Beausoleil restaurant?”

“Not entirely. There’s old Branksome’s farewell dance to-night, you know, on the yacht. I haven’t heard of his putting it off.”

She watched the wine being poured into her glass.

“I had no idea that you were such a frivolous person,” she observed.

“I don’t go to dances if I can help it,” he admitted. “I have known old Branksome for a long time, though.”

She called for the bill, waving aside his protestations.

“Glad you reminded me about the dance,” she said. “I must go back and change.”

“You’re not going?” he exclaimed. “You told me you went nowhere.”

“I’m like you—one has to make exceptions,” she rejoined. “Sir Richard has been very kind to a brother of mine who is delicate. He is in charge of the wireless on board.”

“Couldn’t I take you then?” he suggested.

She counted her change and bestowed a liberal tip upon the waiter.

“I am going with a party,” she explained.

“I am to be allowed to dance with you, I hope?” he ventured.

She remained silent for several moments. He felt an impulse almost of anger. She saw his expression cloud over and patted the back of his hand as she rose to her feet.

“Leave that to me,” she begged. “Don’t be offended if I seem to have no manners. Let them call me a carriage, please.”

He obeyed without a word.

“Thank you very much for an excellent dinner,” he said, as he handed her into the *voiture*.

She looked at him, inviting a smile. His eyes were set, and remote. She shrugged her shoulders and waved the man on with a little laugh.

“Young Christian,” Sir Richard repeated, as he shook hands with his early guest. “Yes, he’s my Marconi man. A very decent fellow, but delicate. Crazy about his job. He’s been tinkering with his instruments all day, but I think he’s about now. Got a sister coming to-night with Lady Fakenham’s party. Excuse me, old chap.”

“No news, I suppose?” Hames enquired of his departing host.

“They’re sitting round ’em, all right,” Sir Richard called back—“somewhere between Bordighera and San Remo, I think. They’ll make an arrest as soon as they get the papers.”

Peter Hames strolled on to the dancing deck and did his duty for half an hour. Afterwards he mounted the ladder and tapped at the door of the Marconi room. A young man, pale, but of pleasant appearance, admitted him.

“Your name Christian?” the visitor greeted him.

The other nodded. He had evidently been in the act of completing his toilette.

“I know your sister slightly,” Hames explained. “Thought I’d look you up. Aren’t you coming down to dance?”

“Afraid I’ll have to,” the young man admitted. “Sybil’s turning up presently and

some other people I know. Mind waiting whilst I tie my tie? Take a pew.”

Peter Hames subsided into a chair. He glanced curiously at the titles of the books on the shelf by his side, and with even greater curiosity at a college photograph upon the wall. A pair of huge dumbbells upon the dressing table also attracted his attention.

“You’ve had a busy day, I hear, tinkering with your instalment,” he remarked.

“For a millionaire,” young Christian commented, “Sir Richard’s a trifle stingy in his instruments here. Pretty poor lot. I’ve taken one down completely to-day.”

“I suppose you like your job?”

“The only thing I’m fit for. I have to live at sea and I was always fond of this sort of thing, anyway.”

“How long is Sir Richard going to keep this show going to-night?” Peter Hames asked.

“Lights out at one o’clock,” was the cheerful reply. “We shall just have time for an hour at the Sporting Club. I’m ready now, if you are,” he added, turning around and slipping on his coat.

They descended together and exchanged amenities in the bar. Afterwards, Peter Hames turned towards the gangway.

“You’re not going!” his companion exclaimed.

“Only for half an hour. We’ll go up to the Sporting Club together later, if you like.”

“Right-o,” the young man assented, as he strolled off in the direction of the music.

Peter Hames, an hour or so later, felt a light touch upon his shoulder. One of the yacht’s officers, who was acting as Master of Ceremonies, addressed him.

“If you happen to be free for a few minutes, sir,” he said, “a young lady over there, Miss Christian, would like to have you presented to her.”

Peter Hames swung along the deck by the side of his companion. He felt himself unreasonably exhilarated. For hours he had been nursing a secret resentment, which disappeared finally as she rose to dance with him.

“Were you surprised?” she asked.

“I was going away in a few minutes, feeling very hurt,” he told her.

She frowned thoughtfully.

“You shouldn’t have felt like that,” she remonstrated. “You must know that there were reasons. Even now that you are acquainted with Miss Sybil Christian, that very improper young woman of Beausoleil is and must remain a stranger to you.”

“You might have trusted me,” he complained.

“I shall and I do,” she replied. “What a relief to have spent even a few seconds with some one who hasn’t told me that the bank has offered a thousand pounds’ reward for the return of their money.”

“You can’t exactly blame the chatterboxes,” he observed. “As a matter of fact, though, I hadn’t heard about the reward.”

“You’re still interested in the affair, though?”

“Yes, aren’t you?” he rejoined.

There had been a momentary pause in the music. It recommenced and they danced in silence. She walked with him into the saloon afterwards and they drank a glass of champagne.

“What was it you asked me,” she reflected, “just before we began to dance again? Oh, I remember—whether I wasn’t interested in the bank robbery. Of course I am. I share your tastes, you know. I suppose we shall be driven to talk about it. Have you any fresh theories?”

“There doesn’t seem room for any, does there?” he answered, a little evasively. “One hears that the two men are run to earth in Italy and will be arrested directly the necessary authority comes along.”

“You are hopelessly out of date,” she told him. “The two men at San Remo have been questioned and were easily able to prove that they had nothing whatever to do with the affair. The gendarmes returned this afternoon.”

He sipped his wine thoughtfully, conscious that she was watching him all the time.

“Then they will have to begin all over again,” he remarked. “How they must curse me for having led them off on a false scent!”

A partner found her out and claimed a dance. She rose to her feet reluctantly.

“Are you going to join in the hunt again?” she asked, looking into his eyes.

“Perhaps a partnership?” he suggested.

She shook her head.

“I am like you,” she said. “I prefer to work alone.”

A sudden change took place in the weather before the dance was over. A drifting rain rolled in from the sea, and, though a certain amount of preparation had been made against anything of the sort, the decks were soon damp and uncomfortable. People began to leave, in a thin stream at first, and afterwards in a procession. Amongst the tail-enders, Peter Hames caught up with young Christian.

“Sporting Club?” he asked, as the two fell into step on the quay.

The young man nodded.

“I want some of my money back from last night,” he confided. “I am playing for

a friend too, so I can afford the big table.”

“High play there!”

“I’m really playing for three of us. I didn’t come to any serious harm last night and I feel like winning to-night.”

Peter Hames drew a pipe from his pocket and began to fill it. A little abruptly, he turned on one side and sought the shelter of a buttress.

“Go on. I’ll catch you up in a minute,” he called out to his companion.

The latter nodded and continued his way. Peter Hames had difficulty. The air was damp and his place of shelter draughty. Just as he succeeded in lighting his pipe, however, he heard a shout from the darkness and the sound of a fall. A man came running towards him. Young Christian called out:

“Stop him, Hames! Stop that fellow! He tried to rob me.”

Peter Hames watched the man come lumbering on, but if he made any effort to interfere with his progress it was a very half-hearted one. He stood for a moment in his way with outstretched hands, but the man easily dodged him.

“Why did you let the fellow go?” Christian demanded.

“Too quick for me, for one thing,” was the indifferent reply. “What happened?”

“He came out from behind that wall there,” the young man explained, in some excitement, “and snatched at my coat, trying to get my pocketbook.”

“Did he get it?”

“No, fortunately he slipped on the pavement there and went over—a purler. Seems to me you might have pulled him up, though.”

“Sorry I didn’t quite understand that it was as serious as that,” Hames apologised. “They’re pretty dangerous to tackle, these night birds.”

They climbed the steps and crossed the road to the Sporting Club, Christian’s opinion of his companion having undergone a definite change. Nevertheless, he accepted his invitation to have a drink at the bar. They were almost alone, as the hour was late, and the roulette tables closed. A man, seated on a stool at the further end, however, in obedience to a gesture of invitation from Hames, joined them. He was a broad-shouldered, strong-featured Frenchman of swarthy complexion and flashing brown eyes. At the moment, however, he seemed singularly nervous.

“Christian,” Hames said, “I want to introduce you to an old acquaintance of mine, who has lately come to Nice to open a Boxing and Sporting Academy. Mr. Christian—Monsieur Paul Redoux.”

The colour slowly left the young man’s face. He looked at Hames and he was afraid.

“You two should be interested in each other,” the latter continued. “Monsieur

Redoux, I believe, commenced life on the stage, and you, Christian, I noticed from that framed photograph in your room, were once a member of the Thespian Society at Cambridge. Nothing like an early start in amateur theatricals to give you a good grounding in the art of making-up. You don't remember me, Monsieur Redoux," Peter Hames went on, turning towards him, "but I came to you seven years ago when you taught me that trick of throwing a man on his back. You taught it to young Christian too. I saw him do it to a man I hired to try to steal his pocketbook a few minutes ago. Yes, you ought to be interested in each other," he continued meditatively. "Christian here speaks of being half an invalid, but I observed in his room he uses the same weight dumbbells as I do, and you've only to shake hands with him to know what sort of a grip he's got. But perhaps, after all, this introduction is unnecessary. Some of those afternoon dashes of yours, Christian, on your motor bicycle, may have led you towards Nice and Monsieur Redoux's Academy."

"We have had quite enough," Christian gasped. "I saw you there, in the distance this afternoon, but I never dreamed what you were up to. What are you going to do?"

"We are all going to have one long drink together," Hames announced, summoning the barman, "and afterwards we are going in the corner there, to talk business."

At a quarter to twelve the next morning, Peter Hames strolled into the bank, and, finding the manager disengaged, took him by the arm and led him into his office.

"Pontifex," he asked, "what would be your attitude, supposing some anonymous person returned to you that ten thousand pounds in Bank of England notes, a million of francs, and a bundle of bonds?"

"Speak plainly," Pontifex begged.

"What I mean then is this," Peter Hames said. "You have offered a thousand pounds' reward, not for the apprehension of the robbers, I notice, but for a return of the money. If the money and the bonds are forthcoming, will you sit tight with the money, and keep a stiff lip to the police?"

"I should damn well say we would," Pontifex agreed emphatically.

Peter Hames threw a brown paper package, which he had been carrying, on to the table, and cut the strings.

"Count 'em out," he enjoined. "They are all there. No questions, mind. As a matter of fact, I picked them up in the street."

Peter Hames climbed the steps to the Royalty Bar as the clock struck twelve.

As usual, the place was crowded. This time, a new form of excitement prevailed. Before he had even reached a table, several young women bore down upon him. Sybil, however, brushed them lightly to one side.

“This is my pet victim,” she insisted, producing a square card, decorated with ribbons. “You know what you’re in for, I suppose, Mr. Hames?”

“Not the slightest idea.”

“It’s collection day for the English and American Hospital.”

She presented the card. He looked down at the list of names. Then he felt in his waistcoat pocket and produced a slip of paper.

“You relieve me,” he confided, “of an embarrassment.”

She unfolded it, carelessly enough. Then, as she looked at the draft, the colour slowly faded from her cheeks. For the first time during his acquaintance with her, she lost her self-possession. He moved his position, to shut her out from view of the others, and she sank into the chair he brought forward. There was a light of almost terrible enquiry in her eyes as they sought his.

“The whole affair is wonderfully arranged,” he said, smiling and dropping his voice a little. “The bank have their money—and no questions asked. The matter is closed and your hospital is a thousand pounds better off.”

She looked at him mistily.

“And I have gained a wonderful friend!”

He took the chair by her side and called for a waiter.

“You didn’t know; I am convinced of that,” he assured her, after he had given an order.

“There was a terrible, haunting guess in my brain all the time,” she whispered.

“The thousand pounds on your card,” he suggested, as they went off to lunch a few minutes later, “had better be ‘anon.’”

III THE QUARREL

With vehement gestures and shaking voice, Vittorio—Peter Hames' almost too perfect butler—sought out his master in the studio of his hillside villa and burst into a stream of agonised words.

“But out in the road, Monsieur—they fight like madmen. They kill one another.”

“Those roadmen fighting again? Well, why didn't you stop them?” Peter Hames queried, knocking out the ashes from his pipe.

Vittorio's gesture of protest was almost sufficient without words.

“One is of a huge size, Monsieur,” he announced, “and neither of them are roadmen. If Monsieur does not wish to interfere, perhaps with a revolver he could frighten them.”

Peter Hames hurried out, followed at a respectable distance by Vittorio, whose firm intention it was to watch what might happen from behind the iron gates. The former quickened his pace as, over the low wall, he saw the swaying figures of the combatants. For once Vittorio had not exaggerated. The two men—one a head and a half taller than the other—struggling now in close grip, were savagely in earnest. Blood was streaming from the faces of both of them; the dust of the road was churned up by their straining feet. The smaller man had evidently been down once, and, although he was fighting the more fiercely of the two, he was obviously on the point of exhaustion. Peter Hames strode across the road, seized his antagonist by the collar, and dragged him back.

“You've had enough of this, you two,” he declared. “Break away! Do you hear?”

The answer was a vicious left-hand jab, which Peter Hames only escaped by a quick leap to one side. He retained his hold, however.

“You've both had all that's good for you,” he repeated firmly. “Besides,” he added to his captive, “you're big enough to kill that man.”

“I'm going to when I get my wind again,” was the furious retort.

The threatened combatant stumbled to the low wall which protected the garden of the villa. He sat down and buried his face in his hands. Suddenly, Hames, looking from one to the other, realised that they both belonged—externally, at any rate—to his own class. He had expected to find a fight between two of the peasants of the district, but, notwithstanding his torn raiment and disfigured face, he recognised the

man seated upon the wall as a well-known figure in the Principality—a retired English soldier of some distinction. His opponent, although something about him seemed vaguely familiar, was a stranger, but his clothes and linen, crumpled though they were, were of the best. Peter released the latter, and, keeping between the two, addressed the man with whom he had some acquaintance.

“What the mischief’s all this about, Colonel?” he asked.

The pathetic figure upon the wall looked up wearily. There was something very like tears in his eyes.

“I can’t kill him,” he lamented. “Not like this, anyhow. I shall kill him before long, but every day he lives is a day of agony.”

The younger man stole forward.

“So you’re going to kill me, are you?” he demanded.

“You’ll be lucky if you live for a week,” replied the Colonel. “I’m afraid,” he added, turning to his rescuer, “you’ll have to leave us alone, Hames. It’s not your affair.”

His opponent approached, swinging one arm viciously—a clean-shaven, rather full-faced young fellow, well over six feet and broadly built.

“Out of the way!” he shouted.

Peter Hames made no movement.

“Look here,” he insisted, “listen to me for one moment. This fight has gone far enough and has got to stop. If you come a step nearer, I shall knock you down, and—listen—I don’t want to butt in without giving you a word of warning—I held the championship for Harvard for two years, and I am in pretty good training at the present moment. You seem to be fairly well knocked about already, but you’re only asking for trouble if you come any nearer to me.”

“You’re that damned painter fellow, Hames,” the young man muttered, looking him up and down.

“You have the advantage of me, but you’ll be staring at the sky in another minute if you are not careful.”

“What the hell do you want to interfere for, at all? It’s not your business.”

“Isn’t it?” Peter Hames rejoined. “Well, I’m making it mine. When I see a youngster of your size attacking an older man, a head and a half shorter, I have something to say. What I suggest,” he continued, turning to both of them, “is that you should come into my villa here, have a wash and brush up, and shake hands over a drink.”

Whatever the nature of their hate may have been, it was at least mutual. Neither of them relaxed in the slightest degree.

“You are doubtless one of these kind-hearted persons,” the Colonel said coldly, “who interfere in matters concerning which you know nothing. I am temporarily without the means of killing him, and at the moment my physical strength is not enough. All the same, before long, if I have to drag him from under the skirts of one of his verminous womenkind, I shall kill him.”

The threatened man flinched.

“You see,” he cried, turning to Hames, “that is what he’s out for—murder. I must protect myself. Stand away whilst I make an end of him.”

“I shall do nothing of the sort,” was the prompt retort. “You know what will happen to you if you touch him.”

“What about him then? You heard what he said he was going to do to me?”

“Men say more than they mean at times like this,” Peter Hames soothed him. “One thing I can assure you of, and that is, whatever may happen to you, Colonel Rawson will never shoot you in the back.”

“Why should I wait to give him the advantage of a weapon?” the other demanded angrily. “I’ve got him beaten now. I’m going to put him out of the way.”

“You’ll get the worst thrashing of your life if you talk like that,” Hames warned him. “I’m going to take Colonel Rawson into my villa and give him a drink. You can come too if you like.”

“You leave us alone to settle our own affairs,” was the surly reply. “I don’t want to come inside your damned villa and I don’t want a drink.”

Peter Hames helped the Colonel to his feet, took him by the arm, and led him to the gate, which he pushed open. Then he turned around to the other man, who was lingering in the rear.

“Are you coming in too?” he invited.

It was lucky for Peter Hames that he turned around as he spoke. The young man had made a sudden dive down to the ground, caught up a huge jagged flint lying with a pile of others for manipulation by the roadmenders, and, with it protruding from his hand, made a leap towards his adversaries. Hames, displaying an unexpectedly long reach, leaned forward, and caught him a lightning-like blow on the point of his jaw. He swayed, staggered, and the stone dropped from his fingers. Slowly he collapsed on to the pavement. The Colonel stood looking down at him with the gleam in his eyes of that awful lust to kill which flares up in a human being sometimes once in a lifetime.

“Blasted toad!” he muttered savagely. “He’s barely thirty years old. If he lives to be sixty, every day will be a day of evil.”

Peter Hames threw open the garden gate and ushered in his guest. Vittorio, who

had been watching from a safe distance, at once disclosed himself.

“Look after this gentleman, Vittorio,” his master enjoined. “Take him to the lavatory first and give him a stiff whisky and soda. Here, let me help you, sir, as far as the door,” he went on, suddenly aware that his companion was retaining consciousness only with the greatest effort. “We’ll have the drink first, Vittorio. Hurry away and get it.”

They reached a divan, on to which the fainting man sank with a groan of relief. Within a few seconds, Vittorio was back again with a whisky and soda upon a tray. Colonel Rawson took a long gulp from the tumbler which his host handed to him and became almost at once a changed man.

“What became of—Salvador?” he asked a moment or two later. “I went queer in the head as we were coming through the gate. I can’t remember.”

“If you mean the young man with whom you were fighting,” Peter Hames replied, “he came too near me and he is lying in the road. Now, if you’ll step into the lavatory with Vittorio and get cleaned up a little, I’ll go and look after him.”

Rawson rose to his feet, and, leaning on the butler’s arm, disappeared, carrying his refilled tumbler in the other hand. Peter Hames turned back to the gate, passed out into the road, and looked about in not unnatural astonishment, for neither on the road itself, nor in the pathway, nor on the empty rock-strewn hillside opposite could he see the slightest sign of the man whom he had knocked out. Colonel Rawson’s enemy had disappeared.

The affair savoured of the marvellous. Peter Hames found it impossible to believe the evidence of his own eyes. He crossed the road and examined the country from the other side. He clambered a little up the slope, looking around him all the time warily. He walked to the bend of the road and back, without sight of any human being save a carload of returning golfers. Then he attempted some amateur detective work. He examined the dusty road in front of the villa, near the heap of flints. There were marks of a car having gone down the hill recently and having stopped close to the spot where his late assailant had been lying. There were marks, too, where it had been restarted. Peter Hames shrugged his shoulders. After all, it was perhaps for the best that these two men should be separated. He returned to the villa, taking the precaution to lock the wooden gate on the inside. He found Vittorio waiting for him in the hall.

“What have you done with the gentleman?” he asked.

Vittorio was once more all excitement.

“He washed his hands, sir, bathed his face, finished his whisky and soda, and insisted upon leaving by the path which leads from the orchard down to the lower

road. He would not even stay for an act of politeness. 'Tell your master,' he said, 'we shall meet again.' He was hoping to be able to hire a car at La Turbie, I think."

Peter Hames mixed himself a drink and turned to go back to his work.

"The next time, Vittorio," he enjoined, "you see two men fighting outside the villa ___"

"Have no fear, sir," the man interrupted vehemently. "I shall leave them alone, if they kill themselves. *Ingrats!*"

"At last!" Peter Hames sighed, as he mounted a stool at the Café Régal and ensconced himself upon it.

Mademoiselle Anna, who was seated by his side, paused in the use of her lipstick, closed her shabby little vanity case, and looked at him a trifle insolently.

"What do you mean by 'at last'?"

"I mean that I have been coming here three or four times a week for a month without catching a glimpse of you. To-day you are here."

She smiled—a cleverly forced gesture of her presumed profession.

"How flattering!" she murmured. "And now that you have found me?"

He ordered a drink, and glanced enquiringly towards her. She shook her head.

"I take nothing but syrups here," she explained. "They don't lend themselves very well to conviviality, but they are safe. What did you want to say to me?"

"Several things. First of all, when can we dine again?"

"I am not so sure that it is good for my resolutions to dine with you," she demurred. "My double life is difficult enough at times."

"Does it amuse you so much?" he asked.

"It has points," she acknowledged.

"Yesterday," he confided, "in the *Daily Mail* I read about a grand dinner given by some noble lady at her château, and amongst the list of the guests I saw your name and the name of Colonel Rawson."

She looked at him now with a different expression in her face.

"Why do you couple him with me?" she enquired. "There were twenty other guests."

"Colonel Rawson happens to be concerned in a queer little incident which took place outside my villa the other day. The affair might almost be called mysterious. The solving of mysteries is the passion of your life. When I saw your two names together, it seemed to me a coincidence."

"Tell me of the affair outside your villa?" she begged.

He told her of the fight and of the disappearance of the two combatants. She

listened without moving a muscle of her face, but he knew her well enough by now to realise that she was interested.

“Well?” she asked, when he had finished.

He shrugged his shoulders.

“The incident seemed to me to have singular points,” he said. “I wondered whether you knew anything about it.”

She fitted another cigarette into her tube, lit it, and smoked thoughtfully.

“Yes, I know a little about the affair,” she admitted. “You have been very frank with me. I will return the compliment. You want to know what the quarrel was about, I suppose, and what has happened to both of them since?”

“I don’t even know who the other man was,” he confided.

She raised her eyebrows.

“I am surprised at that,” she observed. “I should have thought that you would have found the affair worth following up.”

“How could I?” he pointed out. “Rawson treated me discourteously enough. He just nods when we meet and has never even apologised for leaving my house without a word of acknowledgment. From the other man I scarcely expected civilities, because I hit him very hard, but somehow I thought I should have heard from him again.”

“There is a humorous side to this episode,” she volunteered, “and because I like you very much, Mr. Peter Hames, because I think you are a sportsman, and because I like being with you occasionally, I shall take a slight risk and ask you to dine with me at the Café de France to-night at half-past eight. The humorous side of it I will explain then. You will see both the combatants in this Homeric struggle—who seem, by-the-by, to have treated you rather badly—and I think I can promise you, at any rate, a smile.”

“To dine with you will be happiness without anything else,” he said boldly.

“You mustn’t take too much for granted,” she warned him, with some asperity in her tone. “I have nothing to promise you except a dinner, for which you will probably pay, but I can perhaps satisfy your curiosity concerning that extraordinary fight. I think even fate owes it to you that you learn the sequel. Whether you will be in at the death, I don’t know. We shall see.”

“May I fetch you from anywhere?” he asked, as he saw her preparing to slip from her stool.

She glanced deprecatingly at him.

“You know very well that you may not,” she replied. “The day you discover my address will be an unfortunate one for you if you really value our acquaintance.”

“I value our acquaintance,” he affirmed, “because I trust that it may lead to the gates of friendship, and I shall value our friendship when you may condescend to bestow it upon me, because I trust that that will lead—”

She flitted away with a little backward gesture of reproof. He watched the swing doors close and his sentence remained unfinished.

The Café de France was moderately well filled when they took their places at nine o'clock that evening, at a table which Sybil had insisted upon engaging herself. From the first, Peter Hames' interest in that extraordinary combat, which had taken place in the road outside his villa, was requickened, for the reason that, only a few yards away from them, on the edge of the dancing floor, Colonel Rawson was seated at a small table alone, dressed with precise care, severe, and with all trace of his wounds effaced; whilst, exactly opposite, on the other side of the room, at a more retired table, two young men were seated, the face of one of whom was instantly familiar. Hames gave a little start.

“Why, over there, with the dancing professional,” he pointed out, “face to face with Rawson, is the man with whom he was fighting!”

She nodded.

“I thought you'd recognise him,” she remarked. “He also is a dancing professional and a very well-known one.”

“Tell me some more about them, please,” he begged. “Remember, I know nothing. I have been treated, I think, a little unfairly. I saved Rawson from being battered to death, anyway, and I thought he might have looked me up to explain his sudden flight. He not only hasn't been near me, but when I saw him in the Hôtel de France bar the other day, he just nodded and moved away. I thought I'd rather played the Good Samaritan.”

“So you had,” she assured him. “But Colonel Rawson, on one subject at any rate, these days, is crazy. Until that is dealt with, I don't think he'll be much use to any one.”

“What's the idea of his patronising this restaurant at all, if he hates the young man so terribly?” Peter Hames asked.

She hesitated.

“I don't know quite everything,” she admitted—“not as much as I hoped to—but I can tell you this. Colonel Rawson has engaged that table for every evening and he never misses. He has declared, and I am certain that he means to keep his word, that if that young man—whose name, by-the-by, is Donald Salvador—attempts to dance with any one here except the professional *danseuse*, he will shoot him on

sight.”

Peter Hames whistled softly to himself.

“The idea being to drive him out of the place, I suppose.”

“You see he was getting, if one may believe gossip, very large sums from some of his clients for dancing. For the last few days, he hasn’t dared leave his seat. He dances with the little girl professional and if any one sends for him he has to make some excuse. At twelve o’clock Colonel Rawson moves on to the Carlton, in case Salvador should go there. He behaves in exactly the same way and exactly the same thing happens. For a week now, Salvador, who is, amongst the old ladies here, at any rate, the most popular and adored of the professional dancers, hasn’t earned a penny.”

Peter Hames leaned back in his chair and laughed.

“It is damned funny,” he muttered.

The service of dinner continued. In due course the orchestra, which had been playing more serious selections, changed over to jazz music. The other professional at once rose and approached a client. Salvador, with a wicked glance at his enemy, followed suit by bringing one of the professional *danseuses* on to the floor. Peter Hames nodded in full appreciation of the situation as he watched.

“I must say one thing, I never saw a man dance like that before,” he confessed.

“That’s rather the point,” Sybil observed. “He is the most marvellous performer that any one has ever seen here. He has no manners to speak of and his good looks are of a questionable type, but I should think no one in the world has ever danced this ordinary stuff better.”

Peter Hames watched the young man who was rapidly becoming his *bête noir* closely. The latter was well over six feet, with pallid, puffy cheeks, dark eyes which were well enough, but insignificant features. His sleek black hair was brushed back from his forehead in the fashion of the moment and he grew very short side whiskers. He glanced once towards them and his expression was venomous.

“The fun will begin presently,” Sybil remarked coolly. “Of course, I don’t suppose there’s a soul understands the situation in this place except you and me, but, although we are so near tragedy the whole of the time, one can’t help appreciating the other side of it. Look, down there is old Mrs. Robinson. She comes from Leeds, her husband was a millionaire, and she would be willing at the present moment to give Salvador a *mille* if he would dance with her half a dozen times. Salvador would be uncommonly glad of the *mille*, for, like all his class, he’s pretty extravagant, but, so far, he has valued his skin too much.”

“How long have you known all about this?” Peter Hames asked.

She shook her head. "The question remains unanswered."

"Well, can you tell me why this virulent hatred?"

She shook her head again.

"I can tell you nothing for the moment. If the affair develops, as I fear it may, every one will know the whole story. Until then, I am very much afraid that there is nothing to do. I am always trying," she added thoughtfully, "to hit upon some plan to save Colonel Rawson, and if I see the slightest hope I shall probably ask you to help me. Watch! Mrs. Robinson has sent across to Salvador."

A *maître d'hôtel* had approached the table at which Salvador was seated. He evidently delivered a message. The dancing professional shook his head. The *maître d'hôtel* turned to the manager. There was a brief discussion between the two and the latter himself moved over to the table. A short argument ensued. Afterwards, Salvador, very unwillingly, rose to his feet. He crossed the room towards where Mrs. Robinson was seated, and as he did so Colonel Rawson's right hand slid into the pocket of his dinner jacket. A steely light flashed into his eyes. One could almost see him tensing himself for the aim, imagine the craving of that blood lust in his veins. Nothing was to happen, however. After two or three minutes' conversation, which was obviously composed on Salvador's part of profuse apologies, he bowed and returned to his place, leaving a very disappointed lady behind. He did his best to walk indifferently, but it was easy to see that he was furiously angry. He was biting his lip and there was a dull streak of colour in his cheek. He shot one more vicious glance towards Colonel Rawson and simultaneously the latter's expression of cold indifference deserted him. He smiled quietly, whole-heartedly, but murderously.

"An affair of this kind," Peter Hames confessed, "gives me a sort of mental indigestion. I am afflicted with a curiosity which is eating into my very existence. I am asking myself all the time what could be the cause of this quarrel between an elderly and puritanical English soldier, and a gigolo?"

"I admit that my silence is rather hard upon you," she conceded, "especially since you've told me about the fight. Would a dance be any compensation?"

He rose promptly and, with Sybil willing and anxious to continue dancing, the affair of Colonel Rawson and the professional became of less importance. Upon several occasions, Salvador was sent for from different corners of the room, but each time, with an angry glare across the way he refused to dance. The manager expostulated with him. Even his fellow dancing professionals demanded an explanation. Finally he lost his temper. He sat alone like a sulky but vicious animal. Not even a bottle of champagne sent him by one of his unknown admirers soothed him. He drank it freely enough, but nothing could induce him to leave the place until

the evening was over.

“Of course, I owe you an explanation, I know,” Sybil repeated once more, as, almost the last to go, they stood waiting for a *voiture*. “Be patient for a short while, will you? I hate words. Soon I shall show you a little picture—a picture that speaks for itself. Then you will understand.”

He ventured to raise her fingers to his lips as he placed her in the carriage and, in obedience to her gesture, simply waved the man up the hill.

“I seem to spend a great deal of my time being patient where you are concerned,” he observed a little ruefully. “So long as I win out in the end, though, I won’t worry.”

Peter Hames’ steady heart gave a joyous little beat as, in turning the corner of the sunny street leading into the Boulevard des Moulins, he came face to face with Sybil. There was a moment’s irresolute anxiety. Sometimes it was her pleasure to know him; sometimes she wrapped herself in mystery and passed on with sightless eyes. To-day, however, she stopped. She checked abruptly his few stammered words of greeting.

“What luck!” she exclaimed, laying her hand lightly upon his arm. “Walk with me, please. I was sending you up a note this morning. You have seen the drama of that quarrel by the roadside. You have seen the blend of humour and tragedy in the Café de France. There had to be a pause then, but now I can show you the pathos of it all—the pathos with perhaps a volcano underneath.”

She led him a few steps down the hill and turned in at the small shop, in the window of which were a few hand-worked linen handkerchiefs. The interior was almost devoid of merchandise, except for some very beautiful specimens of needlework upon the counter. Peter Hames’ eyes, however, from the moment of his entrance, never wandered from the figure of the girl who was seated behind the counter. The sheer beauty of her face thrilled him—the beauty and something else. She was bareheaded, and her simply arranged fair hair had obviously never known the *coiffeur’s* devastating touch. Her complexion was so exquisite that it was almost transparent, pale, with the slightest tinge of colour in it—the texture and shade of a wild rose. Her eyes were clear, almost too large, luminously hazel, with a minute splash of deep brown. Her features were of delicate mould, her lips without colouring, a trifle pale, but the curve of her mouth soft and passionate. She smiled as she saw Sybil, and Peter Hames, who was not a very fanciful man, thought that it was like the smile of an angel. She spoke sometimes in French, sometimes in English.

“But you have come to see my once more opening day! It is too wonderful! It is

better than the hospital, this! I am much happier.”

“You are a great deal better,” Sybil observed, patting the girl’s wasted fingers, “and I hear that you have done some wonderful work.”

“I am as well as I shall ever be,” the girl sighed, “and as happy.”

“Plenty of customers, I hope?”

“The Colonel has been in. He would buy everything, but I would not let him. He is always too good to me. There has been no one else, but indeed I have orders—I cannot work too much.”

“You have no handkerchiefs you could sell me?” Peter Hames enquired.

She pointed to a very small pile.

“These I made in hospital. They are for sale, if you wish.”

Peter Hames bought them promptly. The girl looked up at Sybil and there was something pleading, something of doglike devotion in her expression.

“Mademoiselle, my Good Samaritan,” she said, “I tell the Colonel this morning and I tell you—soon I shall be happy again, but I cannot stay here.”

“Do you want to leave us?” Sybil asked deprecatingly.

“I wish to go away,” the girl confessed, with moist eyes. “Perhaps back to Avignon, to Beauvais—what does it matter?—but here I cannot stay. Where I go there will be forgetfulness. Before I go, there is one thing would make me happy. I spoke to Monsieur le Colonel, who has been like God to me. He will consent if you will.”

“Then I am sure I shall,” Sybil predicted cheerfully.

“Once before I leave here forever,” the girl went on, with a little quiver in her tone, “once before I forget, let me go where he dances. I have a frock. I have been saving it for this. I have everything. And Madame Gounod will be with me. Let me go and dance with him once more. One dance—that is all. Perhaps I am not strong enough for more. Then I will go away and I will forget.”

Sybil toyed with one of the handkerchiefs on the counter in front of her. There was a faint frown of distress upon her forehead.

“Are you sure that you’re wise?” she remonstrated. “He is not worth such a souvenir. You know that.”

“I know that,” the girl admitted, “but I wish it—oh, I wish it, as I hope for heaven.”

“Louise,” Sybil persisted, and there was such a softness in her tone that Peter Hames felt a little shiver in his heart, “it would not be good for you, dear, because you have finished with those things in your life. It would not be good for him because it would make forgiveness seem too easy.”

Great tears filled the girl's eyes.

"Oh, I wish it," she cried—"I wish it. Mademoiselle, you will not be cruel."

Sybil, who knew the truth, felt her judgment leaving her.

"If the Colonel consents," she yielded—"yes."

The girl drew a tremulous sigh of ineffable content. She caught Sybil's hands and kissed them.

"Now I am quite happy," she murmured. "Everything will be as I should wish it."

She stood up to bow them out and Peter Hames realised, with a little shock, that she was slightly—very slightly—deformed. He realised, too, the real meaning of that complexion.

"You will come that night?" she begged. "You must not come near me, for I know that you would not speak to him—neither you nor the good Colonel—but let me know that you are there."

"Of course we will," Sybil promised. "It shall be when you wish."

They walked down to the boulevard and across to the Gardens, with lagging footsteps. Upon one of the benches they seated themselves for a moment.

"You scarcely need much more in the way of explanation," she said.

"Very little, I am afraid."

"Louise was always a protégée of Colonel Rawson's," she confided; "also, in some degree, of mine. She has tuberculosis, of course, but we thought we might have cured her. We set her up in that little shop, and, by some wicked chance, that beast Salvador—the most successful, the most run-after of all these gigolos on the Riviera—must catch a glimpse of her face one day. He entered—I suppose the beast has some charm—he taught her to dance. Curiously enough, to see her dance is the most amazing thing in the world. If she had health, she would be as successful as he is. I saw them dance together once. I hated it, but it was wonderful.—It is even worse than the usual thing. He took money from her. He took her savings. She went to hospital, broken-hearted, penniless, and—"

"I understand," Peter Hames murmured. "I wish to God I had known when he stood up to me for a minute in the road outside my villa."

"Colonel Rawson has sworn to break him or to kill him," she continued. "I think he will keep his word. At any rate, Salvador dare not dance with any of his old clients. Do you mind going away now, please? You see, I have told you what no one else knows and the child is proud—and she was a very good child. Hurry away now, please, and if this horrible thing comes off, you can be my escort."

"There is nothing in the world I could do?" he asked, as he rose with reluctance to his feet.

“No one,” she announced sadly, “can replace the petals on a rose.”

The commencement of the evening at the Café de France was very much like the previous ones. Salvador dined with the other dancing men, biting his nails and scowling fiercely over at the solitary table where Colonel Rawson, dressed with the utmost precision, with a white Gardenia in his buttonhole, sat with his hand straying now and then to his jacket pocket. It might have been a very profitable evening indeed, for four times messages were brought across to Salvador, which he was obliged to ignore. The manager’s patience was exhausted. He came to the table, obviously lost his temper, and delivered an ultimatum. After his departure, Salvador sat pulling out his underlip, desperately perplexed. He was to risk that bullet—or go. At no other place in Europe was there as much money waiting for him as here. A motor car he had been promised—not a French affair, but an English Bentley—an *appartement* for the season, a visit to the bank. Every night these women seemed to go crazy at the sight of his dancing, until at last he had left off taking even a *danseuse* on to the floor. If there was murder to be done, perhaps it was better that he should do it. He looked across at his enemy and the thoughts in his heart were as evil as the glint in his eyes. It was because of his absorption that he saw nothing of the entrance of Louise and Madame Gounod.

Peter Hames felt a catch at his throat as he looked up and saw Louise. Madame Gounod was an elderly lady, neatly dressed in black silk, and of unremarkable appearance. Louise, on the contrary, seemed to him the most beautiful thing who had ever crossed the portals of any restaurant on earth. Her deformity was almost unnoticed beneath the lilac-coloured shawl she wore. Her eyes, notwithstanding their too hard brilliancy, were shining like stars, and her lips were parted in an eager, expectant little smile. Her dress was simple enough—of white georgette—and she wore no jewels whatever, but there was a murmur, almost a shiver of admiration, as the manager, who had had his instructions, hurried forward to lead her to a table. She waved her hand to Colonel Rawson. She kissed her fingers to Sybil. Then she glanced towards Salvador. He looked at her, stupefied. What was in her face was untranslatable, but she certainly smiled, although the curl of her lip seemed for a moment to be inspired rather by torture than happiness. She paused for a moment before taking her chair and Madame Gounod stretched out her arm. But if for an instant her courage seemed to fail her, it came back again quickly. She seated herself, beamed as she pointed out the bottle of champagne standing in the ice, and clapped her hands at the sight of the caviare. Salvador’s eyes had followed her with a dazed, half-frightened gleam. Taking note of the wine and ordered dinner of his

enemy seated opposite, and Sybil and Peter Hames a few yards away, uneasy thoughts seemed to come to him. Surely he would never be allowed to resume his conquest? What was the meaning of it—a meeting like this—his enemy—one of his poor victims? Why on earth hadn't he had the sense to leave the weakling alone—and that prize-fighter Peter Hames!

For a time, however, everything proceeded as usual. At a whispered word from Sybil, Peter crossed the floor and asked Louise to dance. She rose cheerfully. A new experience in life came to her partner. Save for the touch of her, and the soft cling of her fingers, and a little breath of respiration, he might have been alone. Her feet moved over the floor with a lightness which was almost inhuman. It was like dancing with a spirit. He whispered a clumsy compliment and she smiled.

“Dancing is easy to me,” she said, “when the music is as I love it.”

He took her back to her place, and she thanked him prettily and with perfect composure. Colonel Rawson beckoned to a *maître d'hôtel*.

“A piece of paper and a pencil,” he directed.

Both were at once forthcoming. He wrote eight words steadily and firmly.

“*You will dance the next waltz with Louise.*”

“Take that across to Monsieur Salvador,” he told the man, twisting it up. “No answer.”

The waiter obeyed. Salvador read the few words and was conscious, for a moment, of a chill feeling at his heart. What was the meaning of it, he asked himself—his enemy to send him back to her? Did they recognise, then, that after all he was powerful, that for a word from him women would bite the dust, sacrifice honour and dignity, even the good-will of their friends? He shrugged his shoulders. Well, they had desired it. Louise should have her moments of happiness.

There were two more dances. Then the violinist stepped forward and played the first few bars of a very popular but very musical waltz. Salvador rose to his feet. He advanced on to the floor. Every one watched him with interest, for many rumours had been going around during the last few days. Colonel Rawson remained motionless, his steely eyes following his progress. As he approached the table where Louise and her chaperone were seated, her hand for a moment sought her heart. Then she was herself again. She received him with a little smile and rose to her feet. They floated off.

“What a damned fool that man is!” Peter muttered. “If they danced together like that, a plain waltz, they would make a furor. I've never seen anything like it.”

“There has never been anything like it,” Sybil echoed.

Most of the guests were content to watch. Louise's head was a little thrown

back. Salvador held her in the modern fashion, drawing her a little closer with the sway of the music. Twice he whispered to her but she appeared to be deaf. Her feet seemed somehow or other apart from the floor. For all her delicacy and fragility, they were at one corner of the room one minute, and away at the other end almost directly. When the music ceased, they paused in the centre of the floor. The colour had ebbed from her cheeks and her left hand slipped downwards. Every one was clapping, including Salvador. They started off again and danced perhaps half a dozen bars. . . .

There were three people in the room, possibly, who saw what had happened, but Colonel Rawson was one of them, for it was opposite his chair. The handkerchief which she had been carrying during the pause fell away, her left hand flashed suddenly backwards, and something thin—shining like a ribbon of steel—was driven with a strength which seemed incredible right under the shoulder blade of her partner. He gave a long gasp, a little cry, let her go, and fell swaying upon the floor, to lie there in a crumpled up heap. She turned to Colonel Rawson, who had sprung to his feet.

“I say that if any one should kill him and should suffer for it, it is me. In hospital they showed me where. It is complete.”

It certainly was, for Salvador was dead before they could carry him to the cloakroom.

IV THE TIGER ON THE MOUNTAINS

Paddy Collins was an enterprising young New York journalist, who had come into a thousand pounds and was spending it in foreign parts. True to his nationality, he passed most of his time in argumentative discussion, and nothing pleased him more than to make sensational statements and support them with a stream of eloquence, and even by brute force if those who differed from him could be induced to follow him so far. He stood at the bar of the Hôtel de France and laid down the law about Monte Carlo.

“What’s all this talk about Monte Carlo being the hub of the world for adventure and queer doings, and that sort of stuff?” he demanded. “I’ll tell you there isn’t a soberer or a quieter spot on God’s earth—and I’ll tell you why. It’s the gambling that makes people lead Sunday-school lives here.”

Mervin Holt, a well-known diner-out and wit of the place, who had just escaped from a gala dinner, edged his way into the discussion.

“You intrigue us, my friend Collins,” he said. “Proceed, we beseech you. I warn you that my friend here, Peter Hames, and I are in utter disagreement with your premise.”

“Sure, that’s more interesting,” the Irishman declared. “I have no use for the fellow who agrees with me. I’ll tell you why what I said was the truth. You see that great big building across the way. That’s the octopus that sucks dry all the passions of this place—that and a smaller, very superior stepsister, when its flunkeys deign to open the doors. I’m telling you, a big crowd of people nowadays haven’t room for more than one passion in their lives. You’ll see ’em streaming in there hour after hour, from ten o’clock until two in the morning. When they’ve had their little whack there, they’re like a wet glove—no life in them—no spirit for love-making, no stomach for fighting, no heart for even a good all-round quarrel. The gambling emasculates the place.”

“This,” Peter Hames observed pleasantly, “is an entirely new point of view.”

“It’s damned well the truth,” Collins asserted. “I ask you, when do you ever see a fight in the streets here? When do you ever see a drunken man? When do you ever see any real love-making even, except between those painted dummies and their gigolos? I am not counting that sort of muck. I tell you there’s no red blood in the place. The man who gets led away by those lying novelists and story writers, and

comes here for adventures, gets jolly well left. . . . Whiskies and sodas all around, barman. I've wasted my money on this trip, but there's never a penny wasted that goes into honest liquor."

"You are a man," Mervin Holt remarked, "after my own heart. You have the gift of downright speech, the courage of your opinions, and the additional advantage of being amazingly ignorant upon the subject you choose for discussion."

Paddy Collins laid down his glass. Mervin Holt wagged a forbidding forefinger.

"No, you don't," he warned him. "I know you of old, my fire-eating friend. You don't pick a quarrel with me. Try some one of your own size. We will dispute with words, if you like. Words are the chosen rapier of the duellist. But when it comes to brute force, so far as I am concerned, it is a thing extinct. I love all men, however much I may disagree with them. I quarrel with none."

"You've a fair gift of the gab yourself," Paddy Collins observed, looking at his neighbour with curiosity not unmingled with respect. "You don't happen to be an Irishman?"

"I was spared that—I was denied that privilege," Mervin Holt regretted, swiftly correcting himself. "For the Irish race in the abstract, however, I have an immense admiration. Individually, I find them intellectually stimulating."

"It's more than the Monte Carlo whisky is, anyway," Paddy Collins grumbled. "Is there any one else of a sizable physique who disagrees with me?"

"I do, utterly and completely," Peter Hames announced.

Collins swung around and eyed the speaker with satisfaction.

"Well, that's something," he approved. "You're a man worth putting the hands up with. Let's hear your tongue first."

"You're wrong fundamentally," Peter Hames pronounced. "In the first place, the gambling that goes on there and in the Sporting Club provokes passions in a great many men and women, instead of deadening them."

"The passion of a dirty greed, that's all," the Irishman scoffed. "It makes men forget to take a turn in the ring now and then or to make love to the lassies when the wine's been around."

"I say that it provokes passion," Peter Hames went on, "and I stick to it. Love-making isn't the only passion in the world. There's jealousy, there's fury at having lost your money, there's despair. There's also a full heart and the tingling pulses of the winner. Secondly, you, my friend, who, I think I am correct in saying, have spent some twenty-four hours in the place, know very little of what you're talking about if you say that in the Principality there are no crimes, no fighting, no disturbances, no tragedies. We've no American press here to blazon out our day-by-day happenings

and there's a great deal goes on that never finds its way into print."

"You say so," Paddy Collins sneered. "From what I've seen of the Monégasques—amongst the croupiers, at any rate—I shouldn't think there's one of them with a stomach for a fight."

"Again you speak in blissful ignorance," Peter Hames assured him. "The Monégasque, when the time comes, is a very dangerous fighter indeed. His women, far from being what you think, are almost fiercely virtuous, and their menkind are ready to slit the throat of any one who tries to make them anything else. Where you get left in ignorance is the fact that they don't report their little affairs. Journalism here is a dead calling. I could take you a hundred yards away and we could stick knives into each other. The gendarme would be exceedingly annoyed and the Principality would do its best to find a relative before it went to the expense of burying the victim, but that would just be about their sole interest in the affair."

Paddy Collins ordered another round of whiskies. He was promptly forestalled, however, by Mervin Holt.

"You, sir, are our arch entertainer this evening," he explained. "We may be a smug crowd, but we never sponge on a man for drinks."

"You are too small to talk to in a disputative manner," Paddy Collins declared. "This man Peter Hames here is my lad. He's contradicted me."

"Yes, but I'm not going to quarrel with you about that," Peter Hames assured him. "I'm going to put it to you in this way. You don't believe there are bloodshed and murdering habits and loose passions going about here, except those that are born in the gambling rooms. I contradict you."

"Let us take a little walk together," Paddy Collins suggested. "Those gardens—"

"Not at all," Peter Hames interrupted. "Let us be reasonable men. The final argument always remains. I propose to prove my contention."

Paddy Collins licked his lips. He was beginning to like this prospective antagonist.

"You'll show me a row?" he asked eagerly.

Peter Hames laid his hand upon the journalist's shoulder.

"I have heard of you, Collins," he said; "I know you're a great talker, but you're no fool. You can keep a still tongue, act like a man of discretion when it's necessary, and use your fists when it isn't."

"You're speaking golden words," the journalist agreed.

"Then I will show you a row," Peter Hames promised. "You're staying here, aren't you?"

"I surely am, and for a pub outside New York it's not so bad."

“Then, hop up to your room,” his new friend suggested. “Change into an old suit, put something into a hip pocket that isn’t a flask, if you’ve got it, and I’ll meet you here in twenty minutes, and take you for a stroll.”

“My God, I sha’n’t have the heart to knock you silly,” Paddy Collins declared, finishing his whisky and soda at a gulp. “I’m beginning to like you, man—I like you fine. I’ll be down in less than a couple of drinks.”

Up the hill towards the tangled region of Beausoleil went the two men, arm in arm.

“It will be half a dozen we have to tackle, maybe?” the Irishman asked hopefully.

“To-night,” Peter Hames told him, “you may not have to clench your fist even. You may have to hold your breath and wait, but if we have luck, we shall learn where and when this thing is to be fought out. There’ll be four on the other side to-night, but I don’t think they’ll be fighting, unless they discover that we’re watching them.”

“I’ll not lose sight of this business,” Peter Collins remarked cheerfully, “even if I have to stay on a day or so. There’s a queer look about some of the people around these parts, and as for the cops, they don’t seem as though they’d hurt a fly.”

Peter Hames pushed open the door of the Café Régal.

“Keep your mouth closed in here,” he enjoined. “Let me do the talking. It’s a bad place.”

The Café Régal was only moderately full. Mademoiselle Anna sat on her accustomed seat. A little distance away, a fair-haired young woman, who had recently taken to patronising the establishment, and who went by the name of Fifine, occupied another stool. One or two of the small neighbouring tradespeople or passers-by were scattered about the place. At a table, talking earnestly together, were three black-haired, black-moustached and bearded, olive-skinned Monégasques. They were a little apart from the others and they talked seriously. Occasionally their neighbours threw them a glance, half of respect, half of fear.

“Those three men,” Peter Hames whispered in his companion’s ear, “are planning an assassination. That will give you something to be going on with. Now come to the bar.”

“I’ll swear your grandfather was an Irishman,” Paddy Collins declared vigorously. “There’s sober sense about your conversation. It’s whiskies and sodas, barman—and doubles.”

“Leave that girl alone for the present,” Peter Hames enjoined, as Mademoiselle Fifine shot an inviting glance in their direction. “They’d be in our way to-night.”

Paddy Collins accepted the hint with reluctance. The two men were served with

their drinks.

“One moment,” Peter Hames murmured. “This is business.”

He strolled behind and offered Mademoiselle Anna a cigarette.

“Lotarde’s coming,” she whispered, her lips scarcely moving. “They had a meeting this afternoon. He has them all worked up into a perfect fury. It’s to be to-morrow or the next day.”

“The devil!” Peter Hames muttered.

“I never thought they’d go so far,” she went on. “I sent for you directly I saw there was danger, but I didn’t believe they meant murder. They’re making their plans to-night. Your room is ready. They’ll be next door. If there’s trouble, I’ll come.”

“Keep out of it,” he begged. “I have a man with me who was born fighting.”

“You forget Lotarde,” she warned him. “He is a madman. He shoots at sight. Be careful. One of the three—Mercault—went to the Palace yesterday and apparently they refused every one of his demands. Be careful! He’s watching us here. . . . I don’t want your cigarette,” she added, pushing his case away with a touch of insolence. “Let me alone, please.”

Peter Hames withdrew apologetically and the Irishman grinned at his apparent discomfiture.

“Now, my amorous but clumsy guide into the land of adventure,” the latter said, planting one hand firmly upon the counter and swinging himself from his stool, “you need a lesson in the way to approach a reluctant will-o’-the-wisp?”

“Shut up, you fool!” Peter Hames interrupted. “We are going to sit in that corner. Listen! There are more serious things doing than talking nonsense to these young women.”

Mr. Paddy Collins left the neighbourhood of the bar with reluctance. He was almost coldly sober. He had caught a glance of Miss Anna and the opportunity seemed to him propitious for a flirtation.

“You are like all Americans,” he said to Peter Hames, as they seated themselves upon the hard leather bench. “You do not understand my race. We love adventure and we love fighting, but if, mingled with it, there comes a chance for a few polite words, a squeeze of the hand, perhaps even a caress, with a young lady as attractive as those two are, it gives us spirit for the fray. There was never a fighting Irishman worth his salt who did not love women.”

“Take ’em on another evening, old chap,” Peter Hames begged. “To-night you and I have got to tread on velvet. Within the course of a few minutes we may be fighting for our skins. By this time to-morrow night, if you stick it out, we may be fighting for our lives. When that’s over, you can have a free hand with the women.

You asked for this, remember. I know the way to bring it off. Both those girls are spies. One of them is our friend; the one who is just out of hearing is the mistress of Mercault, the leader of the dissatisfied Monégasques, and would give us away in a second if she had any idea what we were after.”

The Irishman, who was beginning to find the enterprise entirely to his taste, as he gained faith in his companion, became more and more amenable.

“When’s the next move?” he asked cheerfully.

“See those three men?” Peter Hames enquired, without even glancing in their direction.

“Those three monkeys chattering themselves into a fever over a glass of syrup? I see them. It doesn’t seem to me they’re going to spit any blood.”

“That’s your ignorance of these parts,” Peter Hames confided. “They’re natives of the Principality, and there isn’t one of them who hasn’t a knife in his pocket—maybe a gun too, for anything I know, but they’re handier with the knife. We’re going to follow them.”

“Where?”

“Into a room upstairs—or rather, we’re going into the next room. Now, hold your breath. You’re in this business and you may as well know what there is to be known. Ever hear of Lotarde?”

“Tiger Lotarde, the anarchist?”

“That’s the fellow.”

“Hear of him! God help us, what a question!” Paddy Collins exclaimed. “I was detailed to get his story the day after that explosion in Wall Street. I saw him in Sing Sing before he escaped. I knew him before that. I went across to Chicago to try and run his gang to earth. They were protected there. If I had written the story I got from Lotarde himself, it would have been back to the old country for me, or a knife in my back. What about him?”

“You may see him to-night, that’s all,” Peter Hames replied. “If he’s a pal of yours, you’d better quit.”

“A pal of mine—the dirty fox! Vile little skunk!” the Irishman declared, spitting with abject disgust into a sawdust-filled receptacle. “He went against me. Told me in Sing Sing that he’d given orders to have me knifed before I left Chicago—told me that, whilst he was sitting in his cell!”

“You’re in luck, then. You may get your own back on him before we’re through. It is his show we’re up against.”

Paddy Collins roared for whisky.

“When I meet a man like you, Hames,” he confided, “I like to drink.”

Peter Hames eyed him carefully—magnificent shoulders, features as hard as iron, clear eyes, and a mouth like a rat trap.

“You’re all right, Paddy,” he acknowledged. “Drink what you want, but remember this job isn’t all fighting. We may have to be crawling about like cats and holding our breaths in a few minutes.”

“There isn’t whisky enough in all Monte Carlo to make a noisy lad of me when there’s a bit of sport going,” the Irishman boasted.

A door leading into the back premises of the café, at right angles to the bar, was slowly opened. The men who were talking so eagerly together stopped and looked up expectantly. A woman stood on the threshold—grey-haired, with a fat, evil face and bent shoulders. She held a shawl around her neck, extended a forefinger, and pointed upwards. With that she disappeared, and, one by one, the three men passed through the door which the old woman had left open.

“So that’s that!” Peter Hames muttered. “Lotarde has arrived.”

He called to the barman and their glasses were refilled.

“Never did I imagine,” Paddy Collins reflected, “that Lotarde and I could ever be sheltered by the same roof. You’re making no mistake, my friend? It’s Tiger Lotarde, the anarchist, you mean?”

“He’s upstairs and there’s mischief brewing,” Peter Hames assured him; “and listen, my friend, I met you only an hour or so ago, at a bar, and you talked impulsively for a few minutes. Just remember this. It’s not too late to walk away and wash out those few sentences. If you go through with this—and why you should I don’t know, for it’s not your affair—it will be life or death for us, perhaps, within half an hour; certainly within a week.”

The Irishman laughed until the corners of his eyes crinkled.

“I see myself quitting!” he scoffed. “I’m for fighting any man or any men, with their own weapons at any moment. My blood’s gone stagnant with these civilised ways.”

Once more the door opened—more slowly this time. More slowly still, the old woman pushed out her head. Her face was like the face of a gnome, but in her pendulous, sagging lip and bleared eyes there was a new expression. She was afraid. Her stubby forefinger, however, pointed upwards. Peter Hames drained his glass.

“Here’s luck to us,” he murmured. “Come on, Collins.”

The Irishman followed cheerfully. The woman had left them—muttering to herself, and ill at ease apparently, after that one fierce word of warning whispered into her ear by Peter Hames. The latter led the way up a narrow staircase, turned the handle of a door, and entered a small, filthy bedroom. He closed the door behind

him and opened a cupboard. Inside the boxlike aperture was a dangling wire from what seemed to be a telephone instrument.

“Homemade microphone, Collins,” he confided. “Only one of us can listen. I’ve started this business, so I’ll be that one. Close the door. I shall hear when they leave off talking and I’ll hold out my hand. Be prepared then, in case they’ve tumbled to it that there’s any one about. Remember, we’re expecting Mademoiselle Anna and Mademoiselle Fifine to mount.”

Paddy Collins chuckled.

“They’ll be welcome,” he whispered back. . . .

There was a silence in that shabby little room which seemed to have qualities of its own. Peter Hames listened with fierce and rivetted attention. Paddy Collins, seated on the edge of the bed, watched the doorway. Time went by uncounted. Suddenly, Peter Hames stepped backwards quickly, closed the door of the cupboard, and came out into the room.

“All serene, Paddy,” he reported. “They’ve tumbled to nothing. Don’t breathe. Don’t make a sound. Let them get down to the café.”

The two men stood tense and alert. They heard the footsteps pass on the crazy landing. Suddenly, without a moment’s warning, the rearmost of the Monégasques kicked open the door of the bedroom, stood upon the threshold, glanced suspiciously at Collins, and burst into a storm of excited questions. The Irishman listened in puzzled silence for a few seconds. Then he stooped, lifted the man in his arms, and threw him down the staircase.

“I couldn’t tell what else to do with him,” he remarked apologetically to Hames, “talking a lot of gibberish like that to a decent man. He was too small to hit, anyway.”

“Get behind, you fool!” Peter Hames muttered. “Lotarde may recognise you. I’ll see to this.”

He stepped on to the landing. All four of the conspirators now were creeping up the stairs and there was a very evil look in the face of the nearest. Peter Hames gave them no time to ask questions. He addressed them in fluent French.

“Gentlemen,” he said, “I apologise for my friend, but what would you? We have a rendezvous here with two young ladies from the bar. Already we have waited nearly half an hour. My friend does not speak French. He thought that the man who forced his way in had been keeping the girls away.”

Almost as Hames finished speaking, there was the sound of soft footsteps along the crazy passage and the red light of a cigarette through the gloom behind. Mademoiselle Anna made her appearance. She stopped short.

“But you call this a rendezvous!” she demanded angrily. “Have you brought the whole of Beausoleil to see me mount the stairs?”

Peter caught her wrist.

“Mademoiselle, do not go,” he begged. “One of these gentlemen made a mistake. The affair, I trust, is explained,” he added, turning to them. “Be so good as to enter, Mademoiselle.”

He pointed to the bedroom. The little party of men were full of apologies. Peace suddenly reigned. They descended. Peter Hames followed Mademoiselle Anna, stepped swiftly past her to the cupboard, tore down the wire, and the little instrument, and flung both under the bed.

“We are well out of this,” he exclaimed. “As usual, Mademoiselle, you turned up exactly at the right time. Now, will you show us the way out through the kitchens. The rest I leave to you.”

She laughed.

“Follow me,” she enjoined. “Afterwards I shall go to the bar and make my complaints. Madame will be furious to have this, my first little affair, interfered with.”

They passed down some rickety back stairs on tiptoe. Mademoiselle Anna opened a door and they went out into the night.

“We are over the first hurdle,” Peter Hames whispered, as he grasped his companion’s arm, “but, after what I’ve heard through that amazing little instrument, you’ll have to pray to all the saints in your calendar, Paddy, to bring us safely over the next one.”

Paddy Collins was looking back at the door through which Mademoiselle had disappeared. He was not altogether good-tempered.

“I wasn’t so anxious for safety on this particular occasion,” he complained.

Flat on their stomachs in the shadow of a tumbled mass of rock, a few yards above one of the narrow, winding roads, the most dangerous in Europe, which zigzag from Monte Carlo to Eze and beyond, Peter Hames and the Irishman, having disposed of their car, lay cheek by cheek. The whole panorama of the coast lay stretched beneath them—the black rock, the harbour lights, the glittering casino, the electric standards in the avenues. Below, on the coast road, they could trace for miles the lights of moving vehicles. They could hear, even, in the still, clear atmosphere, the night murmur of insects hundreds of feet below. There they were, perched on the edge of a precipice, looking down upon a set of child’s playthings illuminated by fairy lights.

“Now your time has come, Paddy,” Peter Hames whispered. “There’s no

eavesdropping here and you shall know exactly what we're up against. Have you heard of the trouble between the Monégasques and the reigning family here?"

"Why, sure I have," Paddy acknowledged. "I went up to the Palace to get a story and it wasn't any too polite I found them. An old chap—a kind of librarian—showed me off the premises, and said that neither of their Royal Highnesses were discussing affairs which were private between them and their people for the benefit of other nations. I cabled that bit out, anyway."

"Which is in the right," Peter Hames went on, "I don't know. Everything here is done by means of petitions, and just as the Monégasques are preparing another petition, along comes Lotarde. In less than two days he's got them all worked up. They were excited enough in their small way before, but they lapped up his poison as though it were mother's milk. There's no more talk of petitions or deputations. They're out for murder, and they've chosen to-night to bring it off, and within fifty yards of this place for the scene."

Paddy Collins rubbed his hands softly together. The joy of battle was creeping into his veins.

"The dirty skunk of an anarchist!" he muttered. "Begad, Peter Hames, if you'd told me as much last night, I'd have had the life out of him on those stairs."

"He'd have shot you before you got near," his companion rejoined quietly. "Besides, there was no proof—just our word against theirs. These royalties have been warned to keep within their own walls for a time, but, whatever their faults may be, they don't lack courage. You see the château above us. They are dining there to-night—the two young people and his Royal Highness. I watched their car go up at half-past eight—unguarded, if you please, but driven at a great pace. In less than half an hour they will be returning. We shall see the light flash out from the château when they start. You notice that corner—I could chuck a pine cone into it—exactly below us?"

"Well?"

"The idea is to put some sort of an obstacle just around the bend. The car is to smash into it and then they start the shooting. There'll be seven of them."

The Irishmen grinned.

"There won't be seven on their legs a few seconds after we show ourselves," he bragged. . . .

A slight hiss of indrawn breath—otherwise silence. Both men watched the dark shapes of two motor cars without lights, which had climbed the hill and were now drawn up close below them. They counted the descending figures—eight men altogether. One by one they disappeared into a little growth of scrub, carrying

something which seemed to be like a coil of rope. When they emerged, they had evidently attached it to some hidden obstacle. Straining and groaning, they dragged it over the road until it reached from the overhanging bank halfway across—an iron railway chain which must have weighed at least half a ton. Peter Hames was uneasy. He had expected something less formidable.

“We can’t move that,” he muttered.

“Better have a go at them right away,” Collins urged. “I’ve marked Lotarde. He’s there, all in black, with a black *béret*. I want him.”

The Irishman was itching to rise. Peter Hames laid his hand upon his back.

“Steady!” he whispered. “There’s only two of us and eight of them. They’re probably all armed. Supposing they got us, as they very well might, before we were at close quarters—there’d be nothing to save those poor devils then from driving slap into that thing.”

“I’d have broken the necks of half these ruffians by then,” the Irishman grunted.

Peter Hames’ grip was almost unnecessarily hard.

“This is my show, Collins,” he insisted. “Listen! We are going to crawl through the scrub here another forty yards higher. We can stop the car on the bend above. We’ll let them know what the trouble is and then we can tackle this crowd below. We can’t afford to risk being done in before they come. Follow me.”

They made their way slowly some thirty yards. Once Collins dislodged a pebble, which clattered into the road. The little party below were startled, but only momentarily. Their task was completed. They all crawled back into the scrub. Another ten yards of painful progress and a little belt of scrubby pines concealed Peter Hames and his companion from the upper road.

“Now we’re safe,” the former whispered, “and, by God, we’re only just in time.”

With a blaze of lights from the *château* above, and the sound of a motor horn, twin lamps appeared, curving down the long drive, and remained visible, threading their tortuous way to right and left, but always descending. Peter Hames groaned as he noticed the pace at which the car was being driven.

“Unless they’ll stop for us,” he said, “they’ll smash right into that thing. There’s no one on God’s earth can help them then. Follow me, Paddy.”

They slipped from the scrub and the rough ground on to the road. Both had electric torches and both kept their fingers upon the switches. As the oncoming car swung round the last corner, they both turned on their lights. Almost instantly they heard the grinding of brakes. Peter Hames glanced anxiously over his shoulder and downward.

“Those fellows will know there’s something up,” he muttered. “It can’t be helped.”

The car came skidding down the hill, slackening its speed more and more as the brakes began to bite. It was almost at a standstill when the two men disclosed themselves. Peter Hames at once addressed the chauffeur and his companion upon the box. He spoke in rapid French.

“There is an ambush of men just below, who mean mischief. They have an iron chain across the right-hand side of the road. When you turn the next corner, keep absolutely to the left, and then you can pass. Wait whilst I speak to your passengers.”

“*Mais c’est Monsieur le Prince et la Princesse,*” the man expostulated.

“I know,” Hames replied impatiently. “Go on directly I’ve spoken to them, only instead of keeping to the proper side of the road, keep to the left and you’ll just clear it. They’ll be so surprised they’ll let you pass.”

The window of the car had been lowered. Peter Hames stepped back.

“Sorry, sir,” he explained. “There’s an ambush of some of your dissatisfied citizens just below and I’m afraid they mean mischief. They’ve blocked the road, but I’ve told your man how to pass. If there’s any trouble, we shall be there. If you’ve any arms in the car, get them ready; if not, make a dash for it.”

“Who are you?” the man who was leaning out of the window asked.

Peter Hames waved the chauffeur on.

“My friend and I don’t matter,” he answered. “You’ll know all about us later if there’s trouble.”

The two men hurried down the scrub and arrived at the obstacle before the car had turned the corner. Lotarde and his friends, startled by the sound of their approaching footsteps, leapt into sight, but the glare of the headlights of the big car, as it swept round, dazzled every one for a moment. A shot was fired at random, of which nobody took any notice. Both men were eagerly watching the progress of the automobile. Magnificently driven, it passed the obstacle with barely an inch to spare, shot by, recovered after a violent skid—for a second or two one wheel had been over the precipice—and rocked and swayed down the road. There was a howl from the opposite side of the way and simultaneously Paddy Collins threw off all restraint, for the lights had shown the two men the nature of the terrible obstruction left untouched in the road and had given the Irishman, too, a glimpse of the beautiful woman in the car.

“The bloody murderers!” he shouted. “Come on at them, Hames!”

Somehow or other they all seemed to be in the road together. The Monégasques

were armed, apparently, only with knives, and, bent double, they were spreading out in a curve to surround the two men. Paddy Collins, who was perhaps more used to mob fighting than his companion, suddenly caught sight of Lotarde crawling round to the open end of the semicircle.

“Look out, Peter!” he cried. “Duck!”

Peter ducked and Paddy Collins sprang sideways. A stab of flame spent itself in vain and the whistling bullet sped on, burying itself in a tree. There was a great joy in the heart of the Irishman, for, quick though Lotarde’s draw had been, his own gun barked out a second later.

“This,” he grunted, “was worth coming to Europe for!”

Lotarde spun around on his feet, gave a long, terrible cry, reeled and fell in a heap upon the road. One of the Monégasques, who had a fancy for a quick stab at close quarters, felt Peter Hames’ fist crash into his face and remembered nothing more till he awoke in hospital. Paddy Collins disposed of another in almost the same fashion, and a third, whose knife was dangerously near, Peter Hames shot through the leg. The others seemed about to make a concerted rush, but were suddenly stricken with a new panic. The car had stopped at the bend and the younger man of the party came panting up the hill, with a revolver in each hand. The Monégasques never hesitated for a second. Bloodshed on this scale they had never contemplated. They turned and ran like rabbits. Peter Hames and Collins lowered their revolvers, and the young man, who had just joined them, followed suit reluctantly.

“Our own people!” he cried bitterly.

“They were only puppets,” Peter Hames assured him. “Come here.”

They all three went to where Lotarde was lying in the road. Paddy Collins pointed downwards and there was a merciless fury in his eyes.

“That’s the man who is responsible for to-night,” he declared, “and for more tragedies in Europe during the last ten years than any other human being. If I were a Latin, I would spit on him. Being an Irishman, I say God help his soul if he has one, for if ever there was a rascal well off the face of the earth, it is Tiger Lotarde.”

“Lotarde the anarchist?” the young man exclaimed.

“Dead, and I shot him, thank God!” the Irishman avowed.

They drew away. The young man laid a hand upon the shoulder of each of them.

“Gentlemen,” he said earnestly, “you are both of you strangers to me, but my people as well as I myself will be anxious to know to whom we may express our gratitude.”

Peter Hames hesitated.

“Not out of discourtesy, sir, but for many reasons, please let us go our own

way.”

“But who are you? I must know that,” the young man insisted.

“We are just two human beings,” Peter Hames told him, “who love adventure and seek it whenever we have the opportunity. We interfere sometimes in other people’s business, but it is generally when we think we can do some good by it. My friend here had an old grudge against Lotarde. His life is forfeit in half a dozen countries, so his death is no one’s crime. If you want to do us a service, and if you will forgive my suggesting it—perform a gracious gesture to your people—wipe out the memory of to-night. It was Lotarde’s responsibility and Lotarde is dead.”

“Your view shall be mine,” the young man promised, “but I cannot possibly leave you like this upon the mountain. Will you permit me to present you to my relations?”

“We will pay our respects, if you will allow us, at the Palace another time,” Peter Hames begged.

“We are not looking for thanks,” Paddy Collins chipped in. “It was a mighty smart little breeze whilst it lasted. I noticed you didn’t hesitate long about coming into it yourself, sir,” he added, with a twinkle in his eyes.

The motor horn from below sounded and the three men separated. As they fetched out the car from its hiding place, Paddy Collins made queer little sounds with his tongue.

“I’m for asking you one question, my friend,” he said. “How far might it be to the nearest bar?”

“I have whisky enough at my own villa,” Peter Hames assured him, “to fill a bath tub.”

“At the present moment,” the Irishman declared, “I’m feeling that I could empty it.”

V
PADDY COLLINS FLAPS HIS WINGS

Peter Hames was dining in august company—as a matter of fact, at an Hôtel de Paris gala dinner. It is true that he occupied a somewhat lowly place at the table, but his presence itself at such a gathering was unusual, and probably to be accounted for by the persuasions of Sybil Christian—the very attractive young woman seated exactly opposite to him. During the first possible pause in the conversation, she leaned across the table and addressed him, half seriously, but with a humorous light in her eyes.

“I rang you up at your villa just after you had left,” she confided, “and I couldn’t get hold of you here before dinner, there was such a crush. Did you hear what happened at the Casino this afternoon?”

He shook his head.

“I have heard of nothing special,” he admitted. “I have been at home all day, trying to finish up some work. I did start down here rather early though. I hadn’t the faintest idea what time dinner was.”

“You remember your Irish friend, Paddy Collins?”

“Am I ever likely to forget him?” Peter Hames groaned. “He’s in Ireland now—gone to visit an invalid uncle who owns a large whisky distillery.”

“He may have been there,” Sybil Christian conceded, “but I can assure you that he is in a much less reputable place at the present moment.”

“Tell me about him,” Hames begged.

There was a brief delay, owing to the service of dinner. Then she leaned towards him once more.

“It seems,” she recounted, “that he arrived in Monte Carlo this afternoon, went straight to the Casino, and emerged about half an hour later, carrying a croupier in his arms, having knocked down two chefs and the door attendant.”

“Good God!” Peter Hames exclaimed, with a sinking heart. “Where is he now?”

“In prison, and likely to stay there for a long time, unless some one interferes.”

“But what on earth happened in the Casino? Paddy can generally be trusted to behave like an ordinary human being in the middle of the day.”

“No one knows.”

Their conversation was interrupted. Sybil’s neighbour claimed her attention, and Peter Hames, too, was constrained to do his duty. The dinner seemed interminable.

As soon as it was over, he made his excuses to his hostess, slipped away from the group in the lounge of the Hôtel de Paris, who were preparing to invade the Sporting Club, wrote a brief note, and, enclosing his card, placed both in an envelope and despatched it by a special messenger. An hour or so later, Paddy Collins, crumpled but cheerful, joined him in the hotel bar. It was, on the latter's part, at any rate, a riotous meeting, and if Peter Hames' manner was a little strained, his friend was blissfully oblivious of the fact.

"Peter Hames, laddie, you'll never guess where I've come from," the Irishman challenged, wresting a bottle of whisky firmly from the barman's hand and pouring out double portions.

"I think I could if I tried," was the dry response.

"Straight out of prison, my lad—a nasty, dirty little hole, too, that a full-grown man ought to have been able to push his way out of with his elbows. I'm a jailbird, Peter. That's what I am. It's the first time this side of the briny, anyway."

"What did you do to get in there?" his friend asked severely.

Paddy Collins looked thoughtfully into his tumbler.

"'Tis a long story," he replied. "You know that I went to Ireland to look up the old folks, if any of them was left, at Limerick, especially my old Uncle Henry, who had the good sense to be born a whisky distiller."

Peter Hames admitted that he had that much knowledge of his friend's intentions.

"When I got to Limerick—about two o'clock in the afternoon it was—I drove straight to the old address and found myself in the midst of a funeral. Old Uncle Henry—eighty-two he was—had died four days previously and they were in the act of burying the old boy that day. I smartened up as well as I could and drove out to the churchyard, and, as soon as the proceedings were over, a little black-coated man tapped me on the shoulder and invited me up to the house. There was plenty of good stuff going in the dining room—enough to make the wake a properly cheerful affair—but they didn't lead me to it—not at once, that is. They dragged me to the library, to hear the will read. Peter lad, it takes something to knock the stuffing out of me, but as soon as I could see daylight through that gibberish of words, and begin to understand what it was all about, I was like a dazed creature. The old man had left a pot of money and it seems he had but three relatives in the world—myself, his brother, and his brother's child. He left the whole of his money to whichever one of the three who, due notice having been given of his illness, should attend his funeral. Bejabers, I was the only one there!"

"And you hadn't had any notice!" Peter Hames exclaimed.

"The notice had been sent to me, all right, by letter and cable, but it had gone to

New York,” Paddy Collins explained. “Me turning up on the exact day was just a stroke of luck and nothing else. If I hadn’t been present at the funeral, the money would have gone to build another wing to the Limerick Infirmary. I’m feeling I shall make a better use of it.”

“And what about your Uncle Henry’s brother and his daughter?” Peter Hames asked.

“There was never a mention of them, but I’ve a word or two to say to you later on, Peter, upon the subject. At present, I’m feeling I must take another glass of that whisky, for I’m what you might call dazed. Two hundred thousand pounds, that’s what the old man left, and him making it all out of distilling whisky, when it’s a job he should have done for love. I’ve got a draft for five thousand pounds in my pocket, to be going on with, and a good fat bundle of notes to pay my way until I open a banking account.”

Peter Hames shook hands with his friend.

“Heartiest congratulations!” he said. “Now, would you mind coming down to earth for a minute or two and explaining how it was that you spent your first two hours here in prison?”

“That was just an unfortunate incident,” Paddy Collins confided. “I was coming to it in due course. You know, I’m not a superstitious fellow as a rule, for an Irishman. Listen to this. Number seven was the number of my *voiture* on the train, number seven was the number of my compartment, number seven was the number of my table in the dining room, seventy francs was my dinner bill, leaving out the bottle of whisky I’d paid for directly I boarded the train, and when I was stepping into the Hôtel de Paris bus at Monte Carlo station, a little carriage came trotting up—number seven. I ask you, Peter Hames, what should you say would be the action of a reasonable man under those circumstances?”

“I can guess what you did, anyway,” Peter Hames observed.

“Sure, you’d have a thick head if you didn’t. I jumped into the carriage. I stopped at the Casino. I changed some money. I put a plaque for five hundred francs on number seven. Up that sweet little number rolled. There I stood, with both hands open, and not a farthing did I touch.”

“Why not?”

“Some dingy-looking, crooked-faced South American had been backing six, the *carrées* and *chevaux*, and my plaque had got edged off on to the six. They all came around me and argued, but not one word could I understand, my French being of the slow-motion variety, and they chattering like a cage full of parrakeets, so I just took the little man who was holding back my money—a chef they call him, I think—

by the seat of his pants and the back of his collar, and I carried him out of the place, and a couple of chaps like undertakers' clerks, who tried to interfere, got it in the neck. I laid him down amongst the flowers in the garden opposite, and I was just stepping across to the Hôtel de Paris, as peaceful as possible, to take a little refreshment, when the army they'd telephoned for marched up, and I was for it. I couldn't take on the whole dozen of them, and besides, I should have hated to have spoilt their uniforms. What I don't understand is, how did I get out so soon? To hear them all chattering around me, I thought I was there for life. . . . And what might your business be, sir?" he broke off, turning to address a very polite young man in dinner clothes but with an official air, who was standing by his side.

"The Management of the Casino desire me to hand you these seventeen thousand, five hundred francs, with their compliments, Monsieur Collins," the young man explained, handing him a packet. "They regret very much that there was a little misunderstanding about your stake. They enclose also an annual ticket, which they trust you will accept with their compliments, as the one you had upon your person when you were arrested had been cancelled. Is there anything further I can do for you, sir?"

Paddy Collins looked at the money and blinked. He looked at the ticket, enclosed in a very ornamental leather case, and blinked again. Then he laid his hand upon the shoulder of the messenger.

"You will take a glass of wine with us, sir," he begged, "and explain this unheard-of generosity."

The young man extricated himself.

"Monsieur will pardon me," he apologised. "I am an official of the Casino and I am not allowed to drink at the bars. I wish you a very good evening, sir."

He bowed and took his departure. Paddy Collins scratched his head.

"Can you beat it, Peter?" he demanded. "Me knocking them all about in the beginnings of a temper, which I surely was. Then all these apologies, paying up me money without a word. Do they take me for royalty in disguise, I'm asking myself?"

Peter Hames smiled.

"I can explain it all, Paddy," he replied, "but if I were you, I wouldn't ask any questions. You remember our little adventure upon the hillside. Those people would have done anything in the world for us. Directly I heard of your trouble, I sent a card around, and you see the result."

"And they say there's no gratitude in this world!" Paddy Collins exclaimed fervently. "I'm a royalist for life. I'll teach those little devils how to fight, if the country ever gets into trouble."

“In the meantime, my friend,” Peter Hames suggested, “let us take those two easy-chairs in the corner, and you can tell me just why you came rushing back here, instead of taking the boat from Queenstown?”

Paddy Collins edged his glass surreptitiously towards the barman and afterwards followed his friend in the direction indicated.

“It’s wanting to know why I’m back here, instead of on my way to America you’re after, eh?” he observed. “Well, I’ll tell you. The fact is, Peter, I’m not a greedy man. I’m not after keeping the whole of Uncle Henry’s money for myself just because his brother and the little colleen didn’t roll up for the funeral. I made enquiries of the lawyer as to their whereabouts, and he discovered that they’d been settled down in this part of the world for the last seven or eight years. Maybe you know the neighbourhood.”

Peter Hames studied the half-sheet of paper which his friend pushed across to him. Upon it was neatly typewritten: “Mr. Dennis Charles Collins, and Miss Eileen Collins, Château d’Amaris, St. Pierre, A. M.”

“I know about where it is,” Peter Hames acknowledged. “It’s a wild strip of country up between St. Jeannet and Pouget-Theniers. I’ll look it up in the map and take you over there any day you like.”

“And it’s myself will be very obliged,” Paddy Collins declared heartily. “The man has prospered, seemingly, and I’m not entirely at my ease with people living in castles, even when they’re blood relations. If you’ve no engagement, we’ll be off to see them to-morrow.”

Peter Hames nodded assent. Then he rose to his feet.

“Keep out of mischief, Paddy,” he enjoined. “I must go back to my friends for a time. If I miss you to-night, I’ll be around soon after nine in the morning.”

“A pleasant little excursion we ought to make of it,” the Irishman declared, “if these relatives of mine haven’t grown too big for their boots.”

Peter Hames wiped the perspiration from his forehead and consigned to the nethermost corners of hell all maps and makers of maps who had attempted to deal with the region in which, on the following afternoon, they had found themselves, for the last two hours, hopelessly lost.

“My friend, Paddy Collins,” he confided, with manifest irritation, “I should imagine you are the sort of man who has led many people into foolish enterprises, but I warn you this is the last time I come château hunting with you.”

“Now what’s got you, man?” the Irishman rejoined, from his very comfortable seat. “Myself, I think the whole place is fine. Marvellous country! The perfume from

those peach trees we passed down in the valley reminded me of the smell of my late uncle's distillery, and as for the roses on that last slope, next time you stop this old bus of yours, I'm for helping myself to a handful."

Peter Hames drew slowly to a standstill. There was a precipice on his left, some six or seven hundred feet deep, and with barely a tree on its stony surface to break one's fall. On the right, the barren hill stretched still higher and seemed to become bleaker, save for one small stretch of cultivated land some distance ahead of them. The track along which they had been proceeding—roads had disappeared long ago—left them a bare six inches upon each side. Peter Hames, notwithstanding the fact that he was a skilful driver, began to feel that he had had enough of it.

"Paddy," he acknowledged, "the odour from that orchard of peach trees which we passed in the valley, and where I wish to God we had stayed, was marvellously sweet. Even at this distance, I can also at times detect the faint fragrance of the roses, but, chilling my senses at the same moment is that instinctive and natural fear of eternity that even the most righteous living of us sometimes experiences."

"Say, what are you after, preaching a sermon at me with words like this?" his companion demanded, in a hurt manner.

Peter Hames pointed forwards and continued impressively.

"If your Château d'Amaris is hidden on the other side of that gate, well and good. If not, I warn you that if, as seems possible from here, there is room to perform the operation, I am going to turn round and creep stealthily back to safety. Castles in Spain are bad enough, mythical châteaux in the roadless bosom of the mountains, like this, are a trifle worse."

"Well spoken, my lad," Paddy Collins applauded, knocking the ashes from his pipe. "You're learning the gift of the gab from me. Proceed, and I will be a consenting party to your bargain. If no signs of the château of my respected relatives should be visible when we have passed that gate, we will steal slowly back to the land of cafés and civilisation."

"That being clearly understood," Peter Hames concurred, cautiously inserting the clutch, "I will proceed that much further in search of your relative's demesne."

They moved slowly onwards. A few yards from the gate, Peter Hames brought the car once more to a standstill. The gate itself presented a difficulty. It had apparently been withdrawn from its hinges and it was leaning in dissolute abandon, one end against a battered post and the other against a fragment of stone wall. Paddy Collins dealt with the matter in logical fashion. He removed the obstacle bodily and leaned it up against the stones. Then he waved his companion on.

"Here," he remarked, "we have space—parklike space. Something tells me that

we are near the end of our quest.”

Peter Hames drove between the gateposts, bore to the right towards a clear space in the rock-strewn stretch of turf, and, safe from the precipice on one side and the mountain on the other, lit a cigarette with a sigh of relief.

“Further than this, Paddy, my friend,” he announced, “I do not risk my Chrysler. Below, behind the orange trees there, sheltered by that row of cypresses, there is something which may be a cow barn, or may be your relatives’ *château*. I propose that you complete your investigations on foot.”

“Come out of it!” Paddy Collins begged. “I’m a shy man and I’ve left my cardcase at home. It’s not for me to go butting in on those who may have forgotten their own native language.”

His friend slipped from his place.

“Under those circumstances,” he assented, “I will accompany you on foot.”

They marched off together, finding themselves on a sort of plateau of short green turf studded everywhere with boulders of ancient grey rock. The wind from the snow-capped mountains by which they were encircled stung their faces. The place had almost an Alpine aspect and atmosphere.

“What a site for a golf course!” Peter Hames mused, looking around him.

“Good feeding for goats,” his companion observed.

They drew nearer to what was evidently a human habitation. With every yard, their astonishment grew. It was an ancient building enough, of Provençal type, but from basement to its dilapidated roof, it betrayed every sign of neglect and decay. It stood in the midst of the uncultivated land, with no possible pretence at an avenue or a garden. A gate, also hingeless and without fastening, led into a vineyard in which no living thing was visible. Yet the situation itself was almost incredibly beautiful. As they passed down to the front, they had a glorious view of the long green slope, falling into a bottomless valley—a slope commencing with olive trees, starred farther down with yellow gorse, late blossoming peach trees, great bushes of wild roses, a long, irregular tangle of orange trees grown wild, yielding to the mountain winds a medley of faint and unanalysable perfume. To the right, there was an amply planted, but neglected apple orchard, the fluttering petals of which added further sweetness to the air. Farther away still, desperate efforts had been made to cultivate a small plot of arable land. Higher up, at the rear of the house, was another miserable-looking vineyard, the vines unpruned and neglected, crawling upon the ground.

“If this is the *château* anything,” Peter Hames exclaimed, as they turned the corner, “I shall be inclined to eat my hat!”

“One can but enquire,” his friend suggested, with unabated cheerfulness.

“Whatever it may be, we’re here, and there’s a door anyway, swinging on its own hinges.”

They knocked upon it—a firmly closed, oaken structure, worn and worm-eaten with time. There was no reply. Out of a shed behind them, a man came with a great roll of binding material under his arm and a pitchfork over his shoulder. He was a huge fellow, gaunt and bent from stooping, with a black beard streaked with grey, and a sunburnt complexion, yet somehow utterly unlike the natives of the place. Peter Hames raised his hat.

“Monsieur,” he began, “*c’est ici le Château d’Amaris?*”

The man’s eyes were fixed upon Paddy Collins. For a moment he made no reply. When he did, he spoke English, with a pronounced Irish accent.

“This is the Château d’Amaris,” he assented. “What about it?”

Peter Hames glanced towards his friend, who came beamingly forward.

“Are you Dennis Collins from Limerick, who married a Miss Levine from these parts?” he demanded.

“What if I am,” the man rejoined ungraciously. “Explain your business. I have learned to be suspicious of all strangers.”

This was the style of conversation which suited Paddy Collins. Too much politeness, as he often maintained, got on his nerves and made him quarrelsome.

“I shouldn’t think you’d find many strangers would want to come to such a God-forsaken spot,” he remarked. “I being your nephew, and nephew also of old Henry Collins of Limerick, have nearly smashed up my friend’s beautiful car and broken my own neck, to come and find you out. Are you mad, man, to live amidst a mass of precipices like this?”

“Are you my brother’s son, Paddy, who went off to America fifteen years ago?”

“Sure, don’t you recognise me?”

A black thundercloud seemed to have darkened the man’s face. He grabbed his pitchfork short.

“Well, if that’s who you are, clear out,” he ordered, “before I spit you with this.”

“’Tis true Irish hospitality, although on foreign soil,” Paddy Collins declared, with unabated cheerfulness, but keeping his eye carefully upon the pitchfork. “This is the château right enough, Peter. It is me uncle who’s speaking to us so eloquently. Things have apparently gone wrong with him the day. Still, before I leave, having risked my life, and the life of my friend, in coming, could I have a word with my own cousin Eileen?”

The man was shaking with fury. What the next move might have been none of them knew, but suddenly the oaken door was dragged creakingly back, and a girl

stepped out. She was strangely clad, like a peasant working in the fields. Her complexion was roughened with stinging winds from snow-covered hills and hours of midday sunshine, but nothing spoiled her beauty. Straight and firm she stood, so slender that her figure seemed like the figure of a boy. Her voice was soft and liquid, but there was pride in its tone, in the poise of her daintily shaped chin, and in the subdued flash of her dark blue eyes.

“I fear that my father is receiving you gentlemen unkindly,” she said. “Will you forgive him. He has just had a great disappointment. Please let me know who you are and what you want. Our abode and manner of living do not, unfortunately, permit me to offer you anything in the shape of hospitality.”

Paddy Collins’ bow was the gesture of a courtier.

“It’s little Eileen,” he exclaimed, “and she’s all in the clouds, and not knowing her cousin Paddy.”

“I know too much of you,” she answered coldly. “I know that you managed to present yourself at the funeral at exactly the right moment and take the whole of Uncle Henry’s money. A cousinly action that!”

“I was always a bright lad,” Paddy Collins murmured.

“We don’t want you here—you or your friend,” his uncle shouted. “When I threatened you, I meant it. Get off these premises.”

“You’re hasty, Uncle Dennis,” his nephew remonstrated. “If you knew the trouble we’ve had to get here, you’d be welcoming us a little more politely. Since we are here, make up your mind to listen to what I have to say. It’s likely enough the last time I shall ever make the expedition. My friend here values his car and his life too highly to attempt it again, and I am of the opinion that any hired vehicle would have been lying by now at the foot of the precipice. I’m a diffident speaker and the sun is too hot on me. I’d do better sitting down, if it’s only on your stone floor inside.”

“A diffident speaker,” his uncle muttered fiercely. “You talk like a mechanical doll.”

The girl pointed to the door, which she pushed a little farther open.

“If you are not man enough to stand the sunshine,” she scoffed, “pray accept the shelter of our roof. We offer no apologies. We can afford to pay none, even of the natives, to help us. The factory at Grasse is paying less for our blossoms because our pruning is bad. Our vines have failed, we cannot borrow a horse to plough our land. Our herbage would feed no animal worth keeping. Therefore,” she added, as the two men passed before her into a huge but bleak sitting room, “we have no carpet upon our stone floor and most of our furniture has been carted away upon the vans of antique dealers. If you can find anywhere to sit, sit; if you can find anything to

say, say it. Then go.”

“Going would be best,” the man muttered.

“’Tis borne in upon me,” Paddy Collins declared, seating himself with the utmost care upon the corner of a chair, one leg of which was bound up in straw matting, “that in the minds of you two I am not a popular person.”

“Popular!” the black-bearded man groaned, handling his pitch-fork lovingly. “The only way you’d ever be popular with me, young man, is never to have been born.”

“And you, Cousin Eileen?” Paddy asked. “Are you as bitter against me too?”

She stood with her hand resting upon the huge chimneypiece, a miracle of suggestive grace, notwithstanding her unshapely garments. She looked him up and down from the crown of his head to his toes.

“You appear to be a full-grown man,” she observed scornfully. “It seems a pity you couldn’t have made some sort of a place for yourself in the world without sneaking around, waiting for old men to die.”

“That’s how you’re thinking of me, is it?” Paddy Collins sighed, and there was a little hurt tremor in his tone, which his friend had never heard there before.

She shrugged her shoulders.

“You have told us who you are,” she said, “and my father, I can see, is becoming impatient. He is a man of violent temper, and up here, amongst the mountains, he has time to brood. It irks him, too, that to you, who are his kith and kin, he has no hospitality to offer. It would be well, I think, for your safety and my comfort, if you departed.”

“My business is not yet finished,” Paddy Collins insisted stubbornly, and there was in his eyes a light which flashed back into hers.

“Finish it then quickly,” she enjoined. “It is not that I have any care for the safety of either of you, but if the sun sets in that bank of clouds, or before it reaches the snow-capped mountains, you’ll be lucky if you find the valleys again.”

“You are skilled in the weather portents,” Paddy Collins remarked, scarcely knowing what he said, but only anxious to keep her just where she was, even though the scorn in her eyes bit.

The girl made no reply. The silence, with the old man grasping his fork and glaring menacingly at his two visitors, seemed to take to itself a portentous character. The setting of the passionate little scene possessed a singular and appropriate realism. Well furnished, the apartment might conceivably have been the reception room of a château. It had a domed roof, still supported by worm-eaten but strong oak beams. It had walls which might have borne noble pictures. It had a fireplace,

high over which were still inscribed the mouldering remains of the intertwined arms of the families of d'Amaris and Levine. Not even the humanising glow of conversation, however, had chased the dank heaviness from its ghoulish atmosphere. The place had been unwarmed for generations. Clean it was, and clean was all it was. For the first time, it seemed as though it might have been for ages, human voices broke the chill. It was the girl who ended the silence, wearily and with a measureless contempt lurking in her tone.

“Your visit of courtesy,” she said, “has lasted fully long enough. My father and I would be glad to be relieved of your presence.”

Peter Hames was already eager to depart. His companion, however, was slow in rising to his feet and made no movement towards the door.

“It is myself who is a little stupid with the words this morning,” he acknowledged. “This is a visit of business, though I was willing to make it one of courtesy as well, being happy,” he added, looking straight into the girl’s eyes, “to discover a relative so gracious and so charming as you, Cousin Eileen. However, it is surely not my lucky day. I’ll get to the business. There was a codicil to my uncle’s will which required a legatee or heir—that being me—to visit those members of the family who could be discovered, which it seemed are only you two, and ascertain whether there was any real reason why they did not attend the funeral. I have to make a report to the lawyer, and if his idea is that the excuse, if any, is a good one, some redistribution of the estate has to be effected.”

“Say that again,” the old man gasped.

“I’ll get out of those legal words which fit me tongue badly,” Paddy Collins acquiesced. “What I’ve got to write to the lawyer is that, misfortune having overtaken you, you hadn’t the money for the passages to Ireland, and when I tell him that, you’ll get a slice of the estate. I’m not saying how much, because I don’t know, but it would be somewhere about forty thousand pounds, I daresay, or something like that.”

The man was shaking. It was not a pleasant sight to see his face twitch and his body quiver. He made no attempt at words. The girl’s voice trembled, but the fire in her eyes was undimmed.

“You’re mocking us, Cousin Paddy,” she challenged, with a sob in her throat. “May God damn you into hell if you are!”

“By the soul of the old man himself, I swear that I am not,” Paddy declared fervently. “It is my honest belief—my conviction—that on my report there’ll be some forty thousand pounds coming to you both. In fact, I’ll guarantee it.”

“A million francs!” Dennis Collins muttered. “A million!”

He looked at his hands, hard as leather, and the pitchfork slipped from his grasp and fell clattering on to the stone floor. Peter Hames, and perhaps his companion too, were suddenly aware of a queer tremor of shame because of the clothes they wore and the lives they had lived in ease and comfort. The drama of the little scene imposed itself painfully upon them—the old man’s bones, the skin tightly drawn across his cheeks and withered at the throat, the girl’s leanness, interwoven with the splendour of her youth, the lines of suffering about her proud mouth. These were the marks of no ordinary poverty, but of that poverty which makes a torment of the days, a tantalising hell of that sweet cavalcade of beauty amongst which the grim struggle was fought. . . . Suddenly the old man called out. His head fell into his hands. The girl left her place by the mantelpiece and rushed to his side. Her arms were wound around his neck. She pressed her cheek to his. Peter Hames and his companion tiptoed their way out of the place, sped over the rough ground, and never spoke until they were in the car and on their homeward way.

“It’s a queer codicil, that, Paddy,” Peter Hames observed.

“Aye, it is that,” Paddy assented.

“Did it ever exist?” his friend enquired.

“Be asking no questions,” Paddy Collins enjoined, as he pointed to the telegraph office down in the valley, for which they had been searching. “Can’t you see they’re eaten up with pride, those two, and money from me would burn in their gizzards. They are going to get it through the lawyer, put in proper shape. I’ll just send them a word of confirmation too, so that they’ll know we were no bogey men.”

Peter Hames watched his friend scurry into the post-office, and, out in the sunshine, heard his strident enquiries as to how soon a telegram could be delivered at the Château d’Amaris with a fee of ten times the original charge. Presently he emerged, his business satisfactorily concluded, a huge grin upon his face. Peter Hames suddenly leaned forward and shook his friend by the hand.

“You’re a damned good fellow, Paddy,” he said, with a little catch in his tone.

“You’re another, Peter,” was the hearty response. “What do we do about that?”

He pointed down the village street. Swinging in the light breeze was the sign of a café:

LE CAFÉ DES BONS AMIS

VI THE IMPERFECT CRIME

A pale-faced, slim, and not undistinguished-looking young man emerged from the bureau of Monsieur Dumesnil, cashier and financier omnipotent of the Sporting Club, and closed the door softly behind him. His first rapid glance up and down the heavily carpeted passage showed him that he was in luck. The official at the top of the stairs was talking to the lift attendant and both had their backs turned towards him. The flunkey in powdered hair and black satin knee breeches, who stood at the corner near the entrance to the *chemie* room, had temporarily disappeared altogether. There was not a living soul who could have witnessed his exit. With his hands in his pockets, he strolled along, turned sharp to the left on the other side of the staircase, passed the lift gates, and opened the door of the small lavatory opposite to him. Here again fortune favoured him, as up to a point it usually does favour the criminal of courage. The place was empty. The young man who had entered the lavatory divested himself of his dinner coat, hung it up, and carefully examined the sleeves. They were absolutely unstained. Then he paid meticulous attention to his shirt and, looking in the mirror opposite, scrutinised closely the cuffs. These, too, were flawless. Only on the third finger of his right hand was a stain,—and that very small. He turned on the water, plunged in his hand, used the scrubbing brush fearlessly, and dried his fingers upon a towel, which he searched with anxious eyes for any incriminating mark before he threw it into the wire receptacle. Then he brushed his hair, more from habit than necessity, put on his dinner coat once more, and sallied out. The lift attendant and his friend were still talking, but turned around and bowed as he passed. To have escaped attention altogether was more than he dared hope for and he was fully prepared for their recognition. He even glanced in to the bar and nodded to the barman, but, instead of entering, he looked in at the *chemie* rooms, reserved a place at the high table, which did not commence play until midnight, stepped back again, and made his way along the passage towards the Nouvel Hotel. The man at the desk saluted him with a low bow. He addressed the liveried attendant who opened the door.

“Nothing doing here yet, Charles,” he yawned. “I shall have a look at the Salles Privées.”

“They start later here each evening, sir,” the man observed. “There’s a big dinner party in the Paris too, to-night. There won’t be much of a crowd here before

midnight.”

In the lounge of the Nouvel Hotel the young man paused for a moment. His plan of action was definite, but things had gone so much better than he had dared hope for that he was inclined to modify it. He walked out of the swing doors, down the short drive, crossed the road, and entered the Casino proper. Here he met with what was to him his first disappointment. The tables were sparsely occupied and there was no crowd at any particular spot. He hesitated for a few seconds, then fell in line with the little queue at one of the cashiers' desks, changed a twenty *mille* jeton for counters of a lower denomination, repeated the proceeding at another *caisse* where business was brisk, and gambled with another five *mille* at a table where some high play was going on. He won twice, and passed on towards the Salles Privées with bulging pockets. Arrived at his destination, he turned sharp to the left and entered the bar. Here he seated himself upon a stool, carefully criticised his appearance in the looking-glass opposite, and somewhat astonished the barman, to whom he was well known, by drinking a double liqueur brandy at a single gulp.

“Bad indigestion, Charles,” he explained, with a pleasant smile. “Give me another ordinary one.”

They chatted for a few minutes, after which the young man strolled on to the playing rooms. He marked a place at a *chemie* table which had not yet commenced, changed another ten *mille* into counters at a crowded board, and relapsed into an easy-chair close to the *chemie* table where he proposed to play. Then he drew out his cigarette case, lit a cigarette, and gave himself up to careful meditation. Step by step, he reviewed his evening. He had dined at his usual table in the restaurant of the Club, and had talked there with several acquaintances and both *maitres d'hôtel* of his afternoon winnings at Nice, and of the fact that he had been repaid an old gambling debt by a man whom he had met there accidentally. That was quite in order. He had left his table early, frankly announcing his intention to gamble. He had mounted the stairs of the Sporting Club cheerfully, found the place almost deserted, as it was a few minutes before the formal opening time, and entered the bureau of Monsieur Dumesnil unnoticed. Monsieur Dumesnil was alone and had the good taste not to utter even a groan when the long, marvellously tempered blade sunk inch by inch through his shirt-front into his heart. Ever since then things had gone a little better than planned. The weapon—the only thing he had left behind—was a home-manufactured one—the blade of which had been in his possession for many years, the homemade handle riveted on by himself. No soul had seen him enter or leave that office. His booty was practically untraceable, for his first prize had been the long list on Dumesnil's desk containing the numbers of the notes and the identifying marks

of the high-priced counters. He began to feel marvellously cool and self-assured. A crime which no one could prove was non-existent. He sauntered across and took his place at the *chemin-de-fer* table where play was just beginning. Luck followed him as it sometimes does the evil-doer. His seat at the table was number two. He “bancoed” the man who had opened number one for a *mille*, and won. He started his own bank with five *mille*, and ran it seven times. His winnings now were considerable and a curious species of excitement seized him. He had been wasting years of his life. Crime—cunningly devised crime—was the brave man’s adjunct to success. He had been a fool ever to have walked in the shadow of poverty, ever to have neglected those gifts of which he certainly now found himself possessed.

For the first time in his life, Peter Hames heard Sybil Christian’s voice in his ear without that responsive throb of the senses which, as a rule, marched with her coming. He had been standing on the outskirts of a little group of acquaintances, all eagerly discussing the tragedy of the evening, but he followed her without protest to one of the quiet seats of the inner room of the bar. Then he saw that she was really perturbed and forgot his first irritation.

“Mr. Hames,” she said, “this is a terrible affair.”

He looked at her curiously.

“You were no special friend of Dumesnil’s, were you?” he asked.

“I certainly was not,” she admitted. “I disliked him very much, as I think most people did. It is of the living I am thinking; not of the dead.”

His little interrogative nod was an invitation to her to proceed.

“Dumesnil is finished with,” she said. “One may be sorry for him or not, but the fact remains that he can feel no more. Some one will have to suffer, of course. That is as it should be, but do you know what I think the most terrible thing in life? Let me tell you. It is to be wrongfully accused of a crime like that.”

“Is there any fear of anything of the sort happening?”

“I think that there is.”

She looked around. There was absolutely no one within hearing. A waiter was the nearest person. She summoned him and Hames despatched him with an order.

“One of the stupidest things in the world has happened,” she confided. “Of course, nearly everybody believes that the two croupiers who wanted instructions about opening the new table were the first people to enter the bureau and find Dumesnil dead. As a matter of fact, they weren’t.”

“How the mischief do you know that?” he asked.

“I know, because I saw some one go in before them,” she replied. “Not only did

I see him, but two others did.”

“Are you going to tell me who it was?”

“It was Clive Densham. I saw him go in and I saw him come out, looking like death. Lady Hackett saw him too; so did Jack and Minnie Fulsford.”

“This was before the croupiers went in?” Peter Hames questioned.

“Three or four minutes before.”

“Why didn’t Clive give the alarm at once?”

Sybil groaned.

“Why does one sometimes lose one’s nerve in a crisis?” she rejoined bitterly. “I can only imagine that he was terrified. Every one knows that he hasn’t a penny, that he lost everything last night, and that Dumesnil had threatened not to advance him any more money. I suppose that he was simply too terrified to give the alarm. Anyhow, he is sitting there at the corner of the bar, drinking, and, although I haven’t said a word, I believe Minnie Fulsford has, for I saw some of the principal officials with the Commissaire of police a few minutes ago, looking at him and talking to one another.”

“What do you want me to do?” Peter enquired.

She looked at him gratefully.

“I have spoken to Jack Fulsford and Lady Hackett, and they have agreed for the moment not to open their mouths unless some one else is accused. In the meantime, I want you to talk to Clive. Ask him why he didn’t give the alarm when he found out what had happened.”

“I’ll do that if you wish,” Peter Hames assented, “but wouldn’t it be better for you to speak to him yourself? You actually saw him come out.”

She shook her head.

“A man is always best in a case like this,” she insisted. “Clive Densham would hate confessing to me that he lost his nerve. I’m sure he’d tell you the sober truth.”

“When do you want me to tackle him?”

“This instant. I am so afraid that they may get hold of him and ask him a lot of questions before he has pulled himself together. He has been drinking steadily ever since he came out of the room and he is certain to contradict himself.”

“You don’t think he did it?” Peter Hames suggested curtly.

“I could as soon believe that I had done it myself,” was the emphatic rejoinder.

They dealt with their drinks perfunctorily and Peter Hames went on his mission. The young man Densham, as a rule surrounded by friends and acquaintances, was seated at the far end of the bar alone. His hair was unkempt, his eyes a little bloodshot. He seemed to have wrapped himself in a mantle of silence and

inaccessibility. Nevertheless, Peter Hames drew a stool to his side.

“Clive, I want to talk to you,” he said.

The young man glanced at him and scowled.

“Leave me alone, there’s a good fellow,” he begged. “I am trying to get drunk by myself.”

“That’s just what you mustn’t do,” Peter Hames continued firmly. “You may have to face a little trouble at any time. It is better for you to keep your head clear and be ready to deal with it.”

The young man swung around and faced him—a good-looking lad ordinarily, but almost repulsive now, when the signs of incipient intoxication were apparent.

“What the hell do you mean?” he demanded.

“It’s just as well you should know,” Peter Hames told him. “Several people saw you come out of Dumesnil’s office before the croupiers went in. You did a damned silly thing, Clive—not giving the alarm—and you’ve got to decide now what’s best to be done.”

Curiously enough, the imminence of a crisis seemed to act as a stimulant. Peter Hames’ composed manner, too, was helpful.

“Well, what is best to be done?” the young man asked. “I know I’ve been a fool. I felt all the time that some one must have seen me, but I couldn’t speak. Then I began to think the worst.”

“Will you put yourself in my charge for ten minutes?” Peter Hames suggested.

“Of course I will,” was the prompt acquiescence.

“Very well. You’re coming first to have a wash. Pull yourself together and look quite as usual as you leave the bar, and afterwards we’ll come back and we’ll have a drink together quietly. I rather imagine that the best thing for us to do then is to go and see the authorities.”

“I’ll do just what you say,” Densham agreed, slipping from his stool.

They passed out of the bar and round the corner to the small lavatory without interference, although Peter Hames, with an unpleasant premonition, had caught sight of a gendarme guarding the passage to the Hôtel de Paris and two or three others in the hall below. A few minutes later, a very different looking young man walked boldly by his friend’s side back to the bar and sank into an easy-chair in the annex.

“What have you been drinking?” Hames enquired.

“Brandy.”

Peter Hames ordered a brandy and perrier, and a whisky and perrier for himself.

“Now, Clive,” he enjoined, “explain to me just why you went to Dumesnil’s office, found him dead there, and came out without giving the alarm. We are all your

friends and we want to get you out of this without any trouble.”

“I suppose,” the young man groaned, “it seems to you like the act of a madman to have kept my mouth shut, but just consider this. Every one knows I haven’t a bob and that I’ve got one of my gambling crazes on, which is like another man’s drinking bout. When I get them, I’m simply crazy to play, and I sometimes have said that I’d do anything at such times to get hold of money. Then perhaps a year goes by, and I don’t touch a card, and don’t want to. Anyway, in I went to that office, and I honestly believe that I had some sort of an idea of taking old Dumesnil by the throat and frightening him if he refused to let me have a few *milles*. However, when I got there, Dumesnil was crumpled up in his chair, drops of blood were falling from his shirt front on to the carpet, and his face—well, you’ve seen dead men before; I hadn’t. I stared at him and my first impulse was to rush out of the place, shouting. I wish to God I had done so. What really happened was that, with my hand on the door knob, I looked back. I seemed to take in the whole ghastly little scene. Dumesnil was dead, with a dagger sticking out of his shirt front. All those piles of notes and counters with which he is always surrounded were gone too. For a second or so I seemed to see things quite coolly. I’ve actually been fool enough to talk about what I was going to do to Dumesnil if he wouldn’t advance me more money. I could see the same expression on the face of every one I met, when I rushed out and announced that Dumesnil had been murdered. I could have read the thoughts in their eyes. I was suddenly afraid, Hames, as I have been afraid of nothing else before in my life. I opened and closed the door and I staggered down the passage. I wasn’t sure whether any one had seen me or not. I struggled downstairs and outside into the fresh air. I think I was half inclined to make a bolt for it. Then I realised how damnably foolish that was, so I came back, climbed on to that stool, and I’ve been there ever since, drinking. Several people came over to speak to me—told me even what had happened—and I told them all to go to hell. Then I began to feel that every one in the bar was whispering about it. I daresay they are now, but I’ve got over the shock. What shall I do?”

“You’ll come straight with me to Monsieur Perault and the Commissaire of police,” Peter Hames insisted.

“I’m quite ready,” the other assented, rising to his feet.

The two men passed out of the bar and there were very few who did not guess their errand. An attendant outside, in response to Peter Hames’ enquiry, ushered them into a room at the end of the corridor. Monsieur Perault, the manager, with two of his subordinates, and an official of the police, were seated at a table. They had evidently just completed an examination of the bureau, the key to which lay upon the

table.

“Monsieur Perault,” Peter Hames announced, “our young friend here, Mr. Clive Densham, wishes to tell you what he knows of this affair. He was in the bureau before your croupiers.”

“Ha ha!” Monsieur Perault ejaculated. “We have heard something of this. Sit down, Mr. Densham, if you please. Monsieur Cheval, the Chef de la Sûreté, will doubtless like to ask you a few questions.”

The latter, a short, military-looking man of middle age, with a heavy moustache and gold pince-nez, addressed himself at once to his task.

“You then, apparently, Monsieur Densham,” he said, “were the first to discover that Monsieur Dumesnil had been murdered?”

“Apparently so,” the young man admitted. “I was certainly in his bureau before the two croupiers.”

“Will you tell me why you did not at once give the alarm?” the Chef de la Sûreté asked.

“I cannot answer that question even to myself,” Densham replied. “I simply don’t know. I was horrified at what I saw, in the first place, and in the second, it seemed to me that every one knew I was poor and had gone to borrow money, and that I should be accused of the murder.”

“I see. And did you murder him?” the Chef de la Sûreté added sharply.

“Of course I didn’t,” was the indignant disclaimer.

“Well, well, for your own sake, we hope not. Where did you go to when you left the bureau?”

“To the bar.”

“Nowhere else?”

Densham hesitated.

“Yes,” he acknowledged. “Before I went to the bar, I went downstairs and out into the street.”

Monsieur Cheval made a note.

“Out into the street? Why?”

“I don’t know. My head was going round and I wanted some air.”

“Perhaps you don’t know where you went, either?” his questioner suggested.

“As a matter of fact, I don’t,” Densham maintained. “I don’t think I was quite conscious. I walked some distance up towards the Casino, but how far I don’t know. I realised suddenly how foolish I was to leave the place. I came straight back and remained in the bar until Mr. Hames came and spoke to me. He advised me to come here with him and I did.”

“It seems rather a pity,” the Chef de la Sûreté remarked, peering through his pince-nez with narrowed eyes at the pallid young man, “that you did not come here before you took that little stroll outside. Now tell me, Monsieur Densham, did you look around the bureau at all? Did you notice that from his desk plaques for large amounts, as well as the *mille* notes which Monsieur Dumesnil kept always under his own hands, were missing?”

“I noticed nothing beyond that horrible blood on Dumesnil’s shirt front,” the young man declared passionately. “I wasn’t in a condition to notice anything.”

“Have you any objection to being searched, Monsieur Densham?” Monsieur Perault asked.

“None whatever.”

Monsieur Cheval shrugged his shoulders.

“That will probably come later,” he pointed out, “but if my friend considers—”

He waved an acquiescent hand. One of the gendarmes standing at the door took Densham into a corner. He returned in a few moments with a miscellaneous lot of articles which he laid upon the table. The money amounted to less than five hundred francs. The other things were the usual etceteras which every man is supposed to carry with him.

“What was your object in going into the bureau?” Monsieur Cheval enquired.

“To borrow money from Monsieur Dumesnil,” was the frank acknowledgment.

“You were in need of money then?”

“Desperately.”

Monsieur Perault intervened for a moment, talking in an undertone to the Chef de la Sûreté, who was a stranger to the neighbourhood. He thought it only right to mention the fact that Clive Densham was the son of old and respected inhabitants of the place, and, although he was without a doubt impecunious, he and his people had always been welcome visitors to the Sporting Club. The Chef de la Sûreté listened, but remained unimpressed.

“Crime must have its commencement,” he observed, “and the young man has admitted that he needed money desperately. He has none on him at the present moment, it is true, but what about that little visit outside?”

There was further discussion. Peter Hames ventured to point out that the young man was willing to give his word not to leave the building, that there could be no possible hiding place in which he could deposit the large sum which was missing from the bureau, and finally that, after all, what he had done, although unwise, was by no means unnatural. The shock of discovering a murder was quite sufficient to unbalance a sensitive person. There was more whispering between the Chef de la

Sûreté and Monsieur Perault. Finally the latter made an announcement.

“It is to be understood, of course,” he said, “that proceedings in this room are entirely informal. If you, Mr. Hames, will undertake to remain with Mr. Densham for the next hour and make no attempt to leave the buildings, you are both at liberty to depart.”

“Before I go,” Clive Densham declared, “I should like to assure you that my visit to the bureau was simply an attempt to borrow money. I never dreamed of doing Monsieur Dumesnil any harm, nor should I have done so under any conditions, and I did not touch a penny of the money which is missing, or one of the counters.”

The two men at the table listened in noncommittal silence. The gendarme opened the door. Peter Hames and his companion made their way back to the bar. The first informal enquiry into the murder of Jacques Dumesnil was at an end.

Acting upon Peter Hames’ advice, Densham decided to face it out amongst his friends, and he was very soon surrounded. He was perhaps one of the most popular young residents on the Riviera and there wasn’t a soul who believed him capable of the murder of any one, much less of poor old Dumesnil, who, notwithstanding his unpopularity, was notoriously frail and in ill health. At the same time, the absolute absence of evidence against anybody gave a sort of queer flavour to the affair. The general opinion was that Densham, at any rate, would hear no more about it except that he might have to give his evidence before another court. Just as they were leaving for a stroll in the roulette rooms, however, Monsieur Perault himself entered. He was looking a little harassed.

“We shall have to ask Monsieur Densham to spare us one more minute,” he regretted. “Monsieur Hames can accompany him if he wishes.”

In silence, the three men returned to the room at the end of the corridor. The Chef de la Sûreté waited until Densham had approached within a few feet of him. Then suddenly he flung upon the table before him a ten *mille* jeton, and pointed to it with a dramatic finger.

“Do you recognise that?” he demanded, and this time his tone, whether purposely or not, was almost the tone of a judge addressing a prisoner.

“It’s a ten *mille* jeton, obviously,” Densham replied. “I don’t recognise it particularly. Why should I? I don’t play so high myself.”

“You say that you left this place immediately after the murder was committed, which must have been at about ten o’clock. That jeton was picked up in the street between here and the Casino. People don’t throw ten *mille* jetons about, as a rule, if they are sane. Listen to me, young man; I suggest that you left this place, dazed with

horror at the deed which you had committed, and that, in your excitement and natural nervousness, one of the jetons which formed part of your booty slipped from your pocket. There it is. What have you to say?"

"Only that it's all rot," Densham insisted indignantly. "I've never handled a ten *mille* jeton in my life."

The Chef de la Sûreté cleared his throat and referred to some notes he had made.

"Clive Densham," he began, "you were the first person to be seen coming out of the bureau after the unfortunate Dumesnil had met with his death. With that terrible tragedy actually before your eyes, without warning to any one, you crept from the place and wandered aimlessly out into the street, where this jeton from Dumesnil's bureau was later picked up. The law gives me no choice in this matter. I am compelled to place you under arrest. You will be taken down to the Gendarmerie now and formally charged."

The young man bore himself bravely enough this time, although the colour seemed to have been sucked out of his cheeks.

"I never touched Dumesnil," he declared doggedly. "He was dead when I entered the bureau."

The Chef de la Sûreté rose to his feet.

"The informal part of the proceedings is completed," he announced. "It is now an affair for the recognised authorities."

Probably no single item of news had ever created more sensation in the Sporting Club than the instantly confirmed rumour that Clive Densham—one of the best-known young residents of the place and a constant *habitué*, an inevitable guest at all interesting social functions and almost as popular with the men as with the women—had been marched down the stairs which he had often mounted so light-heartedly, a gendarme on each side, under arrest upon the charge of murder. Two tables of *chemin-de-fer* were broken up at once, the participants—mostly ladies—declaring themselves unable to continue. The call of the croupier from the principal roulette table was made in vain, for every one was talking to his neighbour, or across the table, and the last thing they thought of was putting on a stake. Excited little groups stood about in all the corners. The bar was crowded but did very little business, as no one seemed to have the heart to drink. Sybil Christian, after a long search, discovered Peter Hames in conference with two of the managers and unceremoniously dragged him away.

"Is it my fancy," she asked him severely, "or are you taking this matter just a little

lightly?”

“I couldn’t do that,” he assured her. “On the other hand, I honestly believe that they’ll have to set him free in a day or two. There is no direct evidence. I have been talking to Maître Lapouge, the lawyer, and I am of his opinion. He says that there is enough evidence to arrest, but not to convict.”

“Listen to me, please,” she begged, “because I do know something of what I am talking about. The French legal policy is different to the English or American. When they have made an arrest, they devote every scrap of intelligence the police or detective force can summon together to finding that particular man guilty. Having once arrested Clive Densham, they will have a perfect horror of letting him go. There will be detectives at work, of course, but they will be at work in one direction only—to collect further evidence of Densham’s guilt. They have finished now with studying the case as a case. They have their hands upon a man, they have some evidence against him, and they’ll work until they have more. They’re fair enough in their way, but it isn’t their business to find any other suspect. They can keep him in prison practically as long as they like, whilst they search for evidence. The evidence they search for will be incriminating evidence against Clive Densham.”

“That’s very well put,” he conceded, “and I believe it’s not far from the truth.”

“Very well then,” she went on, “every scrap of intelligence you or I or any one else possesses must go to finding the really guilty person, and we must start at once.”

“You place it, I presume, outside the bounds of possibility,” he asked, “that Clive Densham might be guilty?”

“Absolutely.”

“I don’t know the young man as intimately as some of you,” Peter Hames meditated, “but you can’t get away from the fact that he was desperately hard up, that he had one of his fevers for gambling upon him, that he had actually gone about telling people what he was going to do to Dumesnil if the old man wouldn’t advance what he wanted. He entered the bureau in that spirit. It makes the story that he found him dead, and then, without any particular reason, gave no alarm, a little difficult to believe, doesn’t it—especially when he had to confess that he left the place and didn’t know where he went to?”

“That will do,” she pleaded. “That’s the official point of view and it’s almost enough to cost a man his life. Discard it, please, will you, for my sake. Work backwards and wipe out Clive Densham. Supposing that he didn’t do it, who did?”

“It’s terribly difficult in this country to work unofficially, but I see your point and I’ll do my best,” Peter Hames promised. . . .

He began his task by changing a *mille* note into hundreds, and, with these in his

pocket, he commenced a series of friendly and gossiping conversations with the attendants who had been on duty just before the opening of the Club. At the end of half an hour, he had made slight but definite progress. He had ascertained first that from the time of Monsieur Dumesnil opening his bureau and establishing himself there at about twenty past nine, no one else had been seen to enter or leave it except Clive Densham. Secondly, there were only about a dozen people in the Club, most of whom were having a scratch meal in the bar, and did not leave it until after the tragedy. The exceptions consisted of two elderly ladies who made a nightly habit of standing out in the corridor or in the doorway of the bar, watching for the opening of the *salles de jeux*, that they might get their favourite places at the *trente et quarante* table; an elderly gentleman of fabulous wealth, who could only walk with the help of crutches; and a young man known to most people—a great gambler, but a most agreeable player at *chemin-de-fer*, Prince Krotzky, a Hungarian Pole, whose family before the War had been socially famous in Paris and London. His presence there was accounted for by the fact that he had dined downstairs in the restaurant at his favourite corner table alone, and had come up before the Club was open, to drink a glass of brandy at the bar and secure his place at *chemin-de-fer*. As soon as he had done this, he had left the building for an hour and was now established at the place he had reserved, and was apparently winning heavily. Peter Hames' next move was more difficult. He sought out Monsieur Perault with a request. The manager was doubtful. He was as anxious to help the young man as any one could be, but a gendarme stood outside the bureau, strict orders had been left by the Chef de la Sûreté that nothing should be touched there until the arrival of a finger-print expert, and a detective from Marseilles. Nevertheless, Monsieur Perault compromised. He produced the key of the bureau, whispered a few words to the gendarme on guard, and himself accompanied Peter Hames inside.

“Don't let your hand rest anywhere,” he begged. “I expect we shall get into trouble about this, but to me it is incredible, as it is to you, that that young man, beloved of everybody, could have committed a crime so horrible.”

He turned on the light with shaking fingers and gave only one shuddering glance in the direction of the dead man.

“I beg that you will hurry, Mr. Hames,” he whispered hoarsely.

Peter Hames wasted no time. He went down on his hands and knees upon the floor and searched every inch of the carpet. Then he stood up and made a thorough examination of the mahogany counter. Finally, setting his teeth, and struggling hard against a fit of revulsion, he lifted the flap of the counter, stepped behind it, and bent over the crumpled form of the murdered man. He drew from his pocket a seldom

used magnifying glass and made a close examination of the dead man's shirt front. Finally he turned to the Manager.

"Monsieur Perault," he begged, "there is a small article, probably without the smallest significance, of which I wish to possess myself. It is resting at the present moment upon the waistcoat of Monsieur Dumesnil."

"It would be better to touch nothing," Monsieur Perault faltered.

"On principle, I quite agree with you," Peter Hames acquiesced. "But for once, Monsieur Perault, I beg of you to grant a little latitude. The French law is a magnificent thing, but it has but one idea—the criminal. This trifle is probably not of the slightest importance, but I want to remove it myself. Will you be my witness?"

Monsieur Perault demurred, but stepped reluctantly forward. His companion leaned over and removed from its resting place, at the bottom of the dead man's waistcoat, a speck of something which seemed to have a blue tinge. He dropped it into an envelope, which he thrust into his pocket.

"This is scarcely likely to be of any significance," he admitted, "but I will keep it for the present, if I may."

Monsieur Perault nodded uneasily.

"I will confess, Mr. Hames," he said, "I have done wrong in letting you reënter this room. I beg of you now to come away. I shall find it hard to explain my position to the Chef when he returns."

"I don't think you need worry," Peter Hames reassured him. "There doesn't seem to be a thing here in the shape of a clue. Besides, they have their man."

Monsieur Perault opened the door.

"You will come now, please," he insisted.

The gendarme, who had disapproved of their entrance, saluted reluctantly as the two men passed down the corridor together. Peter Hames asked his companion one more question.

"Monsieur Perault," he said, "you report a large number of high-priced counters missing. I presume that if these were held for several days, it would be possible, by entering the Casino in the morning, say in a fortnight's time, purchasing a jeton and studying it carefully, to detach the gummed-on labels from the old ones and bring them up to date?"

Monsieur Perault grudgingly admitted the fact.

"Now, will you do one thing more for me?" Peter Hames begged. "It is for the good of us all—and myself included. Will you send across with me to the *Salles Privées*, some one who shall authorise the various officials there to answer any questions I may put."

“With the utmost pleasure,” Monsieur Perault approved. “It is an intelligent idea. Anything I can do, Monsieur Hames—anything I can do in the world to help prove the innocence of our young friend, I would do joyously. The only thing is, the police are the police. I have exceeded my powers in permitting you to revisit the bureau. From henceforth it must be considered sealed.”

It was barely one o’clock when Peter Hames, a little tired but filled with a queer, tremulous kind of exultation, returned to the Sporting Club. The place was fuller now than ever, conversation more clamorous, and elbowing his way through the rooms, he noted with a shiver the number of people whose horror at the happening of the night seemed mingled with a sort of unholy pleasure. He made his way to the railed-in baccarat table, where people were standing five and six deep outside. One of the chefs, however, recognised him and let him in.

“Very high play to-night, Monsieur,” he whispered. “Monsieur le Prince had won at one time ten millions. He loses now heavily.”

Inside the rails the crowd was not so great. Peter Hames easily found a place opposite Krotzky. He studied him with fixed and curious expression for several minutes. He was a young man of medium height, absolutely pale, with hollow eyes and the long, nervous fingers of the gambler. He was taking a bank at baccarat and Peter Hames watched him deal the cards. For a moment, he felt a little catch in his throat. The night had been over-full of events. The atmosphere of the place itself seemed charged with emotion. He set his teeth and moved with difficulty to where Sybil Christian was standing amongst the spectators.

“Your friend Krotzky seems to be losing,” he remarked.

She shrugged her shoulders.

“I suppose he can afford it,” she observed. “They say that he had an enormous win at Nice recently.”

Peter Hames glanced at the “shoe.”

“They’ll have to make the cards directly,” he pointed out. “Do you know Krotzky well enough to ask him to have a drink with us?”

“I think so,” she assented, a little dubiously. “I find him sometimes rather a nuisance, as a matter of fact.”

“I’ll meet you at the door of the bar or in the annex,” Peter Hames suggested.

“I’ll bring him along,” she promised. “Any news?” she added wistfully.

“There may be later on.”

Prince Krotzky was at any rate a fine gambler. Notwithstanding an hour of tragic

losses, he was bending over Sybil Christian, as they emerged from the room, like a man who had no other thought in life than to win a smile from that very difficult young lady. She laid her hand upon Peter Hames' arm.

"Prince," she said, "I want to introduce a friend of mine. Mr. Peter Hames—Prince Krotzsky."

The Prince, who had apparently contemplated a tête-à-tête, responded courteously but without enthusiasm.

"We are going in to have a drink," Sybil continued. "Will you join us?"

"With great pleasure. But first of all, Prince, have you noticed that you have lost one of those small but very beautiful turquoises in your ring?"

The Prince raised his shapely hand and glanced at the disaster which had befallen him.

"Bad setting," he murmured. "I bought the stones in Colombo last year and was stupid enough to have them set there."

"Well, you're luckier than you deserve," Peter Hames remarked. "Come with me a yard or two and I'll show you the missing stone."

The Prince agreed, apparently without demur. They walked down the corridor together. When they reached the room with the gendarme stationed outside, however, the Prince stopped suddenly.

"My God," he exclaimed, "that's the room in which poor Dumesnil was murdered!"

Peter Hames nodded.

"Yes," he said, with his hand upon the knob of the door. "We are going inside."

An earthquake rumbled and swayed under the feet of the Prince. There was a sobbing in his ears. He took a quick step backwards. Somehow or other, the gay throng of people ascending and descending the stairs, passing into the rooms or out into the bar, seemed to consist of gendarmes—a gendarme to his left, another on his right. Race or some latent quality helped. The thunders ceased. The floor was steady beneath his feet.

"Well, it's a queer place to bring me," he commented, smiling. "I've no fancy for horrors, and it would scarcely have been here, Mr. Hames, that you found my stone."

He entered the room firmly enough, Peter Hames' hand in friendly fashion upon his shoulder, and, with a click, the door was closed. The Chef de la Sûreté, his anger at being dragged out of bed suddenly dispersed, rose to his feet.

"This is Prince Krotzsky," Peter Hames explained. "It seemed to Monsieur le Prince here that he might be able to help us in this matter of poor Densham. One

finds over at the Salles Privées that a considerable number of plaques which might have come from Monsieur Dumesnil's evening store were changed there, and, although they are, of course, almost impossible to trace, one of the officials of the place believes that it was the Prince who changed them. Furthermore—”

Peter Hames paused. The Chef de la Sûreté drew an envelope from his pocket and shook a small object out on to the counter.

“Furthermore,” the latter continued, “this fragment of stone, Prince, was found resting at the bottom of the waistcoat of the murdered man. Will you permit me to see whether it fits with the empty space in your ring?”

The Prince drew his ring from his finger and laid it upon the counter. A little exclamation broke from the lips of the onlookers. The stone fitted exactly.

“You are willing, Monsieur le Prince,” the Chef de la Sûreté asked, “to submit yourself to an interrogation?”

The Prince's long fingers were again busy. Peter Hames was within a yard of him, but he acted upon one of the principles of his life, and he moved neither hand nor foot. The gendarme stood with his back to the door and the Chef de la Sûreté was on the other side of the counter. So Prince Krotzky blew out his brains in ease and comfort and Clive Densham slept in his own bed after all.

VII WHAT SIR STEPHEN FORGOT

Monte Carlo was in the hands of the tourists, or rather the glorified ocean-cruising tripper. The huge liner lay just outside the port, a startlingly incongruous object, making the Casino, the Café de Paris and the hotel look more than ever like pasteboard toys from a child's playbox, when placed against the material realities of life. On the crowded quay men and women were struggling into numbered automobiles or embarking upon adventures of their own in small *voitures*. Up the steep steps, short-cut into the centre of the place, climbed Mr. William P. Cogan, Mr. Ernest Inman, and Mr. Paul H. Doggit.

"Say, boys, isn't this great?" Mr. Inman exclaimed, taking off his strangely shaped grey felt hat and wiping the perspiration from his forehead. "We're here ahead of the others. Some spot, eh?"

"Fine!" Mr. Doggit agreed, as soon as he could get his breath.

"It's the goods!" Mr. Cogan echoed enthusiastically. "What about a quick one?"

They crossed the road towards the Hôtel de Paris bar. Peter Hames, who had just issued from the hotel, came face to face with them. He recognised Mr. Ernest Inman with a little exclamation of surprise, and Mr. Inman recognised him with an exclamation in which many sentiments were mingled.

"Why, In—"

Mr. Inman let himself go.

"If it isn't Peter Hames?" he cried. "God bless my soul! They told us over in New York that you were living in these parts, but to tumble on you like this! Why, we only landed here two minutes ago. I call this fine."

Mr. Doggit and his companion, confidently awaiting an introduction, loitered expectantly in the background. Mr. Inman continued his ecstasies in a slightly lowered tone.

"Inman, the name—insurance broker, Garden Street, New York."

"I see," Peter Hames murmured. "Incognito, eh?"

"You must meet my friends," Mr. Inman insisted, with renewed heartiness of tone.

Introductions were effected. Peter Hames good-humouredly followed the three to the bar.

"How's the insurance business?" he asked.

“Going fine,” Mr. Inman declared. “To tell you the truth, I’m over on this side to try and land something big.”

“Why, I thought you’d come on this excursion steamer,” Peter Hames remarked.

“So I did—quickest way of getting here. She don’t waste much time until after she leaves here. Say, Hames, you might be just the man I’m looking for, to give me a few pointers.”

“Glad to be of any service to you,” was the cordial assurance. “What is it you want to know?”

Mr. Inman picked up his tumbler.

“Will you boys excuse me for five minutes,” he begged. “Chalk another round up to me. Mr. Hames was in the same line of business as me in New York, and maybe he can tell me something I’m wanting pretty badly to know.”

They waved him away with words of hearty acquiescence. Inman proceeded to a small table and seated himself opposite his old friend. He was a man somewhat inclined towards corpulence, but well set up. His cheeks were sunburnt with the voyage and his eyes a peculiar shade of steely blue. At a first glance he was very much like Mr. Doggit, Mr. Cogan, and a few hundred other inhabitants of New York and other American cities, who had landed from the steamer. At close quarters, however, he had a mouth which told its own story.

“Mr. Hames,” he began, “I was sorry to have to bluff a bit. You’ll forgive me, I know. I came over on that boat because I thought I’d find one man I’m looking for on it. I believe he is there, all right, but I haven’t tumbled to him yet. I was terribly afraid you were going to get the ‘Inspector’ out. Nobody’s wise to my walk in life and I don’t want them to be.”

“You chose a pretty good alias,” Peter Hames observed, smiling. “I got as far as the In.”

“My name’s Inberton still in New York, but Inman on this cruise,” the latter went on. “I’m still at Police Headquarters, but I have had a promotion since you left. There’s one question I should like to ask you. Do you know an elderly gentleman resident in these parts by the name of Sir Stephen Driscoff?”

“I know whom you mean,” Peter Hames admitted. “Very few people know him personally.”

“Do you happen to know if he’s here now?”

“I saw him yesterday, driving out of his villa.”

There was a flash of satisfaction in the Inspector’s eyes.

“Far from here?”

“A couple of miles. Unless you have very influential introductions, though, I warn

you that he's almost impossible to see. He is, or pretends to be, in a very delicate state of health, has a doctor practically living in the house, and menservants who lose their job on the spot if they admit anything in the shape of visitors."

The Inspector seemed unperturbed.

"I guess I'll find my way in," he remarked. "Now I must be getting back to those boys. They want me to finish the tour with them, but this is as far as I'm going. I've had my luggage taken off."

Peter Hames made his adieux to the other two men and went on his way. The Inspector, who had walked with him to the door, watched him thoughtfully until he had disappeared. This meeting with his old acquaintance in Monte Carlo presented something of a problem to him.

Sir Stephen Driscoff, ex-diplomat, multimillionaire, and man of mystery, was taking his usual morning promenade in the orangery attached to his magnificent villa on the slopes of Roquebrune. The windows were flung wide open to the soft Mediterranean breeze and the air of the place was faint with exotic perfume. Great palms reached to the summit of the domed roof. There were ferns of rare varieties banked up against the wall, and floating lilies, with their curious aroma, in the pool into which the waters of a fountain fell with soft, rhythmical cadence. Sir Stephen had been a large man, and even now, though gaunt and wan, he was a commanding figure, leaning upon his ebony stick as he passed back and forth. His grey but still heavy eyebrows met in a frown as he recognized the approaching figure. He was a man of routine and the time had not yet come for him to receive his secretary. A rather stout little dark man, however, came hurrying up.

"Sir Stephen," he began—

"You cannot have finished the letters yet," his master interrupted him.

"I have not, Sir Stephen," the man admitted. "I was disturbed by callers. As you know, Sir Stephen, it is very seldom I suggest such a thing, but I think that you should receive them for five minutes."

"Nonsense!" his employer exclaimed. "What are you talking about, Martin?"

"One of the two is Mr. Peter Hames," the secretary proceeded. "He is quite well-known here—an American—wealthy—who paints a little for a pastime. The other is a detective from Police Headquarters in New York."

"What the devil does an American detective from New York, or Mr. Peter Hames, for that matter, want with me?" Sir Stephen demanded.

"That is what I think you had better give them the opportunity of explaining."

Sir Stephen struck the tessellated pavement with the end of his stick.

“What the devil,” he complained, “is the use of my keeping you and a dozen menservants in the house purposely to protect me from visitors, when you come and suggest that I should receive a young man whom I scarcely know from Adam, and a New York detective?”

“To-day is Thursday,” the secretary observed calmly; “there have been between ninety and a hundred callers already this week, not one of whom has done more than sign his name in the book. I have not suggested that you should see one of them.”

“Bring them here,” Sir Stephen enjoined curtly.

The secretary disappeared and returned a few minutes later, ushering in Peter Hames and his American acquaintance from the boat. The Inspector, away from his associates, had a very professional appearance. Even the swing of his broad shoulders suggested officialdom. Sir Stephen, seated in his chair, watched their approach with a frown.

“These are the two gentlemen of whom I was speaking, Sir Stephen,” Martin announced. “Mr. Hames you have met several times. As you go out so seldom, you have probably forgotten him. The gentleman whom he has brought with him is Inspector Inberton of New York, who wishes to see you upon business.”

Sir Stephen nodded not unpleasantly to Peter Hames and looked keenly from under his bushy eyebrows at his companion. At a gesture from him, Martin brought chairs.

“Living in the neighbourhood, as he does,” Sir Stephen said, “Mr. Peter Hames probably knows enough of my habits to be aware that I do not receive visitors. Perhaps you will let me know the nature of your business, Inspector, as briefly as possible.”

“You can have it in a very few words, Sir Stephen,” was the almost brusque reply. “This is no visit of courtesy, I can assure you. I come in pursuit of my duty. A fortnight ago a man left New York for Monaco with the sole purpose of robbing you.”

“And how the devil do you know that?” Sir Stephen demanded.

“Isn’t that rather a foolish question, when you consider my profession and my position, for which Mr. Hames can vouch, on the New York Police Force?” the Inspector rejoined gruffly. “It is our business to keep tabs on our criminals and to know what they’re up to. As a rule, we’re not particularly concerned in their activities in foreign countries, but you were once well-known in New York and the Chief thought you should be protected.”

“Who is this fellow then, and what does he want to rob me of?” Sir Stephen asked, with grudging interest.

The Inspector's manner showed signs of irritation. Sir Stephen was evidently a new type to him.

"He isn't expecting to pull a million francs out of your safe, or anything of that sort," he replied sarcastically. "You have a document which he is after—a document which, we understand at headquarters, a firm in New York has made several attempts to obtain from you in the ordinary course of business."

"What is this man talking about, Martin?" Sir Stephen enquired testily.

"I'd like you to understand this, my friend," the Inspector broke in. "I'm not here for the good of my health nor am I wasting Uncle Sam's good money to amuse myself. In the course of our investigations, we discovered that a notorious criminal, who is also the most accomplished burglar in existence, had accepted a large sum from a syndicate to come over here and rob you. Neither I nor the United States Government have anything to gain by stopping it. So far as my personal feelings are concerned, I should even prefer to let the matter rip. If you would kindly bear that in mind, this conversation might go a little more smoothly."

Sir Stephen adjusted an enormous monocle, which he seldom used, and stared at the speaker. When he let it fall, he drew a little sigh.

"You certainly remind me of the years I spent in New York," he admitted. "The only trouble is, if I may say so, I never knew an American private individual, or an American institution, interfere to save an outsider from being robbed, unless they were deriving some benefit themselves."

"I guess you'll have to listen to a little plain talking from me, sir," the Inspector observed. "You're a millionaire, and a knight or a baronet, or something—we don't take any stock in that rubbish over on my side—but, when you talk about America, you don't know what you're speaking about. Police Headquarters of New York has nothing to gain for itself by putting you wise to the fact that you're the mark of a gang. It's just a matter of international courtesy that brings me over here with the hope of laying hands on a criminal we're very anxious to catch. I've brought Mr. Hames with me so that you should have no doubt about my *bona fides*. Mr. Hames was on the Force with me as a younger man. If you—"

"Yes, yes," Sir Stephen interrupted, "I don't doubt your *bona fides*. Perhaps I'm a little irritable this morning, Inspector. Get right on with it, and tell me about this gang that are going to try to rob me."

"May I ask a question?" Martin begged. "The firm that you said had been trying to purchase this document in the ordinary way of business—was it the Incorporated Finance Trust Limited, of Wall Street?"

"That's right," the Inspector agreed.

"I think I can explain something of the matter then, Sir Stephen," his secretary volunteered. "I have brought to your notice two or three times the fact that they have written to acquire an option you once bought from a man named William David Harding—a six years' option, it was, I think, expiring next year, to purchase certain lands in Tennessee—not far from a famous oil well."

"I remember," Sir Stephen reflected. "I didn't want to have anything to do with the affair, but I had made a little money one way and another through Harding, and he needed the cash. That was all he had to offer. Yes, we've got the option, all right. I suppose they've discovered there's oil there, eh?"

"Looks like it," the Inspector agreed.

"They began by offering to buy it for twenty thousand dollars," Martin continued. "They increased that to forty thousand. Last week we had a cable offering fifty thousand. Acting on Sir Stephen's instructions, I replied that the option was not for sale at the moment, and I wrote to our solicitors in New York requesting them to send an expert to report upon the property."

The Inspector chuckled.

"Well, there we have the whole affair," he pointed out. "Your friend Harding, or the people who now own the land, want to get hold of that option at any cost. They haven't been able to buy it, so they've engaged the cleverest burglar in the world to come and rob you of it."

"And where is this light-fingered gentleman?" Sir Stephen enquired.

A frown slowly darkened the Inspector's countenance. Momentarily, at any rate, he seemed to lose his air of supreme self-assurance. His tone betrayed signs of irritation.

"There were seven hundred people on board the *Mauretania*," he confided. "I took five to one in a hundred dollars that I would spot Joe Marven before we were a week out. I lost my money."

"You mean then, that after having been on the boat with him for a fortnight, you couldn't find him, and you have not the slightest idea as to his present whereabouts?" Sir Stephen suggested ironically. "You fellows aren't so smart as you used to be."

"I know that he is in Monte Carlo, anyway," the Inspector declared. "He was one of the crowd who left the steamer with the rest of us this morning, all right, but I haven't got him marked down yet for a certainty. I have two men I've got tabs on, who kinda answer the description, and I'm not letting them far out of my sight. I don't know as it makes much difference, anyway. It's here I wanted to arrest him—in your strong room, or wherever you keep your papers."

"How do you know I keep my papers here at all?" Sir Stephen demanded. "I

have three other houses, not to speak of interests in a few banks.”

The Inspector answered a little wearily. From his manner, one would judge that he was beginning to heartily dislike his host.

“Do give me credit for knowing something now and then, sir,” he begged. “What we know, we know through the man who squealed about the job. We had it from him, after he had left the syndicate, that all your private papers and documents were kept at this villa here, that it was supposed to be burglar proof, but that you had a weakness for keeping no money in the house, only gold and silver plate.”

Sir Stephen was obviously somewhat taken aback.

“That syndicate you’re speaking of must have a fairly intelligent espionage system over on this side,” he admitted. “It is perfectly true that I seldom keep more than a few *mille* in the house, but most of my documents are in my strong room here, because it amuses me to go through them sometimes, and there is, of course, gold and silver plate. Except for that—although I consider mine is the most perfect burglar-proof house in the world—I haven’t a thing worth stealing—not a thing, I mean, that would be really portable.”

The Inspector’s smile was supercilious in the extreme.

“I’ve heard of those burglar-proof houses,” he remarked, with a twinkle in his eyes. “However, let’s get back to hard facts. I don’t want to waste time and I mean to have my man on the Cosulich Line steamer from Marseilles by the day after tomorrow. Try to get this into your head. Your house is going to be broken into to-night.”

Sir Stephen smiled.

“You say that you have been unfortunate in losing a few bets about spotting your man coming over,” he observed. “I will give you a chance to get some of it back again. I will bet you five hundred pounds that no burglar in the world to-night, or at any time, reaches my strong room, or if he does reach it, that he does not help himself to a single document in my safe.”

“You wouldn’t like to give me a bit of odds, sir?” the Inspector ventured. “Five hundred pounds is a great deal to a man in my position.”

“Five to one,” Sir Stephen acquiesced. “Now, come along, Martin, get your keys. Mr. Hames will excuse us, I am sure, because what I am going to show to a detective who lives in New York, I couldn’t show to a resident here, if he were the Prince.”

Peter Hames rose to his feet.

“Well, there’s nothing more I can do for you, I suppose, Inberton?” he asked.

“Nothing at all, thank you,” was the cordial reply. “Your introduction to Sir

Stephen was all that I needed.”

“Remember me to the Chief and to all of them in New York,” Peter Hames enjoined. “If you have any time to spare and care to look me up, they’ll tell you at the Hôtel de Paris how to find my villa.”

The Inspector sighed.

“No luck for me that way, I am afraid. I have to get my extradition papers viséed this afternoon and I expect to-morrow I shall have a little playmate with me. Many thanks, all the same.”

“Glad to have seen you, Mr. Hames,” Sir Stephen grunted, holding out his hand. “You understand, I am sure, the feeling I have about divulging the secrets of the house to a resident?”

“Absolutely,” Peter Hames assured him. “I have always been told you live in a fortress and I am quite willing to take it for granted.”

Whereupon Peter Hames took his leave.

Mr. Paddy Collins, sometime reporter on the *Evening World* of New York, but now a man of means and the prospective owner of a château in the neighbourhood of Monte Carlo, was having the day of his life. From his terrace he had watched the arrival of the American steamer, and in less than half an hour he had been back in his old world. Probably no man had ever a larger circle of acquaintances than had the ex-journalist. There was slapping of shoulders, cocktails, reminiscences, almost hugging, every few minutes. He lunched on board with a riotous crowd and afterwards extemporised a personally conducted tour of the bars of Monte Carlo. There was another riotous dinner at the Hôtel de Paris, where Paddy himself was host, and afterwards an invasion of the Sporting Club. Then, one by one, his new friends began to fade away, for the ship was due to sail at midnight, and, although everybody agreed that Monte Carlo was as near paradise as any place outside the United States could be, no one wanted to miss the boat. As the last carload disappeared, Paddy Collins felt lonely. He was indisposed to go home at this early hour. He needed genial and human companionship. He rang up the Villa at La Turbie and was gratified to hear Peter Hames’ voice replying.

“Peter, my lad,” his friend confided, “it’s been the day of my life. I’ve met a hundred old pals and it was good to see them. I think I’m sober, but I’m not sure. There’s one thing very certain, I’m not for bed. Come down and see them off, and join me in a whisk around. You’ve missed the day of your life.”

“Have I?” Peter rejoined. “I’ve been keeping out of the way on purpose. I love my fellow countrymen, but not *en masse*, and not tripping.”

“Step out of that, Peter, my lad. They’re good fellows, all of them. I’m the best, and I’m alone and thirsty. Get into that little two-seater of yours and give me a spin around.”

“I’ll be down in a quarter of an hour,” Peter promised. “Where are you?”

“I’ll be sitting in the bar of the Hôtel de Paris, with a bottle of the best in front of me by the time you get down,” was the grateful reply. “It will be good to see you, my lad. I’m feeling kind of homesick with all the crowd melting away so sudden.”

It was a malady, however, which lent itself to treatment.

“You’re a wonderful fellow,” Peter Hames exclaimed, a short time later, as he scrutinized his vis-à-vis. “How many drinks do you suppose you’ve had to-day?”

“Oh, I’m always a bit of a bluffer with the drinks,” Paddy Collins confessed. “I take my whack, and no one enjoys it more, but there’s many a one goes overboard when no one’s looking. It don’t take alcohol to get me cheerful, especially since Uncle Henry died. But what a day! Peter, I’ll tell you something that will make you howl. Did you ever know, in your time at police headquarters, anything of a man called Inberton. He was an inspector, I think, when you were there.”

“Yes, I knew him quite well,” Peter acknowledged.

“A funny business about him. You heard the rights of it, I suppose?”

Peter shook his head.

“I have never heard anything of him since I left New York,” he confided. “When I saw—”

“God bless my soul!” Paddy Collins interrupted. “Well, I’ll have a drink on that,” he went on, filling his tumbler and his friend’s. “I’m telling you something that will make you laugh about Ernie Inberton. He was as smart as they make them and he was the terror of every burglar in the States. He understood every trick there was in the trade, could walk into any house he chose at any time. There was never a lock invented which he couldn’t pick in the course of a few minutes, or a safe he couldn’t open. Now this story will make you laugh, Peter, if you haven’t heard it, and I know you don’t take the American newspapers. He became obsessed with his own skill—got into his blood, I suppose. One night, there was a marvellous bank burglary—over a million dollars’ worth of securities stolen—and there didn’t seem a line on anybody. Then—I don’t know how it was—some stupid little thing, I expect—it all came out. Ernie had done the burglary himself.”

The glass which Peter Hames was holding to his lips went crashing on to the floor. He took no notice. His eyes were riveted upon his companion’s. He was filled with a sudden and terrible premonition.

“Say that again, Paddy?” he demanded.

“Ernie had done the burglary. He got four years for it. He was out about six months ago. I thought you’d have heard that. But listen, my lad, here’s the cream of the joke. Live and let live, I say. Other people can go hunting wrongdoers; never me. Ernie Inberton is here with the rest of them, on the steamer. I saw him with me own eyes. . . . Why, what’s the matter with you, Peter? What’s wrong, man?”

Peter Hames was thinking rapidly. He glanced at the clock. Within a quarter of an hour of midnight.

“Paddy,” he said, “I’ve been the damnedest fool, but how was I to know? I met Inberton. He was still wearing his badge and he never breathed a word of any of this trouble. I believed him when he told me he was over here shadowing a man who meant to commit a burglary at Sir Stephen Driscoff’s to-night. I—listen, Paddy—I took him up there—the damned fool that I was. I introduced him to Sir Stephen as an inspector on the New York police force. I left him there with Sir Stephen, who was going to show him his strong room and his burglar-proof safe, and all the rest of it. My God!”

If Paddy Collins had ever been in the least degree unsober, that time had passed.

“By the grace of God,” he exclaimed, “I have a gun in my hip pocket. Your car’s outside. Let’s leap into it and make for the Château. We’ll likely enough be in time. A pleasant end to the evening it may turn out to be!”

It was ten minutes to twelve when the two men left the Hôtel de Paris and twelve o’clock when they pulled up outside the Château de Roquebrune. There was no light in the porter’s lodge and the gates were locked. Neither of the two visitors were inclined to waste any time. Within a minute, they were both safely over the famous wall, which in itself was looked upon as being almost sufficient protection against marauders. They went up the avenue at a fast double, running one on each side on the grass border, in order to approach as silently as possible. Before them all the time loomed the huge, gloomy front of the Château. Breathless, they crossed the final circular sweep of the drive and arrived at the front door. Peter Hames drew down the great bell chain vigorously. The echoes had scarcely died away, when, to the amazement of the two men, the door was thrown open. A manservant presented himself.

“Sir Stephen,” Peter Hames gasped.

The man’s reply was astonishing.

“Sir Stephen will see you, gentlemen,” the man replied.

A little dazed, they followed the servant into a magnificent library on the ground floor. Sir Stephen, correctly attired in dinner suit, but with a flowing black tie, was seated in a comfortable easy-chair before a log fire, reading. He looked up at their

entrance and laid his book down.

“Ah,” he remarked, “my young friend of this morning and a gentleman with whom I am not acquainted.”

“Mr. Collins, an American journalist,” Peter Hames explained hurriedly. “He has just told me a most alarming story. Sir Stephen, I’m terribly sorry. The Inspector was a fraud. He has been in prison himself for burglary since I knew him. I’m afraid he was after your paper.”

“Dear me!” Sir Stephen exclaimed, without visible sign of emotion, “and I showed him all—or very nearly all—of my burglar-proof devices. This is most distressing.”

“We’re in time, I hope?” Peter Hames continued. “We’ll guard the room, if we may. We’re both armed.”

Sir Stephen nodded approvingly.

“Martin was quite right,” he reflected, “quite right. He was certain that you came in good faith. As regards your friend, the Inspector,” he added, rising to his feet, “it is perhaps time we went and had a look at him. He may be alive. He appeared to me to have a good constitution. We shall see. Martin!”

The secretary approached from the shadows in the background.

“Let us,” his employer suggested, “have a look at our visitor.”

The young man glanced at the clock.

“It’s quite time, Sir Stephen,” he agreed. “This way, please.”

They trooped across the hall, down a blank passage until they reached a door at the end. Martin drew a small gilt key from his pocket.

“Will you gentlemen all stand back, please,” he begged, as he fitted it into the lock. “Stand quite clear of the door until I have touched the switch. I don’t think there’ll be any trouble of that sort,” he added, as both men drew their guns. “Just as well to be prepared, though.”

The door swung open. A little column of faint violet mist strayed out. Martin thrust his hand to the side of the wall and pressed a plug. There was a sound inside like the rushing of wind.

“It will be quite all right to come in now,” he announced, a moment or two later.

They stood grouped on the threshold, looking into what might have been an ordinary banker’s strong room, with several iron doors at intervals let into the wall. In one of them was fitted a key, and, flat upon the floor below it, lay the Inspector, motionless. The room itself was still half filled with the violet mist, which was being rapidly sucked up, however, by a large tube hanging down from the ceiling. Sir Stephen bent over the prostrate body.

“I showed him a good many of my anti-burglar appliances,” he explained, “but not quite all. I quite forgot to tell him how to shut off the poison gas. What do you think of him, Martin?”

The secretary was on his knees. He opened the waistcoat from which still hung the badge of the ex-detective’s non-existent office. Then he looked up and shook his head.

“I am afraid, Sir Stephen,” he confided, “that we left him just five minutes too long.”

VIII

GOING, GOING, GONE!

For an hour or more, Peter Hames had been painting fervently. Little puffs of the west wind had been sucking the perfume from the waxy pink and white blossoms growing thick in the orchard on his right. Chance had brought him to a very riot, a phantasy of colour. There were long clusters of *Bougainvillæa*, violet and deep purple, clambering along the grey front of the farmhouse below and even hanging over the barn. A hedge of wild roses, pink and white, enveloped the rude fence which bordered the grassy meadow, tailing off at the end into odd bushes and twining branches of flower-starred thorns growing upon the ground. Peter Hames had come across this little paradise by mounting the hill from the opposite side. He had planted his easel at a perilous angle upon the grassy slope and commenced to paint with a zest in those days rare to him. The whole place seemed soaked in colour and perfume. Even at his feet there were big yellow buttercups, cuckoo flowers, and spider-like harebells, blue as the skies. A grove of cypress trees, stark-stemmed but rich in foliage, shielded and guarded the little demesne from the snow-chilled winds. On all sides it lay open to the sunshine; a tiny stream raced through the deep valley below, and on the opposite hill sprawled the old citadel town village, whose houses had lost all shape and might indeed have been carved out of the rocks from which they were indistinguishable. From Peter Hames' sheltered point of vantage, the place itself seemed to be deserted, and it was only after a long and breathless spell of exquisite labour that he became aware, as he paused to light a cigarette, of sounds in front of the half-seen building. He listened for a moment then made his way cautiously down. To his surprise, on the other side of the flower-wreathed hedge which separated him from the farmhouse, quite a little group of village people were standing. There was an old waggon which had been pulled out from the barn, on to which a man in the alien habiliments of civilised places had climbed. There were perhaps a score of villagers around, and, seated on the doorstep of the house, a man in blue overalls, his head sunk on his chest, his fierce, light-coloured eyes wandering here and there, with a look of hatred for everybody. Men were dragging articles of furniture out from the house.

Hames, gazing over the dilapidated gate, realised that he had stumbled upon a sale of household effects, that the man upon the waggon was the auctioneer, and the man upon the doorstep the probable victim of the law. He pushed the gate to one

side and approached the outskirts of the gathering—a strange figure to the wondering villagers, for he was dressed in very shabby brown Holland shorts, a blue shirt open at the neck, a pair of brogue shoes, a sun helmet, and very little else. The auctioneer leaned from his waggon as though to question him. Peter Hames removed his helmet with meticulous politeness.

“I am a wayfarer by accident,” he explained. “It is perhaps a sale which takes place. I do not intrude?”

“For to-day,” the auctioneer confided, “this garden is the property of any one who cares to enter, and if Monsieur has a few francs to spend, there might perhaps be bargains.”

The man with the queer-coloured eyes and yellow beard scowled across at Peter Hames.

“There are no bargains, even for the hungriest antique seekers, amongst my poor possessions,” he sneered.

“Is everything out of the house?” the auctioneer asked, a few minutes later.

“Everything except the bed upon which my poor wife lies,” the man upon the step replied, “and the person who lays a hand on that will get his neck broken for his trouble.”

They looked at him strangely, all that crowd of people, and it was easy to see that, although he might have lived amongst them for a year or more, he was not one of them, either in class or race. The auctioneer shook his head at the belligerent speech.

“It is never a pleasure to us who follow my profession,” he declared, wielding the little cane in his hand, “to dispose of the household goods of any man—least of all of one with whom one has some acquaintance. The law is the law, however. Monsieur Froydshen here owes money, and those to whom he owes it have obtained a licence to sell his belongings. If anything remains after the sale, the balance will go to him. I fear, however,” the auctioneer concluded, looking downward at the strange medley of goods, “that as the claims against Monsieur Froydshen amount to something like fourteen *mille*, a balance is scarcely likely. . . . I begin, as usual, with the heavy articles. The order of the sale remains at my discretion. The size of it has not warranted the printing of a catalogue. Each lot will be paid for as bought and removed by the bidder to such place as he may deem to be one of security.”

A strongly built but fat man in dark clothes and with weather-tanned skin, who in his sombre way seemed to be dressed for a fête, pushed his way to the front.

“I will save you time if you will, Mr. Auctioneer,” he volunteered, speaking with

the well-assured air of one accustomed to command. "As all my good friends here know, to-morrow my son Guillaume marries Anna, the daughter of our neighbour. Without furniture, Monsieur Froydshen must vacate his premises, even though his tenancy has not yet expired. I propose to establish my son here, and I offer you, Mr. Auctioneer, five *mille* for everything that you see. It is an offer to be seriously considered."

Men and women alike began to chatter. They lifted up the chairs and inspected them, banged the tables, shook the dust out of an old bed, handled the fire irons. The suggestion of their wealthy neighbour was very little to their liking, for each had squeezed a few francs from his stocking for bargains.

"What can one do?" the Widow Marose muttered. "The second bed I needed, and the linen too, such as it is, but how can one bid against a man of wealth like Jean Bourdaut, the merchant of timber?"

The auctioneer cleared his throat. He was an important little personage, clad, although he had removed his coat, somewhat differently to the others, and with a superior air. He shook his head at the merchant of timber.

"My instructions would not allow me to sell in such a manner, much though I should prefer it," he regretted. "To make things in a measure agreeable to every one, however, I will sell with speed."

Peter Hames crossed the narrow space of weedy gravel, encumbered now with a medley of domestic articles, and approached the man who was seated on the doorstep.

"Aren't you Froydshen?" he asked. "Haven't I met you once or twice at St. Paul with Pierre Meisonier and his friends?"

The man rose to his feet. He was long and lanky; and, notwithstanding a coating of sunburn, his high cheekbones and deep-set, piercing eyes were premonitions of disease.

"Yes," he acknowledged, "Froydshen's my name. I remember you."

"Sorry I seem to have stumbled in upon a little trouble," Peter Hames continued. "I had no idea what was going on; I have my easel pitched upon the hillside opposite."

"You should paint this, if it's in your line," the other suggested bitterly. "Look at them all, like carrion crows come to see what bit of my entrails they can pluck out and make away with. They're a cruel race, these peasants."

"How did it come about?" Peter Hames enquired.

"Sick wife, drink and laziness, and I suppose want of talent. I can't ask you in, because I haven't a chair for you to sit on or a glass of wine to offer you. Perhaps a

more opportune—”

He motioned towards the gate. Peter Hames understood, and, although his cheeks burned for a moment, he stood his ground.

“Look here,” he begged, “let me hang around for a bit and see if I can’t be of some assistance.”

A woman’s faint voice called from an upstairs room, and Froydshen leaped to his feet, and hurried away. Peter Hames joined the rest of the company. The bidding for the bedstead had commenced.

“At twenty-five francs it is perhaps finished?” the auctioneer queried.

Jean, the timber merchant, was standing well out in front of every one, grasping his roughly cut stick and looking around him with a challenging air. He had many irons in the fire, and no one wished him for an enemy.

“Fifty francs,” Peter Hames offered firmly.

There was commotion, evidenced at first by a pregnant silence, then by an outburst of exclamations. Monsieur Jean struck the wheel of the waggon on which the auctioneer was standing with his stick.

“Who is that fellow who interferes?” he demanded. “Where is his money? I ask you, does he look as though he had any?”

Peter Hames produced a fifty-franc note from his pocket.

“Well, there’s fifty francs, anyhow,” he pointed out.

The auctioneer shrugged his shoulders and, without committing himself to speech, endeavoured to convey to the important man of the district the idea that things must take their course. Jean went over to the bed, poked it about, shook it, and turned away with a grimace.

“A miserable affair,” he pronounced. “Besides, of what use is one object of furniture without the rest? I am a fool to bid. Nevertheless, Guillaume is my son. Fifty-five francs.”

“Sixty.”

“Sixty-five.”

“Seventy.”

Jean, the timber merchant, glared across at his opponent.

“It is, in effect, your intention to buy the bed?”

“It is,” the latter acknowledged.

“Then buy, if you have money enough to pay for it,” Jean shouted angrily. “Test his money well, Mr. Auctioneer. I have no liking for the fellow.”

“For the first, second, and third time then,” the auctioneer continued, “since Monsieur Bourdaut has withdrawn, the bid is with the gentleman there for seventy

francs. Going—going—gone! The affair is concluded.”

Peter Hames counted out seventy francs from his pocket and seated himself upon the bed with a chuckle. He could see that both the auctioneer and the timber merchant were of the opinion that the seventy francs had practically exhausted his store. He had not the air, in that pair of shabby shorts, and attire generally disreputable, of carrying money. He himself, however, was pleasantly conscious of that very much thicker than usual pocketbook nestling close to his skin underneath his shirt. An old Provençal dining table, which had a certain genuine value, was brought out. Jean Bourdaut struck it depreciatingly with his stick.

“A poor piece of wood,” he declared. “I who am a judge should know.”

“Then it is probably not worth more than a hundred francs,” Peter Hames regretted. “Shall we start it at a hundred francs, my friend on the waggon?”

Once more commotion, excited exclamations, and protests! Eventually, the table was knocked down to Peter Hames at two hundred and fifty. Without the assistance of a single one of the men, each of whom ignored his request for help, he dragged it over himself to the side of the bedstead.

“Would you please put up something a little smaller, Mr. Auctioneer,” he begged, wiping the perspiration from his forehead. “I’ll be in training as a furniture remover presently.”

Jean, the timber merchant, choked down his rage and decided to adopt different tactics with this mad Englishman or American, or whatever he might be.

“You do not want this furniture, Monsieur,” he protested. “Of what use is it to you? It is not of the antique design valued so much by your country people. It is fit only for the farmhouse or the cottage. Why do you buy it at such an incredible price? Why not leave what is necessary for the well-being of my son and his future wife? You interfere, and your interference, as a complete stranger, is scarcely a welcome one here.”

“It is an open sale,” Peter Hames pointed out, lighting another cigarette. “I enjoy bidding. I like this furniture. As to what I am going to do with it, that is my own business.”

“You will not be allowed to remove it,” Jean Bourdaut shouted. “My two sons will be here within half an hour. They will deal with you.”

“I shall throw myself upon the protection of Monsieur, the Director of the Sale,” Peter Hames declared equably. “He represents the law here. I am within my rights in buying whatever I choose, so long as I pay for it.”

The great man of the neighbourhood was beside himself with fury. He whispered once more with the auctioneer.

“There is but one thing in the house worth real money,” the latter confided. “Supposing I put it up now. It will cost you dear, perhaps, Monsieur Jean, but you will still be able to sell at a large profit, and, if he buys, it will take all the money he has.”

Jean Bourdaut grunted unwilling assent and a beautiful carved Provençal sideboard was dragged out. Peter Hames examined it carefully. The timber merchant, with his hands deep down in his trousers pockets, cast a single contemptuous glance at it and turned away.

“That piece of furniture,” Peter Hames acknowledged, “I like. I like it very much indeed. This I shall bid for with more spirit. At what price shall we start it, Mr. Auctioneer? Shall we say three hundred francs?”

“Four hundred,” the timber merchant growled.

“Five.”

“Six.”

“Seven.”

Monsieur Jean Bourdaut stalked wildly up and down. It was indeed impossible to keep one’s temper. This interfering rascal, in the clothes of a tramp, whose French, notwithstanding his accent was faultless and fluent, seemed to have inexhaustible pockets. Seven hundred francs, and, without the interference of this miserable interloper, he’d have got it himself for two hundred! He swallowed hard.

“Eight hundred,” he shouted.

“Ah, I see our friend is in earnest,” Peter Hames smiled. “Let us face this matter in a businesslike spirit then. One thousand francs.”

Every one began to talk at once. Now, as very often happens in a small neighbourhood, Monsieur Jean Bourdaut, the merchant of wood, although he appeared to be the most popular person whenever he walked the streets of his native village, or even the thoroughfares of Grasse, where he had many friends, had in reality contrived to incur a great deal of secret enmity. There were many who had suffered from his grasping methods of doing business, and there was also to be taken into account the invisible jealousy of the French peasant for his rival who acquires wealth where he fails. Consequently, a great many of the loiterers at the auction that afternoon were already hiding their faces to conceal their smiles. Their indignation was only simulated. Perhaps even Jean himself knew that their sympathy was a sham. Anyway, he lost his temper.

“Let him have it then at a *mille*,” he bawled, “and let him take it with him to hell.”

“In the meanwhile,” Peter Hames suggested gently, “and if the sideboard is mine, Mr. Auctioneer, I will pay for it.”

The auctioneer knocked the piece of furniture down formally and Peter handed across a *mille* note. There were a dozen hands now, having seen the way things were going, ready to help him move the sideboard, which was soon ranged by the side of his other possessions. Jean Bourdaut had walked to the gate and was looking anxiously down the road. The auctioneer sent a messenger to recall him, but he received the latter with a cut across the shins from the stick he was carrying, which sent him howling away. The auctioneer, who began to see trouble ahead, leaned across to this mysterious and disturbing visitor.

“You have perhaps secured as much of this furniture as you require, sir,” he ventured.

“Not at all,” was the genial reply. “I shall probably buy the lot.”

Six very decent chairs, a sofa, a carpet, and an ottoman were added to Peter Hames’ possessions. He sat upon the table in the midst of them all and made a grimace as he saw a nondescript assortment of china, cutlery, and kitchen utensils coming along. His enemy was still at the gate.

“If this affair is becoming wearisome to Monsieur the Auctioneer,” Peter Hames suggested at last, lighting a cigarette and courteously offering his case to the official, “I have an idea. There are four or five canvases there, leaning against the wall. Now if our friend Froydshen’s work has not deteriorated, it is just possible, if you take them next, I might be able to buy them at such a price that the rest of the sale would be unnecessary.”

The auctioneer looked doubtful.

“There is a long way to go,” he pointed out, “before one arrives at fourteen *mille*.”

“I get your point,” Peter Hames conceded, “but I have a great deal more than fourteen *mille* with me, as it happens, and, furthermore, I can give you a cheque which any banker in Grasse would honour if necessary. You realise the position, Monsieur? I am determined to spend as much as will pay off this absurd debt. What I am going to do with the furniture afterwards is my own affair.”

The auctioneer looked despairingly at the bulky and furious figure of the man at the gate.

“What can one do?” he asked the heavens.

A tradesman of the village, who was also a café proprietor and a man of some substance, intervened. Jean Bourdaut was well out of hearing.

“Monsieur the Auctioneer,” he said, “the sale must proceed according to advertisement. There are articles here we others desire.”

The auctioneer drew a little sigh of relief. At least, there was some one amongst

the buyers who had insisted that the law should be carried out. His responsibility was no longer a single one.

“We will deal with the pictures,” he announced.

One by one they were handed around. The little group of peasants gazed at them spellbound. The prevalent sensation seemed to be one of stupefaction. Peter Hames’ heart, as he, too, joined in the inspection, momentarily failed him. Then there arrived the canvas of an unfinished twilight landscape—the valleys below St. Paul glimmering in the fading light, pinpricks of fire studded in the darkening sky.

“Proceed, Mr. Auctioneer,” he begged. “Proceed, I beg of you. There is good money waiting here for one at least of those pictures.”

The auctioneer bowed.

“Monsieur,” he suggested, “will perhaps start the bidding.”

“I will not insult the artist by offering less than a thousand francs for this picture of St. Paul.”

The auctioneer looked around at the circle of blank faces. A thousand francs would almost buy a farm, would give a dot to a daughter, would start a son in life, might mean all the difference between prosperity and failure. A thousand francs for some strange masses of colouring lumped on to a ten-franc canvas!

“The picture is yours, Monsieur,” the auctioneer announced, after a few moments’ unbroken silence.

Peter Hames crossed the open space, picked up the canvas carefully, and set it upon his recently acquired couch.

“Mr. Auctioneer,” he proposed, “I gather that there are no other picture buyers in the place. There are three more canvases. It has long been my desire to possess some of the works of Monsieur Froydshen. Put them together. Let us say two thousand five hundred francs for the lot.”

A little gust of wind blew a shower of cherry blossoms across the garden. One or two of the loiterers looked up and watched the petals floating in the air. The others stared about them stupidly, but for the moment they were tongue-tied. Then suddenly, his strangely coloured eyes aflame with anger, Froydshen strode out of his house. Some rumour of what was happening had reached him.

“What is this?” he demanded furiously. “You are a painter yourself. Why do you buy my pictures?”

“Because, being a painter, I know good stuff when I see it,” was the suave reply. “I liked your pictures when I saw them at St. Paul, and if you weren’t so damned lazy about finishing them off, you’d have had dozens of people trying to buy them. Anyhow, these are mine now, and you’d better get to work on some more.”

Jean, the merchant of timber, having regained some slight measure of composure, came striding back from the gate. Some one had told him that the foolish American had thrown all his money away on the pictures, and there was good stuff still to be bought.

“Enough of this pantomime!” he shouted. “Get on with the sale, Mr. Auctioneer. You know who I am—Jean Bourdaut. I am somebody of account, am I not? The stranger there has demanded that you sell the pictures. Very well, he has had his way. Now I say sell the rest of the furniture, sell it *en bloc*, if you like.”

“It is an idea;” the auctioneer, having it very much in his mind to keep friends with Jean Bourdaut, agreed. “What does our other buyer say, who has honoured me with his patronage to-day?”

“Put them up *en bloc* by all means,” Peter Hames assented, from his uneasy seat amidst the rest of his recently acquired possessions. “Something more comfortable to sit in I should like. Those two armchairs there, for instance. There is a spring in this sofa which afflicts my backbone. *En bloc* by all means, Mr. Auctioneer. I get poorer every minute but I acquire property.”

Across the little space strode Paul Froydshen, but before he reached Peter Hames his anger died away. The latter was thoroughly enjoying himself. His pleasant, freckled face was one great smile. His eyes were twinkling with good humour. Froydshen’s trade was a losing one from the start.

“What the devil are you doing here, Peter Hames?” he growled. “Is it out of charity you are buying my pictures and my furniture?”

“Don’t be a bloody fool,” Peter Hames enjoined cheerily, “and don’t, for God’s sake, sit on the other end of this couch, or we will both go into perdition—or horsehair. I want some of your pictures. I’ve a perfect right to buy them, and I’ve bought them for a song too. I’ve bought the furniture because I’m having lots of fun with that old timber merchant—and I’m going to have more before I’ve done with him. It isn’t my fault that I happen to be rich. I have a perfect right to amuse myself as I like. Go and sit with your wife, old chap, and tell her not to worry.”

The man broke down. He pretended to be examining the table against which he had been standing, but it was very obvious that all he wanted at that moment was to keep his face hidden. The auctioneer banged with his little cane against the waggon wheel. The remaining pieces of furniture had been dragged out. He jumped from his place and tapped them one by one with his stick, calling general attention to the strange and motley conglomeration of articles. Then he remounted his extemporised rostrum.

“There are thirty-two lots there,” he announced. “Examine them, you who are

interested, before I open the bidding.”

Jean, the timber merchant, poked around them with his stick. Peter Hames did not move from his place.

“Five hundred francs for the lot,” Jean roared.

“Try five *mille*, you old thief,” Peter Hames bellowed back.

There was another of those strange silences. The wind, rising a little before the sunset, was bending the blossom-laden branches so that another shower of leaves and petals, and a long, insidious wave of perfume stole from the fruit trees. Such a treat these villagers had not been vouchsafed throughout all the seasons. The big man there, perched amongst his ramshackle lot of furniture, had called the Croesus of the place “an old thief”, and had bid five *mille* to his five hundred! What was to happen? Across the trampled-up little wilderness of grass and gravel, pushing rudely out of his way any one near, came the timber merchant, fury in his blood, dimly conceived ideas of battle in his brain.

“Rascal!” he exclaimed, addressing this hated intruder. “You come here to rob honest men and prevent them from providing their sons with furniture. You bid five *mille* for that lot of rubbish!”

“You must not call me names,” Peter Hames warned him reprovingly. “I might forget that you are a much older man.”

Jean, the timber merchant, raised his stick. Then he met Peter Hames’ eye, and he dropped it again.

“Five *mille*!” he spluttered. “From what asylum have you escaped?”

“You don’t think the things are worth it?” Peter Hames queried. “Leave them to me then. I want them. I like the furniture, and, talking seriously, my wicked old friend,” he added, shaking his head, “those two Provençal easy-chairs over there, in one of which I wish I were seated at the present moment, are worth almost as much as I have bid for the lot. You see,” he went on, “it is your day of ill fortune. I found my way here by accident. I find interesting things to buy and I have money in my pocket. Yesterday, or to-morrow, you would have had your will. To-day chance brought me here. What about this little odd lot of furniture? Do you bid, or do you not?”

Jean, the timber merchant, was a man of words and much bluster in the company of pigmies. In the presence of Peter Hames he collapsed.

“Let me have what is left for six *mille*,” he begged. “It is to set up two young people in their new home. Six *mille* is an outrageous sum, but I will give it.”

“It may be to set up two young people in their new home,” Peter Hames rejoined sternly, “but it is also to strip the home of a friend of mine and his sick wife,

and leave them with four walls and neither a couch nor a bed nor a chair to sit upon. Ah, no, Jean, the merchant of wood! That does not arrive. Bid your six *mille* and I make it seven. Between ourselves, I am an obstinate man. Bid your ten and I will make it twenty.”

That was the end of the local Croesus. He had neither temper nor courage left. Before he had reached the gate, he had lost even his scowl. They were mocking at him, these villagers, whom he had ruled all his life. They were laughing at him. He was a beaten man. God, how he hated it!

“The furniture,” the auctioneer announced, “is yours, Monsieur, for five *mille*.”

Peter Hames struggled to rise but failed. He handed out five *mille* to the auctioneer. Every one of the peasants rushed forward to help bring him the furniture. He ensconced himself in one of his new acquisitions—a strong, old-fashioned easy-chair—and lit a cigarette.

“If only we had wine!” he lamented.

The auctioneer coughed. The keeper of the café hastened across towards this astonishing stranger.

“It is to be procured,” he murmured.

Peter Hames pressed money into his hand.

“Bring many glasses,” he ordered. “This has been a wonderful afternoon. Are you sure there is nothing else left to sell, Mr. Auctioneer?”

“There is one old chest which has been forgotten,” the latter replied, signalling to a porter.

It was brought out from the house—an ancient chest of battered iron, of no particular value save for the amazing metal work of the lock. Peter Hames examined it curiously.

“Do you know anything about this?” he asked the auctioneer.

“Nothing at all, except that it belongs to the goods to be sold.”

Peter Hames examined it more closely. Then again, whilst he bent over it, the silence of the still afternoon was broken. Up the rude track which led to the farmhouse one could hear the galloping of a furiously ridden horse. The little crowd of peasants rushed in a body to the hedge. There was something terrific in the sound of those pounding hoofs, something wildly suggestive of human energy, effort and passion. Peter Hames dropped the chest and hurried off to join the rest, who were crowded together around the gate, looking over one another’s shoulders towards the bend, barely a score of yards away. Even as the horse—a great stallion—came into sight, they could hear its wheezing and groaning. They saw the blood at its mouth, as, with head low down, it came tottering but still straining with every muscle.

The horseman rode without saddle or spurs, barebacked, but with a cruel switch in his hand which he was still using freely. When yet a dozen yards away, the great animal stumbled, went crashing into the hedge and lay there, his hoofs helpless in the air, his eyes bloodshot. The rider fell on his side into the road, but was up again almost immediately. A mass of black hair was matted over his face, white as death, notwithstanding the burning sun. There was blood upon his lips—either he had bitten his tongue or broken a small blood vessel. He staggered on towards the gate. There were dozens around him now.

“The sale!” he faltered. “The sale at Le Manoir!”

“Just over,” the auctioneer replied. “Who are you?”

The man fought a gallant struggle. He was either French or Italian, Sicilian or perhaps Corsican, but he was of a Southern race—a race which seldom loses consciousness. He gripped at the air for a moment. Finally he gasped out his question.

“There was a chest. Is it sold? Who bought it? Where is it?”

“It is,” the auctioneer announced, “under the hammer at the present moment.”

They helped this man who had made so dramatic an appearance into the garden. He looked around at the incongruous scene, and when he saw the chest lying before the waggon, life seemed to steal back to him. They installed him in a chair. The wine had mercifully arrived and Peter Hames, with a dozen willing hands to help him, was passing it around to right and to left. The newcomer swallowed a tumblerful without speech. Then he sat up. He said nothing to anybody, but his eyes were hungrily fixed upon the chest. Others led his horse in and tethered it. The animal might not have existed, so far as his rider was concerned. Peter Hames slipped into the house and called softly to Froydshen. There was a look in the man’s face which made him keep his own eyes averted.

“Look here, old chap,” Peter Hames asked, “what the devil is in this iron chest that you’ve sent out to be sold?”

“I have no knowledge of its contents,” Froydshen answered. “I bought it because of the lock. It is the most beautiful lock I ever saw, but there is no key.”

“How do you open it, then?”

“You do not. It is too beautiful a lock to break. You and I may paint pictures that are a little worth while, Peter Hames, but we never had the cunning in our fingers, or the genius in our brains, to fashion such metal work as there is in that lock. The man who broke open the box, even if it held gold, would be a Goth.”

Peter Hames went back into the still burning sunshine. The flowers were

beginning to droop a little. Their perfume had departed. Most of the audience of this strange drama were sheltering under the shade of the trees. Only in the middle of the open space, a few yards away from the chest, sat the man who had ridden up the hill.

“Put up the chest,” Peter Hames told the auctioneer, who was perspiring freely after his third tumblerful of the country wine.

The latter mounted his waggon. Peter Hames disposed of himself in his comfortable easy-chair.

“The next and last article for sale,” the auctioneer announced, “is this chest with a very wonderful lock, fine metal work, a little battered, but quite a curio.”

“I’m getting poor,” Peter Hames confessed, “but I’ll start it at five francs.”

The last arrival—the man with the raven black hair, terribly tired eyes, and bleeding lips—leaned forward.

“A thousand francs!” he said.

“Now,” Peter Hames sighed, “I am up against real competition. Very well, my equestrian friend. We will not descend in the scale. Fifteen hundred.”

“Two *mille*,” was the hoarse response.

“The affair is getting serious,” Peter Hames groaned, his right hand in the pocket of his shorts, counting one by one the notes that were left. “Still, let us make a jump. Three *mille*.”

There was the dawning of a look of horror upon the face of the rival bidder. He dabbed at his lips.

“Three *mille*, five hundred.”

Peter Hames smiled.

“Got him,” he murmured to himself. “Five *mille*.”

To the end of his days—and life was to bring him in future, as it had done in the past, many adventures—Peter Hames never again saw such a look of despair as convulsed the face of the man who sat opposite to him. He half rose to his feet. His fingers pawed the air.

“You don’t want it,” he cried. “It is nothing to you. You cannot give five *mille*.”

“You look at the lock,” Peter Hames advised him pleasantly. “It’s quite worth the money.”

Then he hated himself, because he felt that he had been a brute. Almost he withdrew his bid. A shivering sense of pity robbed him of all the exultation of success. The man had risen to his feet. He was staggering away. A kindly peasant lent him an arm. He reached the gatepost and leaned there, his head resting between his hands. For a moment it seemed that he was sobbing. Some one brought his

horse, still quivering but apparently unhurt. He mounted, rejecting all offers of assistance, and, with a truly marvellous seat, walked the great beast down to within a yard of where Peter Hames was standing. His left hand stole out. First to the chest he pointed and then to Peter Hames.

“You buy death!”

And with that he rode away.

Peter Hames spent most of the next day in his studio, with the chest upon a table by his side, going through his small collection of volumes dealing with the metal designs of the Renaissance period and before. The more he studied the exquisite lines of the wonderfully fashioned metal around the lock, the more he marvelled. The design was analysable—a mixture of Doric and Egyptian—but the workmanship was so excellent that in places the metal seemed to be little thicker than a thread of silver. In one volume—a History of the Rosicrucians—he found a copy of a design wrought in copper and found in an Indian temple, in which a certain likeness between the general curves and the universal hand of fate could here and there be traced. Towards evening, he wearied of his task. Pre-Egyptian—probably Indian—several thousand years before Christ, he decided, and copied during the early part of the Italian Renaissance. He wondered whether the offer of a fortune would produce the key.

The telephone bell rang, and as he listened, Peter Hames forgot all about his chest. It was Sybil Christian talking.

“Are you at home to-night?” she enquired.

“Why, are you coming to dine with me?” he rejoined gladly.

There was a certain hesitation in her tone to which he was unaccustomed. She seemed almost ill at ease.

“I want to come after dinner,” she replied. “I don’t want to come a minute before eleven o’clock, and I want to bring a friend with me whose name I am not going to divulge.”

“You will be welcome under any circumstances, at any hour, and you can bring whom you like,” he assured her; “but you sound very mysterious.”

“I can’t help it,” she regretted. “I’m coming upon a mysterious errand, I warn you.”

“I wish you were coming alone,” he sighed. “I could tell you of a little adventure I have just had.”

“Perhaps I know something about it already,” she answered. “We shall be with you soon after eleven.”

She rang off, and Peter Hames got through the evening as best he might. Towards eleven o'clock he ordered various suitable refreshments to be placed in his studio, covered over his chest with a cloth, locked the doors leading into the garden, set Leo, his police dog, loose, and slipped his small automatic into his pocket. At eleven o'clock the telephone rang once more. Again the voice was Sybil's.

"Don't tell me you're not coming?" he groaned.

"We're coming," she promised him. "In fact, we're almost at your villa now. I forgot to ask one thing, though. Would you mind sending your servants to bed and opening the door yourself?"

Peter Hames chuckled.

"I'm going to read up my 'Arabian Nights,' as soon as I get a chance," he declared, "and to pinch myself to be sure I haven't gone to sleep. Is this Monte Carlo or Bagdad? I have an Irish friend with a sense of humour. I wish I'd sent for him."

"Don't be silly," she admonished. "Will you do as I ask?"

"Have I ever refused you anything?"

A quarter of an hour later, the bell in his courtyard sounded gently. Peter Hames placed Leo on guard before the chest, opened the door, and walked down the flagged path. A large limousine was standing at his gate. Sybil stepped quickly out, followed by a small, dark man, slim, and apparently youthful. He was bareheaded and his features were entirely concealed behind a black silk mask.

"Don't think we are crazy or melodramatic," Sybil begged, taking Peter's arm, "because I am not going to introduce you to your visitor. I am going to ask you to take him into your studio with me and to let him talk to you for a little time."

"Delighted!" Peter Hames assented, without marked enthusiasm. "Please come this way."

He led them into the villa and across to the studio, opening the door which he had locked, and quieting Leo, who had sprung to his feet at their entrance. He wheeled up chairs.

"I should like to offer you a glass of wine," he observed, "but I am afraid that your friend is too much handicapped."

The stranger spoke for the first time, and his voice, notwithstanding its slight foreign accent, was so delightful that Peter Hames was half ashamed of his momentary irritation.

"Before I leave, it will give me great pleasure to drink a glass of wine with you, sir," he said. "Believe me," he went on, after a brief hesitation, "the mask is a necessity, and certain parts of my short story will seem incomprehensible. I will do

my best to explain, however, if you will meet me on that little strip of common ground in life to which we both belong. Miss Christian has told me about you. You are an American gentleman. I am Italian, born unfortunately into a family which is facing troublous times. I shall seem to be terribly confidential with you, a stranger, but I start with the idea that you, being an American, are not greatly interested in inter-European politics, and that you have not, for instance, strong sympathies in favour of one nation over here more than another, and that you are content to let them work out their own destinies.”

“So far we are agreed,” Peter Hames declared.

“The countries to which I refer are Italy and France,” the stranger continued. “There may probably never be war between us, but we Italians think that France is a little hard upon some of our national aspirations and that she is inclined sometimes to mock at the whole régime of Italy now subordinated to a new power. You probably have heard, and I am not here to deny it, that there are a great many agents of the old régime living between here and the far end of the Riviera, whose business it is to keep together in patriotism and national spirit those Italians who have been forced for political reasons to leave their own country.”

“Anti-Fascists,” Peter Hames murmured.

“Very well. Call them that,” the other assented. “There are a hundred and twenty thousand of them thoroughly organised between here and Fréjus. They have officials, meeting places. They have definite aims. They have a fixed purpose. The statement of all these, with their names and what they intend to do, is in a chest which found its way in a marvellous fashion into a curiosity shop at St. Paul and has now, I understand, come into your possession.”

“A chest with a wonderful lock,” Peter Hames remarked.

“With a lock which is the masterpiece of one of the greatest workers in metal of the fourteenth century,” the stranger continued. “The chest was in my possession always, at one of my châteaux in this part of the country. A few years ago, our enemies in Italy made great friends with the French Government and a strenuous attempt was made to break us up. We discontinued our meetings for a time. The chest was hidden. I shall not tell you the story of its wanderings further than that it was lost through the death of its custodian, who alone knew what it contained, that it found its way into a curiosity shop, and that it is now in your possession.”

Peter Hames swept away the cloth which concealed it and from behind the slits in the mask there came a glow into the eyes of the man who saw it.

“That is our chest,” he exclaimed, in a tone of immense relief, as he noticed the sound hinges and the unscratched lock. “That contains, I should tell you, Mr. Hames,

enough evidence for Italy to insist upon the extradition of at least fifty men whose lives would probably be forfeited. You in England have had your Cromwell. You have had your brief periods of politicians who have differed from the Government and have faced death rather than abandon their principles. So it is with my friends whose names are in that box. One moment," he went on, drawing a chain from his pocket. "Perhaps you have never seen a key of gold. There is one here. It is the only key in the world that can unlock that chest. You will allow me to prove my words?"

"It is unnecessary," Peter Hames assured him.

The stranger sighed.

"I come now to the most difficult part of my task," he said. "When Miss Christian here told me of your rank in life, and your status, Mr. Hames, I was almost sorry. I would rather you had not been one of us, that I might have offered you my cheque book. We could have spoken of a million francs—or five million. The lives of my friends and the lives of those who love Italy, my country, are in that chest."

"I'm afraid," Peter Hames apologised, "that unless you will permit me to ring up some of my servants, you will have to help me to carry it out to your car."

"You will part with it?" the mysterious visitor cried eagerly.

"With the utmost joy," was the prompt assurance. "After what you have told me, it is yours."

There was a brief silence. Sybil gripped Peter Hames by the arm.

"You have spoken of money, sir," Peter Hames reminded his visitor. "As a matter of fact, you really owe the return of your chest intact to a starving painter whose household goods I saved, a few days ago, from being dragged out of the farm in which he lives. His name is Froydshen and I can assure you that he has talent. If one day you would drive up to his farmhouse amongst the hills—Le Manoir, one mile from Gournon—if, without a word of explanation, for he is proud, you would ask to see some of his work, would offer your patronage, and perhaps buy a picture or two that pleased you, you would perform a very humane action, and you would repay both him and myself for any slight service we have been able to render you in connection with your chest."

Peter Hames' mysterious visitor wrung him by the hand.

"It is a great gesture," he exclaimed. "Your painter's career is in my keeping. Now, sir, if you will permit me, we will drink a glass of wine together."

IX

THE LUCKIEST YOUNG MAN IN THE WORLD

Every one in his particular set, and at the haunts which he was accustomed to frequent, had been telling "Dagger" Rodwell for the last two years that, with his luck, he ought to visit foreign gambling places, where real money was to be touched. Rodwell, however, who had led a precarious existence until some time before, when he had developed an amazing habitude of winning at whatever game of chance he indulged in, was shy about the matter.

"You see, Jimmy," he explained to his own particular pal, Jimmy Dane, who had gained the security of an hotel in Bayswater, a share of a club in Notting Hill, and an interest in a very wide-awake stable at Newmarket, which had a habit of winning unexpected races, "I can't speak the lingo for one thing. Then, turning an honest penny at *chemie* as we play it in London, with always a mug or two at the table, is easy enough. One is up against a different class of play over there, and a mountain of money."

"Dagger, my lad," his friend persisted, "your luck would stand anything. If we weren't pals, and if I hadn't known you all my life, I should have said that you had taken to stacking 'em a bit when you drew that fourth ace the other night against Charlie's four kings. It seemed a bit too much to hope for."

"I'm lucky," Dagger Rodwell admitted, "and you know well enough I play on the straight. One takes advantage of a mug now and then, naturally, but one does it honestly. If I know more about the game than he does, I've a right to win."

"It doesn't matter how much you know about any game, Roddie," his friend argued earnestly. "The fact is that to-day you're in what they call the 'streak.' It doesn't matter whether it's horses, cars, or a billiard match. You're in luck, and if you take my advice you'll play it whilst it lasts. Don't hang around here to pick up perhaps a thousand or two. Go for the big things before it stops. Then buy a small hotel, or something solid, and take life easy."

"I'll think it over," the other promised. "If I could get a pal to go with me, I wouldn't hesitate."

Jimmy Dane sighed.

"My busy season, as you know, old chap," he regretted. "Besides, I'd spoil your luck. I can't touch a card now."

"I think I shall leave it alone," the fortunate young man decided. . . .

Nevertheless, when, ten days later, he touched a fantastic double at Newmarket, which very nearly sent his bookmaker into the bankruptcy court, and, within a few days, simply paralysed the *chemie* at the two best known haunts in London, Charles Rodwell changed his mind. With a new outfit, selected for him by a West End tailor, and a letter of credit of quite respectable proportions, he packed his bags and departed, for the first time in his life, upon foreign travel. His destination had been subject to the spin of a coin. Rather to his joy, as the place had an alluring sound, fate consigned him to Monte Carlo. Accordingly, on the first day of March, Charles Rodwell, with a London-wide nickname of Dagger, twenty-eight years old, tall, lean, and blue-eyed, a touch of the colonial in his occasional awkwardness of speech and demeanour, descended upon the Hôtel de Paris, and, in these days of greater latitude, found no difficulty in adding a card of admission to the Sporting Club to his *Salles Privées* ticket.

The night of his arrival, he devoted to watching the various games. On the following day, he drew a thousand pounds from the bank and started operations. In the afternoon, he lost six hundred pounds at roulette, but won it back again at *chemin de fer* in the evening. His first reverse was his last. At the end of a week, he was six thousand pounds to the good and should have been more—a fact which perplexed him not a little. He had made friends too—a Frenchman who spoke excellent English, his lady companion, who also spoke a little English and whose flirtations were apparently suffered gladly by her protector, and a French supporter of the turf, well known to him by name and reputation. There were frequent little supper parties after the gambling was over, and visits to the various bars. Dagger Rodwell wrote home to his friends that he found Monte Carlo a very amusing place.

This rather exceptional young man, who owed his peculiar nickname to the speed with which he accomplished everything which he set himself to undertake, from stealing runs at cricket or playing a shot at billiards, to making up his mind whether to call a large *banco*, had been imperfectly educated, had spent his youth among circles of dubious reputation, and had acquired such knowledge as he possessed of deportment among his social betters, late in life, and by a strenuous effort of imitation. It was seldom, however, that he gave offence, owing to his swift and tactful appreciation of his own failings. Established at a *chemin-de-fer* table in the Sporting Club, for instance, he rarely attempted to address any of his neighbours and he even permitted himself an occasional smile at his own expense at the very fact of his presence there. He was accordingly very much surprised when, one night, while engaged in his usual pursuit, a very attractive young lady seated on his left followed his example of retaining her place during the making of the cards and rather

abruptly addressed him.

“You’ve been winning a great deal of money the last few days, haven’t you?” she asked.

“I—yes, I suppose I have,” he admitted.

“Do you come to Monte Carlo often?”

“I have never been in France before in my life,” he told her.

“Where did you learn to play *chemie* then?”

“In London.”

“I thought it wasn’t allowed there.”

He grinned.

“If you know the ropes,” he assured her, “there’s a game every night.”

“You play very well,” she reflected. “You are also very lucky.”

“There isn’t much in the way you play,” he said modestly. “Unless, of course, you’ve got a lot of mugs at the table. I’m lucky. That’s why I came out here.”

“Alone?” she asked.

He nodded.

“My friends aren’t used to travelling much,” he confided. “I shouldn’t have dared to take this on myself if they hadn’t bothered me into it.”

“Luck,” she meditated. “Yes, one hears that word very often at Monte Carlo. Of course no one really believes in it.”

He looked at her in blank astonishment.

“You don’t believe in luck?” he exclaimed.

She shook her head.

“I’m afraid I don’t,” she confessed.

“What about that last hand,” he demanded, “when the gentleman took no cards against me? I drew to a five, and got a three—eight against his seven.”

“Such things happen occasionally.”

“You don’t believe in luck!” he repeated. “Will you let me show you something?”

She felt that he had only just saved himself from saying “Miss,” but she nodded pleasantly.

“Will you give me a plaque, or as much as you care to risk, and walk with me to that roulette table?” he suggested. “We shall just have time.”

She hesitated for a single moment and then laughed at herself. In the thralldom of Monte Carlo she was becoming a snob!

“Of course I will,” she assented, rising to her feet. “Here’s five hundred francs. Now, what are you going to do with it?”

“I’ll show you,” he promised.

During their brief progress, Dagger Rodwell almost lost his nerve. His companion curtseyed to a minor royalty and exchanged greetings with many of the people whom his French acquaintances had pointed out to him as being among the great ones of the earth, none of whom, however, they had seemed to know themselves. He set his teeth and pushed his way a little ruthlessly to the table. Again he justified his nickname. He scarcely glanced at the numbers and placed the five hundred francs which had been entrusted to him, and one of his own, upon the *cheval* of fourteen to seventeen. Seventeen turned up. He fought his way back to the outside circle where the young lady loitered, his hands full of plaques.

“Eight thousand five hundred,” he counted out, “and five hundred for your stake. Now, do you believe in luck?”

He looked at her triumphantly. Notwithstanding a certain quaintness of deportment, he was quite handsome in his well-cut dinner clothes, his long, lean body, and thin face. His blue eyes were sparkling with pleasure.

“Well, I must believe in yours, at any rate,” she acknowledged, smiling. “Do you mind keeping the counters until we get back to the table?”

They returned to their places. He was becoming more voluble.

“I just can’t help it,” he confided. “Perhaps it won’t last. I don’t know. If it doesn’t, I shall leave off playing, but I haven’t been a loser in a single day since I’ve been here, or a single week in London during the last two or three months. It isn’t only cards. It’s racing. I touched a bookie just before I left London for a double at two hundred and eighty to one.”

She looked at him thoughtfully.

“Do you gamble every night in London?” she enquired.

“Pretty well. Gamble or play billiards.”

“Don’t you get tired of it?”

“I don’t think so,” he replied doubtfully. “There isn’t much else to do.”

“Haven’t you a business of any sort?”

He shook his head.

“I meant to be a jockey when I was young. I was at Newmarket for two years, but I grew so fast I couldn’t keep my weight down. Later I used to help my father, who was a bookmaker. Then this luck began and I haven’t been doing anything since.”

The game claimed their attention for a few minutes. A short, dark man and a very chic but somewhat obvious young woman sauntered up and stood at the other side of the table. Dagger Rodwell exchanged greetings with them eagerly.

“Do you know that gentleman?” he asked his companion complacently. “That’s

the Marquis de Verrais and his lady friend.”

She looked across the table and studied the two with thoughtful eyes.

“The Marquis de Verrais,” she repeated softly. “Is he one of your friends here?”

“We have supper together most nights,” Dagger Rodwell confided. “Lucky for me coming across him, and a chap named Ambrose, a racing fellow. I don’t speak a word of French.”

“Your luck seems to extend itself in strange directions,” she murmured.

Dagger Rodwell felt there was something in this speech which he didn’t quite understand, so he passed it by.

“Do you find that your supper excursions cost you a great deal of money?” she enquired.

He flashed a look of quick surprise at her.

“In a way,” he admitted. “To tell you the truth, I’d begun to wonder whether there were many pickpockets about, or whether the waiters were quite honest at the hotel. I never count my money carefully, but I always seem to have a lot less than I expected in the morning.”

“The Marquis and his companion might be expensive guests,” she remarked.

“I generally pay the bills,” he confessed frankly, “but they don’t come to much. The Marquis only gets his money four times a year and he lost a hundred thousand francs gambling a week or two ago.”

“Really,” she murmured. “Now we must both pay more attention to the game.”

He accepted the hint and relapsed into silence. Presently his companion picked up her winnings, and, with a pleasant little nod of farewell to her neighbour, took her leave. Dagger Rodwell gazed after her wistfully. He had come into indirect contact with people of her class, in the London *chemie* rooms.

“If only I had dared to ask her to have a drink!” he sighed.

The lady friend of the Marquis de Verrais watched the departure of Dagger Rodwell’s new acquaintance with anxious eyes. She drew her companion into the background.

“François,” she asked, “do you know who that woman was—that girl—there she is—talking to the Duke?”

“Never saw her before in my life,” the Marquis replied.

“You have. You’ve seen her often,” the girl went on. “That is the woman who comes sometimes to the Régal and calls herself Mademoiselle Anna. I’ve often sat on the next stool to her there.”

“*Imbécile!*” the Marquis declared scornfully. “There is a slight likeness, but I tell you—I, who am a judge—that young woman is a person of consequence. Her

jewels are real. She—”

“I know all about that,” the girl interrupted, “and her dress came from Worth, but I tell you she was Mademoiselle Anna, and she was talking to Monsieur Charles—how is it you call him?—Monsieur Dagger Rodwell. She recognised me too.”

Her companion remained incredulous.

“If one listened to you,” he observed, “one would have nerves all the time. You mistake a *maître d’hôtel* for a detective, and a commissionaire for a gendarme. Listen. We will prove this.”

The Marquis de Verrais had a large and Catholic acquaintance amongst the frequenters of the place. He stopped a well-known English bookmaker who was passing.

“Monsieur Jackson,” he said, “you are acquainted with all the world. Please tell us the name of the lady in the pearl-coloured dress and rubies, talking to the Duke there.”

Monsieur Jackson glanced down the room and nodded.

“One of our English beauties,” he replied. “The Honourable Sybil Christian, her name is, the daughter of Lord Farrowdale.”

“I am obliged to you,” the Marquis acknowledged. “Well, Fifine?”

Fifine was looking a little dazed, but her eyes were fixed upon that departing figure.

“That was Mademoiselle Anna,” she repeated. “She was talking with the boy who wins the money, whom you wish me to take out to supper to-night.”

“*Imbécile!*” the Marquis repeated again wearily.

Peter Hames, the young American painter and seeker after adventure, in a lazy fit, had gone to bed at ten o’clock. At midnight he was awakened suddenly to find the telephone buzzing by his side.

“Is that Mr. Peter Hames?” a soft voice enquired.

“That’s right,” was the electrified reply.

“What are you doing? Are you in bed yet?”

“Of course not,” was the scornful but lying response. “Who thinks of going to bed at ten o’clock. I was just going to have a last whisky and soda and finish a book I am reading.”

“Never mind the whisky and soda. I want you to come down and have it with me at the Régal.”

“I’ll be there in a quarter of an hour,” Peter promised cheerfully.

“Say half an hour. It won’t be necessary to-night, I’m sure, but just in case—

you'd better bring your—flask.”

“I understand.”

In less than the appointed time, Peter Hames had achieved a satisfactory toilette and made his way down the hill to Beausoleil. He found a retired spot for his car and entered the Café Régál. The place as yet was almost empty, but Mademoiselle Anna was seated upon her accustomed stool, smoking a cigarette in a long holder and talking confidentially to the barman. She beckoned Peter Hames to her side.

“Sit close to me, please,” she invited, “and listen. I ought to have told you before. I owe you all the confidence in the world. However, I tell you now. Since the affair of Monsieur the chemist, and the death of old Madame, this place has belonged to me. Madame Lapouge is my woman; John here does as I tell him. That is why now and then I have been able to pick up scraps of interesting information.”

“You might have told me,” Peter Hames said simply.

She recognised the hurt in his tone, laid her hand impulsively upon his, and pressed it.

“Forgive me,” she begged. “Reticence has become almost a vice with me. This little world here is so small.”

“Go on, please,” he enjoined. “I am pacified. You have some work for me, I hope?”

“There may be,” she admitted. “There is a young Englishman over here—an amorous young man, very simple, who has been winning a great deal of money. Legrande has got hold of him—Legrande, if you please, posing as the Marquis de Verrais—and Fifine, my little neighbour at the bar, posing as his mistress and an actress at the Opéra Comique. The little beast very nearly recognised me this evening. I never dreamed of her getting the entrée to the Sporting Club. Most nights, to wind up with, they come here. They make this young man pretty well drunk—you know how clever Legrande is at it—and they help themselves to his loose *mille* notes. I have sat here and seen Legrande take the notes from him whilst Fifine has been whispering in his ear. However, enough of that. They are planning a much bigger thing. What it is I don't know, but they have sent for the three men we know as the ‘Three Musketeers,’ who will rob or murder anybody for a *mille*, and the three are now upstairs in the salon.”

“Looks like a dirty business,” Peter Hames commented.

“I am afraid it is,” she agreed. “Now presently, the Marquis, as he calls himself, and the young man and Fifine will be here. I cannot be certain if Fifine recognised me to-night, but I am absolutely sure that she was suspicious. I meant to use the microphone from the small bedroom, but if they did recognise me, of course the

whole thing is finished. Will you take that on?"

"Rather," he assented.

"I'm afraid I'm leaving you all the work," she sighed, "but I know that little cat will never let me out of her sight. If you wouldn't mind just having one more whisky and getting up to the salon, I shall clear out quietly. Legrande will go upstairs to meet these three desperadoes and you will listen to his orders. I'll tell you one thing. I'm sure it won't be for to-night. They'll want to have all the young man's money. Meet me to-morrow morning at the bar of the Hôtel de Paris at eleven o'clock, and tell me what you have discovered."

Peter Hames had discovered a great deal when he met Sybil Christian at eleven o'clock the next morning in the Hôtel de Paris bar. Her face grew graver all the time as she listened.

"The one weak point about it that I can see," he remarked, as he drew to an end of his story, "is this. What would happen if, instead of winning to-morrow night at Nice this young man, Dagger Rodwell, should lose his money. It seems to me they're risking the whole grab."

Sybil shook her head.

"Legrande is no fool," she declared. "If he sees that the luck has changed there, he will make Fifine stop the play and take Rodwell out to supper. Then they'll bring him back and everything will proceed according to programme."

Peter Hames meditated for a few minutes.

"Are these three musketeers really clever fellows?" he asked.

"They're slippery, treacherous, and diabolically cunning," she assured him.

"Then I have an amendment to propose. Listen, please."

Sybil listened, and the amendment was carried.

At about twenty past two in the morning, a large and comfortable limousine was driven out of Nice on to the slopes of the most picturesque road in the world. As it mounted on its tortuous way, the lights of the city underneath became like a vast carpet of pinpricks of fire, with one magnificent, interlacing border by the sea front—the lights of the Promenade des Anglais. Inside, Fifine was sitting with one arm around Dagger Rodwell's neck, and his arm, it must be confessed, was around her waist. She had thrown off her hat and her head rested upon his shoulder. Outside, Monsieur le Marquis, by the side of the chauffeur, was apparently enjoying the view so much that, notwithstanding the jealousy insisted upon by Fifine, he never once looked around.

"I say," Dagger Rodwell asked once, as he ventured to snatch a willingly

returned kiss, "is this all right with the Marquis there?"

"Of course it is, you stupid," she answered. "He has to let me do what I like, or I wouldn't stay with him."

"What became of Mr. Ambrose?"

"He went home with some friends," she replied carelessly. "Aren't you glad? We didn't want him in here."

The young man demonstrated his satisfaction at his absence and their heads remained only a few inches apart.

"Such luck as yours," she murmured, "I have never seen. What was it you took with you?"

"Five thousand pounds."

"And how much did you win?"

"Just about another five thousand," he confided, his eyes alight with the joy of his success.

"You will give me a little present, dear, will you not?" she begged. "Nothing much. I dare not accept anything valuable. Something that costs no more than four or five *mille*. Just a souvenir."

"You wait," he promised. "We will go to Janesich to-morrow."

"It must not be anything elaborate," she reiterated. "I dare not accept presents from any one, and the Marquis will give me all I want when he has some money."

They mounted higher and higher. Now the bluff and lights of Cap Ferrat stretched out beneath them. The high lights of Eze, few but clear, confronted them on the right. Fifine was glancing from side to side with eager eyes.

"Why are you trembling?" he asked.

"I don't want to get back to Monte Carlo too quickly," she sighed.

"Hullo, what's this?" her companion remarked, looking out of the window. "A car broken down?"

The events of the next few seconds were amazing and speedy. A dark form, flashing an electric light, stepped out into the road, the brakes were put on their car, and it was brought to a standstill. Through the window they caught a momentary glimpse of a strange little panorama. They saw the chauffeur flung off the box, saw him rolling for a moment in the dusty road, spring up and run for the sheltering woods upon the left. Monsieur le Marquis, looking very dazed, made a brave show of tackling the aggressor, but received a blow which placed him almost immediately *hors de combat*. There was no time to watch more, for their own troubles had begun. The door had been thrown open and the muzzle of a very ugly-looking gun was poked to within a couple of feet of Dagger Rodwell's forehead.

“Your pocketbook—quick as hell!” a gruff voice demanded.

Dagger Rodwell crouched back and clenched his fist. In another moment, he would have been upon his assailant, gun or no gun, but Fifine’s arms were around his neck.

“Don’t hurt him!” she shrieked. “He shall not be hurt. Here! The pocketbook is nothing. Take it!”

Before he could recover from his amazement, she had thrust her hand into his pocket, brought out the pocketbook, and flung it through the open door to the man whom they could now see dimly. Without a word the door was slammed, the man joined his companion, and both disappeared. Dagger Rodwell shook himself free from the girl’s arms.

“Here, I say!” he cried. “I’m not going to stand this. That’s every penny I’ve got in the world, Fifine.”

“He would have killed you,” she sobbed. “There was a man murdered here last year. He would have killed you! We can do without money. The Marquis has plenty.”

“I’m going after mine, anyway,” Dagger Rodwell declared, pushing her away.

He sprang into the centre of the road. Almost immediately, another car came rushing round the corner and pulled up. Before he knew where he was, there were more automatics, and a chorus of cries and exclamations. Monsieur le Marquis came staggering into the little circle of light thrown by the headlights of the newly arrived automobile. He tackled one of the newcomers with much apparent courage. The other two were within a few feet of Dagger Rodwell, a villainous-looking pair and obviously meaning business.

“Throw up your hands!” Fifine shrieked from the car. “What does it matter?”

Dagger Rodwell did as he was bidden. After all, what did it matter?

The luckiest young man in the world received the shock of his life when, on arriving at the Hôtel de Paris, at four o’clock in the morning, scratched, bruised, dishevelled and practically penniless, he was taken charge of by the night concierge, to whom he had begun to tell his story, and ushered into a sitting room on the second floor. There he saw, in the order of their importance to him at that moment, two bottles of whisky upon the sideboard, some opened bottles of perrier, ice and glasses, the aristocratic young lady who had vouchsafed to talk to him at the gaming table, and two good-humoured looking giants of men, both of whom were strangers to him.

“I say,” he began—

Peter Hames mixed a generous whisky and soda and handed it to the dazed newcomer. The latter drained half its contents and set it down. Once more he looked round the room, and this time he saw, also, upon the table, his bulging pocketbook. He gave a little gasp. Peter Hames nodded as he saw the direction in which his eyes had travelled.

“That’s your pocketbook, all right,” he assured him. “Miss Christian, I think it would be almost best if you explained to our young friend.”

Sybil smiled and thrust a cigarette into her holder.

“You remember my speaking to you at the Sporting Club?” she asked him.

“Of course I do,” he answered.

“Well, that man whom you told me was the Marquis de Verrais was, as I knew, a rogue and an adventurer. The woman with him was a little cocotte of the place—never been near the Opéra Comique in her life. What they were after was your money. It is rather a hobby of mine,” she went on, “and of my two friends here, to interfere where it is possible in affairs like yours. I shall not tell you how, and you must never ask me, but Mr. Hames and I got to know that you were to be taken to Nice with all the money you possessed and induced to gamble. If you showed signs of losing, they would bring you home; if you won, so much the better. Then they arranged a little hold-up and robbery, on the Corniche Road.”

“But there were two sets of robbers!” the young man pointed out, raising his glass once more to his lips and draining its contents.

“Quite so,” Sybil agreed. “Our first idea was to wait until the three men who work for your sham marquis had robbed you of the pocketbook, and then interfere ourselves and get it back for you. Mr. Hames, however, had a better idea. He pointed out that these three thieves were absolutely reckless, and would use knives as freely as an Englishman does his fist, and, however clever and quick my two friends here were, they might very easily get away with the pocketbook. If we called in the police, who, by the by, never pay much attention to these affairs unless they have direct information themselves, they were very unlikely to patrol the Corniche Road just on the strength of our word. Accordingly, we changed our idea. My two friends here held up your car, robbed you first, and the three men who had been hired to take the pocketbook away from you at any price arrived a few minutes too late. There is your pocketbook, and all you have to do is to shake hands with Mr. Peter Hames and Mr. Paddy Collins here, and thank them very prettily for looking after you.”

The young man stood up and those blue eyes of his were very bright. He wrung the hands of the two men and he held out his tumbler willingly at Paddy Collins’

suggestion. This time habit was too strong for him, and the “Miss” slipped out.

“You aren’t going to tell me after this, Miss,” he remarked, looking across at her, with a twinkle in his eyes, “that I’m not the luckiest young man in the world?”

X

MADEMOISELLE ANNA DISAPPEARS

“’Tis a pleasant strip of land, though small,” Paddy Collins, the wanderer, meditated, gazing out of the window of his friend’s villa at La Turbie. “The whisky is agreeable and the cost of living moderate. I’m thinking of taking up my abode in your vicinity, Peter.”

Peter Hames shook his head.

“You are too restless, Paddy,” he observed. “Leaving out the gambling, which you don’t care much about, there’s not enough here to interest you.”

“God bless my soul!” the Irishman replied. “Five pretty good rows, two broken heads, a shot on my shoulder blade, a dozen very near drunks, and a lovely cousin found in the bosom of the mountains. What are you talking about, man? It’s a place after God’s own heart.”

“You’re luckier than I,” was his friend’s gloomy comment.

Paddy Collins rose from his seat in the studio and came across to the easel.

“You spend too much of your time, Peter, slapping paint on those old canvases. You’re a good night bird all right, when there’s something calling, but that’s all there is to you. You don’t need to paint for your living, lad. You don’t help any one else in life by spoiling good honest canvas like that. Come down with me now to the centre of the world and we’ll take a couple of dry ones with Francis.”

Peter Hames knocked out his pipe.

“You’re not a flatterer, old chap,” he observed.

“Though I’ve the tongue of an Irishman, I’m a truthful man,” Paddy Collins avowed. “I’d sooner have one picture from that chap whose home you saved up in the mountains than a dozen of yours. Quit it, lad. Let’s go and see the town.”

“Against my will, I am persuaded,” was the regretful reply. “Wait until I take off this smock and I’m with you.”

They drove down to the Royalty Bar, and, being early, found a table out in the sunshine. The Irishman leaned across towards his friend.

“Peter,” he said, “you mind the little lass up in the mountains there?”

“I do indeed.”

“Well, cousin or no cousin, I’m going to marry her. We’re going to build up that farm into something worth while, spend a month or two a year there, and when we go away to jog around a bit, we’ll leave it in charge of her father. What do you think

of that for a scheme?"

"You're a lucky man, Paddy," his companion declared.

"And what's the matter with you that you can't find a girl of your own?" Paddy Collins demanded. "There's many of them about in these parts, and one I have seen ___"

"That'll do, Paddy, old chap," his friend begged.

Just then a waiter hurried out from the closed part of the bar.

"There's a lady who desires to speak with Monsieur upon the telephone," he said, addressing Peter.

The latter hastened in, picked up the receiver, announced himself, and listened. The voice which answered him was the voice of a stranger.

"It is Monsieur Peter Hames?"

"Speaking."

"I speak for Mademoiselle Christian. She left word that I was to ring you up at your villa, at the Hôtel de Paris, the Royalty Bar, and afterwards at the Café de Paris. Mademoiselle desires that you come to her at once."

"Certainly," Peter Hames agreed. "Where is she?"

The woman's tone became a little troubled.

"But Monsieur—Monsieur would know that."

"How the mischief could I know?" was the anxious rejoinder. "I have not seen Miss Christian for a week. If you are ringing up for her, you must know where she is. Tell me and I will go there immediately."

The woman's voice was still uneasy.

"Mademoiselle never allows her whereabouts to be spoken of, but one would imagine that Monsieur knows where she spends much of the latter part of the night ___"

"Good God!" Peter Hames exclaimed. "Do you mean the—"

"Monsieur is probably right," the voice interrupted. "Monsieur will search for Mademoiselle there?"

"I should say so," he replied, ringing off.

He strode out to where his friend was waiting for him.

"Gone all thoughts of our peaceful gossip, I'm afraid, Paddy," he sighed. "Come along. Have you got a stout heart in you this morning?"

"Aye, and a fist that's spoiling for a bit of work," Paddy Collins declared, surreptitiously downing the gin and tonic which the waiter had brought. "Drink your own, Peter. You'll be none the worse man for it."

But Peter Hames had other thoughts. He was already in his car.

“Is it a long way we’re going?” his friend enquired, as he settled himself down by his side.

“Less than half a mile. It’s to the little night café at Beausoleil.”

“Is it trouble we’ll be finding there?” Paddy asked hopefully.

“I can’t tell you anything,” was the dazed reply. “I only know that a young woman I’m interested in was probably there last night and hasn’t returned. I just heard from her maid.”

Peter Hames drove without concealment to the front of the café. The door was inhospitably closed, but it yielded to firm treatment. A sleepy-eyed youth in blue overalls was making languid efforts to tidy up the place.

“Where’s John?” Peter Hames demanded.

“Gone,” was the brusque reply. “I’m the new barman.”

“And Madame Lapouge, the patronne, where’s she?”

“Gone, too. Every one’s gone.”

“Where’s the patron?”

“Gone out to get his coffee. If you want a drink, I’ll give you one. We’re not ready for customers yet.”

“Was there a young lady here last night—Mademoiselle Anna?”

The barman shrugged his shoulders.

“How should I know?” he asked. “My first evening. There may have been.”

Peter Hames took hold of the youth by the back of his shirt and the seat of his trousers, and lifted him out of the way.

“I’m going to search this place,” he announced.

The young man flung his broom at this unpleasant visitor and escaped into the back premises. They could hear him shouting in patois. Almost simultaneously, a familiar figure entered from the back door of the place. Coatless and unshaven, he presented a very different appearance, but it was undoubtedly Monsieur le Marquis de Verrais, sometimes known as François Legrande, who confronted them.

“What do you want, making a disturbance in my café at this hour of the morning?” he asked, with an angry flash of his white teeth.

Peter Hames stared at the speaker, and that vague sense of apprehension which had been with him since the ringing of the telephone, suddenly deepened.

“Since when has it been your café?” he questioned.

“The papers were signed yesterday, if you must know. It is my café and I am free to serve whom I please. I don’t wish for anything to do with you or your friends. Be so good as to leave without disturbance.”

“On the contrary,” Peter Hames told him fiercely, “I am going to search every

inch of your premises from cellar to attic.”

“Search my premises indeed! For what?”

“Stand out of the way!” Peter ordered. “The last time I knocked you down on the Corniche Road—rather a surprise, wasn’t it?—I hurt you a little more than you expected. This time, it may take you a little longer to get over it.”

Legrande’s fingers slipped into his waistcoat and he produced not a weapon, but a whistle. He blew it long and furiously.

“That is for the police,” he mocked them. “Now we shall see whether they will allow strangers tramping through my premises.”

“Not quite strangers, Monsieur le Marquis,” Peter Hames reminded him.

“I’ve never broken the law, anyhow,” the other replied. “I’ve never stolen pocketbooks. We’ll see what the police have to say about your breaking into an honest man’s café at this hour of the morning.”

“If there is really a chance of the police arriving,” Peter Hames observed, “so much the better. If they do not arrive, I shall, as I threatened you, search the place.”

Legrande held out his hand, pointing towards the door in a triumphant gesture. With official bearing, but very unofficial haste, a sergeant of police, attended by a gendarme, was crossing the threshold. The two men arrived just in time to save Legrande’s skin, for Paddy Collins was finding the affair hanging fire and had decided that it was time for action. Legrande swaggered forward.

“Monsieur le Sergent,” he complained, “these two men—I do not know them—they are not clients of mine—arrived this morning, assaulted my barman, and announced their intention of breaking open my doors and searching every room of the house. They should be removed at once. I charge them with assault. It is a hard thing for an honest man to have his premises entered in this fashion.”

“What have you to say about this, Monsieur?” the sergeant demanded, turning towards Peter, and there was something in his tone and manner which betrayed easily enough the fact that his sympathies were already enlisted.

“A young woman, who is accustomed to spend an hour or so here several nights a week,” Peter Hames recounted, “was here last night and has not returned to her home. I happen to know that this fellow Legrande, who tells me he has purchased this café, besides being a thorough scamp, has a grudge against the young woman. I admit I told him that I intended to search the place to look for her. Since you are here, Sergeant, you will perhaps spare me the trouble.”

The Sergeant looked at him sternly.

“What reasons have you, Monsieur, for believing that the young woman is on these premises?” he asked.

"I received a telephone message asking that I should come to her assistance," he replied.

"This is an absurdity," Legrande declared. "As a matter of fact, last night was my opening one. We had no young women in. The clients were all friends of mine, desiring to drink a glass of wine with me and to wish good fortune to the house. Jean, were there any young ladies in this place last night?"

"Not one, sir," the boy replied.

The Sergeant closed his book.

"You're making a mistake, sir," he declared, addressing Peter Hames. "Monsieur Legrande is, so far as we know, an honest man, and there is no evidence whatsoever making it necessary for us to search his premises."

Peter Hames looked the man steadily in the face.

"Listen, Sergeant," he said, "I am fairly well known in the Principality. Do I look like a person who would come here and make these charges without some foundation? What pleasure or profit could it be to me to have the apartments of Monsieur Legrande searched?"

The man avoided his eyes.

"Monsieur will be so good as to depart and take his friend with him," he insisted.

Peter Hames sighed, as he produced his pocketbook.

"No, Sergeant," he said gently, "you need not fear or hope that I am about to offer you a bribe. Be so good as to glance at this card."

He passed it across. The Sergeant glanced at it at first superciliously, started as he read the name, and collapsed as he read the few lines of writing. He handed it back and saluted.

"Monsieur is at liberty to search the premises," he announced. "My gendarme and I are at your disposal."

"What?" Legrande scowled. "Sergeant, what is this?"

The Sergeant extended his hands.

"I believe you to be an honest man, Monsieur Legrande," he said. "My sympathy is with you, but Monsieur has a card there which permits him special licence in the Principality, and by courtesy in the immediate neighbourhood. I cannot interfere."

Legrande stood for a moment, thinking fiercely.

"Stop!" he cried. "It was a young woman for whom Monsieur was enquiring? There was one here last night, for a very short time. She arrived drunk and asked leave to lie down upstairs. I had forgotten her. It is perhaps the young woman of whom Monsieur is in search. Wait!"

He hurried out of the place. Peter Hames made a movement as though to follow him. The Sergeant of police saluted.

“It is as Monsieur wishes,” he admitted respectfully, “yet one feels that Monsieur Legrande should have a chance to prove the truth of his words. If Mademoiselle arrives and has a charge to make, here am I to receive it.”

Peter Hames assented reluctantly.

“Three minutes,” he conceded. “No longer than that.”

“It is for Monsieur to decide,” was the suave reply.

In less than three minutes Peter Hames, at any rate, had the surprise of his life. There was the sound of the banging of a door, light footsteps outside, and, through the back entrance to the bar, a cigarette in her long tube, a queer little smile upon her lips, came Mademoiselle Anna. She showed no signs of distress or disturbance of any sort. Her clothes were neatly brushed and her *toute ensemble*, as usual, immaculate. She swung across the room towards him.

“But what a commotion!” she exclaimed. “The police too!”

“Is this the young person?” the Sergeant asked Peter Hames.

The latter nodded.

“Mademoiselle Anna,” he went on, turning towards her, “the Sergeant is here to know if you have any complaints—in plain words, whether you have been detained here against your will?”

Monsieur Legrande, who had followed softly down the stairs, stood irresolute by the side of the counter. Mademoiselle knocked the ash from her cigarette.

“Complaints?” she repeated. “What complaints should I have? I stayed here too late last night and fell asleep.”

Peter was watching Legrande’s face. His expression of fear had changed at first into one of blank bewilderment; afterwards to one of relief. The Sergeant’s embarrassed disquietude disappeared as though by magic. He drew himself up once more.

“Monsieur perceives,” he pointed out ingratiatingly, “that affairs were not so bad as he supposed. Monsieur Legrande, I am convinced, is incapable of committing an illegal act.”

Mademoiselle Anna tossed away her cigarette. Standing there in the full glare of the morning sunshine, Peter Hames marvelled more than ever at her amazing make-up. There was scarcely even a suggestion of Sybil Christian, either in her features or colouring.

“Oh, la la!” she exclaimed. “I want my *déjeuner*! *Bon jour, Monsieur Legrande*. My two friends, since you are here, you will accompany me, I trust?”

They left the place together. Mademoiselle Anna, walking between them, took an arm of each and led them a little way up the street. As soon as they were out of hearing of the café, she paused and summoned a passing carriage.

“Remain mystified until one o’clock, dear friends,” she begged. “Lunch with me then at the Pomme d’Or.”

She sprang lightly into the vehicle, waved her hand with a gesture half impudent, half friendly, and drove away,—Mademoiselle Anna at midday as perfect of her type as at midnight.

The Pomme d’Or, which was truly French, was not prepared to offer cocktails, but over their glass of Dubonnet, served whilst the lunch which Sybil Christian had ordered, was prepared, she told her story.

“You knew, of course,” she began, “that up till yesterday, the Café Régéal belonged to me?”

“So I understood,” Peter Hames admitted.

“Madame Lapouge was the ostensible owner. A few days ago, she told me that she had had an offer for the place. It has been of little use to me since we ran it respectably, as all the gamins of the neighbourhood stay away. I wasn’t keen to sell, however, until she divulged the name of the would-be purchaser. Legrande, if you please, with Fifine living in the place as the wife of the patron! I didn’t hesitate for a minute. I told her to sell, with a proviso that the room on the first floor, where I have the microphone in the cupboard, was reserved entirely for my use. Madame Lapouge told Legrande that I had taken it for a year and paid for it in advance. He believes that I wish it for resting in, to put my clothes in, or to give a rendezvous to my lovers—”

“Stop!” Peter Hames interrupted. “Are you telling me that Legrande has not recognised you?”

“That is the point of the whole thing,” Sybil explained. “He suspects I’m a spy of some sort, but he doesn’t know for whom, and he actually has not connected me in any way with Sybil Christian; neither, although she is vaguely suspicious, has Fifine, who now patronises me. Last night, I knew that Legrande meant to entertain a few of his criminal friends in the salon. I pretended a headache and went up to my room to lie down for a time. Whilst I was there, I heard the handle turn, but I had had brass bolts fitted to stop any enterprises of that sort, and to prevent any one coming in whilst I was using the microphone. Half an hour later, I heard the key, which I had foolishly left in the lock on the outside, turn, and I knew that I was locked in.”

“But how did you telephone?” Peter Hames marvelled.

“Wait!” she begged. “I am convinced that when Legrande locked me in, he thought that I was probably asleep, and that, at any rate, he was making sure of me. Half a dozen men had a little meeting in the salon and most of what they said I heard. That’s another story. I’m only explaining last night for the present. It was quite worth waiting for, quite worth listening to. I feel sure that Legrande really forgot to turn the key again; forgot that I was there, locked in. This morning, I withdrew the bolts, slept for a little time, and waited. Soon after you arrived, I suppose, I heard the key turn. Then I came out.”

Peter Hames held his head for a moment.

“What about the telephone?” he asked.

“That was a blunder,” she admitted. “Some time ago, I told Christine, my maid, if ever I should fail to return, to telephone to you. I felt safer like that, for, as you know, queer things have happened at the Café Régal. I didn’t come home; hence your telephone message, which under the circumstances was unfortunate.”

“Then really,” Peter Hames observed dolefully, “You didn’t send for us and you were in no need of help.”

“I don’t think so,” she meditated. “I have kept my room locked up all the time. The lock came to me from Paris, and I am perfectly certain the key could not be copied, so my wardrobe, which contains the microphone, can never have been examined. The proof of that is the conversation I heard last night. You can understand my attitude this morning now. I want to keep my position at the café. It was a bad place in old Madame’s time. It seems to me, from what I heard, that it will be a much worse place under Legrande.”

Luncheon was a somewhat silent meal, and immediately afterwards Paddy Collins hurried off to meet his relative from the mountains.

“Why so depressed?” Sybil asked her remaining guest.

“Let me drive you up to the hills, well away from this place,” he begged, “and I’ll tell you.”

“I should love it,” she assented. “Let’s ask for the bill and go at once.”

In a side road, which was little more than a cart track across a field, in the shadow of a small plantation of pines, Peter Hames brought his car to a standstill and answered his companion’s question.

“I am depressed,” he said deliberately, “because I hate the life you are living—this double life of social stunts and sordid adventures.”

“I’ve had some fun out of it,” she reminded him. “So have you.”

“Let it go at that,” he begged. “One can’t keep on having all the luck. And I’m

all the more depressed," he went on, "because I have a queer presentiment about the Café Régal. You may be right; they may be only mildly suspicious about you. I'm not so sure."

"If they had meant mischief," she pointed out, "they had plenty of time between four o'clock, when the meeting was over, and half-past seven."

"All the same," Peter rejoined, "Legrande swore that there was no one in the place when I came for you and nothing would induce him to let me make a search. It was only the coming of the police that made him remember you and let you out."

She lit a cigarette and spoke thoughtfully.

"Peter," she announced, "I'll make a bargain with you. I'll listen in once more to the meeting to-night and that shall be the end. If there's an adventure in what I hear, it shall be our last."

He took her hand.

"Agreed," he promised.

Mademoiselle Anna, from her stool at the end of the counter that night, watched them slip out of the room one by one—these furtive-looking men whom she had seen enter by twos and threes. Very few of them were Monégasques, she had noticed; most of them were from Nice or Marseilles, unpleasant-looking in some nameless way, sinister in their silence and the lack of good fellowship with which they had met and drunk. The "Three Musketeers" who had been among the first arrivals were quarrelling still about the price of a bottle of brandy which they had bought. When they too joined the little procession which mounted the stairs, the café was almost empty. She glanced at the little platinum and diamond wrist watch which, as a rule, she kept well concealed. Then she too, slipped out by that back door, climbed the stairs, unlocked the door of her room, locked it again from the inside and drew the bolts, made her way into what seemed to be a little wardrobe in the corner, inserted another key, and let herself into its recesses. . . .

It seemed to her that the instrument had never been clearer. She heard even the muttered exclamations, the gurgling of wine poured into glasses, the demand from a stranger who had apparently arrived that day from Marseilles as to their plans. Then, more distinctly than anything, she heard Legrande speak. He had a full, oily voice, suave yet penetrating. To-night, for the first time, it inspired her with a vague sense of fear. She felt her heart beat in the darkness of the little cubicle. She was suddenly terrified, full of keen regret that she had ordered Peter Hames to stay away. The fingers which held the instrument to her ear were trembling. A fit of nerves—most unexpected visitation—was playing havoc with her. She stepped back into the room.

Almost she made up her mind to withdraw the bolts, unlock the door, and fly. Then, as unexpectedly as the fit had come upon her, it passed. She was ashamed of her momentary cowardice, alert and confident as ever. She stepped back to her hiding place and raised the 'phone once more to her ears. Legrande was still speaking and there were little murmurs of satisfaction from the men who were listening to him.

"Paris, Marseilles, London, New York, Chicago, not to mention any other cities," he said, "have their criminal life organised. Crime is a profession like the others. It is only successful when worked by what the Americans call the 'gang' system, which is to say coöperation. Monte Carlo and Nice have been neglected as too small a field. I dispute that. I contend that there is more money coming and going between these two towns than any other territory of the same size in the world. It is our duty to see that more of it stays. That is why I have asked all you brave fellows who are known to be of an adventurous turn of mind to come together."

There were muttered exclamations and applause. Then something a little more menacing crept into Legrande's voice.

"Before we start serious operations," he continued, "there are one or two little affairs to be dealt with. We have been annoyed here—indeed one of my own operations had been interfered with by the meddling of amateurs. Amateurs in our line of business I detest," Legrande went on more slowly. "The particular little group in this vicinity must be treated firmly. One of them is an American painter, another a thick-headed Irishman, and a third a young woman—a very simple creature who belongs to good people but comes here nearly every night eavesdropping, and posing as a courtesan. Imagine the folly of thinking that she could do this with people like myself about, without being discovered! A fatuous young lady, my friends, but one who has earned the punishment that is coming to her."

The little ebony instrument nearly dropped from Sybil's nerveless fingers. Cold horror struck into her heart. Almost, it seemed that she could see that little circle of men with their fierce and ribald whispers, see Legrande crouching there, his red lips parted, a grin of satisfaction upon his face. After all, she, who had thought herself so clever, was the one who had been fooled. Her first impulse was escape, swift and speedy. She dashed to the door. The bolts still held bravely. She drew them back. Then she fitted in her key and her heart sank. The lock had been tampered with. From her side, at any rate, there was no way of turning it. Well, it was to have been expected. She fled back again to her place and picked up the instrument.

"As for the Irishman," Legrande was saying, "he is disposed of for to-night. Fifine has taken him to Nice. She has just telephoned from the Savoy Bar there that he is hopelessly drunk. There remains Mademoiselle and with her I propose to

deal.”

It was one of the “Three Musketeers” who spoke. Sybil recognised his voice.

“One understands . . . the English world . . . well placed, not one of us. Is it not possible that trouble might come if our friend Legrande should treat her as she deserves?”

“There will be no trouble,” Legrande said calmly. “She has aped the cocotte long enough. She has cut herself adrift from her people with this night life. She has her own bedroom here. No one can deny it. For what purpose? Who can do harm to such a person? What complaints from a young woman living such a life would receive attention? She has destroyed herself. I will deal with her.”

“And afterwards?” some one ventured.

“She will be content,” Legrande replied. “She hankers after this life. She shall have it. We will make it impossible for her to return to the other.”

“And the American?”

“Our Sergeant of Police, who is with us, carries always a loaded revolver,” he confided. “I myself can deal with six men’s lives in six seconds. There is nothing to fear. The American will come after her. He will get what he deserves. The Irishman will be too drunk to do anything for days. When he is sober, there will be nothing left for him to do. When these people are disposed of, I will unfold the great scheme. I am proposing a coup which, if successful—and it will be successful with these damned interlopers out of the way—will bring us in between two and three million francs. First of all, I intend to deal with Mademoiselle Anna. You will excuse me, gentlemen, for, shall we say, half an hour? The champagne and brandy are on the sideboard at your disposal. Descend, one of you, if there is something else needed. Let no one mount.”

There was a little chorus of what seemed to Sybil in those swooning moments, the lewd exultation of a chorus of satyrs. Then there were footsteps outside—heavy, deliberate footsteps, the click of a key fitted into the lock on the other side of the door.

Paddy Collins was, or appeared to be, gloriously and magnificently drunk. He sat in an easy-chair at a famous bar in Nice, his arm around Fifine, who sat in an adjacent one, a bottle of whisky, a tumbler, and a bottle of perrier on his own small table, a bottle of champagne in front of Fifine, for, drunk or sober, there was one principle about Paddy Collins which he never altered—“one night: one drink”—and it was Paddy’s night for whisky.

“I’m thinking,” he suggested, “it’s time we were making for Monte Carlo.”

She bent over him and laughed, patting his cheek and drawing him a little nearer to her. The bar was empty, for most of the people were dancing in the adjacent room.

“We will not go back,” she whispered. “It will serve François right. He sends me out to take care of you whilst he takes for himself another mistress. He is a beast. We will stay here. We will go anywhere you like. I have kept my word. I brought you away. Very well, I will stay with you. You shall be my man, Monsieur Paddy Collins. You are a very fine man. I like you much.”

Fifine was not singularly observant, and she also was very nearly drunk. She did not notice the sudden stiffening of every muscle in her companion’s body.

“Ho, ho!” he exclaimed. “So Monsieur Legrande has plans to-night!”

“It serves that silly little fool right,” Fifine declared, caressing him more ardently. “She plays at being a *cocotte*. Let her become one. François will break her in, all right. She will not be the first and it serves her right. She spies. I hate spies. Monsieur Paddy, I love you, but I hate spies.”

“So do I—like hell,” Paddy Collins agreed, lumbering to his feet.

“Where are you going?”

“Not far from you, sweetheart,” he answered amorously.

He gulped down the rest of his tumblerful of whisky and staggered across the room. She leaned back and laughed. She was earning her money, and after all it was not so bad. He was a fine figure of a man, this Irishman. She sat and waited for his return—and waited—and waited. . . .

Into the blackness of the night Paddy Collins stumbled, and for a moment things were blurred for him. The pavements seemed to rise. People stared curiously. Then he set his teeth, drew himself up, stiffened every muscle, and became a man again. In Peter Hames’ borrowed car he glided off into the Promenade des Anglais, narrowly escaped overturning two protesting gendarmes, and flashed like a streak around the corner, past the harbour, into the Middle Corniche. He knew Peter Hames’ car and he knew that bottom road! A quarter of an hour, he said to himself, as he flung in his fourth speed at the top of the hill. Horns were blown at him, shouts came from the few pedestrians. What did Paddy care? He was out to break records, the vision of that dirty little café in his mind, the girl his friend loved always calling, calling. Winds rushed by, pebbles leaped into the air; around some corners he skidded madly, but the car held the road, and Paddy Collins held the wheel. It was the drive of a lifetime, and he paused, panting, at last, with shrieking of brakes and blasting of horn before the villa on the hillside at La Turbie. Peter Hames was at the door before he reached it.

“Your gun, Peter!” he shouted. “We’ve been fooled. Break your promise, man, and come, or leave me to face it alone.”

They were in the car together. The last part of the rush came.

“They fooled us, Peter,” the Irishman repeated, keeping those stern grey eyes of his fixed upon the road and his hands gripping the wheel until the veins stood out like whipcord. “Sybil put you on your honour. They sent me off with the little Fifine to Nice. These blasted women! They always blab. A bottle or two of wine in her, and out it came. Sybil never bluffed them. They knew. They’re for her to-night. They’ve got a plan for us to-morrow.”

They sat, face level to face, eyes set, nerves tense, blood on fire, but the fight of all the ages never came, for when they flung open the door of the Café Régál, Mademoiselle Anna was sitting on her accustomed stool, smoking a cigarette from her long holder. No other soul was in the place. She looked round and remained staring at them. As they drew near, they saw in front of her the revolver from which the smoke was still curling upwards.

“Paddy!” she exclaimed. “Peter! You, after all! How did you know?”

“Paddy told me,” he cried. “Is all well with you, Sybil?”

She nodded.

“I killed him,” she confessed. “I had to. The others were afraid, when they knew. They skulked away like rats.”

Not a sound in the place, no barman in the bar, emptiness and solitude everywhere. They took her out and helped her into the car. Only one movement she made of her own accord. She took the revolver by the barrel and flung it into the road.

“I had to kill him,” she moaned. “Peter, it was my fault. I should have listened to you.”

They were over the frontier by eight o’clock, with a visa on their passports which brought them many salutations. They raced away into Italy. Paddy Collins, from the dickey, leaned over.

“Peter, my lad,” he confided, “this is a strange country to me. Do you know of a place near by where perhaps a bottle of whisky might be bought?”

“I’m looking for a place with an English chaplain,” Peter Hames replied, “but maybe the two won’t be so far apart.”

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

[The end of *Sinners Beware* by E. Phillips (Edward Phillips) Oppenheim]