

THE OWL TAXI

HULBERT FOOTNER

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THE OWL TAXI
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TO
G. M. F.

WHO FILLED THE TANK THREE
TIMES A DAY AND KEPT THE
CHILDREN MODERATELY QUIET.

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THE OWL TAXI

CHAPTER I

THE TRANSFER

At eleven o'clock of a moist night in December, Gregory Parr was making his way far westward on Twenty-third Street. At his right hand stretched that famous old row of dignified dwellings with pilasters and little front yards, and ahead of him was Tenth Avenue, the stronghold of the Irish. The wet pavements glistened under the street lamps, and the smell of influenza was in the air. The street was deserted except for a cross-town car at long intervals, hurling itself blithely through the night on a flat wheel.

Greg was on his way to the Brevard Line pier at the foot of the street to take passage on the great *Savoia*, premier steamship of her day and on this particular trip the "Christmas ship." The *Savoia* ran as true to the hour as a railway train, and was scheduled to leave at one A.M. in order to make the best rail connections. There was no reason why Greg should have walked to the pier except that at the last moment his heart was loath to leave little old New York, and even the least interesting of her streets called to him. As he walked he communed with himself somewhat after this fashion: "Lord! I didn't know the old burg meant so much to me till I made up my mind to leave it! After all maybe I'm a fool to pull up stakes here. I know the folks on this side; their ways are my ways. I speak New York. Perhaps in London I'll be like a fish in the grass." But his baggage was on the pier and he had paid a deposit on his ticket. It never occurred to him that he could still change his mind. On such trifles do the weightiest human decisions turn!

He crossed Tenth Avenue and passed through the long block beyond with its escarpments of dark factories on either hand. At Eleventh Avenue the street opened into a plaza with the ferry houses facing him from the other side, and a long line of steamship piers stretching south, of which the Brevard pier was the nearest. Over the pier sheds Greg saw the masthead light of the *Savoia* gleaming brightly and heard the soft murmur of escaping steam. On the corner was a little waterfront hotel, the Brevard House, with inviting brilliantly lighted bar. Greg was irresistibly drawn to enter. "One last drink to my own town," he said to himself.

Within, the bar was absolutely typical, and therefore dear to Greg. There was the very red and well-wiped mahogany counter, finished with a round cornice to lean the elbows on, and with a brass rail below for feet. Behind the counter the usual elaborate structure of mahogany and plate glass reared itself to the ceiling, a super-mantel-piece as it were, while between counter and mirrors moved a pink-cheeked young man, in command, one might say, of the battalion of bottles behind him. Bar-tenders used to be mustachioed, but now they are smooth and pink-cheeked.

To Greg's disappointment he found the place almost empty; he desired company; he longed to hear the racy speech of the Manhattan pavements before he finally shook their dust from his feet. There were two travelers, but they, having downed their drinks, were preparing to leave; across the room sitting at a table was a human derelict, without which no picture of a bar-room would be complete—but he was sleeping under his hat like a candle under its extinguisher. The only other customer present was a taxi-driver who was making friendly overtures to the bartender. For some reason the pink-cheeked one scorned him. These instinctive antipathies are impossible to explain; the bartender was perfectly willing to hob-nob with the two travelers—invited to drink with them he took a swig out of his private stock of cold tea with gusto and charged them fifteen cents for the privilege; but as for the poor taxi-driver, well, they did not belong to the same herd, that was all.

Rebuffed in this direction the driver turned eagerly to the latest comer, Greg. There was something almost pathetic in his anxiety to make friends. Every soul has those moments of desperate lonesomeness. Greg was not at all backward in responding. The driver was a spare little man in an overcoat sizes too big for him and almost reaching the ground. Greg was reminded of an old illustration of the Artful Dodger. He had a sharp, humorous, apelike face, much seamed, and in his eyes was a light at once childlike, impudent and deprecating. Taxi-drivers,

that is to say "owl-drivers" like this one, wear no uniform, but they are unmistakable. It may be their overcoats which are full of character. This one was incredibly worn and shapeless. With it went a round cloth cap with a flap let down behind to protect the wearer's ears and neck.

"Say fella," said this individual with engaging impudence; "drink with me, will yeh, if it's not a liberty?"

"Sure," said Greg, "if you'll have another with me after."

"What are you drinking?"

"Rye high-ball."

"Well I don't gen'ally dilute my liquor but just to be high-toned—say Jack! Two rye high-balls."

The refreshment was duly served. Greg noticed that as the taxi-driver lifted his glass his hand trembled, yet he was a young and healthy-looking man. Greg wondered momentarily if he had a secret agitation, and then forgot about it.

They exchanged opinions upon the quality of the whiskey and the rottenness of the weather outside. These and other pleasant conventionalities, not to speak of two high-balls apiece, opened the way for more personal communications. They decided they liked each other.

"I'm Hickey Meech," said the driver. "Christened Robert at birth, but Hickey because I come from the country, though that's fifteen years ago, and I'm like to die before I see it again."

"I shan't tell you my name," said Greg. "Meaning no offense, you understand; but it's been in the papers lately, and I want it to be forgotten."

"Sure that's all right," said Hickey. "What's in a man's label anyhow; 'taint guaranteed by no poor feud law." He glanced sideways at Greg's good clothes. "You're a bit off your regular beat to-night, ain't you?"

"I'm sailing on the *Savoia*."

"The Hell you say! Well some guys has all the luck!"

Greg laughed shortly. He experienced a sudden desire to talk about himself; to put his case before a disinterested party who did not know him, and whom he would never see again; it would help him to grasp his own situation, he felt. During the last difficult weeks he had not talked to any one.

"I don't know as anybody would call me lucky," he said. "I've lately had a good crack over the head. Maybe it was good for my character, but it hurt just the same."

"Oh, we all get those," the other replied sententiously.

"My Dad died when I was a kid," Greg went on. "He left us well-fixed as things go. The property was all in the hands of his partner as trustee. Well, since then I've been accustomed to sucking my silver spoon, as you might say; went to the most expensive schools and college, and didn't learn much except how to drive a racing car. I can drive a car, but that's not going to lay up any bonds in a safe deposit vault.

"Well, it's an old story, but, believe me, when it happens to yourself it has all the effect, if not the charm, of novelty! A month ago our trustee died and left his affairs in a snarl. Our property has just vamosed; he didn't steal it, you understand; it just naturally melted in his hot hands.

"I managed to save enough out of the wreck—it was my first experience of business and I don't like it—to keep the girls from actual want, but there wasn't a penny left for me. Of course I was well known in certain circles and there were plenty of men who would have given me a job out of charity; but I wasn't going to be a poor relation in the crowd where I had once kept my end up with the best. I was pried loose from my old foundations and I wanted an entirely fresh start. So I decided to try my luck in London. No small town stuff for me. It seemed like a good idea

when it came to me but now—I don't know——"

The driver was all sympathy. "What's the matter? Leaving somebody behind you?"

"No," said Greg smiling; "only the old town. I didn't know it had such a hold on me!"

"Every dog loves its own lamp-posts," said Hickey. "It'll do you good to see the world. Wish to God I had the chance! And you'll make good. Even though you've lost your coin you've got the habit of class. Nobody can't take that from you. And people just naturally give up to a classy guy."

"I don't quite get you," said Greg.

"You've got style," said the taxi-driver. "Anybody could see you were accustomed to traveling with top-notchers."

"Nothing in it," said Greg. "My 'style' as you call it only gets in my way now that I've nothing to keep it up on. I'd do better if I could begin life over on a section gang."

"Don't you fool yourself," retorted the taxi-driver. "That's the way a swell always talks. 'Gee!' says he, 'if I was on'y a horny handed ton of soil I could make something of myself!' It reads well in a book. But take it from me, kid, the ditch-digger is the scratch man in the race of life; he's got twict as far to run. Why any ordinary fella born in a soft bed can keep it, but it takes one o' these here now Napoleons to win one. Look at me now. I may as well say I ain't no Napoleon and here I am. I was born to sweat, and I'm still sweating. Of course I got my vices. I shoot craps; that helps keep me poor. But it's the habit of being poor that's so hard to break. If I could only once get ahead far enough to buy me a real swell outfit nothing could stop me."

"You're dead wrong," said Greg. "There's not so much in appearances as people like to think. Why, the richest man I know goes around looking like a rag-picker. And there's many a fancy vest covers an empty stomach. A workman with a good trade is a king alongside one of those poor devils that clings to the edge of what is called Society."

"Well, I'd like to try a little clinging."

"There's nothing like honest work."

"For others. Anybody can have my share. I wisht I had your chances, that's all."

"I'd give my 'chances' as you call them quick enough for a trade."

Hickey favored Greg with a queer look. "Do you mean that?"

"Sure I mean it."

There was a silence of a moment or two while Hickey dipped his forefinger in a wet spot and drew designs on the mahogany. At last he asked very off-hand:

"Would you call driving a taxi a trade?"

"Sure. Why not?"

"Well, why don't you try that? You said you could drive."

"Well, in London I don't suppose I could compete with the native article."

"I mean here."

"I'm going to London, I told you."

"But you don't have to go. According to yourself it's just a notion that you're sorry you took already."

"What are you getting at?"

"I'm just trying you out to see if you meant anything by your ideas. Are you willing to take a sporting chance?"

"Try me."

Once more Hickey hesitated, and then the proposal came with a rush. "Swap with me. I'll give you my flivver outside for three hundred and those clothes you're wearing. She's mine free and clear. Paid the final installment last week. She's not new, you may say, but all the better. She's well supplied up. And a bargain at the price. Got an elegant meter on her. Runs fast for fares and slow for the inspector. I'll let you try her out of course before you pay the money."

Greg drew a long breath and stared at the other with widening eyes. His life had come to the parting of the ways, and he was free to choose any direction. This offer presented fascinating possibilities. Like most young men Greg fancied—it would be hard to say why—that the life of a cab-driver must be full of romance.

"You wouldn't have to leave the old town then," Hickey went on craftily. "Believe me, you'd begin to see it for the first time. Inside and out!"

Greg needed little persuasion. His own imagination pictured the adventure in more glowing colors than the taxi-driver had at command. It was something else made him hesitate.

"Sorry," he said regretfully. "I haven't but two hundred in the world." An idea occurred to him, and his face cleared. "But I've plenty more clothes like these. They're in trunks and bags on the pier yonder. The outfit must be worth more than a hundred even at second-hand clothes prices. I'll give you the claim checks. I'll throw in the deposit receipt too, if you want to travel."

"I'll take you," said Hickey with suspicious promptitude; but Greg on his part was too eager to be warned by it. "I'll take a flyer among the English swells. If I make any breaks over there, they'll think it's just because I'm a Yank."

"Well, let's take a look at the flivver," said Greg. "I suppose she'll run."

"Run!" cried Hickey. "She can run like Duffy in the quarter mile! Before we go out let me show you my papers is all right." He exhibited cards for his car license and operator's license.

"You said your name was Meech," objected Greg. "These are made out to Elmer Fishback."

"Oh, a coupla fellas owned the boat since Fishback," said Hickey. "The cards always goes with the car. You'll have to be Fishback when the inspector comes round. Here's my receipts for the payments."

These were signed by one Bessie Bickle.

"She financed the deal," explained Hickey. "She keeps a little yard over on the East side, and I rent space from her. You might do worse than keep on with her. Bessie's on the level. It's Gibbon Street south of Houston. Jumping-off place on the East side. Better put it down."

"Gibbon Street; I'll remember it by the Decline and Fall," said Greg.

Paying their shot they went out by the front door. The taxi rested easily by the curb, like an old horse asleep. She had a slight list to starboard—"From the bloated rich climbing aboard that side," explained Hickey. Her absurd little engine hood was like a nose without character, and the smoky lamps at either side like bleary eyes. To complete the likeness to a head, the top projected over the windshield like the visor of a cap. Greg was strongly reminded of the human derelict inside the bar and his face fell. Romance receded into the background.

Hickey watching him close made haste to remove the bad impression. "Hell! Nobody expects looks in a flivver. Wait till you feel her move under you! She's a landaulet, see? The top lets down in fine weather. Take the wheel! Take the wheel! I'll crank her."

Greg remembered afterward that during this preliminary inspection, Hickey stood squarely in front of the door of the cab, thus blocking any view of the interior. But it never occurred to him to look inside. He took the driver's seat, and Hickey cranked her. They started.

They had not gone a hundred feet before Greg discovered, though Hickey kept up a running fire of praise to drown the myriad voices of the flivver, that her piston rings were worn and her transmission loose. She was indeed well supplied, a little too supple in fact. There were other rattles, squeaks and knocks that he could not at the moment locate. Nevertheless she ran; she ran indeed with the noisy enthusiasm characteristic of her kind. There is no false delicacy about a flivver. Greg never hesitated. He was a natural born mechanic, and the engine of a flivver held no terrors for him.

When, having completed the circuit of the long block, they drew up before the Brevard House again, Hickey said anxiously: "Well?"

"It's a go," said Greg curtly.

A little sigh escaped the other. "Where'll we change?"

"In the car," said Greg.

"Ain't room enough," hastily objected Hickey. "If we're going to change we can't dress one at a time or the other would have to stop outside naked."

"Well, I suppose we could get a room in this hotel."

"And let Nosey the bar-tender in on our business? No, sir! I tell you. Let's go down behind the hogsheads."

Below, along the deserted waterfront, were great piles of heavy freight which had overflowed from the pier-sheds. Here there were many secluded nooks suitable for their purpose. Letting the taxi stand in the roadway outside, the change of their outer clothing was soon effected. Greg handed over money, baggage checks and receipt for the deposit money; receiving in return the license cards and bill of sale.

"Don't forget you're Elmer Fishback to the inspectors," said Hickey.

In the light of an electric lamp overhead he strutted up and down the aisle between the rows of hogsheads, swinging Greg's stick and "getting the feel of his clothes" he said. They were several sizes too big for him by the way, but he seemed not to be aware of that.

"Well, come on," said Greg. "Hop in, and I'll drive you up to the *Savoia* in style."

His hand instinctively went to the door handle as he spoke. Hickey hastily pushed it aside. "Oh Hell, I'll ride on the front seat with you," he said. "I ain't proud."

Greg ran her back to the Brevard Line pier. Many cabs were arriving now bringing luxurious parties direct from the theaters and restaurants. Greg took his place in the slow-moving line and in due course reached the first cabin gangway. Hickey hopped off, and hooking the stick over his arm, squared his meager shoulders with a swagger.

"Well ta-ta, old chap," he said in a throaty voice; "I'll write you from dear old Lunnon."

"By-by," said Greg, biting his lip. He was sorry he had to miss the comedy that would be played out on the *Savoia's* promenade deck during the next five days.

The cabs pressing behind forced Greg to move on. Turning on the pier, he hastened away back to the town. As he went he endeavored to take stock of his sensations, but without much success; they were rather confused. Here he was a taxi-driver on his own cab, looking for a fare, he told himself, but without quite believing it. The change had been too sudden. He couldn't quite rid himself of the feeling that he would wake up presently. He didn't feel like a taxi-driver inside. The whole thing seemed a bit unreal. He had an absurd feeling that the dark-windowed houses were racing past waving their stoops at him, while he sat still in the middle of the road.

Little by little he began to believe in what had happened. For one thing the flivver made a most convincing racket. Yes, there could be no doubt of it! Here he was starting on the bottom rung of the ladder just as he had always told himself he wished to do. Well, time would show how far he could climb. Meanwhile there ought to be fun in it, rich fun! Many a dollar had Greg spent in his day on the prowling cabs of night! Here's where he would get some of it back. He knew the very air, the confidential, everything-goes-between-good-fellows air with which he must touch his cap and say: "Cab, sir?"

The old flivver rattled and bumped companionably across town. Greg was making for the White Light district, of course, where fares were to be picked up after midnight. At Madison Square he turned north on the Avenue. With its disappearing perspective of twin lights in a double row reflected from the wet pavement it was like a Venetian canal at carnival time, but the old taxi was a noisy gondola.

Greg had gone no farther than Twenty-sixth Street when he was hailed from the sidewalk by two men in evening dress, who had come perhaps from the club down the street. Greg pulled up beside the curb and leaned out to open the door as he had always seen the chauffeurs do.

"Where to, sir?"

"The Chronos Club."

One of the men made to get in and staggered back with a queer throaty gasp: "Good God, what's this!"

Greg hastily slipped out of his seat. "What's the matter?"

"A dead body!" the man gasped, and instinctively looked around for a policeman.

On the floor of the cab before them lay a bulky body queerly huddled on top of an old valise. When the door had been opened the feet pushed out uncompromisingly. The light of a street lamp fell full on the upturned, yellow, dreadfully quiet face.

Greg's mind after an instant's stand of horror worked like lightning. He shut the door pushing the feet in with it.

"Oh, he's only soused," he said carelessly. "I didn't know his friend had left him behind. I'll have to take him to the station house now."

Springing back into the driver's seat he opened her up wide. The two men looked after him with an uncertain air. The taxi leaped ahead. He turned the next corner on two wheels, and the next and the next after that. His blood was pounding in his ears. Finally in the middle of a quiet block he ventured to draw up and listen. No sound of a raised alarm reached him.

CHAPTER II

GREG'S FIRST FARE

Greg had come to a stop beside a gas lamp in a long block of little houses. Not a soul was in sight, and no window showed a light. Slipping out of his seat he opened the door to have a better look at his gruesome freight. Perhaps after all he had been mistaken. When the door was opened the feet impatiently pushed out again. There was something piteously human in the aspect of these turned-up toes in common-sense shoes with soft kid uppers comfortable for old feet. There was no doubt that the man was dead; the slack, huddled attitude, the awful serenity of his expression proclaimed it. Greg ventured to touch his hand; it was death cold.

It was the body of a man of middle age, plump rather than corpulent. He was well-dressed in a somewhat old-fashioned style, the open overcoat revealing a cutaway beneath, while a silk hat not new, lay on the seat of the cab

where it had fallen. A gold watch chain still stretched across his waistcoat, and the little finger of the hand Greg touched displayed a handsome ring. So he had not been robbed. This ring bore a curious red stone cut in octagonal form. The clean-shaven face had a notably benignant look—this had been a kind old gentleman in life; he was very dark and had a slightly foreign look, a Spanish-American, Greg guessed. There was nothing to show how he had come by his death. The bag under his body was an old-fashioned suit-case with a collapsible side.

Meanwhile the question was hammering on Greg's brain: "What am I to do? What am I to do?" His obvious duty of course was to take the body to the nearest police station, but he shivered at the prospect of what would assuredly follow, the searching questions, the pitiless publicity. He could not hope to conceal his identity, for as yet the cabman Elmer Fishback had no background. And then to have his family and friends read next morning how Gregory Parr had become the driver on an owl taxi and was implicated in a murder—well, anything rather than that!

Why not dump the body out where he was, and let things take their course? The crime was none of his. But suppose, just as he started to drag it out of the cab, some one turned into the street, or came out of one of the houses? Or suppose, as was not unlikely, that the crime was already known, and the police even now were in search of a cab bearing his number? In that case to cast the body adrift would be to incriminate himself. For a moment or two Greg was inclined to abandon the whole outfit where it stood, but it now represented all he possessed in the world, and his native obstinacy would not permit of a surrender so abject. After all, he had done nothing wrong; he determined to see the thing through.

A hot tide of anger surged up in him against the man who had fooled him. What made it more bitter was the fact that he had liked the garrulous little cabman and had taken his word, only to be betrayed. How easily he had been deceived—fool that he was! But if he could get hold of him——! Well, even now it was only half-past twelve, and if the man really intended to sail on the *Savoia* there was time——! At this point in his reflections Greg shut the door again, and sliding back into the driver's seat turned his car and hastened back across town.

His state of mind was very different from that in which he had so blithely set forth, for now he carried a burden of horror behind. The picture of that poor form of human clay seemed etched on his brain, and he could not forget it for an instant. He was frankly terrified too; the hardest thing in the world to get rid of is a dead body that you cannot account for. He conceived the idea of driving out in the country and abandoning it in a lonely road. In that case he would have to have gasoline. Suppose while his tank was filling, some one glanced inside. Perhaps he ought to stop and set the body up on the seat and put its hat on its head—but what was the use? At the first jolt it would fall over again. When Greg passed a policeman he instinctively slumped down in his seat, and his heart stood still for a moment as he awaited the expected peremptory hail. But he was allowed to pass.

Back outside the Brevard Line pier, Greg stopped, at a loss what to do with his cab. He could not bring himself to drive out on the busy, lighted pier again; that they had escaped discovery the first time seemed miraculous now. He finally decided to leave it outside in a spot a little apart from the procession passing in and out. If anybody happened to look in while he was gone, well, so be it! The matter would be decided for him.

It is scarcely necessary to state that Mr. Gregory Parr, alias Hickey Meech, was not aboard the *Savoia*. As Greg looked for him voices were already warning all but intending passengers ashore. "Mr. Parr," Greg was informed, had not paid the balance of his passage money, and his reservation was therefore canceled. He was not in the stateroom that had been allotted him. His baggage still lay unclaimed on the pier.

"Safely hidden by now!" Greg said to himself bitterly, "leaving me to dispose of the issue of his crime! He knows of course that I dare not report the matter to the police! What a downy bird I have been!"

With a long earth-shaking rumble of her whistle the *Savoia* began to back out of her slip, while Greg made his way heavily back towards the spot where he had left his cab. He took a survey of it from a little distance, prepared for instant flight if necessary, but there was no one near it. He approached it gingerly, cranked his engine, and drove away, his problem still unsolved.

Once more the lights of the Brevard House across the plaza attracted him. The front door of the bar was now closed, but business was still being done by means of the side door. Greg went in with a foolish hope that he might find Hickey propped in his old place against the mahogany. It was doomed to disappointment, of course. The pink-cheeked bar-tender was still on duty. There was no use asking him if he knew where Hickey was, because Greg had

seen on his first visit that they were not acquainted. The bar-tender looked hard at Greg, and the latter had not even the nerve to order a drink, but walked out again.

As he came out he got a sickening turn. A man was standing close beside his cab, looking around. Had he looked inside? The windows were closed, and one could not see very well without opening the door. Greg's first impulse was to run for it, but once again his obstinacy forced him to stand fast, forced him to march up to the man. He was a tall, handsome, distinguished-looking individual of middle-life, with hawklike patrician features. He had a slightly foreign air. His dress was perfection without being in any way conspicuous. He did not look as if he had just become aware of something horrible; on the contrary as Greg came closer he saw that the man was slightly intoxicated. "He does not know!" Greg thought with a great lift of the heart.

"This your cab?" the man said in a thick voice. "Want to engage you." His voice retained only a trace of a foreign accent.

"I've got a fare," Greg said.

"Where?" asked the other trying to peer through the glass.

"He's drunk," said Greg quickly. "He's lying down."

The tall man sniggered in a foolish way. "Well, he won't mind waiting a bit then. Take me while he's having his sleep out. I'll ride in front with you."

Greg reflected that he needed the money, and moreover that the man riding beside him would afford him a certain protection. Not much danger that he in his befuddled state would discover anything.

"All right," he said. "Where to?"

"Jersey City," said the tall man pointing across the plaza to the Erie ferry.

They seated themselves side by side and started.

"Where did you pick up the drunken man?" asked Greg's fare.

"Had him all evening," replied Greg. "His friends beat it and left him on my hands. I have to wait until he sleeps it off before I can collect my fare."

"You'll have to wait a long time," said the tall man with his foolish snigger.

It gave Greg a nasty turn. Was it possible he had seen or was this just the maundering of a drunken man? Perhaps he was not so drunk as he seemed. Greg thought "detective!" and his heart went slowly down into his boots. But surely this man with his inimitable air of breeding and his proud glance could not be a plain-clothes man. And anyway why should a detective want to take him to Jersey City? And if he were not a detective, what interest could he have in merely tormenting Greg. After a moment of sheer panic, Greg's spirits rose a little.

In his turn he began to wonder what errand a man of this kind could have across the river at such a time of night. That quarter is not usually thought of as the abode of aristocrats.

"Where to in Jersey City?" asked Greg.

"I'll tell you when we get there."

"I just asked because I don't know the town."

"Neither do I."

By this time they were at the ferry house. There was no boat in the slip and they had to wait outside for some minutes. When the gates were finally opened they were almost the first in line, but Greg's fare would not let him

enter until all the express wagons, milk wagons, mail wagons and other late vehicles had gone in.

"Wait till the last! Wait till the last!" he said. "It's safer."

Greg laughed. "What do you mean, safer?" he asked.

"I wouldn't want to be caught in the middle of the boat if anything happened," the tall man said with the obstinacy of one in his condition. "Drive on last, and stay out on the back deck in the open. It's safer."

"There's nothing in that," said Greg.

"Well, you do what I tell you anyhow. I'm willing to pay for what I want. Here's five dollars on account."

Greg shrugged and took the money. He was sure then that he had the vagaries of a drunken man to deal with.

As his fare desired he let his taxi stand out on the after deck of the ferry-boat. As soon as she left her slip this part of the deck was deserted, for everybody else instinctively pressed up forward to be ready to land. Greg's fare lit a cigar of wonderful fragrance.

"This is nice," he said, taking his ease. "I don't like to be crowded on a boat."

But presently he underwent a feather-headed change of mood. "Let's stroll up to the bow so we can see where we're going," he said.

"But I thought you wanted to stay here," said Greg astonished.

"As long as the cab's here it's all right," he said with perfect inconsistency. "I didn't want to be penned up."

There was no making any sense out of this. Useless to argue with a man in his condition. "You go ahead," said Greg good-naturedly. "I'll stay with the cab."

"No, you come too," the other said with childish insistence. "I've got to have somebody to talk to. Mustn't be left alone."

Greg shrugged, and gave in.

The Twenty-third Street ferry to Jersey City is one of the longer routes, and the passage consumes upwards of twenty minutes. There were not many passengers at this hour—in the center of the deck a group of half a dozen drivers comparing notes, and at either side as many late commuters and Jersey citizens homeward bound. The overhanging bow of the ferry-boat trod the dark water remorselessly underfoot. On either hand it heaved in a silent tumult, like an agonized black breast. Along the shores the lights, yellow, red and green, sparkled with an incredible brightness, and over the center of Manhattan hung a dim radiance like the reflection of the embers of a burnt-out conflagration.

At Greg's elbow the tall man chattered on in the inconsequential way that accorded so ill with his aristocratic mask and falcon-like glance. "I hope the old boy's resting easily in the cab back there. He must be cramped lying on the floor." (So he had seen inside!) "Well, there's no accounting for taste in beds. You can't blame a man for taking a drop too much in weather like this. The dampness gnaws your bones. In my country the sun never forsakes us like this."

"What country is that?" asked Greg idly.

"Er—Peru," came the answer after a second's hesitation. He went on with his snigger: "I guess maybe I've had a drop or two too many myself. Two too many! English is a funny language! I had my first cocktail at five this afternoon—no, yesterday afternoon, and after dinner I seemed to lose count. Oh well, what's the difference! We only live once. I'll buy you a drink, cabby, when we land on the other side."

In the middle of all this he pulled himself up short and a great breath escaped him—was it of relief? For a

moment his foolishness seemed to fall away. "Well, that's all right," he murmured.

"What did you say?" asked Greg curiously.

"Nothing." He resumed his chatter. Greg scarcely remarked the interruption, but he remembered it later; remembered too, that the man had been listening.

They returned to the cab. As they rolled out of the ferry house on the Jersey City side Greg said:

"Where to?"

His fare seemed to have become a little drunker. "Fellow told me you could get a drink in Jersey City any time you wanted. Said there was a place called Stack's over here. Something doing there all night. Stacks of liquor, stacks of fun—that's how I remembered the name. I forget the address. But it must be on the main street. Drive up a way and look for the sign."

Greg, reflecting that taxi-drivers had more to put up with than he had supposed, obediently drove quite a long way up the principal thoroughfare leading from the ferry. No "Stack's" appeared among the street signs. Greg's fare hummed snatches of a little Spanish song to himself, and did not appear to pay the slightest attention to the signs.

"Well, what do you want me to do?" asked Greg at last. "We seem to be coming to the outskirts now."

"Oh, ask a policeman," said the tall man foolishly.

Greg couldn't get rid of the feeling that he was being made game of. "What do you think I am!" he said. "If he did know such a place he couldn't give himself away by letting on. Very likely he'd want to run us in for asking."

"Oh well, let's go back to New York then. We've had a pleasant drive."

For a moment Greg forgot his role of the submissive cabman. "What the Hell——!" he began thoroughly exasperated.

"What do you care so long as you get your pay?" said the tall man unconcernedly.

Greg reflected that it did indeed make no difference, so he shrugged his shoulders once more, and turning, drove back to the ferry at a smart pace. He privately determined to charge this capricious fare double rates.

On the return trip the tall man evinced not the slightest concern as to where the taxi was put on the ferry. He had got over his talkativeness. He sat deep in thought, smoking one cigar after another. When they landed on the New York side he curtly ordered Greg to drive him to the Hotel Tours at One Hundred and Second Street and Broadway.

During the long drive to Eighth Avenue, to Columbus Circle, and up Broadway he scarcely spoke. He had apparently recovered from his drunkenness. The night air had cured him perhaps. As a natural result his spirits had sunk. Greg stealing curious side glances into his face as it was revealed in the light of the street lamps saw that his head was sunk on his chest, and that something grim and haggard and perhaps a little wistful had appeared in the handsome features. It suggested the face of a desperate gamester dreaming of the simple life.

Somewhere about Eightieth Street Greg's engine began to sputter. His fare was evidently an experienced automobilist.

"Gas running low?" he asked.

Greg nodded, and looked out for a garage. The first they came to was an open-air place in a vacant lot. A light was still burning in the little office, and Greg turned in. With a hail he brought a man out to the tank. He and his fare had to get out while the flivver was filled up. Afterwards the fare with true aristocratic carelessness handed Greg another bill and resumed his seat. Greg went back to the office with the man to get change. This was fifty feet or so behind the cab. It was dark in the vicinity.

As Greg stepped out of the office he felt a light touch on his arm. He beheld an eager young face looking up into his, a face whose speaking beauty went to his heart like an arrow. The glance of the brilliant eyes at once implored his assistance and enjoined secrecy upon him. Greg was won before a word was spoken. As for the rest he saw a slender, jaunty figure in boy's clothes with cap pulled low over the head. Amazement grew in him, for he knew instantly that it was no boy. A boy's eyes could not have moved him so. He gazed at her breathlessly as at a lovely apparition. He did not realize that she was speaking to him. She had to repeat her question.

"That's your cab there?"

He nodded.

"Where are you taking that man?"

"Hotel Tours."

"All right. I'm following in another cab. When you drop him go on for half a block and wait for me, will you? I want to talk to you."

Greg nodded eagerly. Just here his fare looked around the cab to see what was keeping him, and the pseudo-youth melted like a shadow into the darkness. Greg resumed his place at the wheel in a kind of dream.

CHAPTER III

GREG'S SECOND FARE

He made the rest of the run to the Hotel Tours in a high state of anticipation. That charming vivid face traveled between him and the asphalt on which his chauffeur's gaze was fixed. His delight in the prospect of the coming meeting was not unmingled with dread—for her. He shuddered to think of the risks she ran wandering about town alone in the small hours of night. Surely any one could see through her disguise at a second glance. Her character was written in her eyes—ignorant, innocent and daring. Clearly she had little idea of the dangers she was braving.

His fare paid him liberally without demur and disappeared within the hotel without giving Greg a second glance. Greg went on for half a block and drew up beside the curb. Presently another cab came to a stop behind him, and the seeming youth got out and paid the driver. He (she) made a feint of entering the nearest doorway, and when the second cab had gone on, returned, and slid into the seat beside Greg as a matter of course. She had much the air of a confident child who expects to find the whole world friendly.

"We'd better go back where we can watch that hotel," she said. "I don't think he intends to remain there long."

Greg was utterly charmed by that "we." She took it for granted that he was willing to help her. Well, she should not be disappointed. Little did he care what it was all about; he was on her side anyhow. He burned to assure her of this, but prudence suggested it might be better to let things be taken for granted. He was glad it was to him she had applied; he trembled to think of how she might have been deceived in another taxi-driver. It did not occur to him that she might, like children generally (she was scarcely more than a child) have an intuitive perception of character.

He turned his cab around and they watched the entrance to the Tours from across the street.

She plunged into the middle of her business without any preamble. "You crossed on the Twenty-third Street ferry. I couldn't find a cab just at that moment, so I had to follow on foot. So I lost you when you drove away on the other side. Where did you take him over there?"

"Nowhere," said Greg. "It appeared he was just looking for a drink and when we couldn't find a place we came back to New York."

"Is that all?" she said, disappointed and puzzled. "What reason did he give for getting out of the cab on the way over?"

"No reason. He seemed to be a little drunk."

"Drunk? I can't understand it. He's not a drinking man."

"Who is he?" asked Greg with natural curiosity.

She gave him a look of appeal. "Don't ask me. I can't tell you the truth."

Her speech had an alluring quality of strangeness. It was not that she spoke with an accent exactly; it was more like the speech of an American who might have lived long among foreigners. Greg could not read her race from her features; she had great brown eyes with a fleck of red in them when they caught the light; her skin was creamy. He could not tell the color of her hair because of the cap that she had pulled completely over her head in the style that youths affect, but he guessed it was dark red to match her eyebrows. She had a soft and babyish mouth that did not seem to go with the fiery eyes. Greg guessed that the eyes expressed her character, while the mouth had just been thrown in to make her adorable. Her voice was too deep for her size, but that was no doubt assumed. Sometimes when she forgot it scaled up. She was displaying a boyish nonchalance that was altogether delightful and funny. To tease her Greg offered her a cigarette. She declined it.

"I smoke a pipe," was her astonishing reason.

She did not, however, offer to produce it.

As she had forecast, the tall foreigner did indeed presently issue from the Tours, and hailed one of the cabs waiting below the entrance. Greg cranked his engine. The other cab turned around at the corner and passed down beside them. Greg took care to be hidden behind his cab as the other passed. Climbing in he followed it as a matter of course.

"What time do you suppose it is?" asked his companion.

"About three."

"What a night!" she murmured.

"You're dead right!" said Greg grimly. He remembered what he carried behind and shivered.

They sped down town over the smooth pavement of Broadway. That erstwhile busy street was deserted now except for an occasional motor car like themselves roaring up or down with wide open throttle and except for the ubiquitous cats prowling diagonally across from curb to curb on errands known to themselves. The street lamps shone down like moons as indifferently upon solitude as upon crowds; all the shop fronts were dark.

Greg, it need hardly be said, was fairly eaten up with curiosity concerning his passenger, yet he could not question her. Her air of friendliness and confidence disarmed him. Questions implied a doubt. She volunteered no information about herself, but seemed to feel the necessity of saying something.

"Perhaps I ought to be riding in behind."

"Oh, no!" said Greg very quickly.

"Well, I thought it might look odd, my sitting here in front."

"Why shouldn't a taxi-driver be giving a friend a lift, especially at this time of night?"

This seemed to make her uneasy. She said: "All right; but you know I'm hiring you really, just like anybody."

Greg felt a most unreasonable hurt. "I didn't ask for any pay," he said gruffly.

She was distressed. "Oh, you mustn't let your feelings be hurt! I've got to pay you, you know. You don't know anything about me."

Greg answered with a look that meant: "I'd like to!" But she did not take the hint. Aloud he said: "I won't take anything."

She let the matter drop.

The cab they were following drew up at the great Hotel Meriden at Eightieth Street.

"I thought so," murmured the girl. "He is stopping here. The chase is over for to-night. Drive on for a block or two, then come back. It will give him a chance to get to his room."

Greg obeyed. As they returned and circled in front of the hotel she said:

"Don't stop at the entrance. Go on to the end of the building and wait there."

They came to a stop opposite the last of the great windows that lighted the lobby and the lounge of the Meriden. Greg wondered, if the chase were over, what they were to wait for. The answer came directly, conveying an important bit of information obliquely.

She said, pointing to two lighted windows on the third floor of the hotel: "I daren't go in until he goes to bed. Do you mind if I wait here with you?"

"Do I mind—!" said Greg.

His tone was perhaps a little too warm. She glanced at him suspiciously. Greg tried to look unconscious. Meanwhile he was revolving the significance of what she had just said. So she lived here too, and was, she implied, a member of the tall foreigner's household. It occurred to Greg that her speech resembled the man's: they used the same phrases as people do who live together. Certainly in no other respect was there any likeness. Greg frowned. He resented the thought that man and girl might be related.

She broke in on his thoughts by saying in her abrupt, boyish way: "You don't seem like a common taxi-driver."

"Well, I haven't been one long," said Greg smiling.

He reflected that the surest way to win a person's confidence is to offer one's own, and he proceeded to tell her the story of his meeting with Hickey Meech, and how they had changed places, stopping short, however, of the grim dénouement.

The girl was charmed. "Oh, I like that!" she cried bright-eyed. "I'm glad you didn't want to leave America! I love America. I'm an American."

He wondered a little what impelled her to state this fact so defiantly, as if it had been called in question. It cheered him though, for certainly the man they had been following was not an American. So they could not be close relatives.

"I'm so glad it was you!" she went on.

"So am I!" he said smiling.

"A person like you can understand."

"But I understand nothing."

"Ah, don't ask me!" she said with a painful air. "I can't explain. It's a family affair!"

That put Greg back where he had started from. He was silenced but not satisfied.

"Suppose I need you again?" she asked. "Would you be willing——?"

"Try me!"

"How can I get you?"

"Well, I haven't any address yet. The man I bought the cab from told me where he kept it, and I suppose I'll hang out there. Have you anything to write it down with?"

She nodded, and produced a tiny note-book and pencil.

"Elmer Fishback," he began.

She wrote it down, smiling to herself at the comical sound of the syllables.

"My right name is Gregory Parr," he hastily added.

"That's better," she said.

He continued: "Care of Bessie Bickle—he didn't say whether she was Miss or Mrs."

"I'll just put B. Bickle."

"Gibbon Street south of Houston."

She wrote it all down.

All this while Greg was wondering how she expected to get across the lighted lobby and by the hotel desk without discovery. The question tormented him. Finally he could contain it no longer.

"You can't go in—like that," he blurted out.

She instantly mounted on her high horse. "What do you mean?"

"Well, you know—anybody could see——" he stammered, "anybody could see that you were—well, that you were not a boy."

She sharply averted her head from him. He saw the crimson tide creep up from her neck.

"I don't see what reason you have for saying that," she murmured.

He strove stumbingly to put her at her ease. "Oh, it isn't your clothes. They're all right. You look out o' sight! But—but—well, a girl is different. It's not altogether a matter of looks. I mean the charm of a girl sticks out all over you."

She ignored this. "I'm not going through the lobby," she said abruptly, "but through the service entrance. I bribed the watchman on the way out, and he will let me in again."

Greg breathed more freely. A constrained silence fell between them.

"I'm not altogether a fool!" she presently burst out sorely. "I didn't venture out until long after dark. And I kept away from all brilliantly lighted places. Nobody found me out but you."

"That's all right," said Greg. "But suppose—well, suppose I hadn't been, well—decent."

"I would have known exactly what to do!" she said with an intimidating air that made him smile broadly. "But I knew you were the instant I looked at you," she added.

"Thanks," said Greg.

She was still sore. "I don't see how you could have guessed!" she went on. "At home when we have theatricals everybody says I make a perfectly dandy boy!"

"That's different," said Greg smiling.

"What must you think of me!" she murmured in an humbler tone.

"Nothing but what is good," he said quickly. "I would be a fool if I thought otherwise. I was only anxious for you because I supposed you did not know the risks you ran."

"I knew," she said. "I armed myself."

Greg was both amused and thrilled at the diminutive size of her and her unquestioned courage.

"It seemed necessary for me to do it," she explained further, "though after all I have accomplished nothing. I did it for some one—some one I cared for very much."

A sharp little pang of jealousy shot through Greg's breast.

Another cab drew up at the entrance to the Meriden in their rear. Greg's companion stuck her head out to see who it was. She quickly drew it in again.

"Two of the gang!" she said excitedly.

"What gang?" asked Greg involuntarily.

"His gang, the politicians. They've come after him, I suppose. We'll know in a minute."

Leaning forward in front of his companion Greg saw two men entering the Meriden, one of whom carried a heavy suit-case. They were inconspicuous-looking men, soberly dressed, both under the average height, one stocky, one thin. They had a foreign look like the man they came to see. As they passed back into the hotel they came within range of the big window beside Greg's cab, and the two could sit back and watch them at their leisure. They proceeded to the desk and made an inquiry. The clerk took down his telephone receiver. After a brief colloquy over the 'phone, he nodded to the two men, who thereupon seated themselves near by.

"He's coming down-stairs to them," murmured the girl.

Sure enough, Greg's former fare, the tall foreigner, presently stepped out of the elevator. He had his hat and overcoat on and carried a valise.

"Going out again!" said the girl excitedly. "Going away, it seems!"

When the men met no greetings were exchanged; it was as if they had but lately parted. The three moved away from the vicinity of the hotel desk engaged in low-voiced conversation. They came to a stand not far from the window through which Greg and the girl were watching them. Here they stood talking with guarded expressions, never thinking of looking out into the dark street.

He who carried the suit-case exhibited it to the tall man, who thereupon called the single sleepy boy on duty at this hour and gave instructions. The boy took the suit-case and the tall man's own valise and, proceeding to the entrance, summoned a cab; the bags were put inside. Meanwhile the three lingered a moment to finish their talk. The heavier of the two newcomers took from his breast pocket a rather bulky little black book and handed it over to the tall man. The latter's eyes visibly gleamed with satisfaction as he hastily ran over the contents. He pocketed the book.

At sight of the book a startled exclamation escaped from the girl beside Greg. "Why—why, that's my uncle's book! How did they get it?"

Greg marked well the look of the book. It seemed to be a "loose-leaf" note-book with a number of

miscellaneous papers of different sizes and colors, caught in on a patent fastener. It was somewhat long and narrow, of a size that would just fit a man's breast pocket, and it was bound in black seal leather.

After the transfer of the book the three men started to move towards the hotel entrance.

"Shall we follow?" asked Greg.

"Of course!" she said.

Slipping out of his seat, he cranked his engine in order to be ready for them. The three men got in the waiting taxi, and it came on past them bound downtown. Greg fell in behind them, but not close enough to excite suspicion. Down that broad empty street one could see for half a mile.

The girl did not speak again during this part of the journey. She was staring ahead of her under knitted brows; the softness was all ironed out of the babyish mouth and her little hands were clenched. Greg wondered mightily what grim thoughts could be filling a creature so sweet and delicate. He felt that he could aid her twice as efficiently if he knew what it was all about but he would not risk a rebuff by asking again.

At Seventy-second Street the cab in front stopped beside the subway station, and Greg slowed down while they watched to see what the men would do. The two short men alighted and disappeared down the stairs. The cab went on.

"We follow the tall man?" asked Greg.

"Certainly. The others don't matter."

Straight down the long empty course of Broadway they were led at top speed; through the mile of automobile warerooms, now dark, and the half mile of theaters and restaurants where a few lights still maintained a dingy semblance of festivity, including the strange blue glare of the little photograph stores, which for some mysterious reason keep open all night. In this quarter a few revelers were still to be seen, bound more or less homeward, their loud and repetitious assurances of regard only broken by violent quarrels; while owl taxis like Greg's own surreptitiously followed them on the chance of picking up business. Still they kept on down Broadway through the nondescript stretch between Herald and Madison Squares, the Tenderloin of a bygone day.

"He must be bound for Brooklyn," said Greg.

But at Twentieth Street the car in front turned to the east. Greg followed at a discreet distance. In that dark and silent quarter greater care was necessary if they wished to keep the man in front from guessing that he was followed. At Gramercy Park his car turned south again into Irving Place, and they lost it for a moment.

When they cautiously turned the Irving Place corner they saw that the other cab had come to a stop half-way down that short street. Even as they looked the tall man's bags were carried into a building on that side. His cab went on.

They drove slowly past the place where he had disappeared. It was a modest little hotel with a Spanish name: Hotel dos Estados Unidos. Through the windows of the lobby they saw the tall man standing by the desk, apparently being assigned to a room.

"What does he come here for?" murmured the girl more and more perplexed.

Greg went on for a block, and turning, came slowly back on the other side. The hotel lobby was now empty, except for the dozing clerk behind the desk. Greg brought the cab to a stop just beyond the hotel where they could still command an oblique view of the lobby.

"What now?" he said.

"I don't know what to say," she murmured. "I can't imagine why he should come here to sleep. I can't believe that he does mean to sleep here. I believe he'll be out again. Let's wait and see."

They continued to discuss the situation, a discussion with little profit as far as Greg was concerned, for he lacked a clue. The burden of her cry was:

"If only I knew what he was up to!"

By and by another cab drew up to the little hotel and a man and woman got out; innocent belated travelers these, who have nothing to do with the story; but the sight of them gave Greg an idea.

"I might slip into the lobby while this man's registering," he said, "and glance over his shoulder. I could find out then what name the other registered under. I could make out to be after a drink of water or something. That is, if you wish me to."

"Yes, do so!" she said eagerly. "It might give us a clue."

Returning to her two minutes later Greg said: "He wrote himself down as Antonio Bareda of Santiago de Managuay."

The effect on the girl was startling. She fell back in her seat. "What! My uncle's name! Has he stolen that too? Oh, something terrible is going on!"

Greg stood with a foot on the running-board at a loss what to say. He finally murmured diffidently: "If you could tell me what you suspect——"

"I can't! I can't!" she cried. "I don't understand it myself. It is too horrible!"

Presently more composed, she said: "One thing is sure, I daren't leave here now. I must find out what he's up to if I have to wait till morning. But you must be tired out. Why don't you get in the back of the cab and sleep until daylight, then I'll call you, and you can relieve me. If necessary I can run the car. We have one at home to save the big car."

Greg reminded afresh of his original grisly passenger felt a cold chill down his spine. That problem remained to be solved. He hung irresolute.

"Go on, get in," she urged, putting her hand around like a chauffeur to open the door.

Greg hastily gripped it. "Don't open it!" he cried.

She looked at him in astonishment.

"The fact is there's something I didn't tell you," he lamely explained. "I've got a sou—I mean a drunken man in there."

"What! You mean we've been carrying him around all night!"

"I guess he didn't mind."

"Oh, bother!" she said. "We'll have to dump him out here. There's no help for it. This is important. It may be a matter of life and death!"

In speaking, she instinctively turned her head and looked through the glass behind her.

"Don't look!" cried Greg cold with horror.

But she only pressed her face closer to the glass. "There isn't anybody there," she said.

Greg astonished threw open the door. It was true. The cab was empty. He gasped; his jaw dropped; he stared at the empty place like an idiot.

"What's the matter with you?" said the girl laughing. "I suppose he just woke up and walked off when you

weren't looking."

"He was past walking," said Greg.

His grim air impressed her. "What do you mean?"

"He was dead."

"Dead!" she cried. "Are you mad?"

Greg shook his head. "Dead as mutton!"

Her lip trembled like a child's. "Good heavens, what a city this is!"

"So it seems!" said Greg grimly.

"What had happened to him?"

Greg told her what part of the story he had omitted before.

"Then that was why the man was so anxious to sell you the cab?"

"That was why."

"What has become of it?"

"God knows!"

They looked at each other in dumb amazement. Suddenly the girl's expression changed.

"Did my—did that man who was riding with you know?" she asked sharply.

"No. I told him the same as I told you; that my other fare was drunk."

"I wondered why he rode outside with you. It is not like him to do such things. You are sure he had no hand in it?" she persisted.

This was a new thought to Greg. "Why, no," he said. "How could he? He just happened to pick me up later. But I don't know. Why not? There was something queer about all his actions."

"What was he like, the dead man?"

"A nice old gentleman; plump, smooth-shaven, kindly-looking; looked like a Spanish-American. By Gad! they were all Spanish, weren't they?"

The girl's face gradually sharpened with anxiety now.

Greg went on: "There was a valise under the body; that's gone too."

"Like that you saw in the hotel up-town?" she asked breathlessly.

"The very same! I never thought of it!"

A low cry escaped the girl.

"He had an odd-looking ring on; octagonal red stone with characters cut in it."

"My uncle!" she cried despairingly. "I suspected it! They have done for him! I was too late!" She covered her face with her hands.

Greg gazed at her in silent sympathy.

The hands came down; the soft face hardened. "No time for mourning now. Since I couldn't save him, I mean to avenge him!"

"If I could tell you how sorry I am!" murmured Greg.

"Don't sympathize with me," she said quickly. "It brings the tears back. I must be hard. Help me to be hard."

"I am at your service in all ways," he said simply.

"You see what happened now?" she said.

"I am beginning to."

"I don't know yet how they killed him, but it's clear enough how they disposed of the body. That man learned in some way that it was in your cab. That is why he hired you to take him across the river. The other two men were on board the ferry too. But I paid no attention to them because I was watching him, the man in your cab. When you and he left the cab I followed you up forward. Then the other two went to the cab, of course; searched the body, and then cast it over the rail. You see now why he made you drive on last."

"Of course!"

"Planned with devilish cleverness!" she cried. "That is like him! Why weren't my eyes opened to his true character earlier! But I'll make him pay! If the body is missing, will it be possible to bring the crime home to the murderer?"

"Difficult," said Greg. "It may be found floating in the river."

"How could one find out if it was found?"

"It would be taken to the morgue."

"Watch for it for me, will you?" she cried eagerly. "I couldn't go to such a place. You watch for it, and if it is brought there secure it for me!"

Greg promised. "What do you suppose is his object now in masquerading as the man he killed?" he asked.

"That I can't guess. I know what happened; I don't know what underlies it all. We've got to find out."

Once more that "we" inspired Greg to high deeds.

In speaking of the man they had followed it was natural to turn to the spot where they had last seen him. As he did so Greg saw his very figure reappear once more in the lobby of the little hotel. He called the girl's attention to it.

"Quick! Crank your engine!" she said excitedly. "I thought he would be coming out again!"

The tall man spoke to the clerk, and the latter took down the telephone receiver.

"Calling for a taxi," suggested Greg.

Meanwhile he got his engine started, and climbed into the seat beside her.

"Better move down the street a little way," she suggested. "He might catch sight of us here."

Greg obeyed. They waited in the next block. In due course a taxi-cab drew up before the little hotel, and the tall man got in, without baggage. The cab turned west in the side street. Greg followed at a furlong's distance.

This time the chase was not very long. They were led around the lower side of Union Square and down University Place. The first cab turned west in Ninth Street, and crossing Fifth Avenue drew up before a residence on the south side of the dignified, old-fashioned block beyond. Greg kept on to Sixth Avenue.

"Did you get the number?" she asked.

"Five-thirty."

"I thought so. That's the headquarters of the politicians. I have seen him address letters there."

Meanwhile the other cab having dropped its passenger had returned eastward.

"Go back to that house!" ordered the girl. Her eyes were shining like embers. A great excitement possessed her.

They drew up before the door of five-thirty.

"Are you a brave man?" she asked abruptly.

Greg, much taken aback, answered as stoutly as he could: "I hope so."

"Then take this, and bring me back the little black book." She pressed a piece of cold metal into his hand.

For a brief second Greg hesitated. The strange command took his breath away.

"I do not ask it for myself," she pleaded. "The happiness of a whole people depends on it!"

Greg seriously doubted the wisdom of the proceeding, but being young he could not take a dare from a girl. He slipped out of his seat.

"Keep the engine running," he said. "Whom shall I ask for at the door?"

"Señor Francisco de Socotra."

He crossed the pavement. That which she had thrust in his hand was a small but business-like automatic revolver.

CHAPTER IV

IN THE HOUSE ON NINTH STREET

The house fronting Greg was built according to an old-fashioned plan imported from Continental countries, of which there are two or three examples still extant in the older parts of New York. Though but a small house it was laid out on a liberal plan. At one side great double doors carried a driveway through to the rear. In other words, in the old days the carriage and pair of the owners had driven right in the front door.

Greg pulled the old-fashioned bell, and presently one side of the big door swung open of itself operated by a lever within the house. This in itself had an uncanny effect. Inside Greg found himself in a well-proportioned corridor running through to the yard behind. He took the precaution to leave the big door slightly ajar behind him. At his right hand were severally a service entrance, a wicket and the main door of the house.

The corridor was empty. It was lighted by an electric globe in the ceiling. At the wicket appeared the head of a negro servant who with a villainous scowl demanded to know what he wanted. After all it was four o'clock in the morning; a servant might reasonably be indignant at being called up at such an hour (though, by the way, this man was fully dressed), but there was more in it than that. Greg thought he had never seen so evil a face, and his hand

instinctively closed tighter around the revolver in his pocket.

In a firm voice he named the man that he wished to see, and the negro after a hard stare directed him with a nod to the main door beyond. He closed the wicket. Greg waited with a fast beating heart.

After no great space of time the door was opened and de Socotra himself stood before Greg with an expression of strong curiosity. It was borne in on Greg afresh that he was an uncommonly handsome man; moreover, villain though he might be, there was a superb boldness in his air that commanded an unwilling admiration. Recognizing the chauffeur that had driven him earlier in the night, he fell back warily.

Greg gave him no time to think. Stepping close to him, he drew the revolver and pressed the muzzle to his ribs.

"If you cry out I'll pull the trigger," he whispered harshly.

The man's ruddy brown face paled yellow, yet he kept a certain measure of self-possession, his eyes did not quail. "What do you want?" he asked in a firm, low voice.

"The little black book."

The man's eyes narrowed. "I don't know what you mean," he said quickly.

Greg saw a tell-tale bulge over his right breast. "You lie!" he said. "It's in your pocket. Quick with it, or I'll shoot!"

A curious glint showed in the other's jetty eyes which never left Greg's. His hand went slowly inside his coat and reappeared with the little black book. Greg with a leaping heart took it in his free hand; this had come easier than he had dared hope. He started to back down the corridor, keeping de Socotra covered with the gun. The latter came to the door and stood watching him with expressionless face.

Greg dared not look behind him. It was about twenty-five feet to the big doors; he had measured it with his eyes; say, eight long paces. He had taken five, when the sound of the door softly latching behind him caused his heart to contract sharply. He whirled around. At the same instant de Socotra sprang at him. Greg was seized from both sides before he could find a mark to aim at.

The second who had seized him was the negro servant, a fellow of gigantic stature with muscles like steel bands. As Greg started to run he had caught him in his embrace, pinning Greg's arms close to his sides and keeping the gun deflected downwards. De Socotra with a blow on Greg's wrist disarmed him. Greg's struggles were as vain as those of an infant. He ceased to struggle, designing to save his strength for a better occasion. Moreover he was afraid the sounds of a struggle might reach the girl outside and provoke her to some rash act. With her puny strength she could not help him now.

De Socotra repocketed the little black book, also Greg's revolver. He relaxed and laughed mockingly. "I don't know what your game is, my man, but evidently it was a little beyond you!"

Greg glared at him. "Murderer!" was on his tongue's tip, but prudence restrained him from uttering it.

"Look here," said the other suddenly; "tell me who sent you here, and the door shall be opened for you to go. I don't fight with cabmen. You may go back freely to him who sent you and give him my compliments."

Greg obstinately closed his mouth.

"It's a fair offer," said de Socotra mildly. "Better take it. There are men up-stairs who will not let you off so easily."

Again he waited to give Greg a chance to speak.

Finally he said: "I can't wait here all night, you know."

"You needn't wait," said Greg. "I'm not going to tell you."

De Socotra favored him with a sharp look. "I beg your pardon," he said ironically; "I see you're no cabman. Milio, bring him up-stairs."

He led the way into the house through the main door. The negro followed, half carrying Greg, half pushing him before him. At the steps he tossed him up as easily as a straw man. Greg ground his teeth at the humiliating posture, but still forbore to struggle. The first room of the house was a foyer hall, handsomely finished in paneled walnut, but without any furniture. A finely carved stairway came down at one side. De Socotra mounted with leisurely tread; the man was as straight as a tree, his small head poised with inimitable arrogant grace. The negro carried Greg after. Greg might have given him considerable trouble on the stairs, but he still saved his strength until he should see some chance of getting away.

On the floor above they passed into the front room, their entrance creating a veritable sensation among the small crowd of men gathered there. No sound had warned of trouble below. This was likewise a handsome room but without any furnishings except some cheap pine tables and chairs. Heavy stuff curtains hung before the three windows, but these were evidently for the purpose of darkening them, rather than for decoration. It looked like the hastily improvised meeting-place of a political circle or a gang of plotters.

There were about a dozen men in the room, some Spanish-Americans, others undoubtedly of these United States. The two men who had come to de Socotra at the Meriden were both present. All stared at the negro and his burden with amazed eyes, and questions in both Spanish and English were fired at de Socotra.

The latter moved among these men with the air of an undisputed leader. Their agitation amused him, and he made them wait awhile before he answered. To the negro he said:

"Put the man down. He can't escape. Stand by the door."

When he finally deigned to answer their questions he spoke in English. Greg marked that he said nothing about having ridden in his cab earlier, but let them assume that he had never seen Greg before. Greg supposed this was because he did not care to confess that the explanation of Greg's reappearance was a complete mystery to him; for all his cool airs de Socotra was deeply puzzled by that. The two men who had seen to the disposal of the body apparently did not recognize Greg. They could not have seen him but for a moment as he drove on the ferry in the dark.

All the men in the room were amazed and panic-stricken to learn that some outsider knew of the little black book, but no word was dropped that gave Greg any hint of the contents. A furious polyglot discussion arose. The more frightened demanded that Greg be put out of the way instant—*one* spoke of burying his body under the cellar pavement. Others who kept their heads better insisted on the necessity of first finding out who had sent him, and how much he knew of their affairs.

De Socotra listened with a cynical, detached air. Finally he said: "Well, gentlemen, there's no advantage in letting him hear more than he knows already. I would suggest that you confine him in another room, until you settle what is to be done with him."

At this moment one of the Spaniards, a stocky, scowling youth with a purplish scar on his left cheek bone, peeped through the curtains hanging before one of the windows. He said in English: "His cab is still at the door. The engine is running."

"Who can run it?" asked de Socotra.

"I can," said the previous speaker.

"Then go down and run it away somewhere—anywhere, and leave it."

The man moved toward the door. Greg's heart sunk, thinking of the girl. The door was well guarded, but there was no one in front of him at the moment. He sprang across the room. Taken by surprise they were not quick enough to stop him. Snatching a curtain aside, with a blow of his two fists he smashed out the glass behind and cried:

"Beat it! Beat it!"

He was instantly snatched away from the window, but he had the satisfaction of hearing the old flivver get under way long before the man could get down stairs; he had the satisfaction, too, of seeing the cool and cynical de Socotra grind his teeth and mutter a curse as he realized that the explanation of what he so much wanted to know had been just outside the door all this time.

The uproar in the room was redoubled. They rushed at Greg now, pummeling him, and trying to kick him. He fought back blindly. He would have been worse hurt had they not got in each other's way. It was some moments before de Socotra could make his voice heard.

"Gentlemen! You forget yourselves! Hands off him! The window is out. Do you want to arouse the neighborhood?"

They drew back scowling. The room became quiet again. Greg, bruised, fiery-eyed and panting, had his back against the wall.

De Socotra went on in his icy voice: "If it is necessary to execute this man in the interest of the Cause all right. But I will not have you maul him like a pack of terriers. You, Sforza, conceal yourself behind the curtains and see if an alarm has been raised in the street."

One disappeared through the curtains. The negro was dispatched for rope. When he returned Greg's wrists were unceremoniously tied behind his back, and his ankles tied. The man at the window reappeared to say that while several windows near by had been thrown up, the aroused ones had apparently gone back to bed without taking action. The negro picked up the helpless Greg and carrying him into the back room on the same floor dropped him like a sack, and left him alone.

For awhile he took no notice of his surroundings. To be trussed up like a fowl ready for roasting seemed to be the lowest degree of ignominy possible to a man: a despairing rage filled him; his heart seemed like to burst his breast; he rolled helplessly on the floor.

Then dimly he began to realize that his impotent rage was only destroying him, and little by little with a great effort of the will he succeeded in disciplining it. He had to think, and in order to think a clear brain was necessary.

Must he end in that house like a trapped rat? Youth at the flood could not conceive of coming to an end. He put that thought from him. "I will get out! I will!" he told himself. "They dare not kill me if I am not afraid!"

Meanwhile the girl outside might contrive to aid him. But he determined not to count on her. She was so little and young and inexperienced she would not know what to do. What could she do? If she applied for help it would be only to betray her own secret. She ran her own terrible danger. He shuddered. Well, that thought must be put out of his mind too. Let him once get out and he would save her.

Greg took careful stock of his surroundings. The room he was in was a companion to the room in front. It occupied the whole width of the house, and it had but the one door opening into the central hall. Opposite were three tall windows looking to the rear. Enough light came through them to show Greg that this room like the others was bare of furniture. There was a handsome chimney piece against the right hand wall. The house was solidly built and no sounds reached him.

Suddenly the door was opened softly, and for an instant Greg's astonished eyes beheld a woman's figure outlined against the faint light in the hall. She came in and closed the door behind her, and he heard her hand feeling softly along the wall for the switch. It clicked and the room was flooded with light. Greg saw her, then the light went out again. Her startled eyes had taken in the fact at a glance that the windows were uncovered. Presumably they were commanded by the windows of houses in the rear.

In that briefest of glimpses she was unforgettably impressed on Greg's vision. It was a strange apparition in that empty and sinister house; a beautiful woman, a lady in evening dress! It was black velvet, snugly fitting, against which her arms and neck gleamed like marble. She was a dark beauty, another Spanish-American perhaps, but taller than the run of Latin women; she had hair like a raven's wing, eyes like twin black pools and voluptuous crimson

lips. She was carrying something, but he had not time to see what it was.

She came towards him in the dark, bringing a subtle perfume. "You poor fellow!" she murmured. "Can I do anything for you?"

Greg's feelings were mixed; he took it for granted that she was one of the same lot; moreover he was ashamed to be found by a woman in so lowly a posture. "Who are you?" he asked sullenly.

"Your friend," she breathed.

One in Greg's position could hardly refuse an offer of friendship. His heart warmed to her. Yet he did not altogether abandon caution. Something about her still repelled him; her foreignness perhaps. She spoke excellent English, but not with the unconsciousness of the native born.

"How can I help you?" she murmured.

"Help me to get out of here," said Greg bluntly.

"I daren't!" she whispered. "They would kill me if they found out. Besides it is useless. The house is full of men. All the doors are guarded."

"Cut this rope and I'll take my chances of getting out."

"I daren't," she wailed. "But maybe I can loosen it a little."

Careless of her fine dress, she dropped to her knees on the dusty floor beside him. What she had in her hand she put down. It sounded like a plate. Greg rolled over, and with her soft warm hands she fumbled with the knots at his wrists, not with much success. Her hands trembled a little as if in confusion at being forced to touch a strange man. Greg was thinking principally of the plate.

"What was that you brought?" he asked.

"You are hungry?"

"Famished. I suppose it's ten hours since I ate."

"There was nothing cooked in this house, but I brought biscuits and chocolate. Are your hands more comfortable now?"

"Not much. How can I eat with my hands tied?"

"I will feed you," she said with a charming confusion in her voice.

She proceeded to do so, feeling for his lips with her fingers and pressing chocolate and sweet biscuits between them. In good sooth the situation was romantic enough, the warm breathing woman bending over him in the dark, fragrant as a flower; there was something infinitely caressing in the touch of her fingers, nevertheless Greg remained cold. He could think of nothing but how to get out.

"You are not like a common taxi-driver," she said presently.

Greg was reminded with a little pang of the other woman who had said that. "I'm a taxi-driver," he replied. "As to common that's not for me to say."

"You speak like an educated man."

He shrugged. "Who are you?" he asked for the second time.

"A prisoner like yourself."

It occurred to him as strange that a prisoner should have been so anxious to keep lights from showing in the windows. "What sort of joint is this anyhow?" he asked.

"Joint?"

"Who are these men? What are they?"

"I don't know. They tell me nothing."

"But if you live here you must hear and see what goes on. What do you make of it?"

"It's politics of some kind," she said vaguely. "I don't understand. How did you happen to come here?"

"I was sent."

"By whom?"

"A fare who engaged me on the street."

"What sort of person?"

"Well, I'm not much of a hand at description. An ordinary looking fellow, middle-aged, plainly dressed, nothing special about him."

"You're just fooling me!" she said reproachfully. "You don't trust me."

"Why should I trust you?" said Greg bluntly. "You don't answer my questions but only ask me others."

"Ask me anything, anything!" she said passionately. "I look to you to save me!"

"Who are you, and what are you doing in this house?"

"It's a miserable story!" she said in a shamed voice. "My name is Clelie Mendizabal. I am a Peruvian. My father died a few years ago leaving us penniless. I had to go to work. Well, in Peru a girl who works for her living is looked down upon, so I determined to come to New York. They said that the streets of New York were fairly paved with gold. I had no difficulty in finding work here, but I soon found that a working girl has no easy time in America either. There was a man from my own country who made believe to be my friend—I trusted him—Ah! I was so friendless here! I thought no wrong. I went about with him—Oh, how can I go on! One night a month ago he brought me to this house saying that it was a restaurant. I—I have not been out of it since!"

Somehow this piteous tale failed of conviction. For one thing the teller, in the one brief glimpse he had had of her, had seemed much too radiant and blooming to be the victim of so terrible a fate. Moreover, she had seemed to tell it with a certain gusto that suggested the pride of authorship. It might be true, but Greg resolved to keep an open mind.

"Why don't you throw up the window yonder and call for help?" he asked.

"They're locked."

"Windows are never locked on the outside," he said dryly. "You could hang from the sill and drop without danger. It can't be more than twelve feet or so to the ground. And climb over the fence into one of the other back yards. Or if you couldn't get over the fence you could scream for help until the neighbors rescued you."

"People don't want to rescue one like me," she said mournfully.

"Nonsense! Times have changed. They're crazy about it nowadays. Cut me loose, and I'll undertake to get you out."

"But I'm afraid of you. Who are you? Tell me truly."

"Elmer Fishback," said Greg, grinning in the dark.

"Who sent you here, really?"

"I told you. A fare who picked me up. I don't know his name."

She put her two hands on his shoulders and brought her face close to his; he sensed the great languorous eyes in the dark. "Trust me," she whispered. "You will never regret it!"

Greg was exquisitely uncomfortable. He desired to make use of this woman if he could, but he found himself unable to produce the slightest semblance of warmth. He got out of it the best way he could.

"A man bound hand and foot like this can feel nothing for a woman," he said. "He is not a man but a mere log! Free my hands and I'll show you!"

Her instinct was not deceived. She drew away with a sharp little movement in which Greg apprehended danger. "How can I trust you if you will not trust me?" she said somberly.

"What difference does it make how I came here if the main thing for both of us is to get out?"

"I couldn't go with you unless I knew who you were. Won't you tell me how you came here?"

Greg was already at the end of his powers of dissimulation. "No," he said curtly.

She rose with a single movement, and gliding to the door threw it open. "Francisco!" she called.

De Socotra's leisurely figure appeared in the light of the doorway. "Well, my dear?" he drawled mockingly.

She was glad to throw off the mask, it seemed. "I can get nothing out of this fellow. Better hand him over to the men."

Greg had suspected her throughout, nevertheless this frank unmasking outraged his sense of decency. "You liar!" he cried involuntarily.

She was clearly revealed in the doorway. He saw her elevate her fine shoulders and smile at de Socotra. No man surely could have displayed such hardihood. "If there's nothing further for me to do I believe I'll go home," she said, affecting to stifle a yawn.

"Very well, my dear. Pleasant dreams."

She passed from Greg's sight.

De Socotra made a signal to those outside, and two men followed him into the room. He had a small pocket flash which he threw on Greg. To the two men he said:

"I give him in your charge now to be treated as you see fit. Better have Milio carry him down cellar for you where his cries cannot be heard."

The brawny negro appeared and hoisted Greg on his back. Greg believed he had heard his doom pronounced, and his heart was low. All of a sudden life seemed ineffably sweet. He set his jaw hard, and glared at his enemies. They should not see him weaken.

Greg was carried back down the carved stairway. The two men whom he looked upon as his appointed executioners followed, and in the position in which he was being carried there was nothing for Greg to do but look in their faces. He saw no mercy there. The one had a stiff, rough crop of hair that started to grow far back on his head, and a long, scraggy neck. He swallowed continually. He looked like a carrion-eating bird. The other was still more horrible: short and dumpy with a moist, livid face like something half-cooked in too much grease. These two were followed by others of their ilk. The more human-looking individuals remained up-stairs. With every step of the

descent something seemed to whisper to Greg: "Take your last look at light and life!"

The dark beauty, closely cloaked and veiled for the street, had preceded them down the stairs. When they got half way down Greg heard the door from foyer to corridor close behind her. Her exquisite heartlessness surprised him. "It's nothing to her what they do to me," he thought, feeling a little pin-prick of wounded self-love even in the face of the horror that awaited him at the foot of the cellar stairs.

Greg's bearer turned under the stairs to a door that stood presumably at the head of another flight. But even as he laid his hand on the knob they all heard the sound of running feet in the corridor and the negro paused. Two soft little fists beat frantically on the house door. One ran to open it. There stood the dark girl beside herself with terror.

"The police!" she gasped. "Outside in the street!"

They didn't require her warning. The house was filled with the sound of a pounding on the big doors. A peremptory voice demanded admittance.

"They know we're inside," gasped the girl. "They saw me as I opened the door to go out."

Instantly the house was in confusion. The negro dropped Greg on the floor. All thought of their intentions towards him was forgotten. Those above came scampering down the stairs. De Socotra was the only one who retained his presence of mind.

"Keep cool!" he admonished them. "The door is strong. We have time to get out. Get your hats and coats. Abanez, you know the way; lead the others. I will come last."

Grabbing up their outer wear they fled as softly as mice through the door into the corridor. The negro Milio, leaving with the rest, was sharply recalled by de Socotra.

"Take this man with you," he commanded. "Do you want to leave him behind to identify us all?"

Very unwillingly the negro picked up Greg again and followed the others out into the corridor. De Socotra put out all lights and brought up the rear. They turned to the right in the corridor, that is to say, towards the rear of the lot. Through a covered way at the back they gained another building, presumably the original stable of the establishment. As the stable door closed behind them, Greg heard the blows of a heavy piece of timber on the front doors. De Socotra locked the doors that they passed through.

In the back wall of the stable there was a door which admitted them to still another building, a rear tenement apparently on the lot abutting behind. It was empty. They then crossed a narrow paved court, and struck through a long close passage. The lights of a street gleamed at the far end; a trolley car rumbled in the distance—inexpressibly friendly sound to the prisoner.

At the mouth of the passage the fugitives all clung together, apparently afraid to venture out into the lighted street.

De Socotra coming up with them commanded: "Do not linger here. There is no one in sight. Scatter in different directions. Do not run. You are safe enough. There is nothing to connect you with the Ninth Street house. Go! You will hear from me in due course."

They melted away, leaving only de Socotra and the negro in the passage. The latter had dropped Greg to the pavement. It was of brick, and a tiny trickle of cold water ran down the middle of it. The negro made some whining complaint to his master that Greg could not catch.

"Oh, crack him over the head!" said de Socotra impatiently. "Stick his body in some out of the way corner, and go to your own place. Don't leave the rope behind for evidence."

That was the last Greg knew. Oddly enough he heard the sound of the blow that he did not feel. Consciousness was snuffed out.

CHAPTER V

THE TAXI YARD

Greg came to to find himself in a sort of deep narrow well with rough stone walls on either hand and flag-stones beneath him. He was sensible that he was not alone, but his companion was no more than a hazy shape between him and the strip of pale sky far overhead. A strong odor mixed of stable manure and stale whiskey nauseated him. He was sore all over and there was a splitting pain inside his skull. He had no sooner opened his eyes than he was glad to close them.

As from a distance he heard a voice, husky but kind, say: "Don't think you ain't got no bones broke, Jack. Can you get up?"

Opening his eyes again Greg saw a deplorably dirty, unshaven face bending over him, but the bleary eyes were compassionate. If one could overlook the dirt and forget the spirituous emanation, there was something taking about the face, a quality of childlike innocence of soul. The voice went on:

"Say, can't you get up? We want to get out of here before they open up the stable. These stable fellas are fierce and fresh. Ain't got no guts."

Greg with an effort contrived to sit up. Pain made his head swim, but he would not give in to it. In a few moments he was able to stand, leaning for support against the rough stones. He saw that he was at the bottom of a deep area-way between sidewalk and foundation wall. The building was a great stable. From the open barred windows below the street level came the quiet sound of munching and an occasional stamp on old planks.

He got a better look at his unknown friend. On the stage such a make-up would have been hailed as a triumph: his hat had the jaunty air of utter abandonment; his overcoat made Greg's own look as if new come from the tailor's, the holes in it with the various layers of interlining protruding their frayed edges were like strange blossoms applique; through his broken shoes his bent old toes winked shamelessly.

He was fussing around Greg like a hen with one chick. "How do you feel now, Jack? The steps is just behind you. Take it real slow. I'll come behind to keep you from falling backwards. I'd carry you on'y I ain't got me stren'th back since I had the shakes."

Little by little they got up the long steep steps. At the top Greg rested himself against the iron fence that topped the well. "I was flung over there," he thought wonderingly. "Lord! I must be tougher than I thought!" He saw that he was in MacDougall Street between Clinton Place and the Square, not more than two hundred yards or so from where the gang had issued from the passage.

"I was leaning against this wery fence thinking, when I look over and see you down there," said the ragged one. "Your white face was looking straight up at me. First-off I thought I had 'em again! But you never see no men when you have 'em—on'y squeezy things. So I goes down to have a look. It was only by accident I happened to be here. I was on my way down to Washington Street, but it was early and I stopped to think. If you get down to Washington Street when the commission houses open you get lots of things; an old salt fish maybe, or a grape fruit that's half good, or a cabbage with a good place in it. The salt fish is the best. It gives you a peach of a thirst. Then I follow the brewery wagon on its rounds, and get the drips when they bring the empty kegs up from the cellar. But it's too late now. All the boys will be there before me."

Greg felt of his pocket. "I've got money," he said. "I'll blow you to a regular square meal."

The other with a nod accepted this as no more than his due. "Of course I could have rolled you before you come to," he reminded Greg, "but I'm on the level, I am. Anybody will tell you Danbury Joe is on the level. Danbury Joe, that's me."

He went on to recite his personal history in a lyrical tone that suggested the oft-repeated tale. "I used to be a hat manufacturer in a hat town, a millionaire. Yes, sir, I sported a dicer and opened wine with the best of them. I had a house with ten rooms and a pair of iron deer on the front lawn, and my lovely daughter was educated in Yewrup, yes sir, it's the truth. But she run away and married a grocer salesman and it broke the old man's heart. He ain't never been the same—Say, Jack," this in a more natural tone, "if I had a whole dollar I could buy me a bottle of cough medicine." He coughed affectingly.

"We hadn't ought to stand here," Joe went on nervously, "the sun's up. A cop might get nose-y. If there's anythin' I hate it's a nose-y cop. If you're able to walk I'll take you to my hangout. It's an old vacant house on the south side the Square. We go in through the area door when there's no one looking. It's a great crowd there ev'ry night. You hear wonderful stories of travel around the fire."

Greg thanked him but declined the invitation for the present. He was beginning to feel stronger. "If I could get a cup of coffee and a bite I'd be all right," he said.

"Follow me," said Joe. "I know a place round in Sixth."

Half an hour later Greg, still stiff and sore but otherwise himself again, started to make his way from Sixth Avenue through Ninth Street. In the broad light of day he felt not a little conspicuous in his shabby taxi-driver's make-up, but nobody appeared to look at him. His heart beat fast as he approached the little house with the big doors. As soon as he turned the corner he saw a policeman on guard in front and a little knot of the curious gathered near.

Arrived in front of the house he saw that the big doors had been smashed in. The policeman stood swinging his club, bored and nonchalant, in sharp contrast to the gaping by-standers. Thirsty as he was for news, Greg dared not call attention to himself by applying to Authority. Instead, he loitered among the on-lookers, keeping his ears open. He heard a stout woman with a shopping-bag say to her friend:

"My dear, I always said there was something funny about that house. No Christian people would live in such an outlandish contraption. Why, those front windows down-stairs are the kitchen windows. I looked through it once when it was for rent. Think of having your kitchen windows right on the sidewalk! Any one who walked by could see you in your boodgewear cap! They say a crazy foreigner built it years ago, and I don't doubt it.

"Well, last night I heard a crash of breaking glass—there it lies still on the sidewalk, see? It's from the parlor window above. And a man's voice roared out twice: 'Beat her! Beat her!' just like that. My, but I was scared. I just pulled the blankets over my head. No use lookin' to my Albert for comfort in the night. He sleeps like the dead!"

Greg got more exact information from an Irishman in a gingham jumper, the engineer of an apartment house perhaps, who was describing the affair to another man.

"I know the cop on the beat. He told me the rights of the case. Seems about four this morning a taxi druv up to the station house, and a young fellow, a mere lad they say, run in and told the Sergeant that a guy was being murdered at Five thirty West Ninth. So the Sarge called half a dozen of the reserves and they rode back with the kid in his flivver. They beat in the door but the gang got out through a secret way at the back into Clinton Place and scattered. They made a clean getaway. There wasn't a thing in the house to show what they'd been up to. Nothin' but some kitchen chairs and tables. Now they're trying to trace who hired the house from the old lady what owns it, but she don't know. She got her rent in advance and that's all she asked."

"What about the boy who gave the alarm?"

"There's a mystery about him too. In the excitement he disappeared with his cab, and nobody had thought to take down his number. A real good-lookin' boy, they said; not over sixteen year old."

Greg hung around a bit, but no further information was forthcoming, and he finally went on. His heart was heavy with anxiety for his plucky little companion of the night before. So she had been the means of saving him. But what had become of her when daylight overtook her? what had she done with the cab? The only thing he had to go on was the fact that he had given her the address of the yard where he had meant to keep the cab. Perhaps she had

taken it there. He started to find out.

Gibbon Street proved to be a little thoroughfare on the extreme ragged edge of Manhattan Island, a little backwater of the town passed by by the main currents. It was three blocks long with a bend in the middle. Down one side stretched a row of dilapidated little brick tenements occupied by freer spirits than the dense rookeries farther west; on the other side were lumber yards, coal yards and small manufactories. Greg had no difficulty in finding what he sought. Just at the bend in the street between two yards a little store bore the sign "Bickle's Grocery."

It was a little aged two-story house with the mortar coming out from between the bricks. The store was surely one of the smallest in New York. Peeping through the window Greg saw a bewildering variety of objects displayed for sale. Besides the storekeeper there could hardly have been room for more than three customers at a time. Beside the store was a gateway and Greg went through here. The bend in the street made an irregularly shaped lot and it opened up unexpectedly behind. Around two sides of this yard was built an open shed providing stabling for half a dozen taxi-cabs or so.

There were four cabs there at the moment, among which he instantly picked out his own. He knew her by her rakish list to starboard. His license number, by the way, which he had scarcely taken note of before, was T7011. The cab seemed to be all right, but this was the lesser half of his anxieties; where was its late driver? He looked inside half hoping to see a little figure curled up on the seat, but it was empty.

A baritone voice hailed him from the back door of the little house, a voice with a "no-nonsense-now" ring: "Hey, fella, what do you want?"

Greg beheld a fat woman with arms akimbo regarding him fiercely, a woman more than fat, mountainous. It was the kind of fat that goes with the highest degree of activity and energy; that massive forearm might have felled a prize-fighter. Moreover the honest, choleric blue eye proclaimed the tartar; it was the proprietress, no doubt, and a person to be propitiated.

Greg approached her, cap in hand. She did not relent at all; on the contrary she seemed to find in his politeness an added cause for suspicion.

"I'm the new Elmer Fishback," he announced. "I bought old T7011 from Hickey Meech last night. Here is the bill of sale he gave me."

She looked over his papers with a sharp eye. "Do you want to stay on here?" she demanded.

"If you please, ma'am."

"My terms is the same to all. Dollar and a half a week in advance, with free water from the tap for washing. I serve meals to them that wants them at seven, twelve and six only. Regular fifteen cents; second helping a quarter. Beds twenty cents a sleep night or day."

"That's reasonable," murmured Greg.

"You're right it's reasonable, times like these." She fixed him with a terrible eye. "There's one thing's got to be understood at the start. I says the same to every man that comes here. I'm a respectable woman and I won't stand for no crooked work, see? Your car is registered from this address, and if you get into trouble the police will come here for you. I won't stall them off. So it's up to you, see?"

"I understand, ma'am," said Greg humbly.

In spite of herself a twinkle lightened her grim glance. A long and no doubt disillusioning experience had made her suspicious of strangers, and there was much about Greg that remained to be explained; at the same time his clean youthfulness must have appealed to her after the tag ends of humanity she was accustomed to dealing with. She liked him and tried not to show it.

Greg taking courage from the twinkle said: "I got into a bit of trouble last night—nothing crooked on my part, ma'am, but a gang in Ninth Street set on me and beat me up. A friend brought my cab in for me, a young boy; you

didn't happen to see him, did you?"

Bessie Bickle shook her head. "I sleep nights like a Christian," she said grimly. "That reminds me of something else. I don't hold myself responsible for anything left in the yard. All day I'm in and out my kitchen and I keep an eye out, but at night it's up to you. Most of the boys is out all night anyway, and when they're in they're gen'ally sleeping in their cabs. There's Blossom waked up. Ast him if he seen your friend."

As Greg turned away from the door she called to him, still with the grim air that he soon learned she had adopted out of self-protection: "Say you, breakfast is over now, but come in to dinner on me. There's spare-ribs and cabbage."

"Much obliged, ma'am," said Greg. He thanked the stars that had directed him to such a friendly soul in a selfish world.

A man had shoved his car out of the shed and was preparing to wash it at the hydrant. Since the water was allowed to find its own sweet way out of the yard there was always a muddy hole in the middle—which did not lessen the labor of washing. Even now the man was cursing the mud. Greg had been struck by his name Blossom; but when he raised his head Greg saw that he who bore so poetic an appellation was no beauty. The "Blossom" was a brandy blossom perhaps, referring to his nose. He was a lean, exhausted-looking, morose individual.

"H'are you?" said Greg affably.

A grunt was the only reply.

"How's business?"

"Rotten!"

"Bad weather for taxis."

"Rotten!"

"What's the matter? You seem a bit down on your luck."

"Rotten!" declared Blossom, like a bird with one note. "I got a pain in me back and two flat tires; a fellow done me out of my fare last night. Everything is rotten!"

"I'll help with the tires," said Greg.

The morose one stared. "You're new," he said grimly.

Greg nodded towards T7011. "My car," he said.

"Oh, the machine gun," said Blossom. "God help you! Rotten old boat! Where's Hickey?"

"I'd be glad to know that myself."

"Owes me half a dollar," said Blossom.

"Have you seen my friend that brought her in?" asked Greg anxiously, "young boy?"

Blossom shook his head. "He woke me up backin' and fillin', tryin' to snake her in. I knew it was a green hand bringin' in the machine gun. I cursed him, but I didn't get up. Us fellows gets little enough sleep. He was a determined cuss all right; stuck at it till he got her in."

Watching Greg's handy way with the tires Blossom said: "You're not so new."

"First time I've been on my own," said Greg, wishing to convey that he had long been a chauffeur for others.

"You made a mistake," said Blossom dejectedly. "Rotten life! Look at me. You're tormented night and day not knowing how you're going to come out. As soon as you get square something breaks on you and there's another repair bill. Give me another man's car under me and my pay Saturday night."

"Oh well, there's the independence of it," said Greg.

"To Hell with Independence! Independence don't pay no repair bills!"

When the tires were fixed Blossom desired to borrow a pump. As he got it from under his front seat Greg saw what had escaped his notice before, a little label pasted on his wind-shield on a line level with the eyes of any one who should sit at the wheel. On it was written in bold characters:

"Seek and ye shall find."

Greg grinned to himself in high satisfaction. She had her wits about her! Handing over the pump to Blossom, he returned to his car and proceeded to make a thorough search.

Tucked behind the back seat he found a small hard object wrapped in a bit of paper. The paper opened in his hand, and his astonished eyes beheld a beautiful platinum corsage pin set with a dozen gleaming diamonds. Workmanship and stones were of the finest; a glance told him it was worth hundreds of dollars. There was more writing on the inside of this paper.

"This is for necessary expenses. Pawn it. I'm going back to the hotel."

An exclamation from Blossom caused Greg to look up. He dropped the pin in his pocket. Another man had entered the taxi yard. Greg's attention was first caught by the suit he wore. It had a strangely familiar look. It was one of his own! The wearer was no other than Hickey Meech.

"Well, I'm damned!" said Greg involuntarily.

CHAPTER VI

GREG'S RIVAL

The nine hours had worked a great change in Hickey. Gone was the dashing air; he drooped in every line of his loose clothes. But he was still grinning. It was a shamefaced, impudent and appealing grin that he bent on Greg.

"H'are yeh?" he said, sidling towards him.

Greg hardened himself against the grin. "By God, you have a cheek!" said he.

Hickey jerked his head towards the flivver. "What have you done with—you know—It?" he asked in a hoarse whisper.

"It's disposed of," said Greg grimly.

"And a good job too!" said Hickey with undisguised relief. "I knew you had a head on you," he added propitiatingly.

"Oh you did, did you? You and I have got a long account to settle, old fellow!"

"Aw, be nice," said Hickey cajolingly. "What have you got to grouse about? You've got the flivver, haven't you? I've got nothing."

"Where's the two hundred you got from me?"

Hickey blew into the empty air. "Gone! Just like that! I'm cleaned out."

"Booze?"

"No. Craps."

Greg shrugged.

"Oh, I know I'm a fool," said Hickey with a kind of cheerful despair. "You don't have to tell me. Every man has his own special kind of dam foolishness. Mine's the little bone cubes." He snapped his fingers. "Come you little lubly seben!"

"You've got a nerve to show yourself around here."

"Only place I had to come to," said Hickey simply. "Besides somepin told me you wouldn't be hard on a poor mutt like me,"—this with his inimitable insinuating grin. "Let me sleep awhile in the flivver, will yeh? I'm all in."

In spite of himself Greg began to relent. "If you want to square yourself with me you've got to tell me the truth about how you came by that body," he said.

"You didn't think *I* croaked the guy, did you?" said Hickey.

"No. But I want to know all the circumstances. A lot has happened since you unloaded it on me."

"Ain't got much to tell," said Hickey. "I see by the papie last night that the *Allianca* from Central American ports was sighted off the Hook and was going to dock about ten o'clock. Well, when one of them little vessels docks at night it gives us fellows a show, see? for the swell drivers won't come down-town for it. So I goes to the pier and I draws two of them dagoes; one was him that I threw in with the flivver, see? and the other was a small slender fella with a little black mustache. The old guy couldn't speak no English; the young fella talked for him. He told me to take them to Jersey City by the Twenty-third Street ferry, see?"

"Well, I drove up West and up Eleventh Avenue and I was almost to the ferry when I hear a funny noise in the cab behind me, a scrabbling sort of sound. I looked around, and it looked to me like the old boy was having a fit. So I pulled up beside the curb and opened the door. That was in front of the Brevard House where I met up with you later.

"The old fella was hanging over all limp-like with his hands hanging to the floor, and the young guy was trying to pull him up. Say, that young guy was scared, he was. He was so scared he was green. He says to me as well as he could for his teeth chattering: 'My friend is took sick,' says he, 'real sick.'

"Well, I didn't need anybody to tell me that. It seemed natural for the fella to be scared. I helped him boost the old dago up on the seat comfortable. 'Hold him up a minute,' says the young guy, 'and I'll run in here and ast where's the nearest doctor guy.'

"Innocent as a baby, I was. Oh, yes, soft as a rotten orange; soft in the head. I stood there holding the old fella up and the little slender guy he scampered like a mouse into the bar of the Brevard House. I soon saw the old guy was all in. I waited one minute, two minutes, I dunno, and then it come to me like a clap that I'd been sold. I pulled the old guy's legs out a little so's he wouldn't fall over on his face, but then darned if he didn't slide out of the seat on his back and crumple up on the floor. But I slammed the door on him and run into the bar. I ast the bar-keep for the little slender guy. 'Just walked through,' he says, 'went out by the side door.' Say, I was sick!

"Well, that's all there is to it. It give me such a nasty turn I lost me nerve. I couldn't just bring myself to go back to the flivver with that pore old soft floppy corp in the back. Him walking around on two legs as good as myself, not a half hour before! I stood there lappin' up whiskeys and then you come in. We talked—say, maybe I wasn't glad to have somebody to talk to! and one thing led to another, and I had an impulse to sell the whole outfit to you and like a fool I did. I had ought to have carried the corp direct to the station; they didn't have nothing on me. But I always was an impulsive guy. It has been my ruin!"

Greg saw no reason to doubt any part of this story; the details were convincing; moreover they fitted with what he already knew. Evidently the actual murderer, de Socotra's agent, had been thrown into a panic by the cabman's unexpected discovery of the crime. He had fled, and thus de Socotra's plans had been momentarily upset.

"What killed the old man?" asked Greg.

"Search me," said Hickey. "There was no mark on him that I could see."

"Would you recognize the young man with the little black mustache if you saw him again?"

"Would I! Night or day; from in front or behind."

"Our job must be to find him," said Greg. "It'll be worth something handsome to you if you can run him down."

"Who was the poor old guy?" asked Hickey, "a South American millionaire?"

"Not exactly. I'll tell you the whole story in time. Can't stop now. Did you claim my baggage on the pier?"

Hickey shook his head. Diving into his pocket he produced the crumpled claim checks. "I was afraid you'd catch me if I stopped to claim it."

"Good!" said Greg. "These clothes will come in handy. First of all I'll drive to the pier and get them."

Hickey put on a make-believe aggrieved air. "Hold on. What do I get out of this? The clothes are mine, ain't they? Part payment for the flivver."

"That'll be about all," said Greg grimly. "I didn't contract to buy a hearse, remember."

Hickey hastily changed his tune. "All right. All right. You needn't get sore. You can have your old clothes."

"Just the same I'll deal liberally with you," said Greg. "We'll make the old cab do double duty. When I'm sleeping or busy you can run her, and vice versa. If we keep her in repair she ought to provide a living for both. If you'll turn over your takings to me, I'll settle with Bessie Bickle for your keep and credit you with the balance. When you've paid back the two hundred you got from me I'll retire from the concern in your favor. I pay for repairs, and we go halves on oil and gasoline."

Hickey agreed that this was more than fair.

"All right, climb into Blossom's cab and take a sleep while I'm gone. Or get a room from Bessie. I'll have to have a room to change in when I get back. We have a lot to do to-day."

"Do you mind staking me for a little breakfast?" asked Hickey meekly. "I'll take it outside if it's all the same to you. I'd sooner face a she-tiger than brace Bessie between meals."

"All right, jump in, and I'll drop you at the first lunch-room."

In half an hour Greg was back at the yard with his baggage. In the meantime Hickey, following his instructions, had engaged a room by the week from Bessie in their joint interest, and was even now snoring on the bed. Greg carried his things up, and opening his bags proceeded to array himself with particular care. He was bound to remove the impression of a snuffy owl driver that he must have made on a certain party. He sighed with satisfaction at the comfortable feel of his own clothes.

When he was dressed he remorselessly woke Hickey and dragged him to his feet. Hickey assumed the driver's cap and coat that he had discarded. When they passed through Bessie's kitchen on the way out that worthy soul opened her eyes very wide indeed at the sight of the figure of elegance Greg was making. She came to a stand and planted her hands aggressively on her hips. Clearly, fine clothes were associated in her simple mind with questionable conduct. Greg's gloves confirmed her worst suspicions.

"I'll be back in time for dinner," said Greg airily. "I'm not going to let you off those spare-ribs."

Bessie pursed up her lips. "My poor kitchen ain't fitting to serve the likes of you," she said.

"Don't be sore just because I've put on my sporting rags," said Greg. "Need 'em in my business."

"Fine business, I daresay," said Bessie, sniffing.

"I see you think I'm a confidence man at the least," said Greg. "When I come back I'll tell you the whole story while we eat. I want your good will."

"Well, I won't express an opinion on it till I hear it," said Bessie tossing her head. Nevertheless Greg saw that she was pleased.

He got in the cab. "Where to, sir?" said Hickey, touching his cap with a grin.

"First to a pawn-broker's," said Greg. "I've heard that Salomon's on Sixth Avenue is a good place."

"I know it well," said Hickey. He cranked the flivver, and with her customary preliminary back-fires she was off.

Greg got three hundred on the corsage pin. This he reserved for the girl's business, of course. He still had a little for his own expenses.

He next directed Hickey to take him to the Hotel Meriden, without having any very clear idea of what he would do when he got there. He did not know whom to ask for.

As Greg mounted the steps of that great hostelry two porters in blue flannel jumpers, laden with hat-boxes, suit-cases, hand-bags and dressing-cases enough to outfit a fashionable seminary came out of the door followed by three ladies, a maid and a young gentleman. At sight of the lady nearest him Greg's heart almost leaped out of his breast. It was she.

He was almost bowled over. He had much ado not to stop and stare like a booby as they passed. He had told himself of course that she would look very different in her proper clothes, still he was not prepared for this. She seemed to have changed her very soul with her outer attire. In boy's clothes she had been boyish: in girl's clothes she was intoxicatingly feminine. French hat, rich furs and artful-simple suit; coiffure, filmy veil, cunning little boots—much money and more art had been expended to create that perfect effect. And the whole was enhanced by the rose-leaves of youth and the shine of eager eyes. Her hair was dark red and it was her greatest beauty.

Greg was momentarily intimidated by so high a perfection. Girls, if they wish an imaginative lover, should beware not to turn themselves out too much like princesses. She passed him with not a foot between; she must have recognized him, but her glance passed over him as if he had not been. It hurt Greg shrewdly. Surely she might have given him the merest flicker of an eyelash without danger. She was chattering in Spanish.

Next to her was a handsome matron who might have been the girl's mother, only she looked like a Spanish-American, and the girl looked American without the Spanish. At the sight of the third lady Greg was more astonished than ever. It was none other than the vivid dark beauty who had deceitfully made love to him while he lay bound in the Ninth Street house. She recognized him; there was no doubt about that, though she betrayed it by no more than a startled contraction of her glance. From Greg her eyes went with lightning swiftness to the other girl, and Greg forgave his friend for cutting him.

Greg looked hard at the young gentleman of the party. A hot little flame of jealousy scorched his breast, for a

subtle deference in the young man's air informed Greg that he was not a member of the family. Which girl was he after then? He had not been among those in the Ninth Street house. In his way he was perfection too; exquisitely slender, arrogant, assured; an Olympian youth. He looked like the slightly exhausted scion of a long Castilian line. Greg's intuition told him that this proud youth would aim higher than the dark-haired beauty who, beside little auburn hair, looked common; and Greg's honest, democratic heart hated him at sight.

All this happened in a breath of course. The party passed to the sidewalk, and Greg went into the hotel.

He went to the desk. To the clerk he said with an offhand air: "I just passed a young lady on the way out who recognized me, and I can't place her. A little lady with dark red hair; she was with two other ladies who looked Spanish."

Greg's appearance was a sufficient warranty to the clerk. "Oh yes, Señorita Amèlie de Socotra," he said.

Greg's heart went down. "De Socotra," he repeated like a man trying to remember. "And who were the other two ladies?"

"Señora de Socotra, her mother, and Señorita Bianca Guitierrez, a relative, a cousin I believe."

"Ah yes, now I remember," said Greg. "Are they of the family of Señor Francisco de Socotra?"

"Why yes, his wife and daughter."

Greg's brain whirled a little. He couldn't reconcile this with what the girl herself had told him. He suddenly became aware that the clerk was staring at him.

"Of course," he said, "I met them in Havana. Are they leaving?"

"Yes. Señor de Socotra was called to Peru last night."

"Peru?" said Greg, dryly. "Peru in Irving Place," he thought.

"And the ladies decided to go up to the Marsden Farms Hotel in Westchester County to await his return."

"The Marsden Farms Hotel; thank you very much."

As Greg turned away from the desk he perceived the Castilian youth reëntering the hotel. So he had just been putting the ladies in the cab. Greg kept the tail of an eye on him, and when he presently strolled into the bar in his languid high-born manner, Greg followed.

The young man with a condescending air ordered a Bronx cocktail.

"Our drinks are scarcely good enough for him," thought Greg bitterly. Greg himself, a few feet distant from the other, ordered a drink he did not want, and continued to nourish his hatred with watching the other.

The young man sipped his drink quite unconscious of the violent distaste he had engendered in the one near. He asked the bar-tender a question. His English was poor and he had difficulty in making himself understood. It appeared that he wanted to know how long it would take him to drive to Thirty-Sixth Street, as he had an engagement there, and did not wish to start too soon.

Greg intervened and gave him the information he wanted. The young man recognizing a gentleman in Greg, unbent a little, and they fell into chat. He mentioned that the address he had spoken of was the office of the Managuan consul. Greg pricked up his ears.

"You are from Managuay?" he asked.

The young man nodded.

Greg impelled by his burning curiosity said: "I met two ladies from Managuay once. It was in Havana at the

Palacio Presidential."

"Ah yes," said the other, "we all go to Havana in the winter."

"Señora and Señorita de Socotra," said Greg, watching him close.

"Ah," said the other languidly, "my fiancée."

CHAPTER VII

THE UNDERTAKER

Greg and Hickey dined with Bessie Bickle. Greg's zest in his adventure was gone; there was a pretty stew of suspicion and jealousy in his breast. In his first bitterness he even told himself that the little red-haired girl was no better than the rest of the gang. Nevertheless he had promised to tell Bessie the story, and he did so, disguising his changed feelings as best he could. That is to say, he told them the main lines of the tale; certain details it seemed more discreet to keep to himself.

The volatile Hickey's sympathies were completely won. "Count on me to help you against them dagoes!" he said. Bessie, while kind, was less expansive. One could see that she was reserving judgment on a Miss who flew about town in taxi-cabs in the middle of the night dressed in boy's clothes.

After dinner Greg and Hickey yielded perforce to Nature's demands and slept for a couple of hours. Later Greg dispatched Hickey in the flivver to pick up some business if he could; for the firm would shortly be in need of funds. Greg himself started by trolley car for the morgue. He told himself self-righteously that, however his friend had deceived him, he would carry out his part to the letter. Pressed to tell lost in what she had deceived him he could not have told; but he was sore.

Entering the imposing little building on the East Side water-front his heart failed him a little, thinking of ghastly sights awaiting within. But he was spared all that. He saw only a business-like gentleman in a conventional office.

It appeared that a body such as he described had indeed been found in the North River that morning and had been brought to the morgue in a police launch. The description tallied in every detail down to the ring with the curious red stone. There could be no mistake. But to Greg's intense chagrin it transpired that, only an hour or so before, the body had been identified and claimed by one who pretended to be the dead man's nephew. Having satisfied the authorities of his right to receive it, he had had the body transferred to an undertaker's shop.

The name given had been Alfieri. The dead man was said to have jumped overboard from a ferry-boat while demented. The claimant had been identified to the satisfaction of the authorities, which suggested to Greg that the gang he had to deal with possessed wide-spreading influence in the background. The authorities had been the more easily satisfied because there was no mark on the body to suggest foul play; and besides the man's jewelry a considerable sum of money had been found on his person. There was no question of a robbery.

Greg satisfied himself with obtaining the address of the undertaker, and said nothing here about the facts of the case. He suspected that the newspaper offices must be in close touch with the morgue, and he had no desire to explode a public sensation until he was surer of his ground.

The body had not been taken to one of the humble establishments in the neighborhood, but to a fine place half way up-town; "mortuarian" read the sign. It was the first time Greg had been in such a place. He found the religio-commercial atmosphere, the heavy professional commiseration rather oppressive. "Why can't undertakers be simply business-like?" he asked himself.

In the handsome, subdued private office of the proprietor he found himself faced by a clayey-faced individual,

irreproachably and sably clad, whose expression of preternatural woe was lightened in spite of himself by a spark of anticipation at the sight of, as he thought, a new customer. Greg disliked him at sight. Nobody likes an undertaker; not their fault of course; they have painful associations for all.

"Good afternoon, sir," said the undertaker with an air that seemed to say further: "I know the sad errand that has brought you to me, and I feel for you from the bottom of my heart!" Just the same Greg had the feeling that he would have rubbed his hands, had he not been told that it was unrefined.

All this made Greg a little brusquer than he need have been. "I understand you received a body from the morgue this afternoon said to be that of a Señor Alfieri."

The undertaker's manner changed. "Morgue" brought out so bluntly offended his delicate susceptibilities. He apprehended an unfriendly atmosphere. He signified an affirmative.

"Is it here now?" asked Greg.

"May I ask what is your interest in the matter?"

"I represent the dead man's niece."

"Yes, it is here."

"May I see it?"

"Er—Not at the moment. It is being prepared. A little later perhaps—if you will be good enough to bring the necessary authorization."

"Authorization from whom?"

"Señor Alberto Alfieri, the dead man's nephew, who engaged the services of my establishment."

"Would you mind describing this man to me?"

The undertaker looked astonished, but complied nevertheless. "A young Spanish-American gentleman, short and stocky, very dark, pale skin through which his beard showed though he was freshly shaven, a purplish scar on his left cheek bone."

Greg recognized the description of one of the men in the Ninth Street house. "I believe I have met the gentleman," he said dryly, "but I cannot promise to produce credentials from him. Instead I will try to bring the dead man's niece here to-morrow morning to identify the body."

"That will be too late, sir."

"What do you mean?"

"My instructions are to have the body cremated without delay. I ship to the crematory this evening."

Greg struck his fist into his palm. "I might have guessed as much!" he cried.

"I don't understand you, sir."

"You have been deceived!" said Greg earnestly. "This is really the body of Antonio Bareda who was murdered. His murderers are trying to destroy the evidence of their crime."

The undertaker smiled indulgently. "My dear sir! This is a preposterous charge! You may be assured that I satisfied myself everything was in order before I accepted the work."

"How 'in order?'" Greg demanded.

"The death certificate, the permit from the Board of Health, the younger Mr. Alfieri's credentials——"

"They have both money and influence," put in Greg.

"The dead man's jewelry was still on his person when the body was brought here."

"Men are murdered for other reasons than to secure their valuables. Look here, if I bring a reputable physician here will you allow him to perform an autopsy?"

"Not without the consent of my client."

"I hope he paid you in advance," said Greg.

The other shrugged.

"Did he give you an address?"

The other named a number far up-town.

"I'll swear it is fictitious. Will you do me the favor of investigating the address?"

"I am not convinced of the necessity for that."

"But you will at least delay the shipment of the body until I can get in communication with the dead man's niece?"

"I intend to carry out my instructions to the letter."

Greg perceived that the man was wholly under the influence of the handsome fee that had been paid him. He felt that he was wasting his time, but he tried one more appeal.

"But don't you see, sir, that in asking you to delay matters I could have no possible motive except to discover the truth, while the motives of those who wish to destroy the body so hastily are at least open to suspicion?"

"You should go to the police," was the cold reply. "That is what the police are for."

"I can't open a vulgar newspaper sensation until I am surer of my ground."

The undertaker rose. "Sorry I can do nothing for you."

Greg tried a new line. "Look here, when you have shipped this body, your interest in it is at an end, isn't it?"

The other shrugged expressively. "The ashes will be returned to me in due course. The order includes a handsome urn for their reception."

"A bit of stage-play," said Greg bitterly. "It will never be called for. If this body happened to come back here from another direction would you accept an order to embalm it?"

"That would hardly be ethical," was the smug reply. "Of course if the crematory cared to take the responsibility of departing from my order, you could take it to some other embalmer."

"Can you suggest anybody?" asked Greg slyly.

"Well, there's my son," replied the clay-faced one blandly. "He is just starting in business for himself. But it's in Brooklyn."

"That doesn't matter."

He gave an address.

"Thank you very much," said Greg dryly. "Where is the crematory?"

"Silver Pond, Long Island. About eighteen miles out on the Port Franklin branch."

"What time are you sending the body out there?"

"It leaves here about five. I understand they are always put on the eight-fifteen train arriving at Silver Pond about nine."

"Is the crematory near the station?"

"Some three miles distant, I believe; in a very lonely neighborhood."

Greg thanked him and they parted, having reached an excellent understanding after all.

Greg called up the Marsden Farms Hotel from a telephone booth. Loverlike, he anticipated a melancholy satisfaction in telling the girl who had used him so badly, as he told himself, how he had been working in her behalf. He was prepared to be nobly cold and self-sacrificing and virtuous. Unfortunately for these fine feelings he was told by the office of the hotel that no one of the name of de Socotra was stopping there. Thinking perhaps they might have registered under an assumed name, he described the ladies, but was assured that no such persons had arrived during the day.

Once more jealousy, anger and rage had full sway over him. She had purposely given him the slip, he told himself. She had only used him the night before for her own purposes. Very questionable purposes they seemed now. Well, he'd be hanged if he did any more for her! If he couldn't find her again he would donate the three hundred dollars to a worthy charity. Even while he raged against her a still small voice whispered to him that the glance of her flamelike eyes had been clear and true, but he would not have it so.

The more he told himself he would think no longer of her, the more the mystery of her teased him. If she were de Socotra's daughter how could she be an American as she had so proudly asserted? And if she were de Socotra's daughter how could she turn against her own father even though she had discovered he was a villain. That she was not deficient in natural affection her grief on learning of her uncle's death had shown; but Greg could not conceive of a daughter putting a mere uncle above her father. And if she loved America and Americans how could she possibly think of allying herself to anything so essentially un-American as the exquisite, enervated Castilian youth with his little head and his vacant, arrogant glance?

In the turmoil of his feelings Greg walked all the way down-town to the taxi-yard. As he passed through the little store Bessie told him there was a man waiting to see him.

"But nobody knows me at this address," said Greg astonished. "Who did he ask for?"

"The driver of T7011."

Greg went through to the yard. The man waiting there wore the uniform of a taxi-driver of the better class, but there was no sign of a cab.

"You want to see me?" said Greg.

The other had a naturally truculent manner. "I don't know whether I do or not. I want the driver of T7011."

"That's me."

He scornfully looked Greg up and down. "G'wan! You ain't one of us!"

"Sure, I am. I'm off duty now."

"Tain't good enough, Jack."

"Come into the house and the woman will identify me."

Bessie, full of curiosity, was already at the kitchen door. She assured the man Greg was what he claimed to be, but the obstinate fellow having made up his mind was not to be swayed.

"I don't know *you*," he said to Bessie. "I don't know any of yez. It's a bad neighborhood."

The highly incensed Bessie gave him a good piece of her mind; this naturally only confirmed him in his obstinacy.

"If the cab's yours where is it now?" he demanded of Greg.

"My partner has it out."

"Likely story! I'll wait until I see it before I believe it."

"Suit yourself," said Greg marching into the house in a rage.

Fortunately for his much-tried temper it was not long before Hickey returned. Hearing the "machine-gun" come in, Greg went out into the yard and found the two chauffeurs in talk.

"I can't make out what he's driving at," said Hickey scratching his head.

"Let him tell me," said Greg. "First tell him that this is my cab."

Hickey did so. The other driver was not in the least abashed. Indeed he plumed himself more than ever on his astuteness.

"I drive for the New York Western cab service," he said. "They keep a sharp tab on us fellows and the gas we use, and I couldn't get down here until I was off duty. This morning at the Terminal three ladies engaged me: that is they was four in the party but one was a servant——"

Greg's heart began to beat.

"Old Spanish-looking dame and two pippins, black-head and red-head. Say, red-head was a little queen she was, with a little green hat and a whole grizzly bear around her neck, I guess it was——"

"Never mind her description," said Greg impatiently. "We know her. Get ahead!"

It only had the result of delaying the story still further. "Say, who's telling this, you or me?" burst out the irritable one. "I ain't telling it for your pleasure anyway, but for her that sent me. What if I do drive a taxi-cab, when I'm off duty I'm as good a man as any."

"Sure!" said Greg. "You're all right! But for God's sake get on with your story!"

"Well, I was ordered to take them to an apartment house on Riverside, the Stickney Arms it was, Ninety-fourth Street, big, swell place. Half a van load of hand-baggage they had. While it was being carried in the young lady had a chance to speak to me private. Says she: 'Go to Bessie Bickle's taxi-yard on Gibbon Street south of Houston——'

"When she got that far the black-haired one turned around sudden, and we made believe to be counting the bags. The old lady happened to call the black-haired one and little red-hair had a chance to finish: 'Tell the driver of T7011 that you brought me to this address.'

"That's all. Slipped me a couple of dollars she did, but I would have come for nothing. A peach!"

Greg experienced a complete revulsion of feeling. Gone were all his hard and angry thoughts. She had sent him word; she was all right!

"Good work!" he cried. "I'll give you another two myself if you'll let me."

The driver was not unwilling.

Poor Hickey, who had been looking forward to a "second helping" at Bessie's table and a good sleep, was turned around and bidden to drive to the Stickney Arms for all the flivver was worth. On the way Greg debated how to establish communications with his little friend. What he had seen himself, and what the chauffeur had told him, suggested that she was under the closest surveillance, and it behooved him to be careful in approaching her. Suddenly an idea occurred to him that made him chuckle and slap his knee.

He had Hickey stop at a druggist's where he purchased a sheet of showy note-paper and an envelope, and on the counter indited this note:

"The young man with the blue tie noticed by the young lady with the silver-fox furs on the steps of the Hotel Meriden this morning desires to make her better acquaintance. Read the personal column in the Sphere to-morrow."

The Stickney Arms proved to be a towering structure in what might be called the Jerry-Gothic style, the "Gothic" having been manufactured in a terra-cotta kiln on Staten Island. It was, notwithstanding, a very fine place of its kind, with a truly royal red carpet down the sumptuous corridor from front door to elevators, and in attendance four young Apollos wearing blue uniforms with gold cords across their breasts. One was to open the door, one to answer the telephone, one to run the elevator and one just to stand around and look ornamental.

The last boy had a peculiarly knowing look, and to him Greg addressed himself. Before saying anything he made a suggestive movement with his hand, to which the boy instinctively responded. A dollar bill changed hands like lightning. The blue-clad one assumed a responsive air.

"Little girl with dark red hair," said Greg, "black suit, little green hat, big soft fur around her neck; travels with two Spanish-looking ladies; do you know her?"

The boy nodded. "Sub-let a furnished apartment on the eighth floor. Moved in this morning."

"What name?" asked Greg.

"Soak-oat-er, or somepin like that."

"Slip her this," said Greg, showing his letter. "Only into her hands, see?"

The boy pocketed the letter. "I get you, boss."

Greg returned to his cab in high satisfaction. He had every reason to believe that the note would be delivered. Trust a New York hall-boy in matters of this kind! But even should it fall under other eyes, it could not but put them on a false track.

"Now for a bang-up feed," said Greg to Hickey. "We need it, for there's a big night's work beginning."

"*Beginning!*" groaned Hickey. "I thought my work was done!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE HOLD-UP

Hickey took Greg to a restaurant on Third Avenue that to him represented the *ne plus ultra* in eating-places. It was called "Dick's" on its signboards, or "Greasy Dick's" in affection by its habitués. Whenever a restaurant gets a derisive nickname like this you may be sure it is a good one. Within there was a double row of mahogany tables end to against the side walls, leaving an aisle in the middle up and down which paraded the sociable waiters, who published each man's order to the kitchen in the voices of stentors. Greg and Hickey sat down together; elegantly dressed young gentleman and shabby owl-driver; and such was the democratic spirit of Dick's that none paid the least attention.

They ordered an extra double sirloin with onions, the most expensive dish the bill-of-fare afforded. It was a treat to hear the impressiveness with which the order was transmitted to the kitchen. On the way to the restaurant Greg had stopped at a stationer's to buy a map of Long Island, and while they waited for their meal he studied it.

"What's the program for to-night?" asked Hickey.

"Holding-up a dead-wagon," said Greg with an entirely serious air.

Hickey fell back in his seat aghast. "What!"

Greg laughed.

Hickey shrugged philosophically. "Oh well, you're the pilot," he said. "It's up to you. Remember I'm a nervous man, that's all."

With the point of a fork Greg indicated Silver Pond on the map. "There's our mark," said he. "We cross the Williamsburgh bridge and leave Long Island City by Van Buren Avenue. The rest is easy. The Crematory's not marked on the map but——"

"What's a crematory?" interrupted Hickey. "Anythin' like a creamery?"

"Not much like it," said Greg. "We'll go to the railway station and inquire from there. I suppose I ought to have a gun——"

"Good God! what for?"

"How can you pull off a hold-up without a gun?"

"Then you mean it, a hold-up?"

"Surest thing you know."

"Lordy! Lordy!" murmured Hickey. "What a fellow you are! You'll have to attend to the gun-play yourself. I'm too nervous!"

"I will. I don't mean to use it really, just flash it. We've got a little all-steel monkey-wrench that will give a perfect imitation of an automatic in the dark. That will do. We must fill up the flivver with gas, put in a quart of oil, and let down the top."

"Why the top?" asked Hickey. "It's cold."

"You'll see. We have to have sixty or seventy feet of rope too."

"Is anybody going to be hanged?" asked Hickey with a shiver.

"No. That's to stretch across the road."

Replete and glowing inside, they lighted big cigars and returned to the flivver. Having filled up with gas and oil and bought the rope, they left town by the route indicated. The journey to Silver Pond was without incident. Having plenty of time they let the old flivver roll at her natural gait along the suburban highways. Silver Pond marked the limit of the suburbs in this direction; beyond was the open country.

They reached the station at twenty minutes to nine. The agent's office was closed, but there were several little stores opposite including a bar. Here Greg applied for information.

"What time does the train get here that brings the—er—bodies to the crematory?" he asked, looking as much like a bereaved relative as he could.

"Nine-three," was the reply. "Expectin' somebody?"—this with a sympathetic air.

Greg nodded lugubriously, and the bar-tender shook his head in sympathetic unison. "What'll you have?" he asked, suggesting that therein lay the cure for all woes.

"Rye high-ball," said Greg. "Do they send the bodies right out to the crematory to-night?"

"Sure. When they're notified there's anybody coming the motor-truck meets the train. He'll be along any minute now."

"Oh well, I'll drive on to the crematory and wait for brother there," said Greg.

However, he took time to sip his drink, for he wished to have a look at the motor truck in order to be sure of identifying it on the return trip. In the course of a few minutes it drew up at the station opposite, and Greg marked it, a covered van of the style ordinarily used by undertakers, abounding with black-enameled trappings of woe. Greg observed that for its duty on the night roads it carried a search-light over the driver's head. This would effectually serve to distinguish it from other cars.

The bar-tender came to the door and pointed out the road they should take. "Three miles," he said; "follow the macadam and the telephone poles. You can't miss it. It's their own road that they built. Nobody wants to live down that way."

In order to avoid exciting remark Greg got in the body of the cab, and they started. As soon as they were out of sight of the saloon, he swung himself around the running board to the seat beside Hickey.

"The train is due in fifteen minutes, supposing it's on time," he said. "Give him five minutes to load up, that's twenty minutes' start we have. Time to run all the way out to the crematory, choose the best spot along the road and come back to it."

"I like this job less and less," said Hickey with feeling. "I'm a nervous man."

"I'll play the heavy villain's part," said Greg calmly. "You only have to be property man."

"Suppose there's two of them?"

"There was only one on the driver's seat just now."

"He might have a friend coming out on the train."

"Sure, and he might have a hand grenade in each pocket."

"Oh, Lor'!" said Hickey, taking it quite seriously.

It was a clear night, moderately cold, and the moon was shining. This was fortunate for them, since the old flivver, designed exclusively for street travel, carried no headlights. By the light of the moon Greg searched the roadsides for the spot best suited to his purpose. For that matter one place was about as good as another along that lonely road. They passed no houses. Two hundred yards from the station they plunged into the woods, and continued

through woods the most part of the way. What fields they passed were evidently the back fields of farms that fronted on other roads. The road was smooth, level, and with but few turns in it.

In a few minutes a cleared hollow or vale opened up before them with the crematory buildings grouped around a pond gleaming wanly in the moonlight. The surroundings were laid out like a park. The main building with its tall slender chimney had the look of a power house or a pumping-station; but knowing what it was, this chimney had a gruesome fascination of its own.

"All that is mortal of many a man has gone up that stack," said Greg.

Hickey shuddered. "I'll take the worms for mine," said he.

"Back again now," said Greg. "I have the spot in mind."

About half way back Greg ordered Hickey to stop. "That tall tree ahead on the right. Draw up in the shadow beneath it. There's a bend in the road a hundred yards ahead. Far enough to give him time to stop, but not far enough to give him the tip to turn back."

"I don't like this job," wailed Hickey, for perhaps the dozenth time. His teeth were chattering.

Greg, who was not exactly an experienced highwayman himself, felt a little shaky and dry in the mouth, but if he had let Hickey see that the driver would surely have collapsed. Greg maintained the assumption of perfect calm.

"You have nothing to worry about," said he. "If anything goes wrong you were simply hired by me to bring you out here. You had never seen me before. And when we got here I forced you to do my bidding at the point of a pistol, see?"

"Suppose the driver has a gun?"

"Mine will be out first."

"But yours is only a monkey-wrench."

"He won't know that."

"But——"

"Look here, you're wasting time. Put out your side-lights, take the tail light off your car, and then come help me stretch this rope across the road."

They got the rope ready between tree and tree, and then let it lie in the road in case another car came along before the one they wished to stop. Greg tied a handkerchief in the middle of the rope to make sure it would not escape the driver's attention. He had the red tail light ready as a further summons to stop.

"That clothes line won't hold him up no more than a cotton thread if he wants to drive her through," objected Hickey.

"He won't know but what it's a steel cable."

"I don't like this job."

Greg made haste to keep him busy. "Cover your radiator, and let the lap-robe hang down over the license number. Tie a rag over the rear license-plate. Let down the front window. Detach the meter and lay it on the floor."

"What's that for?"

"It'll be in our passenger's way on the ride home," said Greg grimly.

For nearly a minute before it hove in view they heard the approach of the crematory car through the night. He

was driving her hard.

"It's a six," said Greg listening with a professional ear. "He's got a bum spark plug. She's running on five legs."

"I'm not the man for this job," moaned Hickey. "I'm sick!"

"Hide yourself behind the flivver. I'll call you when you're wanted."

Hickey obeyed this order with alacrity.

Finally the rays of the searchlight showed around the bend ahead, jiggling up and down with the movement of the car. To Greg it seemed as if she would never turn the corner. His heart was beating like a pneumatic hammer. He clenched his hands to keep them from trembling. He had the dummy pistol in one.

Meanwhile rope, handkerchief and red light were in place. Finally the dazzling white light swung around the corner and illumined them. Power was shut off. The great car came to a stop with the scrape of locked wheels on macadam. Greg stepped out of the shadow. He had turned up his collar and pulled down his hat-brim in the time-honored style.

"Get down from your seat," he commanded.

It appeared he had a cool customer to deal with. "Sure, Mike!" was the undisturbed reply. The man jumped down.

"Hands up!" said Greg.

He was obeyed. At the same time the cool voice said: "Sorry, old man, but you've stuck up the wrong train. I ain't carrying no consignment of gold this trip. Thirty-four cents, a pocket knife with a blade missing and a dollar watch, that's the lot. You're welcome to it for the experience."

Greg grinned in return. This was a victim after his own heart. "Much obliged," he answered, matching the other's tone. "Keep the change. This hold-up isn't meant for you personally."

"What is it then?"

"I just want to give your passenger a transfer."

"Gee! A stiff! I suppose you're one of these here now medical students then."

"If you like."

"I didn't think they was so hard-pushed for stiffs nowadays. Well, take your choice. A stiff more or less is nothing to me. We get hardened to 'em in this business."

Greg ordered Hickey to start his engine. "Run her into the road," he said, "and back her up to Charon's boat."

While Hickey was performing this evolution Greg and the crematory driver continued to converse amicably.

"Is the door locked?" asked Greg.

By way of answer the other threw the doors open. Two pine boxes of significant shape were revealed one above the other.

"Take your choice," said the driver.

"Did you read the labels before you loaded them in?" asked Greg. "I want the one marked Alfieri."

"Oh, the dago. He's on the bottom. He's the heaviest."

"Have a cigar," said Greg. "Have a couple."

"Much obliged, Jack. Certainly square of you. Wouldn't mind being stuck up any night if they was all like you. Life is slow in this neck of the woods."

They lit up and puffed comfortably together.

"Sorry I'll have to report my loss as soon as I get in," said the driver. "You see the station agent helped me to load up and he's a cranky cuss, not a regular guy like you and me. What's a stiff more or less to a reasonable man! But you see the relatives kick up such a dust."

"That's all right," said Greg. "We have to take our chances of course."

"Tell you what I'll do though. I'll give you five minutes or so before I drive on."

"Thanks, that'll help."

By this time Hickey had his car in place. They ran out the lower of the two pine boxes; with his flash Greg made sure that it was the one they wanted; then they hoisted it over the lowered top of the flivver. The driver helped right willingly. When they got the box in place one end rested on top of the back seat and the other end stuck through the front window. When they put up the top of the car, only the front end of the box showed, and this they rendered less conspicuous by draping it with the black lap-robe.

"You'll have to lean forward to see around the end," said Greg to Hickey. "I'll ride behind."

They screwed on the tail light, gathered up the rope and all was ready for the start.

"Well, so long, fellows," said the crematory driver.

As soon as they started Hickey's spirits rebounded, and he began to brag quaintly. "Say, that guy was polite all right. He had to be! I was watching him. One ugly move on his part and I'd a dropped on him like a load of brick."

"Oh, you're a dare-devil all right," said Greg dryly.

Hickey subsided.

At the Silver Pond station they took the main road from Long Island City by which they had come, but beyond the village they took the first side road to the left, and aided by the map made their way cross country by various unfrequented roads to one of the highways leading to Brooklyn.

"It's a good thing the undertaker's in Brooklyn," said Greg. "They'll probably telephone in and have the bridges and ferries watched."

"They'll trace us to-morrow," said Hickey nervously.

"I doubt if anybody will be sufficiently interested. The crematory will report to the undertaker; the undertaker will endeavor to communicate with his client, and will find that he gave a fictitious address. The matter will go no further. De Socotra's gang is not likely to learn that we have the body until we tell them ourselves."

Reaching the outskirts of town they chose the less frequented streets. Concealed though it was, that square-ended box was of a curiously suggestive size and shape, and both chauffeur and passenger were nervous. However no one seemed to notice them; or if they did, the cab had passed out of reach before action could be taken. One suspects that taxi-cabs often race through the streets at night with queer burdens.

The address given them was in one of the more important streets of the Park Slope district away on the other side of the borough. A garage was maintained in connection, and it was with fervent relief that they rolled inside and the door was closed behind them. They were received by a younger replica of the clayey-faced man, who exhibited a studied imitation of his father's professional manner. Everything was made easy for them here: though nothing was

said about it, they were evidently expected. But it cost Greg a pretty penny.

They returned to New York. At the bridge entrance they were stopped, and a policeman stuck his head inside the cab. But there was nothing in the least suspicious about the fashionable young gentleman riding there, and the officer apologized. He declined to state what he was looking for. Perhaps he was afraid of ridicule.

Greg had Hickey drive him to the office of the *Sphere* newspaper where, in plenty of time for the morning edition, he inserted two advertisements in the personal column. The first read:

"Boy:

Pick T7011 to win. Look in the place you know of.

Greg."

These few simple words were the result of a long process of selection and elimination on the way back to town. Greg assured himself that the girl would understand, but that no one else in the world could.

The second advertisement read:

"Red Head:

Meet me Southwest corner Twenty-third and Fifth Ten A.M.

Green Tie."

This of course was merely camouflage for the benefit of any one who might have intercepted the note that Greg had sent up at the Stickney Arms.

"Home, James," said Greg to Hickey. "We'll celebrate our success by treating ourselves to a whole night's sleep."

"Thank God for that," said Hickey. "I'm ready for it."

CHAPTER IX

THE FLIVVER AS A POST-OFFICE

Shortly before ten next morning Hickey was despatched in the flivver to the Stickney Arms. Small probability of any delicately nurtured ladies venturing out before that hour. Hickey's instructions were detailed and explicit.

"I've got to send you," said Greg, "because I might be recognized. You're to take up your stand just above the entrance to the apartment house where you can roll down to the door at the right moment. You may have to wait a considerable time. Throw back the hood of your engine and fool around inside with a wrench. This will give you an excuse for standing there so long, and will enable you to turn down anybody else who might want to engage you. But keep your eye on the entrance to the apartment house, and the minute that the girl you have heard described so

many times comes out, close your engine and call attention to your cab as if asking for a fare, see?

"I don't know if they let her out alone or not; probably not. If she is by herself bring her down Riverside past the Soldiers and Sailors monument, where I will be waiting under cover. If you have her inside alone, point up with your finger as you pass the monument and stop beyond, and I will join you. But if one or both of the other women are with her, point down as you pass and keep on to wherever they wish you to take them. Don't forget now; point up for good news and stop; point down for bad news and keep on."

"I get you."

"One thing more. Supposing the ladies come out together and you are engaged to take them on a shopping expedition or anything like that, when they are through with you, charge them bargain rates, see? Give them a discount of twenty per cent off the legal fare. Tell them it's because you're trying to work up a regular trade and you hope they'll engage you again. If we can only get them to hire you every day in advance, it will establish first-rate communications."

"I'm on," said Hickey.

Greg rode up-town with him as far as the Soldiers and Sailors monument. On the way he scribbled a note worded in such a way that none but the one it was intended for would be able to make sense of it. In it he told the girl he had secured the body as she had desired, and asked for further instructions. He was very cold and formal, hoping that she might be led to ask the reason when she replied. He tucked this note behind the seat in the spot where he had found the diamond pin.

Concealed behind the bushes that grow around the base of the monument, Greg was obliged to wait more than an hour for Hickey's return. When he finally made out the flivver pursuing its lopsided way down the drive, Hickey was pointing down, and Greg's heart went down in unison. Of those inside as they passed, Greg had only a glimpse of the brilliant Señorita Guitierrez who was sitting on the little seat facing back. Greg walked aimlessly down the Drive, a prey to heavy doubts and anxieties. Suppose that after all there was an understanding between the other girl and the deceitful Bianca: suppose they had shared his note and were even now laughing over it. That this was inconsistent with the facts as he knew them, had no effect on Greg at the moment. He was jealous, and incapable of reasoning clearly.

Meanwhile time hung heavy on his hands, and once more he walked half the length of the town. It was impossible for him to put his mind to anything else until his doubts were resolved.

Hickey returned to the yard at one. Before exchanging a word with him, Greg flung open the door of the cab, and thrust his hand behind the back seat. His fingers met with a folded paper that he drew out with burning eagerness. His first feeling on beholding it was one of blank disappointment for it seemed to be his own note. But upon opening it he saw that while it was his own note, she had written an answer on the back. His eyes flew over the microscopic lines.

"My friend:

"I am writing this in the rest room of a department store, having given my jailer the slip for a moment. It must be brief. Bianca watches me by his orders I suppose: I cannot imagine what has made them suddenly suspicious of me. She tries to keep me from guessing that she watches; a pretty comedy! I will explain more fully when I see you. For I must see you. It is impossible for me to plan anything by letter. There is one thing that ought to be done; de Socotra should be watched. Find a reliable man to do it if you can. You will be needed for other things. We haven't seen him for the last two days, but he telephoned mamma that he'd be at the office of the Managuayan consul—East Thirty-sixth Street at three to-day, if she wanted to call him up. He could be picked up there.

"Ah, my friend, I was so glad to get your good letter! How ever can I thank you! How clever you are! I laughed at your stratagems in the midst of my anxieties. How nice you looked yesterday morning, and what a blessed relief to see you unharmed! I burn to hear all that has happened. Trust me, I will find a way.

"Amy."

A great, glad reaction took place in Greg's breast. The pale December sun suddenly shone with the warmth of June, and the dingy, muddy yard seemed transfigured. As for Hickey, he could have hugged him. She trusted him! called him friend! gave him her own name! Amy! how sweet and how absolutely fitting! Nothing foreign about Amy!

But a lover is never satisfied for long. Hard upon his first warmth a little chill struck through his breast. Friendship was all very well in its way, but he wanted more than that. He thought of the supercilious Castilian, and writhed. Did *he* get more? He was aware of the fact that a girl feeling herself safely anchored to one man becomes free of her "friendship" to others. If she ever intended to give more perhaps she would not so readily have given so much!

He was recalled to himself by the sight of Hickey's sly grin. Evidently he was giving everything away in his face. Frowning portentously he asked very offhand what had happened.

"Nothing," said Hickey. "I done just what you said. The three ladies come out of the apartment house together. I carried 'em from one store to another shopping. I caught the little girl looking at me funny-like once or twice, but I never let anything on. When I took 'em back home, I knocked off twenty per cent as you said, and the old lady fell for it like a baby. She engaged me to call for 'em again at two thirty to take them to a concert at Harmony Hall."

"Good!" said Greg. "I'll write an answer to this while you're eating. Get a good dinner, Hickey."

Hickey grinned slyly, and gave the windshield a wipe. As Greg walked away he murmured to himself: "Cupid's messenger, that's me!"

Greg sat at his table biting his pen. It was not that he had nothing to say but too much. His heart was charged with enough matter to fill a quire—but there was that damned Castilian! He dared not let himself go until the other was explained. He made a mighty effort to be merely friendly as she had been—warmer feelings only broke through once or twice as will be seen.

"Certainly we must meet. It is too dangerous to commit things to paper. But I know so little of the circumstances surrounding you that I must leave the arrangements to you. All I can say is, rely on me absolutely—for anything. How weak that sounds! Please don't thank me. What I have done is nothing. It was just an adventure. I shall not be satisfied until you make some real demands on me. I am making friends for us. In case of need you can depend on the driver. Why do you stay where you are if you are surrounded by enemies? I have read your letter a dozen times already, trying to guess what is hidden between the lines. Not what I'd like to find there, I'm afraid. Please don't insist so hard on my being your friend. It makes me savage. Find some way to let me see you. This uncertainty is horrible. I can do nothing but walk the streets. I will see that a certain party is watched. I hope you wrote to me during lunch time, but I don't suppose you did. I will look while the concert is going on.

"Greg."

It must not be supposed that this was arrived at in a single draft. Greg was still writing when Hickey called up to him that it was time to start, whereupon he finished in a hurry and carried it down to its hiding-place. To Hickey he said:

"I suppose they'll want you to carry them home from the concert. While it's going on you can hang around and pick up any business that offers. But first of all after you have dropped them at the hall meet me at the corner of Sixth and Forty-third so that I can see if she left anything for me on the way down."

Hickey drove out of the yard with the sly grin that provoked Greg, or half provoked him, for at the same time he

was well assured that he was faithfully served in Hickey.

Greg looked around the taxi-yard. Three of the cabs were in, the owners presumably sleeping inside. Greg peeped through the windows considering which one would best suit his purpose; the morose Blossom, honest, thick-witted Bull Tandy, or old Pa Simmons. He decided on the latter; Pa Simmons, red and white as a snow-apple, was so indubitably the cabman, no one would ever suspect him of acting in another capacity. Pa Simmons was never seen without his cabman's overcoat; he seemed atrophied from the waist down, and one guessed that he had not walked more than a hundred yards at a time in thirty years. In imagination he still dwelt fondly on the days when he had driven a gentleman's private hansom; now his vehicle was an antique Pack-Arrow that still retained a faded air of luxury in its dim enamel and worn upholstery.

At Greg's summons Pa Simmons sprang up blinking rapidly, on the alert for a fare. There was something at once plucky, piteous and comical in his assumption of youthful sprightliness. His face fell at the sight of Greg, for he suspected a practical joke. Yet he and all the cabmen liked Greg for his unaffected friendly ways. All knew by now that Greg was involved in a fascinating mystery.

"Will you take a job for me, Pa?" asked Greg.

"On the level?" asked Pa Simmons warily.

"Dead level. By the day, with gasoline and all expenses. I want you to do a little detective work."

Pa Simmons' blue eyes brightened. "I'm your man! I allus said I'd make a A1 sleuth. Lay the matter open to me. It'll be a pleasant change not to be looking for fares for a few days."

An arrangement was quickly effected, and Pa Simmons, armed with a careful description of de Socotra, was dispatched to the address on Thirty-sixth Street.

Half an hour later Greg was impatiently waiting at the corner of Sixth Avenue and Forty-third Street. Down the block he could see the cabs driving up to Harmony Hall, and the two streams of pedestrians converging at the door. As he waited he took out his note-book and wrote:

"There's nothing special to say since morning except that I have put a reliable man on you know whose trail. But I thought you might like to have a greeting on your way home from the concert, and the real reason is that it's such a pleasure to write to you that I can't help myself anyway. I'm waiting on the corner for Hickey (your driver) to see if there is anything for me tucked behind the seat. Of course it is scarcely possible you had a chance to write while you were home to lunch, but I shall be disappointed just the same if there is nothing there. Queer kind of post-office, isn't it? Here he is——"

Hickey drew up beside him with his grin. But he might grin as hard as he liked for all Greg cared if there was a note there. His eager fingers did indeed meet with a little folded square of paper and he drew it out beaming.

Hickey remarked: "I guess it takes some managing for her always to get that same seat when they go out."

Greg read:

"I have to be as quick and sly as a rat with my little pad of paper that I keep inside my dress and pull out when I get a few seconds alone, and whisk out of sight again when I hear anybody coming. So excuse me if I sound scrappy. We are dressing for the concert. I suppose I ought to wait until I hear from you before writing again, but I have had an idea and I can't keep it to myself. There is a young man in Managuay who used to be my dear uncle's assistant or secretary and is, I am sure, his devoted friend. He must know all the circumstances leading up to this dreadful situation. We ought to have him here. His name is Mario Estuban; his address 37 Calle Pizarro, Santiago de

Managuay. Please cable him and ask if he can come at once, expenses paid. If he answers yes I'll give you the money to be forwarded by cable. He is poor. Mamma calls that it is time to go. First thing as we seat ourselves in the cab I shall slyly slide my hand behind me. I shall be so sad if there is nothing there, but I am sure there will be.

"Amy."

Upon reading this Greg finished his own note:

"I have just read yours written as you started for the concert. It makes me happy. Why? because you feel about these notes the same as I do—only not so much. At least you say you do. Girls have the privilege of keeping their real thoughts to themselves. I wish I knew yours. I'm on my way to send the cablegram.

"Greg."

Hickey went on to pick up a dollar or two for the firm if he could, while Greg wended his way to the cable office. He smiled to himself thinking of the imperious little lady who so coolly commanded a man from Central America to come to her aid.

At six o'clock Greg and Hickey met in the yard. Once more Greg, telling himself there could not be a letter for him,—how could she have written during the concert?—nevertheless felt for it, and lo! the little folded square was there, fatter than the others.

"Dear Greg:

(It was the first time she had used his name; he had not dared write hers.) "Isn't there an old saying to the effect that in boldness there is safety? If there isn't, there ought to be. I am sitting right out in the open theatre writing to you, and I mean to take my time and say all I want. Mamma sits between me and Bianca, so that the latter cannot read what I am writing. Her efforts to do so, while making believe not to, are too funny! Does she think I am a complete idiot? I write small to tantalize her. Finally, unable to bear it any longer she asks with an innocent air to whom am I writing? I reply with an air no less innocent: 'to Clorinda.' Clo-clo is my chum in Managuay. Bianca then says with gentle reproach: 'But you know, dear' (she dears me with every breath, the crocodile!), 'Francisco asked us not to write home during this trip because it was necessary to his business that people should not know for the present where we were.' I reply: 'I'll show it to Francisco when we see him, and if he disapproves I'll tear it up.' Of course I'll contrive to have another letter ready to show him.

"I am not enjoying the concert any the less because I am writing to you. The orchestra is playing the Romeo and Juliet overture—Tschaikowsky's, and delicious chills are running up and down my spine. The nicest thing about music is that one doesn't have to think about it while it plays. One may think what one pleases and the music glorifies one's little thoughts. I feel now as if I were an elf swinging to one of the prisms of the chandelier under the ceiling. Did you ever feel like that? I wonder if things will ever arrange themselves so that you and I can go to a concert together like regular friends. But I forgot—for some reason you do not want to be friends. I do not understand that part of your letter. It grieves me.

"I must tell you I have made a plan for us to meet to-night—we need not meet as friends, but just to talk business. Our maid Nina is devoted to me, and I can depend on her absolutely. Fortunately it happens to be the custom in our family that each one's room is his castle. We lock our doors when we retire, and no one thinks of disturbing another except in case of necessity. Well, when everybody is safe in bed I shall dress myself in some of Nina's clothes—since my former disguise seemed to shock you so terribly, and Nina will let me out by the service entrance. There is a separate servant's stairway and elevator in this building. And she will let me in again when I come home. Let the driver be waiting for me in Ninety-fourth Street, say, at eleven, for we go to bed early. Don't

you come yourself, the risk is too great. I particularly forbid you to come. Arrange a suitable place for us to meet, and we will decide what must be done.

"Silly! the reason I stay where I am is very simple; I have no other place to go. Mamma is the only friend I have in America barring yourself. I am not at all prudish, but I couldn't very well—well, could I?"

"They are playing *D'Apres Midi d'un Faun* now.

"Your rejected friend,
"Amy."

CHAPTER X

AMY'S STORY

Greg's immediate impulse was to confide in Bessie Bickle. That good soul looked interested but dubious.

"Will she have her boy's pants on?" she demanded.

"No," said Greg smiling.

"That's all right, then. Mind, I'm not saying I blame her; if she can get away with it, all right. But I wouldn't have the face myself to talk to a girl with boy's pants on; I wouldn't know where to look. You can have my parlor to sit in."

"You must come in too," said Greg. "I want you to know her. She needs a woman friend."

"But you said she was a high-toned lady. What would she want with the likes of me?"

"Well, I don't know, if it comes to that, you're pretty high-toned yourself."

"Go along with you!"

Bessie's parlor was the front room over the grocery store. The room was the secret pride of her heart, though, poor soul, she had little enough occasion to use it. So carefully was it kept that it looked as spick and span as when it had first been created, perhaps twenty-five years before. There was a Brussels carpet on the floor with a design of bunches of red roses on a green ground, and there was a green plush "parlor suit." In the center of the room stood a marble-topped table with wonderfully curly legs, and upon it there was a plush album, and two piles of "gift-books" placed criss-cross. On the mantel-piece was an imitation onyx clock flanked by a superb pair of near-bronze Vikings with battle-axes which you could take out of their hands if you wished.

Over the mantel hung a crayon portrait of Bessie's second husband, the late Mr. Bickle, fresh from the barber's. He occupied the place of honor presumably because he was the more recent. He was faced from across the room by Mr. Daniel Creavy, his predecessor. Mr. Creavy was cross-eyed and the crayon artist, evidently a grim realist, had disdained to modify his squint by a jot. There were several other pictures colored and representing sentimental situations entitled: "Parted," "The Tiff," and "The Green-eyed Monster."

As the time drew near when Hickey might be supposed to return with his passenger, Greg and Bessie waited in the parlor. Bessie in a stiff, rustling black taffeta was magnificent and very high-toned indeed. She had adopted a manner to match, and sat in awful silence with her hands in her lap, while Greg fidgeted. He found himself endlessly computing the number of yards that had gone to make that voluminous costume. The word had gone round the yard below that Greg's friend, the little South American Princess (as reported by Hickey), was coming that night, and one by one they all found some excuse for dropping in on the chance of seeing her: Bull Tandy, Blossom, Ginger

McAfee; only Pa Simmons was missing.

They heard the machine-gun when she first turned the corner from Houston Street, and Greg sprang down the stairs. Hickey had been instructed to bring his passenger to the front door of course. Bessie waited in monumental dignity at the top of the stairs. When Amy alighted from the flivver Greg, had he not known it must be she, must have looked twice before recognizing her. In her comical tight little jacket and elaborate cheap hat she was the belle of the service entrance to the life. Amy, it appeared, was an incorrigible comedienne; though there was no need for her to play her part just then, she could not help bristling, ogling and flirting her skirts like the coquette of below stairs. Greg chuckled and Hickey roared.

But by the time she reached the head of the stairs she had sobered down. From Bessie's imposing port she gathered, no doubt, that the landlady was not a person to be trifled with. Her abrupt transition to demureness caused Greg a fresh chuckle.

When she removed the absurd hat and jacket she put off the parlormaid for good. In her simple dress she was her own exquisite little self. Bessie, in the presence of one even surer of herself than Bessie was, became a little uneasy, and it was Amy's turn then to put Bessie at her ease. As for Greg he could not look at her enough. It was the first time he had seen her glorious hair uncovered. It was the color of bright copper, of a certain glowing variety of chrysanthemum, of a horse chestnut fresh out of its burr. It was the sort of hair, full of light, that does itself; any old twist creates the effect of a coiffure.

Greg gazed in a sort of delighted despair. He thought: "She is ever so much more charming than I supposed. She's a new woman every five minutes; a dozen women in one! What man could ever hope to tie her down. She would always elude him like a pixie. She's too charming; a man would have no chance against her. God help the man that she enslaves; she'll keep him jumping through hoops!"

Meanwhile Bessie and Amy were doing the polite.

"It's an honor to welcome you to my poor home, Miss de Soak-oater," said the former grandly.

"Miss Wilmot," corrected Amy.

Bessie looked surprised. "But Mr. Parr said——"

"I know, that's part of my story. I'll tell you directly. What a charming room you have, Mrs. Bickle. So cozy and characteristic!"

After that Bessie was hers. "Well, I aim to keep one nice room," she said complacently, "though I live in a street where niceness is hardly looked for."

"What must you think of me appearing from nowhere?" said Amy.

"Mr. Parr has told me about you. It is a strange story."

"But he only knows a little of it. I have come to tell you the whole."

"Wait a minute," interrupted Greg. "The fellows are down-stairs. They sacrificed half their earnings to-night on the chance of seeing you. Do you mind if I bring them up for a moment?"

"By all means bring them up!" said Amy.

When Greg went to call them Bessie with an apology disappeared for a moment, returning with a strip of linoleum which she put down near the door.

"There's a mud-hole in the yard," said she.

The four men—for of course Hickey came with them—filed into the room in their shabby overcoats, caps in hand. A threatening look in Bessie's eyes warned them not to step off the linoleum. It was hardly big enough to hold

them all. They were almost overcome. Though they carried such young ladies in their cabs as a matter of course, to be personally introduced to one of them was another matter. They could scarcely lift their eyes to hers; their voices died away in their throats. There was nothing of the pixie about Amy now. Towards these dumb souls she exhibited an angelic kindness.

"You're Hickey," she said to the first in line. "Of course I feel as if I knew you quite well already, but I'm glad to have the chance of speaking to you."

"This is Bull Tandy," said Greg indicating the next.

"William Tandy," corrected that individual acutely distressed.

"Oh, I like Bull much better," said Amy quickly. "There's something so strong and steady about it."

"This is Ginger McAfee," said Greg.

"Another nickname! And a good one! You look gingery!"

The delighted Ginger could only grin and wag his head from side to side like an imbecile school-boy.

"Blossom," said Greg coming to the end. "Nobody knows his other name."

"Billups," said Blossom in a voice so sepulchral they all had to laugh, and their embarrassment was much relieved.

"How do you do, Mr. Billups," said Amy. "Don't mind if we laugh at your name. We like you none the less for it."

"You have another friend here, Pa Simmons," said Greg. "He's away on your job to-night. You'll have to meet him another time."

At this point Bessie coughed as a hint that it was time for the men to go. But Ginger McAfee stepped forward to the extreme edge of the linoleum and cleared his throat.

"Excuse me, Miss," said he, "but us fellows made up something we wanted to say to you, and they picked on me to put it over, because they said I got the tongue of a ready speaker. But it ain't much to say. It's just this. Without wishing to pry into your private affairs at all we heard that you was up against it like. I mean that you had undertaken the job of putting a gang of crooks where they belong. Well, what we want to say is, if we could help we'd jump at the chance, that's all. If you need a man or a gang to back you up, try us. Us and our boats is yours to command!"

Amy was touched. Her eyes were misty as she replied simply: "Thank you, Ginger, and all of you. It's sweet to find friends. I shan't forget you."

After they had filed out Amy sat down on the green sofa and started her tale.

"My real name is Amy Wilmot. My father, Gerald Wilmot, was United States minister to Managuay. Managuay, as you know, is a small Central American republic. During my father's term of office there he married a Managuayan lady, Emilia Bareda, and I was their only child. My mother died while I was still an infant. My father brought me up with the assistance of a succession of servants more or less inefficient. Of course I was very badly brought up, but I was happy.

"My father was a generous, frank and liberal-minded man, and all the men in Managuay like him were attracted to our house. Young as I was I can still remember the good talk around our table—especially since I have begun to try to think for myself. My uncle Tony, Antonio Bareda, was such a man as my father, and they were the closest of friends. Uncle Tony was continually at our house. He understood children and I idolized him.

"Well, the climate of Managuay is an unhealthy one except for natives, and when I was eleven years old a fever

carried off my kind, wise father. I was too young of course to realize what his loss meant to me. Of course I grieved as children grieve, but like a child I soon adapted myself to my new surroundings.

"These were very different from what I had known up to that time. Since my father had no near relatives, I was adopted by my mother's cousin, Señora de Socotra, who taught me to call her mamma. She is a dear kind soul too, and I love her dearly. The only thing I have against her is that she gave me a Spanish name, while I was still too young to realize what I was giving up. She called me Amèlie de Socotra, by which name of course I have always been known. But I mean to take my own name back now.

"Mamma is devotedly attached to her husband, and actually after living with him for twenty years has no idea but that he is a model of all the virtues. But she is simplicity itself. I have noticed since I have become suspicious of him myself that Mamma will believe any tale, however wild, that he tells her. It is his discovery that I am not so gullible that has made him suddenly suspicious of me.

"For some reason I never could bring myself to call him 'father.' He encouraged me to call him Francisco, and I have always done so. He has invariably been kind to me in his casual, offhand way, which is not the same of course as a real affection. I always acted towards him as my instinct told me he wished me to act, that is to say, the amusing child, the plaything for idle hours. He was the master, the source of all good things. If anybody had asked me if I loved him, I suppose I would have said yes, but I can see now that I never did, though I saw nothing but his charming, good-humored, amusing side.

"The de Socotras are of the old Spanish stock, very prominent in Managuay; and in addition Francisco has made a great fortune to revive the ancient glories of his house. How he made it I don't know. I am ashamed to confess my ignorance of the practical side of life. While Francisco is always deep in affairs he has no regular, visible business like other men. He has no office. He never appears to do any work, but just 'confers' with men of all kinds. It has something to do with politics.

"But there is no doubt about the reality of the fortune. He was rich before I went to live with them. We live in grand style at home. I remember how grand it seemed to me when first I went to them. Later of course I learned to take everything for granted, and came to think that it was the only way for nice people to live. We have a fine house in Santiago and a magnificent country place among the hills. I had horses to ride, automobiles, jewels, troops of servants who looked up to me as a superior being. We went to Havana every year, or to Paris if Mamma felt equal to the trip, and bought more clothes than we could ever wear.

"It is small wonder that a girl should be spoiled by a life like this. Half-grown girls are fatally impressionable. I completely forgot the saner, healthier ideas I had been taught in the beginning, and soon began to look upon myself as one of the chosen ones of earth, responsible only to God who looked with great leniency on the faults of one like me. Life was very busy and pleasant. Everything helped one not to think. I imbibed the idea that it spoiled a woman's looks to think. So I just frivoled.

"I was a good deal freer than the other Managuyan girls and I got the name of being very daring. Much was excused me because I was half-American. I was the one who got up the private theatricals and took the boys' parts myself. The old ladies talked with bated breath of how I rode and hunted in knickerbockers. I loved to shock them. You do not know our Spanish dowagers. They acted on me like a perpetual dare.

"I never saw my dear Uncle Tony after I went to live with the de Socotras. I missed him at first, but it was delicately intimated to me that he was really not one of us, and after awhile I believed it. Little girls are natural snobs. When I grew up I began to understand that Francisco and Uncle Tony were on opposite sides in politics. In Managuay men become extraordinarily bitter over politics. In our house Uncle Tony was called renegade, socialist, traitor to his class, atheist, and I don't know what. I had only the vaguest idea of what was meant by politics. I never read the newspapers.

"I cannot give you any idea of the situation in Managuay at present except to say that in a general way Uncle Tony was on the side of the poor people and Francisco, of course, on the side of the rich. I sided with Francisco naturally. They told me the poor people were envious and discontented; that if they were not kept under, they would burn and destroy and never rest until they had made us as poor as themselves.

"One day in Managuay,—it is really only a week ago, though it seems like seven years, I have traveled so far since,—we were still at Casa del Monte, the country house, and Nina came to me—at home Nina is my own maid, though when we travel she serves both Mamma and me,—Nina came to me and said that a gentleman wished to speak to me and that he was waiting under the banyan tree in the *Jardin des Plantes*.

"For a moment I was very indignant at the idea of any man bidding me to a rendezvous through my maid, but I saw from the expression on Nina's face that this was no ordinary cavalier. I asked her who it was. 'Señor Bareda,' she said in a scared way; 'He said to tell you, your Uncle Tony.'

"Well, at the mere sound of the dear name a sudden warmth flooded my breast. I forgot all the harsh things I had heard said about him in that house; I forgot that I considered myself on the other side from him; I remembered only the days when he had taken me on his knee and recited funny rhymes about the King of the Cannibal Islands. I ran to him as fast as I could go.

"The *Jardin des Plantes* was Francisco's private botanical gardens, planned after the famous gardens in Martinique. It occupied a great stretch of level ground at the foot of the hill on which the house was built. Trees, shrubs and flowers from every quarter of the earth were growing there. The banyan tree is famous in Managuay. It is far from the house, but near the public road on the other side. It made a little natural arbor all to itself, and there was a stone bench under it, on which I found my Uncle Tony sitting. I wondered who had steered him to the spot.

"He looked so sad and kind and patient, and he was not at all fashionably dressed, that my heart went right out to him; the selfish, self-indulgent years slipped away and I felt like a child again. He won me before he said a word. He kissed me on the forehead as he used to do, and said smiling:

"'Is it very wrong for a gentleman to ask for a secret meeting with a young lady if he is sixty-four years old, and she his niece? If I had gone to the house I should not have been admitted.'

"'But how did you get here?' I asked. 'How did you get hold of Nina?'

"'Her brother is a friend of mine. I sent a note to her through him.'

"Every word of that talk is engraved on my mind. 'Sit down beside me,' he said. 'Let me look at you. How beautiful you are!' He said that you know; I merely repeat his words. 'And quite the glass of fashion, the mold of form! What have they taught you, my child, except how to dress well?'

"When he asked me that I suddenly seemed inexpressibly ignorant to myself. 'Why—why, nothing much, I guess,' I stammered. He smiled such a dear smile. 'Oh, well, if you feel that you know nothing there is still hope for you.'

"'I suppose you wonder what my errand is,' he went on, 'and now that I am here I scarcely know how to tell you. It was an impulse of the heart. I felt somehow as if my heart could not rest unless I saw you before I went away.'

"'You are going away!' I cried, already experiencing the sinking sensation that one feels at the prospect of losing an old friend. 'They are driving you away!' I added, thinking of Francisco.

"He smiled a different kind of smile. 'No, they are not driving me away. I go for Managuay.'

"'Where?'

"'To the United States. I sail on the *Alliança* to-morrow. It is a dangerous errand from which I may not return.'

"'Dangerous!' I cried like the foolish child I was, 'but there's no danger nowadays!'

"He smiled and answered with another question. 'Do you know anything about me? what I stand for? what de Socotra stands for?'

"'No,' I said, 'Francisco only abuses you. He tells us nothing.'

"My uncle was silent for awhile. It was at this time that he took out the little black book and showed it to me, saying what I repeated to you night before last: 'The happiness of a whole people is bound up in this!' But he seemed to change his mind, and put it away without saying more. 'No, I shall not tell you,' he said, 'for if anything happens to me de Socotra would be your only protector. I dare not take the responsibility of setting you against him. I will only say this; that he opposes all I hold dear. And he would say the same of me I have no doubt.'

"I am so ignorant!' I murmured.

"Well, at twenty years old that is natural enough,' he said kindly, 'but at twenty-five, say, it will be different. God will never accept ignorance as an excuse from an adult. That was really my purpose in coming. I felt it my duty to my sister's child to make an effort to awaken you while I could.' He looked around at the luxuriant, perfectly-kept gardens. 'You would never awake in this castle of indolence.'

"But I am considered extremely wide awake,' I objected.

"I mean in your mind. It is time you thought of things.'

"What things?'

"Well, life and people and how you stand towards them. You must read and observe and make up your own mind as to what is right. You must examine the rules that have been laid down for you and decide for yourself whether they are meet.'

"But what is the use?' I said like a child. 'Here I am. I can't change anything.'

"You can change yourself.'

"What's the matter with me?'

"He smiled in both kindness and fun. 'One who did not love you might call you a thoughtless, pleasure-loving butterfly. Are you satisfied with that?'

"I believe I began to cry then. I had always thought very well of myself, you see.

"He went on: 'I know it seems a dreadful task to the young, to think. But it need not be. Try the wings of thought warily. Be satisfied with little flights at first. I mean, think with your heart, too. That ought not to be hard for a woman. Consider the poor people in the city below, who, by the workings of an evil system, are actually enslaved to the rich. Are you willing to continue to pass your days in delicious idleness at the cost of the women and children down there; the little children already bent and emaciated by overwork, who have no release in sight but death?'

"I am not responsible!' I cried aghast.

"But you are!' he said sternly. 'For the very people that I speak of work on the plantations and in the factories that pay the dividends that bought this exquisite dress you are wearing, and that string of pearls around your neck.'

"I tore off the pearls and tried to press them into his hand. 'Take them and sell them and give them the money,' I implored him.

"Put them on again,' he said coldly. 'They do not ask for charity, but justice.'

"Well, there was much more to the same effect. I don't suppose you need it as much as I did, so I will hasten on with my story. This was exactly the way Francisco had said that Antonio Bareda talked, but somehow in my uncle's own kind voice it had a very different effect; it had the ring of the truth. If he had been content simply to have lectured me like a school-master I should have listened with my tongue in my cheek, and would have hastened to tell Francisco afterward, and laugh with him. But Uncle Tony seemed sorry for me; that was what brought the tears to my eyes. And he was so very kind, and so ready to laugh, too, and he understood me so well. I didn't understand half what he said, but I knew from his deep sad eyes that he was right. I had never seen the proud and confident Francisco's eyes soften.

"When he left me I wept bitterly. I cannot describe my state of mind; fear for him, fear for myself, lonesomeness, self-distrust, all had a part in it. Of course the final effect was what he had intended. Willy-nilly I began to think of these matters. Since that hour I have not been able to stop thinking. And even if this dreadful tragedy had not taken place I should never have been the same as I was before.

"When Francisco came up from the town that day I watched him with a new and critical gaze. Under the elegant, courteous, smiling air, I became aware of a suggestion of ruthless cruelty. For the first time it struck me that his handsome eyes were too close together. On the present occasion I saw that under his debonair nonchalance which never varied, he was deeply concerned about something.

"At dinner when the servants had left the room, the cause of it came out. He was obliged to make a hurried trip to New Orleans on affairs of the government, he said. I must explain that mamma is of a soft and affectionate nature and prides herself on the fact that she has never been parted from Francisco. Francisco, whatever his faults, is devoted to mamma and humors her in all things. Consequently he is obliged to carry us with him wherever he goes, though I am sure it is often inconvenient. So when he said New Orleans we began to plan our packing.

"We would go aboard his yacht *La Tinita* at bed-time, he said, and she would weigh anchor as soon as she was coaled. It must be given out that we were merely going cruising in the Caribbean, he said. Secrecy had often been enjoined on us before, and we had taken it as a matter of course. To his own household Francisco could do no wrong.

"But this time my suspicions were aroused. I wondered what devilment he was up to. It did not occur to me to connect our sudden departure with my uncle's journey. 'New Orleans' put me off the track. The *Alliança* went to New York. Moreover the idea of a personal enmity between the two men had not yet been suggested to me. I merely thought of them as belonging to different parties.

"At sea next day I had the impulse to try to draw out Francisco. He is always especially good-tempered at sea. We were sitting in deck-chairs under the lee of the after deck-house; mamma was there too, and I said:

"Francisco, what is the political situation in Managuay?"

"He stared and laughed. 'Good Heavens, child! what put the idea of politics into your head?'

"I'm no longer a child,' I objected. 'I must begin to know about things.'

"Not politics, I hope!"

"What is politics, anyway?"

"Politics is knavish tricks,' he said teasingly.

"Well, you're a politician, aren't you?"

"No, I'm a statesman,' he said with a wink.

"Please be serious. What party do you belong to?"

"The Conservative party. Why?"

"What party does my Uncle Tony belong to?"

"I saw that I had flicked him on the raw. His eyes narrowed, he sucked in his lip. Almost immediately he was smiling again. 'What on earth made you think of him just then?'

"I often think of him.'

"What have you heard about him lately?"

"The anxiety with which he asked this suggested to me the wisdom of lying. 'Nothing but what you say about him,' I replied with a clear brow.

"Are you still fond of him?" he asked with a queer look.

"How could I be?" I answered, 'not having seen him in eleven years.'

"I'm afraid you would find your Uncle Tony much changed,' he said gravely. Francisco's manner was really admirable, but I could not forget his terrified start at the first mention of the other man's name. 'He too, has become a politician. You ask me to what party he belongs; well, he calls himself a liberal, but that is a cloak used by many an unsuccessful self-seeking man. I'm afraid your Uncle Tony must be put down as a thoroughly bad man, my dear. He is poor, as you know; his patrimony was squandered before it reached him. Well, poverty is no disgrace of course, but it is the way in which a man sets about to rehabilitate his fortunes that betrays his quality. Most men set to work; others fall to scheming. Your Uncle Tony has chosen the worser way, I'm sorry to say. He is what men call an agitator, a demagogue. His sole aim is to stir up strife. He has deliberately set to work to inflame the passions of the mob to the point of revolution, not caring how much ruin is wrought thereby, or what blood spilt, if he may thereby be carried to a place of power. Do you understand?'

"Perfectly,' I said. I thought of my uncle's deep sad eyes and did not believe a word of it. The possessor of those eyes a 'thoroughly bad man,'—impossible. I began to suspect that the 'thoroughly bad man' was much nearer me at that moment. From that time forward Francisco ceased to have the slightest influence over me.

"Our talk about politics languished. 'Put it out of your pretty head, my dear!' said Francisco. 'Thank God! that horrible unsexed creature, the political woman, has not yet penetrated to our Managuayan Eden. Never forget that a woman's sole duty is to be beautiful. Leave politics to us coarser beings, men.'

"I saw that my political education would not be much furthered by Francisco, and that I should probably learn more from him by appearing to be the feather-headed creature that he commended. So I started to chatter. But he was not perfectly satisfied that he had laid the political bogie in me. More than once during the remainder of the voyage I caught him glancing at me queerly. He was thinking perhaps of my half-American ancestry. Francisco hates Americans, though he never lets that appear of course while he's in America.

"It was on Wednesday night that we left Santiago de Managuay. *La Tinita* is fast, and we landed in New Orleans on Friday. We had no sooner got there than Francisco announced that his plans were changed, and we were going on to New York by train. As soon as he said New York I began to wonder if his trip had anything to do with my uncle.

"We left New Orleans on the first train. Two men joined us there, Managuayans. When I say joined us, I mean they conferred with Francisco en route. He did not present them to us. My curiosity was fully aroused now. I longed to hear what they talked about. But they held all their conferences in a private compartment.

"We reached New York on Sunday morning and went to the Meriden. We found Bianca Guterrez already established there. Bianca is a second cousin of Francisco's. I don't know how she got to New York. She was in Managuay three weeks ago. I must say that in Managuay the women look rather askance at Bianca, and she does not exactly move in society. She is a prime favorite with the men of our set, particularly Francisco. I have sometimes thought,—but that doesn't signify.

"When we reached the Meriden other men kept turning up, none of whom was presented to us. From one thing and other, scraps of telephone conversation, chance remarks picked up, I gathered that there was a little circle of Managuayan politicians established here in New York, whose meeting-place was in that house on Ninth Street. What their purpose was I could not guess. There were some Americans among them too.

"In particular there was one man, Abanez, who seemed to be a sort of leader among them, a leader under Francisco you understand; for it was clear to me that Francisco was the master of them all.

"The day we arrived this Abanez was closeted with Francisco for awhile in our sitting-room at the hotel, and at last I had an opportunity to overhear one of Francisco's mysterious conferences. My bedroom adjoined the sitting-

room on one side, mamma's on the other; she was asleep. I don't know where Bianca was. Her room was in a different part of the hotel.

"I was in my room when Francisco and Abanez entered the sitting-room. Perhaps Francisco thought I was asleep too, or it may be that it never occurred to him that the doors are thinner in this country than at home. In the beginning they were cautious enough, but as they went on they forgot and raised their voices a little. As soon as I heard them come in, I softly drew the key out of my door and put my ear to the keyhole. I felt not the slightest compunctions in eavesdropping, for I was sure that I was helping the right.

"It was maddening at first, they talked so low. I could hear nothing. Then Francisco, it appeared, lost his temper. I heard him say: 'I'll tell you why I came up here. It looked to me as if this job was in a fair way of being bungled. I wanted to oversee things myself. Do you understand the importance of it? Do you understand that if the slightest thing goes wrong it will mean complete ruin for all of us? On the other hand if it's properly carried through, we can sit back, we'll have no more trouble.'

"Abanez' reply I could not hear. From his tone I guessed that he was trying to placate Francisco. The latter then said:

"'I didn't think much of the man you sent down, this de Silva.'

"Abanez said deprecatingly: 'He was the best I could lay hands on at such short notice. As I told you, I hoped you might be able to supplant him with somebody better from down there.'

"'In Managuay?' said Francisco scornfully. 'Where everybody and everything is known? What chance would we have of foisting any of our people off on Bareda? As for Bareda's own people, they are incorruptible. I've tried them and I know.'

"Abanez evidently asked him next what was his objection to de Silva. Francisco replied impatiently:

"'A conceited little bravo. No one but a fool like Bareda could possibly have been taken in by him.'

"Again Abanez said something I could not hear.

"Francisco said: 'It was all right up to the time I left, but they will be thrown together for five days on the ship. Bareda may well smell a rat before they reach New York.'

"I missed Abanez' reply.

"Francisco went on impatiently: 'I didn't think much of the scheme he outlined to me either. It sounded fantastic. The simplest measures are always the best. Why didn't you have him taken to the Ninth Street house? You can drive right in there out of sight of the street.'

"Abanez said: 'That would have necessitated taking the taxi-driver into our confidence. We had no one on whom we could rely.'

"'Good God! Why didn't you buy a taxi-cab, and put one of our men on it?'

"'It did not seem feasible.'

"Francisco was getting angrier and angrier. 'Do you mean to tell me that you are going to depend on any chance taxi-cab that you pick up on the pier?'

"As Francisco stormed the other man became more obsequious. 'It could not be avoided,' he explained. 'You see when the steamship docks the cabs are admitted in single file and engaged by the passengers in order as they come. There was no way in which we could ensure that de Silva would get a particular cab.'

"'There is always a way!' cried Francisco. 'If you use a little head-work! Well, it's too late now to change de Silva's instructions. I wish I had attended to these preliminaries myself. Anyhow, I shall be on the pier. Later I'll go

to the ferry to see what has happened.'

"There was more, but Francisco seemed to have recollected caution, and I could not hear it. What I had heard caused me a terrible feeling of uneasiness, but I had nothing definite to go on. It is perfectly clear now, when we know what happened, but you must remember my situation. I never dreamed of anything so terrible as the truth. Think of my ignorance and inexperience. Why, I had lived in the same house with Francisco for nine years. I could not conceive of him as a murderer.

"But it was clear enough that mischief of some sort was afoot, with my Uncle Tony as the intended victim. I thought perhaps they intended to rob him of the little black book, on which he set such store. I determined to warn him if I could. I made up my mind that I would be on the pier myself when the *Allianca* came in, and tell him exactly what I had overheard.

"From a newspaper I learned that she was due the next day, Monday. Several times on Monday I called up the steamship office, and finally learned that she had been sighted, and was expected to land her passengers at ten o'clock Monday night.

"This was a blow. I had anticipated difficulties in getting away by myself during the day—living in a strange hotel, mamma did not want to let me out of her sight for a moment; but to get away at night seemed quite out of the question. I almost gave up. I was terrified on my own account too. One hears such awful tales of New York after dark.

"Fortunately I had Nina to help me. At first I decided to take her, and go openly to the pier in a cab, but then I recollected that Francisco was going to be there, and would certainly see us. I did not yet dare to defy him openly. Finally I decided to disguise myself and go alone.

"I sent Nina out to buy me an outfit of boy's clothes which she succeeded in smuggling into my room. At dinner Francisco remarked that he had a business engagement, but offered to take us to the theater on his way, if we wouldn't mind coming home in a cab by ourselves. I pleaded a headache, and of course mamma would not go without me.

"The same headache provided me with an excuse to go to bed after dinner. Dear mamma insisted on fussing over me until I nearly went out of my mind! The precious minutes were slipping by so fast! I only got rid of her by insisting that sleep alone would cure me, and that I must not be disturbed. The instant she left me Nina, who was waiting, slipped in and helped me dress. I got out of the hotel as I have told you. Nina had fixed matters with the watchman.

"I got a cab to the pier, but alas! I was too late. The *Alliança* was already made fast to her pier, and the passengers even then were driving away. Only those were left who were having trouble with their baggage. There was no sign of my uncle. But I saw Francisco at the entrance to the pier lighting a cigar, and I determined to follow him to see what was to come later.

"On that water-front street, he took a car bound uptown and rode to a ferry slip some blocks above. I was on the back platform. I remembered the references to a ferry in his talk with Abanez. At the ferry-house he met two men, men I had seen before at the hotel; he seemed to be surprised to find them there, and at what they told him. I dared not approach close enough to overhear what was said, for I knew that my disguise would not stand a close inspection. The three of them waited there for some time, obviously growing all the time more anxious and impatient.

"Finally Francisco set off across the plaza to a little hotel there, and went in to telephone perhaps, or to get himself a drink. I could not follow him in of course. While he was inside you drove up in your cab and went into the bar. Presently Francisco came out by another door. Something in the look of the cab seemed to arrest his attention. He looked it over. He opened the door a crack and peeped in. I know now what he saw there, but of course I couldn't guess then. He turned around with an ugly smile. Then you came out, and he engaged you, and rode off on the front seat. There was no other cab handy. I ran across the plaza after you, and managed to get on the same boat. Well, you know all the rest. That's my story."

Bessie had listened to this tale with ever-deepening indignation. "A black villain!" she cried. "This Francisco fellow! Him with his castle and his yacht and his money and all! He ain't got no call to be crooked. It must be pure cussedness. And I hope you bring him to the rope, I do!"

Amy had ended her story on a note of dejection, and now to Greg's surprise her eyes were full of tears. "It's not so simple," she murmured. "I think of mamma. This would kill her if she knew!"

Bessie made a clucking sound of sympathy. "But she'll have to know sooner or later," she said.

"She'll have to suffer of course," said Amy, "but I must think how to save her from the worst."

Bessie got up. "I expect you and Mr. Parr have your plans to talk over. I'm going down-stairs to make you a cup of hot coffee before you start out in the cold."

Greg thought: "Good old Bessie! She's a lady!"

Nevertheless, left alone with Amy as he had so much desired, a sudden diffidence overcame him, and he could find nothing to say. Amy had fallen into a kind of study, and scarcely seemed to be aware of his presence.

Finally he said: "What do you want me to do?"

"Ah, if I knew!" she murmured.

To Greg's direct masculine mind there was but one course to be taken. "We have the body safe," he said, "and the conversation you overheard in the hotel supplies the necessary link of evidence. I could go to the police and ask for his arrest."

The surprising girl's eyes flashed at him. "I will not have it!" she cried. "That is stupid!"

"But—but you said you wanted him brought to justice," stammered Greg.

"Would you expect me to go on the witness stand and swear his life away—with mamma listening there? Here in a strange country!"

"But you said—you were an American."

"So I am—in spirit. But I have lived all my life in Managuay. Give me time."

"But we cannot let him go free. That would be making ourselves accessory to the crime."

She looked at him strangely. "I shall not let him go free. I am thinking how to punish him. I shall punish him in a way that even you will admit is sufficient."

A dreadful fear made Greg's eyes widen.

She apprehended it without his speaking. "Oh, I shall not kill him myself," she said. "I suspect I am too much American for that."

She went on presently: "I have a feeling that the murder of my uncle is only the first act in a whole drama of crime that Francisco is planning. We must prevent it! If I only knew what was in that little book! You have had no answer to your cable to Estuban?"

Greg shook his head.

"Even if he comes it would be a week before he could get here. Francisco will not wait a week."

Bessie interrupted them to say that the boy from the druggist's at the corner had come to say that Greg was

wanted on the telephone.

"That will be Pa Simmons," said Greg. "Back in a jiffy."

This was what Greg heard over the wire in Pa Simmons' crinkly voice:

"This you, Greg? This is me. Do you get me? Well, I picked up that party all right at the address given, and I stuck to him closer than a brother all afternoon and evening. I'll give you a full report when I come in. I just called up now to say that at eleven-thirty I followed him to the Stickney Arms, and he's there yet. Looks to me like he was going to stay all night. If you want the place watched any longer you'll have to send up one of the boys to relieve me, because I'm all in. I gotta have my sleep."

"All right, Pa," said Greg. "Come on home."

When Greg got back to Bessie's, Bessie and Amy were drinking coffee together like sisters. A slight alteration in their demeanor as he came in, suggested that they were exchanging confidences that were denied him. Greg felt a little sore.

He reported what Pa Simmons had told him.

Amy sprang up. "Good!" she cried. "He'll stay all night of course. I'll go right home. If he still has the little black book upon him I promise you I'll get it before he leaves the apartment."

CHAPTER XI

THE RIDE HOME

Hickey brought the flivver round to the front door again. As Amy got in and saw Greg preparing to follow, she said with a great air of surprise:

"Oh, you're not coming."

"Why, of course I am," said Greg with a surprised air as good as hers. "Why not?"

"But it isn't in the least necessary. I came alone."

"I know. But I want to come."

"Oh, thank you, but I don't think you'd better."

"I'm coming," said Greg doggedly, and got in and closed the door.

She drew stiffly into her own corner, and stared out of the window. Greg not at all sure of his ground was nevertheless doggedly determined to see the thing through. His peace of mind demanded that he come to some kind of an understanding with her.

They rode for five blocks in silence.

Finally Greg said: "Why do you treat me so?"

It then appeared that this young lady who claimed to be an American still retained a considerable share of the fiery Latin temperament. "Treat you so!" she burst out. "Treat you so! How about the way you treat me! I showed you as plainly as I could that I didn't want you to come. What do you wish me to suppose when you come anyway? Do you wish to remind me that it is your cab, and you have a right to come?"

"But why?" stammered poor Greg. "What have I done since earlier to-night. Why didn't you want me to come?"

"Need you ask that?"

"I must ask it. What have I done?"

"Nothing. Men can be very dense when they wish to be!"

"I don't understand. Unless I have offended you in some way——"

"Well, I can't be riding around in taxi-cabs at one o'clock in the morning with a strange man, can I?"

"Oho!" said Greg, a great light breaking upon him. "But that's ridiculous!" he added presently.

"Thank you," she said acidly.

"But you rode around with me the other night later than this and thought nothing of it."

"That was different."

"And if we are engaged together in a serious affair, it *is* ridiculous to say that we may not be alone together."

"Oh, if you wish to be insulting now——"

The inconsistency of the reason she gave was such that Greg saw at once that she had some other reason. It turned a little knife in his breast. "I think I understand," he said bitterly.

"What do you think you understand?"

"You did not tell me your whole story to-night."

"I told you everything that bore upon the affair of my uncle and Francisco."

"You did not tell me you were engaged."

"What has that got to do with it?"

"You are engaged then?"

"Well—yes."

Greg groaned inwardly. Up to this moment he had been consoling himself with the assurance that the Castilian youth might have been lying.

It was she who broke the next long silence. "What difference does that make?"

"A great deal to me."

She perversely chose to misunderstand him. "Do you mean that you don't care to help an engaged girl?"

"I don't mean that at all," said Greg indignantly.

"What do you mean then?"

"Am I no more to you than a kind of detective to be dropped as soon as this case is done with?" he demanded bitterly. "Perhaps you expect to pay me for my services and let me go."

"If you're going to be hateful I don't know what to say."

"Neither do I," said Greg gloomily. "I guess there is nothing to be said."

Once more it was she who could not support the silence. "Who told you I was engaged?" she demanded.

"He did. The young man. I don't know his name."

"Where did you ever meet him?"

"In the Meriden. After he left you day before yesterday. I followed him into the bar and managed to get into conversation with him. I was trying then to find some way of getting into communication with you. He volunteered the information about being engaged to you. It came out of the clear sky to me."

She said, not with entire candor perhaps: "I am to understand, then, that you wish to have nothing more to do with me or my affairs."

"Nothing of the kind," he said, "I shall go through with it to the end."

"Why are you quarreling with me then?"—this with a plaintive note.

"I'm quarreling with you because yesterday in your letters you called me your friend; you led me to believe that I was something more to you than a useful person, yet you withheld this essential fact."

"But you knew it all the time."

"You didn't tell me. How did I know but what the man was lying?"

"He's incapable of lying!"

"Oh, now you're simply trying to change the issue."

He had her there. She fell silent.

Presently he went on with added bitterness. "What I can't understand is, when you said you were an American, when you said you loved America, how you could have chosen him."

"That's why," she said. "He's an American."

"What!"

"Half an American anyway. His father was an American like mine. His name is Henry Saunders."

"I fancy he must take after his mother," said Greg dryly.

Once more they rode for several blocks in a miserable silence, each looking out of his own window.

"I'm sorry I can't drop this painful subject," Greg said at last, "but I've got to know where Mr. Saunders comes in on our case."

"What do you mean? He doesn't come in at all."

"Is he on de Socotra's side?"

"He has nothing to do with politics."

"I see. What does he do?"

"Are you trying to insult him?"

"Not at all. Merely asking for a little information."

"He's very wealthy. He looks after his property and—er—he travels."

"I see. What would your uncle have said about him?"

"I don't know, I'm sure."

"But you said your uncle's ideas had very strongly affected you."

"That's true. But I wouldn't let him nor anybody else choose a man for me to marry."

"Of course not. But as the wife of Mr. Saunders do you expect to lead the kind of life your uncle recommended?"

"I don't admit your right to ask me any such question."

"Easy enough to say that when the question is hard to answer," said Greg bitterly.

"I wish I were home!" she said in a small voice.

But he would not spare her. "Why haven't you told Mr. Saunders everything that has happened?"

"Because—Oh, a thousand reasons! How many more questions do you expect me to answer?"

"Is it because you think he might not be willing to help you run down the murderers of Antonio Bareda?"

"You have no right to suggest such a thing!"

"But you said he was rich. Naturally he belongs to the rich man's party."

"He's honest and straightforward."

"Then why haven't you told him?"

"I wished to spare him."

"I'm sorry, but he must be told."

Her eyebrows went up. "Must? I don't like your tone. Why must he?"

"I should think you'd see yourself. You and I can't be engaged on these secret matters and go around together without his being told. I must insist on his being told for my own sake."

It need hardly be said that in taking this lofty moral position Greg was not wholly sincere. As a matter of fact he suspected that the Castilian youth would cut a very poor figure in a matter of this kind, and he had a not unnatural desire to show him up.

"Very well, I'll tell him," she said crossly.

"And I should be introduced to him."

"Anything else?" she queried sarcastically.

On the whole that drive home could not be considered a success. The very warmth of their feelings towards each other gave them a power to wound that they seemed to take a perverse pleasure in exercising to the full. But Greg thought of how it would be after she left him, and his heart sunk. As he drew near the Stickney Arms he made an effort to mend matters.

"We don't seem to be getting on very well to-night."

"I'm sure it's not my fault," she retorted with her chin in the air.

This was not promising, but he persisted. "I'm sorry if I have been rude or rough. Forgive me, and admit that you were just a little bit to blame too."

"I shall do nothing of the kind! I should never let any man take such a tone of command towards me, least of all a stranger. It's ridiculous!"

"I'm sorry. Forgive me," said Greg again.

"Oh, it's easy to ask forgiveness. You can't expect to make me as angry as you possibly can, and then have me turn around and forgive you for the asking."

As the cab slowed down Greg said: "At least say good-night to me nicely."

"I can't," she said. "You make me hate you."

She marched across the pavement without a backward look. Greg for obvious reasons did not get out of the cab. As they turned back home he sighed. If he had been a better psychologist, or rather if the keenness of his feelings had not blinded him to the psychology of the desired one, he would not have been so cast down.

CHAPTER XII

WHAT THE LITTLE BLACK BOOK CONTAINED

At eleven o'clock next morning a strange taxi-cab appeared in Gibbon Street and drew up before Bickle's grocery. From it stepped a figure so remarkable in that neighborhood that the little boys for the moment were too astonished even to deride it; to wit: Señor Henry Saunders in full regalia, a red carnation in his buttonhole. He picked his way gingerly into the store and looked about him with an expression of astonished rebuke that the common things of life should dare to approach so close. He inquired of Bessie for "Señor Greegoree Parr."

Bessie not at all intimidated by his exquisiteness marched him out through the kitchen into the muddy yard where Greg in overalls, a sight for gods and men, was busy greasing and tightening up the flivver.

"Oh, there is a mistake!" said Señor Saunders elevating his eyebrows. "It is for Señor Greegoree Parr that I ask."

"That's me," said Greg inelegantly. "I know you of course. How are you?"

The situation was too much for the Castilian youth. He looked about him wildly. The sight of Blossom and Ginger McAfee grinning in the background did not tend to reassure him. "You—you drive dees cab!" he stammered.

"Sure!" said Greg wickedly. "I'm what they call an owl-driver."

"A owl-driver!"

"Sure, you know, a fly-by-night." He opened the door of the flivver. "Get in. We can talk quietly here."

Señor Henry glanced askance at the overalls. "Thank you, I stand. My taxi waits. I bring you dees note."

"Ah, from Miss Wilmot!" said Greg with a gleaming eye. He wiped his hands preparatory to taking it.

The other young man marked the gleam and stiffened. These two were bound to strike sparks from each other on sight. "Miss Wilmot—I do not understand," he said haughtily.

"Oh, I suppose you call her Señorita de Socotra," said Greg carelessly. "But she prefers to be known by the other name now."

"Is it so?" queried Señor Saunders icily. "Did she tell you that?"

"She did," said Greg giving him stare for stare.

Meanwhile he opened his note. There were but four lines.

"I have told Henry everything. He is anxious to help. I hope you're satisfied. F. has not got what we want with him. If I detain him here until after lunch, could you have his room at the hotel searched?"

"A. Wilmot."

Meanwhile the dark-skinned youth had been studying the fair one.

"Ave I not seen you before?" he asked.

"In the bar at the Meriden," said Greg.

"Ah, was that you? Then this is a disguise?"

"If you like."

"You follow me into that bar?"

"Yes. I was trying to get into touch with Miss Wilmot."

"Ah! You think this quite the fair thing?"

"What do you mean?"

"She is so young, so inexperience'——!"

"Do you mean that I'm taking advantage of her?"

Señor Saunders shrugged. He had command of a most expressive shrug.

"Well, I won't discuss that with you now," said Greg coolly. "More important things to think about. Miss Wilmot says here that you are willing to help us."

The other bowed. "Willing to help her," he amended.

Greg ignored it. He was only anxious to get rid of the man so that he could get to the task that Amy had laid upon him. "Can you tell me the situation in Managuay that has resulted in this crime?"

"I don't know much about Managuayan affairs," was the languid reply. "I am more in Paris and London."

"I see," said Greg. "But what do you think induced de Socotra to kill Antonio Bareda?"

"It is incredible!" said Señor Henry. "There is somewhere a mistake. Why, the de Socotras are the oldest family in Managuay. Señor Francisco is a man of the world like myself."

"That may be," said Greg dryly, "but he did it just the same, or had it done."

"Should that be so," said the other, "it is not fitting that the Señorita undertake the duties of a police officer. I do not approve of it."

"Oh, don't you!" thought Greg.

"Hereafter I will act for her in taking whatever measures may be necessary."

"That will be nice," said Greg ironically. "You will excuse me now, I am sure. I have an important job on this morning. Have to get a hustle on. You said your taxi was waiting. You and I can have a nice long talk some other time."

So saying, he wafted Señor Saunders towards the yard gate. The latter presently found himself out on the sidewalk, a little dazed and wholly disapproving.

Meanwhile Greg rushed up-stairs to dress. As soon as he was ready Hickey took him to the *Hotel des Estados Unidos*. Greg registered there. He had on his previous visit noted that de Socotra, or Bareda as he called himself here, occupied room 318, and he wished to obtain a room as near to that as possible. He supposed that 318 would be on the third floor.

"Not too high up," he said, as the clerk turned to choose him a room, "say, the third floor."

"Very good, sir. Number 311. Have you any baggage?"

"It will be sent here later."

The clerk looked at him significantly.

"I will pay for a day in advance," said Greg, who had no wish to cheat the hotel out of its just dues.

"Thank you, sir. Two dollars."

Greg was shown to his room. He let the boy go and made a little reconnoissance. His own room looked upon the side street. Number 318 he found was at the end of the same corridor on the other side. It was evidently from its position a corner room with a window on the court and other windows to the west. There was a red light outside the door, indicating that the room possessed a fire escape. Around the corner of the corridor, opposite the elevator, was a window on the court, from which Greg could command the court window of de Socotra's room. The fire escape was outside the court window; moreover the window itself was open. Greg saw that the room might be reached without especial difficulty from five other rooms, i.e. one on the same floor, two above and two below.

He returned to the office. "You haven't a room opening on a fire-escape have you?" he asked the clerk. "I'm a bit nervous about fire in an old building like this."

The clerk consulted his plan. "No," he said. "Those rooms go first. But 316 on your floor is vacant. The fire-escape is adjoining. From the window you could reach out and put your hand on it if there was any need."

"Very well, change me to 316," said Greg, suppressing the desire to thank the amiable clerk who so innocently played into his hand.

Alone in 316 Greg narrowly searched all the windows on the other side of the court. No head was to be seen at any one of them. He reassured himself with the thought that at half-past eleven in the morning in a transient hotel there was not much reason for the guests to be in their rooms. There was a certain risk of course, but that must be taken.

He raised the window of his room to its widest extent and stood back to make sure for the last time that no one was watching him. Then grasping the rail of the fire escape he swung himself over, threw up the window of the adjoining room and slipped in. In all he was not visible above five seconds. Having made the trip he looked sharply behind him, but still no startled face appeared at any window within view. He breathed more freely.

Bolting the door into the hall, he took stock of his surroundings. There was no question but that he was in the right room, for the old suit-case with the collapsible side lay open on the floor, with de Socotra's more elegant valise beside it. The suit-case had been ransacked, but not unpacked. It contained only what an old gentleman of modest tastes might carry on a journey. De Socotra's own things were spread on the bureau and hung in the closet, a bit of stage business for the benefit of the maids, Greg supposed, for it was not likely that the elegant de Socotra troubled this modest room much.

Swiftly and silently Greg made his search. It did not take long, for the room offered but few possible places of concealment; valises, bureau drawers, closet. Greg did not neglect the bed; but no little black book rewarded him. He went over everything twice, taking care to leave all exactly as he had found it. His disappointment was keen. All that thought, not to speak of the risk, deserved a better reward he told himself.

Listening first to make sure there was no one in the corridor, he left the room openly by the door. It locked itself behind him. He went on down-stairs, meaning to return direct to the taxi-yard, for the *Hotel des Estados Unidos* had served its purpose as far as he was concerned. But a little incident in the lobby changed his plans.

As he stepped from the elevator his attention was attracted by a young man entering the lobby from the street at the same moment, a South American apparently, like the majority of this hotel's patrons. Something in his face appealed instinctively to Greg, his honest, eager gaze perhaps, his sensitive and resolute mouth; anyway there was something about him that caused Greg to think: "He'd make a good friend."

Greg was struck further by an extraordinary look of anxiety on the other's face, a generous anxiety. He came quickly to the desk beside which Greg was standing, and not more than a foot separated them. But the young Spanish-American never noticed Greg; his anxiety filled him. He moistened his lips before he spoke, and asked the clerk a question in Spanish, as if his life depended on the answer.

Greg was almost betrayed into an exclamation of astonishment. The young man asked for "Señor Antonio Bareda."

The clerk replied in the affirmative, and an extraordinary look of relief passed over the young man's face. For a moment he seemed overcome; he lowered his eyes until he could command himself, and passed his handkerchief over his face. The clerk noticed nothing.

Finding his voice the young man asked another question. Not hard to guess what this was, because the clerk glanced in the box marked 318, and seeing the key there, shook his head. The young man spoke again—was it to ask when Señor Bareda would return? The clerk shrugged and spread out his hands.

Greg was on fire with curiosity. He lit a cigar, and affected to look idly around like a man with time on his hands. Meanwhile he missed no move of the young man's. The grand question was, was he looking for the real or the false Bareda? Greg wished to believe that he was a friend of the real Bareda's. Certainly he bore no resemblance to others of de Socotra's gang who had all somehow a fishy look. This young fellow's glance was as open as the day. But if it were true that he were on the side of the real Bareda, a dreadful shock awaited him.

After a moment's hesitation the young Spanish-American crossed the lobby and dropped into one of the chairs by the window. He still felt the effects of his late anxiety. He looked exhausted. But a great content had ironed out the harassed lines in his face. Greg's heart was sharp with compassion for him.

"Have I got to deal him a knockout blow?" he thought.

He took a turn up and down the lobby, and finally dropped carelessly into a seat beside the other.

"Do you speak English?" he asked with a friendly grin.

"Why, yes," said the other smiling back.

"Well, I'm glad of that!" said Greg. "I feel like a fish out of water in this joint."

"An American?" said the other. "How did you happen to come here?"

"The hotels are full at this season. I put up at the first where I could get a room." Greg offered him a cigar. "But maybe you won't care for it," he added diffidently. "I expect you Spanish fellows know cigars."

"We know them," the other said accepting it smilingly, "but that's about all. All the best tobacco is shipped to the United States."

"Been in this town long?" asked Greg.

"Just got in from New Orleans."

Greg turned grave. De Socotra had just come from New Orleans. Could he after all be deceived in his man? "Live there?" he asked.

"No, I live in Managua."

"Ah," said Greg.

"Perhaps you never heard of Managua?"

"Oh, yes," said Greg feeling his way, as he had once done with another young man from Managua. "I once met some charming ladies from Managua. Perhaps you know them. Señorita de Socotra and her mother."

The young man received the information with polite unconcern. "I know of them of course. They are grand people at home. But I don't move in such circles."

"And there was a Señorita Guterrez with them," continued Greg.

"Oh, everybody knows her," was the indifferent comment.

"The father interested me," Greg persisted. "Señor Francisco de Socotra——" here the young man's eyes gleamed, but Greg could not be sure with what kind of feeling. "Very handsome man," Greg went on, "do you know him?"

"I know him," the young man said curtly.

Greg was still baffled. "What do you think of him?" he asked direct.

The young man's eyes positively blazed. "I prefer not to say," he replied setting his jaw. "It wouldn't be polite."

Greg was delighted. It was true this might be good acting, but the young man's implied scorn of de Socotra had all the effect of a violent denunciation. Greg could conceive of no reason why a follower of de Socotra's should denounce him to a stranger.

Greg went further. "At the desk just now I heard you ask for Señor Antonio Bareda."

The young man's face seemed to open as with an inner light. He turned eagerly to Greg. "My master and my friend!" he cried impulsively. "The best of men! Do you know him too?"

Greg's heart bled for this generous youth. He shook his head.

"I thought if you are stopping here you might have met him," the other went on. "Perhaps you have seen him about the hotel, a little, plump, smooth-shaven old gentleman, with an old-fashioned courteous air, and a beaming glance that seems to shed kindness all around him. You wouldn't think to see him that he was a fighter, and one of the bravest!"

Greg could no longer doubt his man. "Look here," he said frankly. "I knew we should hit it off, when I first laid eyes on you. My name's Gregory Parr. What's yours?"

"Mario Estuban," was the surprising reply.

Greg's eyes goggled at him. "Good God!" he ejaculated.

"What's the matter?" demanded the other frowning. "What do you know about me?"

"Nothing," said Greg, "only I cabled you yesterday."

"Cabled me?" echoed the other round-eyed. "What about? Who gave you my name? I left Managuay five days ago."

Greg glanced at the hotel clock. It was a few minutes past twelve. If de Socotra stayed to lunch with his family he could scarcely get back to the hotel before two.

"We can't talk here," he said. "I have a room up-stairs. Come up with me."

Estuban followed him wonderingly.

In the hotel bedroom, Greg closed the door behind them and turned a compassionate face towards the other. "I've got bad news for you, old man," he said. His own voice shook.

Estuban guessed what was coming. He fell back with his hands clenched. "Quick! Out with it!" he said hoarsely. "Don't keep me in suspense!"

"Antonio Bareda is dead!"

A low despairing cry escaped from Estuban. "Too late!" He sank into a chair and covered his face with his hands. He did not weep; no further sound escaped him. His silence scared Greg more than any outburst could have done.

"God knows I feel for you," Greg said earnestly. "But just the same you must try to forget your grief for the present. You must get a grip on yourself. There is justice to be done!"

The appeal had the desired effect. Estuban's hands came down. His face was drawn and white, but composed. "How did it happen?" he asked quietly.

"He was murdered by de Socotra's orders."

"Of course! But have you the proof? Can we bring it home to that damned cold villain?"

"With your help I think we can."

"Ah, if that is so," cried Estuban, "if we can smash that devilish ring, my poor master has not died quite in vain! When did it happen?"

"The night he landed; in a cab on his way from the pier."

Estuban looked puzzled. "But if that is so, how is it he is registered here? The hotel clerk told me——"

"It is de Socotra who is registered here under his name."

"What is that for?" murmured Estuban blankly.

"I hoped you could explain," said Greg.

Estuban slowly shook his head. "Has the crime been reported to the police?" he asked.

"No. But we have recovered the body. There are certain difficulties in the way. I will explain as we go on. We are very anxious to learn what Señor Bareda's note-book contains that makes it of such overwhelming importance."

Estuban sprang up excitedly. "You have it? It is safe?"

Greg shook his head. "De Socotra has it. We are trying to recover it. But what is in it? You see we are still in the dark as to the motives for the crime."

"Oh, I can tell you that. But who are you, an officer? a detective?"

"No."

"Then how did you come to take an interest in this case?"

Greg told him the whole story as briefly as possible. Estuban's expressive Latin face was a study in intense concern, astonishment, even grim humor at certain aspects of the tale. He only interrupted Greg once.

"But that little girl, who was she?"

"Amèlie de Socotra!"

"Amèlie de Socotra! Impossible! Francisco's daughter!"

"His adopted daughter."

"Oh true, I had forgotten that."

"And Bareda's niece."

"But she foreswore my poor master when she went to live with the rich. He grieved over it. He had not spoken to her in ten years."

"You are mistaken there. He sought her out the day before he sailed for New York on the *Allianca*, and had a long talk with her, a talk that profoundly influenced the girl."

"I was in jail then," said Estuban coolly.

"In jail!" said the astonished Greg.

"Oh, that's nothing disgraceful in Managuay," said Estuban bitterly. "Go on."

When Greg came to the end Estuban said thoughtfully: "The man de Silva arrived in Managuay a few days before I was arrested. He claimed to be the representative of a New York trading house, and was provided with seemingly authentic credentials. He had lived long enough in the United States to imbibe liberal ideas it was thought, and we hoped to secure in him a recruit to our side. No connection between him and the de Socotra gang had appeared. When I was separated from Señor Bareda I suppose he naturally turned to this man; he had to have an interpreter. Even under the conditions that surrounded us my poor master was always too slow to suspect evil. It was I who was accustomed to protect him from his own innocence of heart."

"And now we know," added Greg, "that de Silva was sent down from New York especially for the purpose of worming himself into Señor Bareda's confidence."

"Now I'll tell you what was in the little black book," said Estuban.

Greg looked at his watch. "Hold on!" he said. "It's past one. De Socotra might possibly return here. His room is adjoining. We had better go down to my own room where there is no danger of being disturbed. In any case I have to be there at two to receive a report over the telephone."

In the little hall-room at Bessie Bickle's Estuban, white-faced and grim, told his tale. There was no sign of weakness in him now. He referred to his murdered friend calmly. He said:

"First I must try to make you understand the situation in Managuay that produced this crime. It may be difficult for a free American to credit, though it is simple enough. You must bear in mind that Managuay is a very small country, a sort of small-town republic, and quite outside the currents of the world's thought; indeed for Managuayans

the outside world hardly exists. In other countries, even the most backward, of late years a social conscience has developed, but in Managua no! Our overlords are still as rapacious as feudal barons. We have no prosperous middle class to act as a balance wheel. In Managua there is nothing between the old Spanish aristocracy and the miserable peons.

"Up to a dozen years ago Managua was a poor country; the old landholders were impoverished, and they had no business acumen; trade passed by our ports. Then American business men began to find us; they had the business ability and the Managuayans had the rich land. Gradually there grew up the infamous association that has almost ruined my country.

"The trouble was, the land was too rich. Under improved methods of cultivation and with the markets made accessible, great fortunes were reaped from rubber, coffee, fruit in a single season. Too easily made money atrophied men's moral sense; they became filled with a lust for more! more! more!

"Our landholders sold their lands to American corporations, taking shares in payment. After that the lazy Managuayans had nothing to do but spend their dividends. The American business men did all the work, and they became the real owners of my country. They never interfered openly in the government; they didn't have to, for their Managuan stockholders were only too willing tools. The entire country is now run with a single eye to producing dividends for the American corporations. What is the consequence? Our people are wretched beyond description. They are set to work on the plantations and in the factories while they are scarcely out of infancy. This keeps down the price of labor and prevents them from ever learning enough to organize against their pitiless masters. It would wring your heart to see them. The generation now growing up are like little old men and women before they are mature!

"It is characteristic of such a gang that the principals never show themselves in the open. We have a succession of figure-heads as President of Managua, but the real power never changes: it is lodged in the hands of Señor Francisco de Socotra. He is the instrument of Big Business. All the reins of power are gathered up into his hands. He directs our poor travesties of courts with a nod,—the judges are his appointees; he is the real commander of our army; he owns our newspapers. What chance has the truth of being spoken?

"I do not mean to blame the United States for the pass we have been brought to; the evil men are the Managuayans who have betrayed their country. The only criticism I would make of your government is that it thoughtlessly backs up its buccaneers of commerce without examining into their methods. And we little helpless people suffer. The ruling gang in Managua derives its real power from the implied support of the United States which is behind it. I believe that Secretaries of State are honest men, but they may be swayed through devious courses that they know not of. And up to this time there never was anybody to speak for the wretched natives of Managua.

"You can see how hopeless it was to think of successfully opposing so perfect an organization. I may mention as a significant fact that our army is largely recruited from neighboring states. It is plentifully supplied with machine guns. With the judges and the machine guns on the other side what could a poor man do? Our so-called popular elections were of the nature of a comic opera.

"As a matter of fact there has been little open discontent. The odds were too hopeless. The most dreadful feature of the situation was the people's apathy.

"The one champion who never lost faith in them was Antonio Bareda; patient, great-hearted, and of dauntless courage, he was well fitted to be the friend of the oppressed. For the last eight years or so, or ever since things began to go to the bad, he had been working for them. During that time his life has been a long record of petty persecutions on the part of the authorities. But his very simplicity and candor baffled his enemies. He gave them no handle to use against him. His clear gaze struck a secret terror to their souls. They dared not take extreme measures against him on account of his hold on the affections of the people. They feared that his death might provoke even that wretched race to rebel.

"He lately came to the conclusion that the people must have outside help in order to free themselves. He determined to appeal to the United States through your President. The late elections in Managua provided his opportunity. As I have said, our elections are no more than a cynical joke. For some years now the gang's candidates

have been returned unopposed. This year, however, with the help of a few of us working in absolute secrecy Bareda succeeded in forming at least the skeleton of a political organization and in putting up opposition candidates.

"Of course we did not expect to win. Our candidates (I was one of them) were either bribed, arrested or bludgeoned. Nevertheless we gained our point, which was to put the corruption of the government on record. Antonio Bareda prepared a report of that election, supported by a dozen affidavits attesting to examples of subornation, bribery, assault, intimidation, etc. That is the matter that is bound up in the little black book.

"Secret as we were, our purpose became known of course; they have their spies everywhere. It threw a panic into the enemies' camp. Bareda was on his way to carry it to the President when he was killed. It was Bareda's intention to appeal to your President to withdraw his recognition from the present illegal government of Managuay, and for him to insist on an honest election being held, if necessary under guard of United States marines. He was on his way to Washington when he was killed.

"I helped get the matter together, but I did not see the little book after it was finished. I was to have accompanied him as interpreter, but a few days before we were to sail I was again arrested on a trumped-up charge and thrown into jail. He dared not delay his departure, he had to have somebody to interpret for him, and so he fell into their trap.

"With the help of my friends I managed to break jail in Santiago—one devoted fellow is serving there now in my place. But I was too late to catch the *Allianca*. I learned that de Socotra had departed secretly in his yacht for an unknown destination, and I did not require to be told that extreme danger threatened my friend and my master. The captain of a small coasting steamer came to my assistance. He smuggled me aboard and carried me to New Orleans, whence I came here by train. But I was too late! They got him."

CHAPTER XIII

DE SOCOTRA HIRES T7011 AGAIN

It was now two o'clock. Greg said to Estuban,

"Come to the corner drug-store with me. I am to receive a report there from the man who is watching de Socotra. He may give us something to go on."

This was the substance of Pa Simmons' communication:

"An hour ago I took up my place where I could watch the entrance to the Stickney Arms. His nobs, the Spanish gent, come out about one-thirty; there was a taxi waiting for him. He was carried down-town, me following, to a house on East Seventeenth Street near Stuyvesant Square, number 716 it was. He let his cab go and went in there. I drove around the corner, and letting my cab stand there come back and went into a lunch counter that was almost directly across the street, and where I could watch the house. I got my lunch while I waited. He was inside about half an hour. He come out with another fellow. His nobs had a little book in his hand."

"What kind of book?" asked Greg eagerly.

"A sort of fat note-book, sort of narrowish and thick, with a black cover. It had different colored papers bound up inside it. He was turning over the pages as he come down the steps as if it had just been handed to him inside. So I saw it plain."

"What kind of man was with him?"

"Another dago, fattish, clean-shaven, elegant dressed, a man with a sleepy kind of look."

"Abanez," thought Greg.

"Well, the two of them started west on Seventeenth, and I hustled back and got my cab and followed. 'Tain't no cinch, though, to follow two men on foot when you're in a cab. I ran circles round the block so's they wouldn't catch on that I was trailing them. At the Avenue they hailed a bus and rode up on top where I could watch them good. They went into a railway ticket office at Thirtieth Street. I followed them in. I saw Soak-oater buy a ticket to Washington and a parlor-car seat on the six o'clock train this evening. I heard him say to the guy with him: 'Yew-neth,' or some such name says he, 'Yew-neth will telegraph me during the afternoon what time the President will see me to-morrow.'

"Well, the two guys parted outside the ticket-office, and Soak-oater led me to a little hotel on Irving Place called—well, I can't say it because it's Spanish, but you know the place. He's in there now, and I'm phoning from across the street."

Greg's instructions to Pa Simmons were to stick to his man and report again in an hour, or as soon thereafter as he was able.

Greg repeated the matter of his report to Estuban.

"Going to Washington to see the President!" cried he, perplexed.

"Who is Yew-neth?" asked Greg.

"Evidently intended for Nunez, the Managuan minister at Washington, and one of de Socotra's creatures of course." Estuban was in a study.

"What do you make of it?" asked Greg.

"I believe I'm beginning to see what he's up to," Estuban replied slowly. "It's a devilish scheme, worthy of de Socotra!"

"You mean he's going to impersonate Bareda when he sees the President?"

"Exactly! Not content with murdering my poor friend he intends to blacken his memory. Nunez will introduce him as Antonio Bareda. The visit will be reported in the newspapers—Bareda sees the President, and the news will be cabled to Managuay. What de Socotra will tell the President one can guess; it will certainly not be anything that will lead him to take action in Managuay. Perhaps that will be reported in the papers too: 'Bareda tells the President Managuay is happy and contented under the present regime!' In any case when Bareda fails to return to Managuay his poor followers, who are so anxiously hanging on the result of this visit, will believe that their champion has betrayed them. How simple!"

"How devilish!" added Greg.

Estuban said: "De Socotra must be arrested before he gets on the train."

Greg thought anxiously of Amy. "That won't do you any good," he said quickly. "You couldn't prove in advance that he intended to impersonate another."

"I could prove the murder."

"Not without Señorita de Socotra. And she won't testify against him."

"Then must he go free?" cried Estuban stormily.

"No. Let us get the little black book from him and he is helpless. You could carry that to the President yourself."

"How do you purpose getting hold of it?"

"I don't know yet. I have four hours before train time. I'll find a way. At least I know now that it is on his person."

"Go ahead and see what you can do. But if you fail I must hold myself free to act. I will be on the train on which he travels to Washington."

"But he must know you," said Greg.

"I shall be disguised."

This gave Greg an idea. "Do you know anything about disguises?" he asked eagerly.

"Oh, yes," said Estuban smiling grimly. "That's a very necessary part of a conspirator's work in Managuay."

"Could you disguise me?"

"What as?"

"A shabby old cabman."

"That oughtn't to be hard with the examples we have before us down here."

"Good! I have to meet a man up-town at two forty-five. You get together what materials you need, and I'll be back at the yard in an hour."

Hickey was taking the de Socotra ladies to a matinee this afternoon. After he had dropped the ladies at the theater Greg met him by appointment at the nearest corner. After his unhappy parting with Amy the night before Greg did not know what to expect. There was a note for him in the usual place. He devoured it. It was sufficiently baffling. The tone was friendly, but there was not the slightest reference to the ride home the night before. On the whole Greg was relieved.

"What did you do to poor Henry? He came back from his visit to you in a fit of the black sulks and has been lecturing me ever since. Men are so trying! I'm sorry I had no luck with the l.b.b. I anxiously await word from you. Francisco says he is going out of town this afternoon, but gives us no hint of his destination. He says he'll be back day after to-morrow, and then we'll all go home. I am distracted with anxiety and completely at sea.

"Have you any news?"

"Amy W."

"What's orders for the afternoon?" asked Hickey. "Shall I try to pick up a little trade until 4.45?"

Greg was standing with a hand on the cab, lost to his surroundings. His plan was beginning to take shape. He shook his head. "No time for that. Hickey," he said suddenly, "can you drive Pa Simmons' car, the Pack-Arrow?"

"Sure!"

"Good! Then I'll want you to change with him. You can tell the ladies when you come back that your own car broke down, see? I'll take the flivver because I know its ways."

First Greg had Hickey take him to a firm of stationers, where after a somewhat lengthy search through the stock he found a loose-leaf note-book bound in black seal that at least in a general way resembled the famous little black book. This Greg carried to the Stickney Arms where he delivered it to his friend the hall-boy with a dollar and

instructions to slip it to he knew who. As the boy was beginning to look on this affair as a regular source of income, there was little danger that he would fail him.

Greg, Hickey and the flivver then hastened down to the yard.

Pa Simmons called Greg up soon after and reported that de Socotra was now at the office of the Managuayan consulate on Thirty-sixth Street.

"Has he his bag with him?" asked Greg.

"No."

"Good! Then he'll have to go back to the hotel for it. We have a line on him now. You needn't wait. Come on down to the yard. I want to borrow your cab for awhile."

In his room Greg wrote to Amy:

"Important developments. Dare not trust them to paper. We have found a friend. It is to Washington that F. goes this afternoon. He hopes to see the President to-morrow. I have learned that he is now carrying the l.b.b. on his person, and I'm going to put it up to you to get it. Here is my plan. I will send him this telegram timed to reach him just before he leaves his hotel for the train: 'Must see you for a few minutes before you leave town. Come to the apartment. Amy.' I am depending on you to find an excuse for telegraphing him, and to secure what we are after if you are able. You will need a similar book as a substitute, and I have sent you one through the hall boy, Frank. Perhaps I am asking the impossible, but it was the best plan I could think of. I was handicapped by not being able to talk things over with you. Anyhow, I know you'll do your best. If you fail, don't lose heart, for I'll be there to have a try, and after me there is a third in reserve. Frank has told me that your apartment is on the eighth or next to the top floor, and that the window of your own room is the third from the corner on the river side. I shall be watching that window while F. is with you. If you get the l.b.b. from him hang something white out of that window, and I'll know everything is all right. If I have luck F. will be riding in my cab, but in any case I'll be hard on his trail.

"Greg."

When Pa Simmons came in with his cab this note was slipped in the usual place behind the back seat, and Hickey was dispatched up-town in the Pack-Arrow to take the ladies home from the theater. Pa Simmons enjoyed a well-earned rest.

Meanwhile in the little hall-room, Mario Estuban was practicing the art of disguise on Greg. To begin with they borrowed the outer wear of Pa Simmons entire. Under ordinary circumstances this would have been disguise enough, but as Greg had been somewhat similarly attired on the night he first drove de Socotra around town, they had to go further. Estuban knew better than to attempt the impossible; he could not have made an old man out of the smooth-faced Greg; at least not one that would have stood scrutiny under the light of day. But with a touch of paint he made his eyes red-rimmed and bleary, and put on a pair of cheap spectacles. A clay-colored pigment rubbed into his cheeks made them look hollow and unwholesome; a ragged mustache, and a lank lock of hair sticking down from under the peak of his cap completed the picture. As a last touch of realism, in the yard below Greg grimed his hands and blackened his nails. His own mother would not have recognized him.

"Holy Smoke!" cried Pa Simmons; "looks like he was born in an owl taxi and never seen the light of the sun since!"

Meanwhile Pa Simmons had been looking over the flivver, giving her a little grease here and there, and tightening up a nut or two. With Blossom's help he succeeded in modifying the list to starboard that was her most characteristic peculiarity. In case de Socotra might have remarked her license number on a previous occasion they changed plates for to-night with Blossom's car.

Greg took the wheel, and Blossom cranked her. Bessie waved good-by from the kitchen doorway. All knew that a crisis in the affairs of Greg and Amy was due this night. After the customary fusillade of backfires while she was warming up the flivver moved out of the yard.

It was now shortly after four. Greg hastened up-town and from the telegraph office nearest the Stickney Arms sent his decoy telegram to de Socotra. Returning then to Irving Place he took up his stand just above the *Hotel dos Estados Unidos* where he could watch the entrance. To all those who offered to engage him he shook his head and pointed to the flag on his taxi-meter which was down.

His principal fear was that the telegram might be delivered too soon, and de Socotra get to the apartment before the ladies returned from the theater. This would be a calamity since Amy would be unprepared for him; she could not be expected to get a chance to read Greg's letter until she got home.

But as five o'clock approached and there was no sign of de Socotra, Greg's anxieties took another direction. Suppose the telegram were not delivered until after de Socotra had left for the station; suppose he had already been to the hotel for his bag, and would not get the telegram at all.

Choosing a moment when the little lobby was well-filled Greg inconspicuously made his way in and helped himself to a drink from the water-cooler. As he passed the desk he glanced in box 318. The key was not there; de Socotra then was presumably in his room. So far so good. Greg returned to his cab with an easier mind.

At five minutes past five a messenger boy entered the hotel with several telegrams, among which Greg devoutly hoped might be the one he had sent. At ten minutes past five de Socotra issued out of the hotel. In one hand he carried his valise, in the other an opened telegram. His face bore an expression of strong annoyance not unmingled with alarm.

Greg eagerly called his cab to his attention. "Taxi, sir?"

De Socotra came quickly towards him, and Greg stooping cranked his car. Thus de Socotra got in without obtaining a good look at his chauffeur. In a few minutes it would be dark. Greg slid into his seat, and turned an ear towards the back of his car.

"Where to, sir?"

"Stickney Arms apartment house, Riverside and Ninety-fourth. And hurry. Double fare if you get me there and back to the Southern Terminal before six."

Touching his cap, Greg opened her up. Deep within him he chuckled with satisfaction; de Socotra obviously had no suspicion that he had ever engaged that cab before.

As de Socotra got out at the Stickney Arms he said with scarcely a glance at Greg: "Let your engine run. I shan't be in here more than five minutes."

Greg waited in what anxiety can be imagined. The five minutes seemed like as many hours. From where he stood beside his cab he could not see the windows of the eighth floor, so he backed across the road and looked up. On this part of Riverside the houses are not built directly on the Drive, but on a narrow roadway terraced above it. There were ornamental bushes and shrubs on this slope. It was almost dark now and many of the windows showed lights, but not the third window from the corner on the eighth floor.

Greg tried to picture to himself what was going on within the apartment. All of a sudden his plan seemed preposterous to him. How could he expect the carefully-reared Amy suddenly to play the part of a pick-pocket successfully!—and in five minutes. If she tried it at all he feared it would only be to betray herself to de Socotra with perhaps tragic results.

But just as he had made up his mind to the worst his heart gave a great leap of gladness, for from the window he watched fluttered something white. She had actually done it! Bravo, Amy!

He returned to his cab. Presently de Socotra reappeared, and at the same moment Henry Saunders came around the corner on foot. The two men met at the foot of the steps. They addressed each other in Spanish, but from expression and gesture it was not difficult to guess what was said. Saunders told de Socotra that he had something important to tell him. De Socotra replied that he was in a hurry to catch his train and invited Saunders to ride down-town with him. The two men entered the cab.

Greg's face turned grim. What was the nature of Saunders' communication? Was it possible that Amy's fiancé intended to betray them?

De Socotra said: "Back to the Southern Terminal. You can make it if you hurry. You have twenty-five minutes."

Turning into the Drive proper, Greg speeded downtown. On that broad thoroughfare, unimpeded by cross traffic, the speed limit is a little bit eased. At the end of the Drive he bore through Seventy-second Street, but instead of continuing down-town by Broadway, the main motor highway, he turned into Amsterdam, and running in the car-tracks of that unfrequented street opened her up wide.

He would have given much to hear what was being said behind. Whatever it was he fervently hoped that it would not prevent de Socotra from taking his train. Once he saw him safe aboard that train Greg determined that he would go openly to Amy and get the little black book from her. Once they had that precious evidence in their hands, little matter if de Socotra did discover their relations. But Amy could scarcely go on living under his roof.

Greg had reached the boundary of the Western Central freight yards and had turned east to find a better street down-town when he was startled by a violent rapping on the glass behind him. At the same moment de Socotra opened the cab door.

"Go back! Go back!" he cried in a strained, harsh voice. "Back to the apartment!"

As he turned around in the street, Greg stole a glance into the back of the cab. He could not see the face of either man, but revealed by the light of a street lamp he saw the little black book open in de Socotra's hands. So the worst had happened. Saunders had betrayed them, and de Socotra had discovered the substitution. Greg's heart contracted sharply. How could he warn Amy in time?

He turned back into Amsterdam Avenue, and headed north again. In his efforts to collect his thoughts he instinctively slowed down. De Socotra hammered on the glass and yelled:

"Faster! Faster! What's the matter with you?"

Presently he changed his mind. Opening the door again he said: "Stop at that drug-store yonder, I want to telephone."

The two men tumbled out of the cab. They were disputing excitedly in Spanish. Saunders seemed to be making some kind of appeal, which de Socotra furiously denied. The latter's face was livid and distorted with rage. Gone was the smiling courteous veneer. Greg was appalled at the revelation of the man's true character. On the other hand Saunders seemed almost ready to weep.

"He is scared now at what he started," thought Greg grimly.

De Socotra, waving Saunders away, went into the drug-store. Saunders, holding his hands above his head and talking to himself, walked blindly away down the side street.

"He hasn't even got wit enough to warn her what is coming," thought Greg. "I must do it."

Through the lighted windows of the drug-store Greg saw that the telephone booth that de Socotra entered adjoined the soda-water counter. Obeying a sudden impulse he followed him into the store.

The soda-clerk grinned at Greg and cocked a humorous eyebrow in the direction of the telephone booth. "Bug-house, I guess?"

Greg shrugged and grinned in kind, and ordered a lemon phosphate. While it was being drawn he edged along the counter towards the booth. Through the glass he saw that de Socotra had his back towards the door—for that matter Greg didn't much care now if he did begin to suspect him.

Many of these supposedly sound-proof booths are flimsy affairs, and Greg, straining his ears, was able to hear a good deal of what de Socotra was saying. The soda-clerk, taking in the situation, continued to grin appreciatively.

De Socotra got the number he asked for and started talking. The first thing Greg heard distinctly was: "Yes, treachery in my own household! But I'll take care of that."

Later Greg heard him say: "I called you up because you know this town. I want the address of a private madhouse—well, sanitarium if you like it better. At once. To-night. A high-class place, expensive and all that. Well, please find out for me and let me know quickly at my apartment. And get Abanez on the wire if you can, and tell him to come to me."

Greg gasped inwardly. The man's boldness staggered him. No need to ask who the madhouse was for! Before he could collect his wits de Socotra was out of the booth. Greg hastily put his glass to his lips.

"Damn you, have you nothing better to do than drink slops!" cried de Socotra furiously. "Come on!"

This was nuts to the soda-clerk. He came to the door to see the last of this diverting pair.

By the time they started, Greg had made up his mind what to do. A few blocks farther up the street—they were in the Forties now—he saw a garage and pulled up at the door.

De Socotra with a violent oath demanded to know what he was stopping for.

"Out of gas," said Greg laconically.

De Socotra swore and stamped on the pavement like a man beside himself. Greg stared at him, affecting a stupid wonder. A trolley car came up the avenue. De Socotra tossed Greg a bill without looking at it and running out in the street swung himself aboard the car.

For an agonized instant of indecision Greg debated whether he would do better to jump back in his cab, and endeavor to beat de Socotra to the Stickney Arms, or stop and telephone. But the car was traveling fast, and de Socotra could surely get another cab at the Broadway intersection. Greg ran into the garage to telephone.

Ages seemed to pass while he was getting the apartment house. He ground his teeth and prayed for patience. As a matter of fact there was no undue delay. He asked for Señorita de Socotra, and there was another fifteen seconds of agony before a feminine voice answered on the wire—not the crisp tones of Amy, alas! but the languorous Bianca. Greg cursed himself for his folly in supposing that they would allow Amy to answer the 'phone.

"I want to speak to Señorita de Socotra," he said.

"Who are you?" asked Bianca.

In an evil moment Greg answered "Abanez." In his excitement he forgot that Bianca and Abanez were cronies. A flood of Spanish answered him. He could only say lamely:

"Yes, I know, but I wanted to speak to Amèlie."

"I don't know of whom you are speaking," the voice said in cold hard English. "You have the wrong number," and click! the connection was cut.

By violently agitating the receiver Greg succeeded in getting the operator at the Stickney Arms. He asked for Frank, the hall-boy. This was what he ought to have done in the beginning. He had only wasted a precious two minutes, and put Bianca on her guard.

"This you, Frank? This is the fellow who passes you notes for the little Spanish lady, do you get me? I gave you a little package this afternoon."

"Sure, I know you, boss."

"Listen; go quick to her apartment—don't telephone. Tell her her father is coming back and to beat it, see? Tell her the old cab will be at the door in five minutes. I'll make it all right with you."

"I get you, boss."

"Be quick! He's almost there!"

Greg then drove the flivver for all there was in her to Sherman Square, to Riverside, to Ninety-fourth Street. As he ran up the narrow roadway to the Stickney Arms a cab stopped there ahead of them. De Socotra sprang out and ran up the steps. The cab went on.

Greg stopped just beyond the steps, and waited for a moment or two. If Amy had got out safely, she would be on the lookout for him. But she did not appear. His anxiety became insupportable. He could not rest. He went into the apartment house to learn what had happened. The gorgeous blue-clad ones looked askance at the shabby driver. The boy he knew was not in sight.

"Where is Frank?" he asked.

"Up-stairs."

Even as he asked Frank stepped out of an elevator. There were two elevators, and evidently de Socotra had gone up in one as Frank came down in the other. Greg beckoned Frank aside from the others.

"I'm the fellow that telephoned you just now—about Miss de Socotra."

Frank's jaw dropped.

Greg had not time to make explanations. He showed the boy the five dollar bill de Socotra had just tossed him. That did the trick, though the boy still gaped at him.

"You gave her my message?"

"Yes, just now."

"Only just now! It was a good five minutes ago!"

"I know. It wasn't my fault. They kept me waiting at the door. I suppose the girl had to wait for a chance to slip her word."

"You should have told the maid! She's safe."

"How was I to know that?"

"Is she out of the place?"

"No, she went back for something."

Greg groaned. "Then it's too late. He's just gone up."

The boy whistled.

Greg jumped for the elevator. But the boy hung back. Greg was too disreputable looking for the Stickney Arms. During that pause from somewhere far up in the building the sound of a slammed door came down the stair well.

"Take me up!" cried Greg. "How do you run this damned thing!"

A signal showed on the telephone switchboard. "His number!" said one of the boys springing to answer, and Greg paused.

"Yes, sir, all right, sir," stammered the boy at the board.

He jumped up breathless with excitement. "The Spanish gent! He says the girl's run out. He says she's not herself. He says stop her. And one of us go up and bring him down."

The elevator signal was already ringing continuously. Greg stepped out. He cast a significant glance around from boy to boy.

"My cab's just beyond the door. A fiver to each of you fellows if she gets in it safe!"

He ran outside and waited for her in his cab, the door standing open, his foot ready to let in the clutch the moment she jumped in. But the seconds passed and she did not appear. Looking anxiously out and back he saw de Socotra come to the door of the apartment house with the four boys at his heels. He heard him say:

"I tell you, she came down-stairs."

"She didn't pass this way, sir."

From the head of the steps they looked uncertainly up and down the street, and then went back into the building. Greg had drawn back out of sight. A moment later another cab drew up behind Greg, and two men got out. It was the puffy Abanez and another of the gang. At the same instant Amy, bareheaded, came running like a deer around the corner out of Ninety-fourth Street. The two men stared, rooted to the pavement in astonishment. Amy ran on to Greg's cab, but at the sight of the strange face, she drew back.

"It's all right," he whispered swiftly. "It is I, Greg."

She climbed in, he slammed the door, and they were off. De Socotra came running out of the building again. He met the two men on the sidewalk. All three jumped in the waiting cab and came on.

CHAPTER XIV

THROUGH THE STREETS

Greg sped down the incline, made a wide turn into the Drive and headed down-town. As they circled they saw the other cab gathering headway. It had a more powerful engine than Greg's, and was in better condition. It ought to have overtaken Greg easily, but as they straightened out in the Drive it did not do so, but contented itself with maintaining a certain distance. Greg slowed down, and the following cab did likewise. "What's their game?" Greg asked himself a little anxiously.

He rapped on the glass behind him to attract Amy's attention. She opened the door.

"All right back there?" he asked cheerily.

"I—I guess so," was the somewhat shaky reply.

"Let down the front glass and we can talk better."

She did so.

"Have you got the little black book?" he asked eagerly.

"No. I was surprised by his return. I dropped it in the back of the piano."

"No one saw you drop it there,—Bianca?"

"No, it's safe enough; if we can only find a way to get it out again. Where can we go now?"

"To the yard."

"He will follow us there."

"Let him. We have plenty of friends there. He'll get a warm reception."

They passed a policeman standing at the curb who glanced at them casually as they passed. They were not exceeding the speed limit now, or at least not by much. The other cab was a short block behind. Amy, who continually glanced back through the little window, gasped suddenly.

"Oh, they're stopping! ... They're picking him up."

"Who, the policeman?" said Greg. "By God! de Socotra has a nerve!" he added grimly.

"They're coming on again! Oh, faster! faster!"

Greg gave her all she would take. The old flivver roared and rocked down the Drive, and the few pedestrians homeward bound stopped and stared at the phenomenon. Most of the motor traffic was bound in the opposite direction, and on his side of the road Greg had a clear passage. The bright round globes flashed past, the cars they passed seemed to be standing still. Greg prayed that his old tires would support the strain. The flivver had long ago seen her best days, and like an old horse she was scarcely making the speed that the violence of her action would indicate. Thirty miles was about her limit.

Through the little window in the back Amy kept watch on their pursuers. "They're gaining on us!" she said despairingly.

And indeed the bigger car drew up on them with ease, once they let her out. De Socotra was leaning far out of the window urging the driver on. The policeman rode in front. Foot-passengers becoming infected with the excitement of the chase started to run after, but were soon out-distanced. Motor cars bound up-town slowed down, turned and joined in the chase.

The pursuing car little by little drew abreast on the outside of the flivver. The driver pinched Greg into the curb as close as he dared, hoping to force him to stop. No more than a foot separated the running-boards of the two flying vehicles. Amy shrank back into the darkest corner. The water was now boiling furiously out of the radiator of the flivver, and Greg knew she must soon begin to miss and slacken speed. But he held her to it.

The second car was now running wheel to wheel with Greg's, and the policeman leaning out was almost able to put a hand on his shoulder. "Stop, you!" he commanded.

At that moment Greg saw an opening, and he obeyed the order quicker than they looked for. Throwing out his clutch and applying brakes, he let the other car shoot ahead. Turning out behind it, he darted up a side street.

Their pursuers carried on a hundred feet or more had to turn around in the Drive and come back. Cars bound up-town got in their way. Greg might have succeeded in giving them the slip altogether had it not been for the other cars which had taken up the chase out of sheer excitement. These cars were far enough in the rear to follow Greg directly into the side street and to point the way to the policeman when he came up.

Greg twisted and turned to the best of his ability; off the Drive the streets were deserted; into West End Avenue, into another side street, into the Drive again. A whole string of cars was stretched out behind him now. Rarely had the sporty chauffeurs such a chance to defy the speed laws. It was like pandemonium sweeping through those

astonished quiet streets. The little flivver was like a mangy fox pursued by a pack of sleek hounds.

Greg's tricks were of no avail. Having lost the advantage of his first turn, he could not shake them off. Meanwhile his radiator had almost boiled dry, and the exhausted flivver was missing badly and ever slowing down.

"No go!" said Greg grimly at last. "I'll only melt down her bearings if I don't stop."

He quietly drew up beside the curb on Riverside.

"Mind you are to say nothing!" Amy swiftly whispered. "You are just a cabman that I happened to pick up!"

"I can't let him carry you back!" Greg protested scowling.

"You must!" she cried with desperate earnestness. "If you don't do what I tell you, you will force me to take his part against you!"

"How can I see you in his power!"

"You needn't fear for me," she said proudly. "He dare not injure me. I am not afraid of him!"

Very unwillingly, Greg gave in.

Their pursuers were upon them. The policeman, de Socotra, Abanez and the fourth man leaped from the second cab and ran up. The policeman laid a heavy hand on Greg's shoulder and drew him to the pavement. De Socotra flung open the door of the flivver. Within twenty seconds it seemed as if a crowd of hundreds had gathered.

"My poor, poor child!" cried de Socotra in a heart-breaking voice. "How could you act so!"

Amy made no reply.

"Don't you know me?"

"I know you," she said quietly.

He drew her gently out of the cab. "Come home with me, dear," he murmured, but not so softly but that the crowd could hear and be impressed. "You'll be all right in the morning. Mamma is waiting for you."

Amy quietly submitted. Greg was boiling inwardly, but he loyally obeyed her command to say nothing.

De Socotra drew Amy's arm tenderly under his own and faced the policeman and the crowd. "She is not herself," he said in a deprecating, appealing voice. "It is a nervous break-down. See how she ran out without hat or coat in such weather. She didn't know what she was doing."

The crowd murmured in respectful sympathy.

De Socotra looked for the cab that had brought him. "Come, dear, let us go home."

"What will I do with this fellow, sir?" asked the policeman. "Don't you want to lay a complaint against him?"

"Oh, I don't think so," said de Socotra, determined to play the kindly gentleman to the end. "I don't suppose he knew what he was doing." Then for the first time he appeared to recognize Greg. "Hello!" he said, "aren't you the man who drove me earlier this evening?"

There was nothing to be gained by denying it. Greg nodded.

"How did you get in on this?" asked De Socotra.

Since he was forced to play the unwelcome part, Greg played it as well as he could. "Well, after I filled up my tank," he said slyly, "I went on to the address you gave me. Something seemed to be the matter, and I thought maybe

you'd want me again. You treated me liberal. Then the young lady came running out. I didn't know she had anything to do with you. She said she'd pay me anything I asked if I'd get her away from there. I thought she was in distress-like."

Greg was comforted by the sight of a gleam of approval in Amy's eyes. Whether or not de Socotra really believed this yarn he could not tell from his face.

He feigned to believe it. "Too much melodrama!" he said indulgently. "Let him go, officer."

But the policeman hated to relinquish his capture. "Why didn't you stop when I first told you?" he demanded.

Greg put on a hang-dog air. "Ah, she said he was after her, that he wanted to do her some hurt."

"Her own father!" put in de Socotra with a shocked air.

"You saw me!" said the indignant officer. "You ought to know I wouldn't stand for no rough stuff!"

"Well, I was excited-like," muttered Greg.

"I had ought to take you in for speeding if for nothing else! You ought to lose your license for that!"

"Please let him go, officer," said de Socotra magnanimously. "The poor fellow's livelihood depends on his license. I wouldn't want him to suffer through the misfortune of my poor girl."

Greg did not believe that de Socotra's suspicions were not aroused as to his real part in the affair; but de Socotra was not any more anxious for a police-court examination than Greg was: hence the seeming magnanimity. Greg saw a glance of intelligence pass between de Socotra and Abanez, and as the policeman very reluctantly removed his hand from Greg's shoulder, Abanez said:

"You may take me and my friend down-town. We are already late for our appointment."

Amy flashed him a warning. Greg scarcely needed it. For a moment he hesitated; but since he had taken his line, it seemed better to stick to it. He determined to watch himself though.

He touched his cap. "Where to, sir?"

"92 Stuyvesant Square."

Greg was reminded of Pa Simmons' first report that day.

Meanwhile de Socotra and his two henchmen bade each other courteous farewells. Abanez and the other expressed a fervent hope that the young lady would be better in the morning—Greg smiled to himself at the grim comedy. The two Spanish-Americans got into the flivver, and de Socotra handed Amy into the other taxi. The policeman seated himself by the chauffeur to ride back to his beat. They started simultaneously, Greg turning down-town, the other keeping on up the Drive. The bystanders remembered their suppers and melted away.

Greg made the best time he could, for he was wildly eager to get back to the Stickney Arms, but he had to humor the old flivver now. She was like a broken-winded horse. Stuyvesant Square, as everybody knows, is one of the last haunts of old-fashioned respectability away down town. It was a good four mile drive, and Greg chafed bitterly at the time he was losing.

A broad and well-lighted street with a trolley line bisects the Square, but around the sides it is dim, respectable and lonely. Greg privately determined that nothing should induce him to leave his cab. Greg looked in vain for Number 92. Having made a complete circuit of the Square he was satisfied there was no such number.

He stopped and notified his fares. "Do you know the house you want to go to?" he asked them.

Abanez replied: "Yes, it's on the east side. Drive slowly up that side and I'll point it out to you."

Near the top of this side of the Square he called Greg's attention to a tall narrow house with a brownstone front, and Greg drew up before it. No lights showed in any of the windows; to Greg it looked like an unoccupied house. His fares did not immediately get out, and Greg looked around to see what they were waiting for. The window behind him was still open.

"Wait a minute," said Abanez, "we have not quite finished our talk."

At the moment the significance of this maneuver did not occur to Greg. Afterwards he remembered that a man was passing on the sidewalk. They waited until he turned the corner.

Without warning two hands from behind closed around Greg's throat, cutting off the slightest outcry. As his mouth, gasping for breath, instinctively opened, two other hands forced a cotton gag between his teeth and knotted it behind his head. Greg, struggling desperately but in vain, was dragged bodily back through the window to the floor of the cab. There pinning his body in an excruciating attitude between the two doors, both knelt on him, effectually stilling his struggles. Their flying light fingers patted him all over and slipped in and out of his pockets, less like human fingers than evil little animals sniffing for prey. Greg's money they did not disturb; they were after a bigger prize. Besides what little money he carried, there was nothing upon him but his license cards. They desisted.

Abanez spoke to the other man who, careless of what part of Greg's anatomy his feet rested on, stood up and leaning through the front window thoroughly searched around and under the front seat. Unrewarded here, he dropped back on Greg. The two men then held a short colloquy in Spanish, but there was one English word terribly significant: "black-jack."

Greg sensed the up-lifted arm and held his breath. The blow descended, but did not fall true. It struck Greg merely a glancing blow on the side of the head. He retained the wit to grunt hollowly and let his body go slack. The man who had struck Greg said something to Abanez, and Abanez laughed in a comfortable fat way that roused a blind fury in Greg. But he lay still. Opening the door they climbed over Greg and slammed the door after them.

Greg gave them a second or two, then sitting up he peered cautiously over the sill of the window. The two men were sauntering deliberately towards the corner.

"Cool hands!" thought Greg with a kind of wonder.

As they turned they glanced carelessly back. Greg took care not to be seen. He waited a quarter of a minute, then slipping out of the cab and running on his toes to the corner he flattened himself against the building there and peeped around. His men were still proceeding down this street with the air of gentlemen with time to kill. A third of the way down the block they paused, looked around to make sure they were not being followed, and mounted the steps of a house.

Greg marked the house well. The street was Seventeenth and the house from its position must be number 716. This was the house from which earlier in the day de Socotra had issued with the little black book. It must be the new headquarters of the gang.

Greg returned to his cab. Stuyvesant Square is not very far from Gibbon Street, and it occurred to Greg that if he went home and changed his clothes, he would be in a better position to keep tab on de Socotra's later activities that night. Moreover he could get plenty of help at the yard; he would almost surely need help later. To think of it was to act on it. In three minutes he was driving into the yard.

Bessie's warm, bright kitchen looked very good to him coming in from the cold, and the smell of hot food made his head swim. There is nothing more exhausting than violent excitement. But he had no intention of stopping to eat. Hickey, Pa Simmons, Blossom, Ginger McAfee, and Bull Tandy were all seated around the oil-cloth-covered board.

All exclaimed at the sight of him. Even under the grotesque make-up they could perceive the strained grimness of Greg's face. Moreover there was a trickle of blood running down in front on one ear.

"What's happened?" cried Hickey.

"Plenty," said Greg laconically. "Can't stop to tell you now. Hurry up and finish eating, you fellows, if you want to get in on it. I'll need you to-night before I'm through. Blossom, you've got to play the part of a piano tuner. Come up and try on one of my suits."

"Sit down and eat yourself," said Bessie. "You've got to eat, or you can't keep up the pace."

"Make me up a couple of sandwiches like a good girl, and I'll eat them as I go."

"I'm through," said Hickey jumping up. "What's for me to do?"

"Go out and flood the flivver with oil. The old girl's had a stiff race, and she may have a worse one before her."

In a quarter of an hour Greg was once more the elegantly dressed young man of the town, while Blossom was giving a fair imitation of an artisan. He was provided with a bag of simple tools. Back in the kitchen Greg made his dispositions for the night.

"Hickey, you'll drive me. We may need a second car. Pa, you come along. Blossom can ride with you. We're going to the Stickney Arms first. You just follow Hickey, Pa, and stop when he stops."

"How about me?" asked Bull Tandy discontentedly. "Where do I come in? Say, if you want any strong-arm work I can put them guys" (referring to Messrs. Hickey, Blossom and Simmons) "over me head with one arm."

"Me, too," said little Ginger McAfee. "You ain't goin' to leave me out of the fun, are you, Greg? Bull's all right with his strong arm, but strong-arms are common; you want a man with a sharp head on him like me."

"Don't you want to come too, Bessie?" Greg grimly asked.

"I'll stop in me kitchen, thankee," said she dryly. "Very like you'll be wantin' hot cawfee when you come home, and maybe bandages."

Greg laughed. "Sorry, you fellows," he said to Bull and Ginger, "I can't use you right now. We'd only get in each other's light. But God knows what this night may turn up. You stay home—I'll make it good to you——"

"Ah, we don't want no pay," growled Bull.

"—And if I can use you later I'll send a 'phone message through the drug-store."

Hickey was out in the yard getting the flivver ready. They heard a cry from him, and he appeared at the door with an angry and grief-stricken face.

"Who cut my car?" he demanded.

Greg ran out and flashed his pocket-light inside the body of the car. A woeful sight was revealed; seat and back of the seat, pockets, even the carpet had been wantonly slashed right and left by the disappointed men in their vain search for the little black book. There was something indecent in the sight, as of an old person mutilated. The men crowding to look swore under their breaths.

"All right," said Greg grimly. "They shall pay for this with the rest. Come on now. We're wasting precious time."

CHAPTER XV

NINA

Once more the old flivver traveled the familiar way up-town. In thin extended Manhattan Island places are bound to be far from other places, and the inhabitants learn to take their long rides for granted. Greg and Hickey always took the same route, and in the course of their ride the whole panorama of town was spread before them in its variety.

First there was Houston Street, the heart of the ghetto with its tall old tenements, its narrow stores and vociferous push-cart venders. Then there was Second Avenue, the Great White Way of the East Side. Second Avenue was lined with great Jewish theaters and smoky Hungarian restaurants, bursting at this hour; the pavements thronged with the East Side crowd bound nowhere in particular; the young girls painted and bedizened, yet fresh young girls for all that; the loutish youths, the coiffed dames and the bearded elders. There followed a long, quiet interval where Hickey was able to open his throttle, through east Fourteenth Street, and up Fourth Avenue with its gigantic loft buildings now dark and empty. At Thirty-fourth Street they climbed a little hill and with another of the abrupt transitions for which the town is famous found themselves in the ultra-fashionable neighborhood of Murray Hill, where it was not yet dinner time, where discreet and perfectly-appointed town cars were waiting at the doors to take the Olympians out to dine.

Then circling the great new railway terminal they sped on up the newer Park Avenue with its empty spaces between the brand-new mighty apartment houses reaching Heavenwards, and with rents in accordance. They turned through Fifty-ninth Street, a narrow hybrid street of book-shops, studio-warrens, lunch counters and red trolley cars, and emerging at the Plaza, seat of fashion again, cut diagonally across the Park, where the night breathed quietly, and emerging at the West Seventy-second Street entrance, made their way to Riverside Drive, the Heaven of the unfashionable well-to-do and Manhattan's finest night-piece, where the street lights, the naked trees, the stars, the gleaming river and the twinkling lights on the further shore made an unforgettable harmony.

As they traveled Greg leaned forward on the sill of the front window, and while gratefully biting into Bessie's thick sandwiches told Hickey all that had happened during the afternoon. Hickey kept up a sort of terrified, delighted comment on the tale. Hickey made no pretensions to be a man of courage, but Greg had learned by this that he was quite as dependable as many a braggart.

"You opened her up on Riverside—and him after you and a lot of other cars and all! Oh Lordy! ... He picked up a cop, and still you didn't stop! It's a wonder he didn't pull his gun on you! ... All around through the streets! It's lucky it wasn't me at the wheel! I'd have fainted clean away!"

Presently Hickey asked nervously: "What's the program for to-night? Any more hold-ups or runaways? I tell you the flivver ain't runnin' so good."

"I can't tell," said Greg. "We have to be ready for anything."

"Lordy! I see my finish!" said Hickey.

Greg made him stop in the block below the Stickney Arms. Pa Simmons drew up behind. The four men gathered together, and Greg issued his instructions.

"You all wait here with the cabs. Shut off your engines. I'll go ahead and look over the ground. If I have to stay on watch I'll take cover in that clump of bushes opposite the entrance. Keep your eye on me. If I want you in a hurry I'll signal with my pocket flash. One flash, start your engines; two flashes move your cars up; three flashes shut your engines off; four flashes come on foot on the run."

After making them repeat this code after him, Greg went on to the apartment house. First from across the road he took a survey of the windows of the de Socotra apartment. All the windows including Amy's were lighted. This was reassuring since it suggested they were still within. Greg then boldly entered the building. To his disappointment he saw that another shift of servants was now on duty in the hall. This meant that new relations must be established. But proceeding further back, to his joy he discovered Frank, now shorn of his gorgeous livery, sitting in an inconspicuous corner under the stairs.

Frank seemed no less glad to see Greg. Eagerly coming forward he said: "I was looking for you, boss. It's my time off, but I thought there'd be somepin doing to-night, so I just stuck around."

"Good man!" said Greg.

"On the level, was it you here this afternoon, made up like a bum taxi-driver and all?"

"That was me," said Greg.

The boy's eyes sparkled with admiration. "Gee! you're some sport, fellow. You deserve to get her! That was some chase you give them. We watched it from the door as far as we could see down the Drive. But the old man got her back off you. Tough luck!"

"Well, I'll have another try to-night," said Greg.

"Say, count me in on it," begged Frank. "I don't care if I do lose me job!"

Greg's heart warmed towards the boy. "Much obliged," he said. "I shan't forget it. But I've already got my gang outside."

"Gee!" cried Frank. "Somepin doin' all right! I'm glad I didn't go home!"

"Is the family all up-stairs?" asked Greg.

Frank nodded.

"Find out who he's been telephoning to, will you? I suppose the operator's been listening in."

"You bet we ain't losing nothing from that apartment now. I can tell you without asking him. The Spanish bloke's been telephoning to a doctor guy that runs a sanitarium-like on Eighty-third Street; I took down the address for you; it's Doctor Tasker, 411 West Eighty-third. Seems her old man's going to take her there to-night. He's trying to make out she's looney."

"I know," Greg said. "Can I get up-stairs by the service elevator, and have a word with the maid?"

"She's fired," said Frank.

"The deuce you say!"

"Señor Soak-oater turned her out soon as he come home. She's down in the basement now, crying to the engineer's wife, 'cause she ain't got no place to go."

"I'll fix that," said Greg. "Show me the way."

In the tidy sitting-room of an underground apartment Greg found the good-looking Spanish girl that he had seen in attendance on Amy. She was red-eyed and sniffing now. A burly, kindly Irishwoman was attempting to console her.

At the door Frank announced without ceremony: "Fellow to see you."

Nina looked at Greg with a fresh access of terror. Perhaps her first thought was that de Socotra had set the police after her.

Greg announced his name. "Do you know who I am?" he asked.

A wonderful change took place in the girl's face. "Si, si, señor," she cried. Then in English to the Irishwoman. "It's all right now, Mrs. McArdle, I am saved!"

Her Latin enthusiasm was gratifying but a little disconcerting to an Anglo-Saxon male. "Sure, it's all right," he said grinning. "I want to have a little talk with you."

Mrs. McArdle rose. "Take my parlor, sir. Sure, it'll be a honor to me. I want to say that all of us that works in

the house is on your side and the pretty little lady's!"

"Thank you, Mrs. McArdle," said Greg smiling and blushing. "It won't take but a few minutes. You don't need to go out."

"Sure I got me work in the kitchen," said she. At the door as she left she gave Frank a great shove before her. "Get along up-stairs with you, nosey! Have you nothin' better to do than pry on the affairs of your betters!"

Nina was sizing Greg up with a shy, delighted interest, very embarrassing to Greg, yet somehow encouraging too. What had the mistress confided to her maid, that made the latter look at him so? Nina spoke good English, which simplified matters.

"Tell me what happened this afternoon," said Greg.

"When the Señorita come home from the theater this afternoon she show me little note hidden in the palm of her glove. She have tell me before about puttin' the notes in the old cab, and gettin' the answers back. She go into her room to read it. While she is in her room, he come home, Señor Francisco; he say he want see her quick. When I go tell her she is scare! She say: 'Nina! Nina! what I do! I got no time to think!'

"She give me little black book. She say: 'Where is his overcoat?' I say: 'Hangin' in the hall.' She say: 'Quick! Look in all the pockets! If you find a little book like this, put this in its place and hide the other. Then go quick and bring him here to me.'

"So I go look in his overcoat, but there was no book in any pocket. So I hide the book she give me in my dress, and I go to Señor Francisco who was talkin' to the Señora and I say: 'Señorita Amèlie say please come to her room.' He say: 'Is she sick?' I say I don't know. The Señora say: 'Poor child, I'll go with you.' He say: 'Better let me speak to her first, my dear.' He go to her room. I listen outside the door.

"Señorita Amèlie say: 'Francisco, I 'ope I didn't upset your plans by sending you that telegram. Maybe you will think I am foolish, but I cannot stand it another hour!' Señor Francisco say: 'For God's sake, what's the matter? You'll have to be quick, my dear, I only got five minutes.' She say: 'It's Bianca. I cannot stand that woman!'

"Señor Francisco is moch surprise'. He say: 'What's the matter with Bianca?' The Señorita say: 'I don't like her. Neither does mamma. Why do we have to put up with her? In Managuay she wouldn't think of coming to our house, but here she lives with us. She is like a spy. She watch everything I do. She will not let me be alone for a minute!' Here the Señorita change her voice. She say: 'Why, Francisco, there's a spot of grease on your coat! You can't go away like that! Let Nina rub it out.' He say: 'I can't wait now.' She say: 'It won't take a minute.'

"Well, I hear her comin' to the door, and I ran down the hall a little way. She open the door, she see me, but she call as if I long way off: 'Nina! Quick!' I run to her. She say: 'Rub out this spot! Be quick! Two minutes! Señor Francisco has a train!' She look at me hard. I understand.

"I run to the kitchen. I find the little black book in his pocket. I change it with the one in my dress. I rub a little cleaner on the coat to make it smell. I take the coat back. I hold it while Señor Francisco slip his arms through. I see him give his breast a little pat to see if the book is there. He is sayin' to the Señorita: 'My dear Amèlie, I've got to catch the six o'clock train. I can't make any change now. But I'll be back day after to-morrow. We'll see then.'

"So he goes. I give the little black book to my mistress. She is like crazy for joy. She give me her amethyst pin for my own. Before she can read the book, Señorita Bianca knock at the door. She hide it. Well, I go to dress the Señora for dinner. I am with her when the door bell ring. I go to the door. It is that bell-boy, Frank.

"He say he got to see Señorita Amèlie quick. He got an important message for her. I know that Señorita Bianca is with her, so I say: 'Tell it to me.' He say: (Nina's unconscious imitation of Frank was comical to see) 'Nix, girlie, this is for her own private ear.' So I go back to my mistress's room, but the spy-woman is still there. That's what I call her. I hate her! I try to make Señorita Amèlie look at me, but she will not. Señorita Bianca say: 'Who was that at the door, Nina?' She don't miss nothing. I say: 'Just the boy with the evening paper.' She say: 'You needn't wait, Nina. I'm going to help Amèlie dress. I'm talking to her.'

"Well, I don't know what to do then. I wait around. Señorita Bianca tell me to go again. But still I wait. At last Señorita Amèlie look at me. She see by my face that somesing's the matter. Then I go out. In a minute she come. I tell her go to the door quick. There is a boy waiting.

"She speak to the boy. Right away she come running back from the door with a hard face. She say to me: 'Quick, Nina! A warm coat and a plain hat!' Señorita Bianca come out and ask what is the matter, but Señorita Amèlie not answer; she run in her room. Before I can move I hear a key in the front door. It bang open, and Señor Francisco run in. *Madre de Dios!* what a face! It is a madman! I am turned to wood where I stand! He shake his fist to me and curse. I think I die then. He say: 'Get out! before I hurt you!' But I cannot move for fear.

"Señorita Bianca ask him what's the matter, but he not answer her. He run down the hall to my mistress's room; he slam the door open and run in. My heart runs away like water. I think he kill her. But there is another door from her room to the salon—living-room. She slip into that room quiet. When the Señor run into her room she run out of the living-room and down the hall to me. Señorita Bianca try to stop her. I give Bianca a push, and she sit down hard. I run after my Señorita. I whisper to her: 'Go to the roof.' I know the roof because the clothes are dried there.

"Señor Francisco come out of the living-room as my mistress go out the front door. He telephone downstairs to stop her. He did not think of the roof. I run hide in my room. When I hear him slam the door I run out again. I run to the salon and look out of the window. The Señora and Señorita Bianca lean out of other windows. The Señora say like a person in a dream: 'What is the matter? Oh, what is the matter?' Bianca say: 'I think Amèlie has lost her mind!'

"Well, I guess you know what happen after that. From the window I see Señor Francisco come out and go back again. I see my little mistress run around the corner and get in a cab,—was it your cab? I see another cab, and Señor Francisco get in it with two men. Then both cabs fly away down the Drive. We watch them as far as we can see.

"In half an hour Señor Francisco comes back bringin' Señorita Amèlie with him. I am sick and frightened. My dear little mistress is like a wooden woman. She say nothing. They take her to her room. He won't let me go in to her. He send me to the kitchen. Afterwards he come to me. He say: 'Where is the book you stole?'

"Well, I am glad he has not got it. But I am weak with fear. I cannot speak. I only shake my head. He twist my arm till I think I die with pain. He say: 'The truth! Where is it?' I say: 'I don't know. I give it to her.'

"He take me by the shoulders and shove me out on the service stairs. He say 'Get out of here!' with many bad words. He always swear in English so the Señora not understand. He say: 'If you show your face here again you'll wish you were dead!' He put me out like that without a coat to my back. And part me from my little mistress!"

Nina began to weep afresh.

"Don't you worry about that," said Greg. "You'll soon be with her again. Listen carefully, and I'll tell you what to do."

But the instructions were not delivered just then, for Frank came running down-stairs to say that Señor de Socotra had just ordered a taxi to be at the door in three minutes.

CHAPTER XVI

THE "PSYCHOPATHIC SANITARIUM"

Greg said to Nina: "Wait here till I come back or send for you."

"Boss, let me in on this," begged Frank.

"Very well, come with me," said Greg.

They went out *via* the basement door of the building which led to the side street. The Stickney Arms as has already been described fronted on a narrow roadway which was terraced above the Drive proper. There was a sloping sward between roadway and Drive, which was set out with clumps of ornamental shrubbery. One such clump across the road from the main entrance offered Greg an ideal observation post.

First he took Frank to the two cabs and the waiting men. "This boy is one of us," he said. "Let him wait with you until I give you a signal. Get in the cabs out of sight."

By a roundabout course Greg made his way to his place of concealment. Presently the cab ordered by de Socotra drove up. A moment or two later a little procession appeared in the corridor: de Socotra tenderly supporting Amy on one side, and a trained nurse on the other,— "Where did she come from?" thought Greg. Two hall-boys, laden with rugs, valises, etc., brought up the rear.

As they drew closer, in the nurse Greg suddenly recognized the handsome, hard features of Bianca. "Of course!" he thought. "De Socotra would never trust Amy in an institution without his own personal spy to keep watch of her." Greg smiled in satisfaction. This meant that they were leaving the innocent Señora de Socotra alone in the apartment, making his task a hundred times easier. All the luck was not against him to-night.

He let them drive away without making any signal to his men. Since he knew where they were going, there was no especial hurry. The cab turned into the drive and headed down-town. Greg joined his expectant men and issued his instructions.

"Frank, you go back to Nina and tell her they're all gone out except the old lady. She must be pretty near distracted by what's happened. She'll be glad enough to have Nina back for company. Tell Nina to go right up-stairs on the pretext of getting her things. Tell her I'm sending in one of my men who will claim to be the piano man, and that she is to let him in and help him. By the way, what is the name of the people who own that apartment?"

"Merriweather."

"Good. Blossom will say that Mr. Merriweather made an arrangement to have the piano inspected monthly. And he can explain the lateness of his call by saying—let me see—I have it! Blossom will say that his baby is going to be christened to-morrow, and he's doubling up his work to-day, so that he can get a day off. Nothing like a little touch of homeliness to make a story carry!"

"I get you," said Frank.

"Blossom, you heard? The little black book was dropped in the top of the piano, and fell down behind the sounding-board. Your job is to recover it. Work quickly, because de Socotra may not be away long. When you get it you're to hustle home, and tell Bessie to put it in a safe place. Oh yes, and take the girl Nina down there with you, and give her in Bessie's care."

"Will Pa wait for me?" asked Blossom.

"No, take the subway home. I need both cabs. Go on with you. Frank will show you the ropes."

Blossom and Frank made their way towards the basement entrance.

To the remaining two Greg went on: "De Socotra has gone to 411 West Eighty-third Street. Pa, your job is to trail him as before. You're to come west through Eighty-third, and stop a little way beyond 411. Very likely his cab will be waiting for him. You're to follow him wherever he goes and report by telephone through the drug-store at nine o'clock. I'll arrange with the druggist to keep open late. Hickey, you take me through Eighty-third traveling east."

Eighty-third Street east of Amsterdam proved to be a block of medium-sized private dwellings as much alike as peas in an interminable pod; solemn-faced houses, immaculately cared for, and of the utmost respectability. It was a block, Greg guessed, that would be as silent and undisturbed as a desert after midnight. Number 411 on the north side of the street differed in no respect from its neighbors on either hand. There was not even a doctor's sign in the window. As Greg had expected, de Socotra's cab was waiting below the door.

Greg had Hickey continue to Columbus Avenue and stop in front of a drug-store. Pa Simmons passed them bound in the other direction, and drew up a little beyond de Socotra's cab. Leaving Hickey on watch, Greg went into the drug-store to fish for a little information.

He said to the clerk: "I'm looking for Dr. Tasker's Sanitarium, but I've forgotten the number."

"Four eleven, sir. You can see it from the side door."

"Do you know anything about the place?" Greg pursued, "I mean what sort of a reputation it bears?"

"The very best!" was the impressive reply. The clerk was a young man without humor. "They never have any trouble there. Why, it's run so quiet, so discreet, half the people in the block don't know we have a private asylum—I mean a psychopathic sanitarium in our street. They put the mild cases in the front rooms so they don't have to bar the windows. The back windows is barred all right. The nurses are real ladies and gentlemen; no rough work there. Have you got a case for them?"

"I'm afraid so," said Greg, sighing heavily.

"Well, it's a great misfortune—but you couldn't do better. You might mention I recommended them if you don't mind. One good turn deserves another. I'm anxious to get more of their business. Heavy users of bromides, you understand."

"Bromides!" the word rang ominously on Greg's hearing. Otherwise dope. Strait-jackets had evidently given way to more efficient methods.

"It's a very exclusive place," the clerk went on. "Steep. They say the board is fifty dollars a week, and up."

Greg shook his head sadly. "That's terrible! However, I'll enquire," he said.

Greg bought some cigars, while the clerk continued his gossip, but Greg learned no more to his purpose. Finally he saw Hickey making unostentatious signals, and went outside. Hickey reported that de Socotra had come out of 411 and had driven west. Pa Simmons had gone after him.

"We must kill time for awhile," Greg said. "It would look too miraculous if we turned up one minute after de Socotra had left."

"Well, we'll need gasoline before the night's out," Hickey suggested.

"All right. Find the nearest garage, and fill her up."

A quarter of an hour later Greg was ringing the bell of 411. His heart was beating fast. He had no idea of what he was going to do when he got inside, but left it to circumstances to dictate.

The door was opened by a neat colored maid who suggested a well run private house rather than an institution. At first sight she gave a tone to the place. She was smiling and respectful, yet there was a guarded look in her eyes which suggested that they were accustomed to sights that she kept to herself. Greg asked for Doctor Tasker.

"Doctor Tasker doesn't live here," she said. "He only has his visiting hours. Doctor Emslie is the resident."

"I would like to see him," said Greg.

As he stepped into the house, he observed that an arch had been cut through the party wall into the house on the left, thus throwing the two houses into one. He was shown into a rather luxurious office at the back in which a blonde, bearded man was working at a desk. However, the eagerness with which he looked up suggested that he was not very closely absorbed in his work.

He was a handsome man, yet Greg instinctively disliked him. He was too fat, too red-lipped, too anxious to please. Greg's involuntary verdict was: "Too soft to go out and work up a practice for himself, so he takes an easy

thing like this. This man would close his eyes to anything in order not to risk losing his job." Greg made up his mind that the truth would not serve here, and he essayed the role of the saddened relative again.

"I have just learned that my poor cousin has suffered a nervous break-down and has been brought here," he said.

"Ah!" said Doctor Emslie orotundly. "What name, please?" He opened a book on his desk, a sort of ledger. This was merely a bit of by-play of course, for he must have had by heart the names of all the patients in that little place.

"Señorita de Socotra," said Greg.

"You have been misinformed," said the doctor. "No such person here."

Greg was taken aback for the moment. He had made a bad start. But he looked up as if an idea had occurred to him. "Perhaps an assumed name was given—to spare the family, you know. I'm sure she was brought here, a young Spanish-American lady. She is here, isn't she?"

But the doctor had taken alarm. A wary look appeared in his moist blue eyes. Greg guessed that de Socotra's picturesque personality, not to speak of de Socotra's pocket-book, had won his allegiance. He did not answer Greg directly but said suggestively:

"Spanish-American and your cousin?"

"Half Spanish-American I should have said. Her father was an American."

"Ah," said Doctor Emslie, and Greg saw that he had only damaged his own case further.

"The gentleman who brought her here was not her real but her adopted father," he explained.

The doctor smiled politely. Greg saw that he did not believe a word of it. "Without saying whether or not there is any such person here," he said smoothly, "may I ask what your purpose is in asking?"

"I want to see her."

The doctor shrugged expressively. "My dear sir! Under no circumstances could I allow that without the express authorization of her own physician, or of her nearest relative. We have to be especially careful with the kind of cases that we treat. Visits are apt to be so exciting."

Greg saw that it was hopeless to try to persuade him, but he sparred for time a little. The ledger or case-record was still open on the desk, and Greg was trying to read the latest entry upside down.

"Just for a moment!" he begged. "You could be present. My poor little cousin! I merely want to see if there is anything she needs!"

Dr. Emslie stood up as a gentle hint. "You may rest assured that everything possible is being done for her," he said,—"I mean if she is here," he added, seeing that he had made a slip. "Go to her father, or her step-father, as the case may be, and if it was here that he brought her, he will of course authorize me to let you see her."

By this time Greg had succeeded in reading at least part of the entry. The name was Clelie Mendizabal. This odd name had stuck fast in Greg's memory. It was the name Bianca Guiterrez had given him in the Ninth Street house. "A family pseudonym," Greg thought, "that is made to serve all kinds of purposes." Following the name came various particulars that Greg had not time to decipher. He was chiefly interested in a number written in bold characters: 16. He guessed that to be the number of Amy's room in the house.

Meanwhile Doctor Emslie was blandly ushering him towards the door. They parted politely at the threshold of the room; the doctor went back to his desk. As Greg progressed towards the front door, not much wiser than when he had entered, the good-looking maid opened it to admit another visitor. This was a sad-faced woman carrying a little package upright with care, evidently a delicacy for a patient.

She nodded to the maid with the air of a frequent visitor and continued on up the stairs.

The incident gave Greg an idea. As she held the door open for him to pass out, he gave the maid a dollar. She accepted it as one who had a just sense of her own worth. Still with the air of a saddened relative Greg said:

"I expect you'll see me often after this. Which house is number 16 in?"

"This house, sir. First floor front."

Greg got in the flivver and had Hickey take him down to Columbus Avenue where he searched for a delicatessen store and bought a pot of jelly. Leaving Hickey at the corner he returned to the sanitarium on foot. When the maid opened the door to him, he nodded as to an old acquaintance, and holding his pot of jelly carefully upright said:

"I'll go right up."

At first she made as if to block the way, but his smiling assurance overawed her. She gave way. He mounted deliberately, and passed out of sight around the bend to the first landing. There were four doors on the landing. They were numbered, but even if they had not been, "first-floor front" was an exact description to any one familiar with New York houses. Greg knocked on the door of 16 with a fast beating heart.

The door was opened by Bianca in her nurse's dress. Things happened quickly after that. She instantly recognized him and attempted to slam the door, but Greg had put his foot in the jamb. Through the crack he caught a glimpse of Amy sitting in a disconsolate attitude by the fire. Putting his shoulder against the door he heaved with all his strength and Bianca gave way suddenly. He walked into the room. Bianca ran out into the hall screaming for help.

Amy sprang up. Her set face softened wonderfully. She instinctively put out both her hands and Greg took them in his. His heart yearned over her, so little, so distressed, so plucky withal! Neither of them recollected the Castilian youth.

"My sweet!" he murmured, "you're all right?"

She took the endearment as a matter of course. They knew they had but a fraction of a minute to themselves, and they spoke swiftly. "I'm afraid!" she murmured with trembling lip. "If you had seen his face! Like a wild beast's! I don't know what he intends. He's sending me south to-morrow, in a private car under guard—Bianca—those men!"

"You shan't go, if I live!" said Greg. "Listen! I'll be thrown out of here directly. Do those windows open?"

"Yes."

"Where does that door lead to?"

"The bathroom."

"That has a window over the front door?"

"Yes."

"Good! I'll be back for you after one o'clock to-night, with a ladder, understand? Be on the lookout. When you see me drop a handkerchief, throw up the bathroom window and climb over the sill. Don't let them give you any dope."

She nodded.

By this time help had reached Bianca. Dr. Emslie, two white-coated orderlies, and Bianca herself came tumbling back into the room.

"There he is!" cried Bianca. "An intruder! Throw him out!"

The three men made to obey; the orderlies were a brawny, hardy pair. Greg's heart sunk—not at the fear of being hurt, but at the intolerable prospect of having Amy see him physically humiliated. He put his back against the wall.

"Keep your hands off me," he said in a dangerous voice, "and I'll go." To the doctor he added significantly: "Call them off if you don't want a nasty row in the house."

It worked. The plump doctor quailed at the thought of a row. "Let him alone," he muttered, "if he'll go quietly."

Greg strode out of the room and down the stairs as deliberately and coolly as he had gone up. The three men pressed close after him, longing to throw him down headlong, but not daring. At the foot of the stairs curiosity got the better of the plump doctor and he changed his tone.

"Come into the office," he said, "and let's talk things over."

"Go to Hell," said Greg.

CHAPTER XVII

THE YOUNG MAN WITH THE LITTLE BLACK MUSTACHE

As Greg proceeded along the street to rejoin Hickey, he measured with his eye the distance from the porch floors to the window overhead. All the houses were of the same design. "Twelve feet," he said to himself; "a ten-foot ladder will do."

"Let's go home," he said to Hickey. "We've got to lay plans for an attack after midnight."

"An attack! Good Lord!" said Hickey apprehensively.

"Hickey, where can we get a ten-foot ladder?"

"There's ladders lying around the yard."

"That simplifies matters."

"Are you countin' on carrying a ladder through the streets after midnight? No cop would let you by."

"Ay, there's the rub, as friend Hamlet says. We might cut it in half and rig it as an extension ladder. Then we could carry it inside."

"How about a window-cleaner's ladder? That works up and down on ropes."

"Excellent idea! Do you know any window-cleaners?"

"No, but it's only eight o'clock. The big stores are open for the Christmas trade. You can get most anything at Macymaker's."

"Hickey, sometimes you display almost human intelligence. *En avant* to Macymaker's!"

Sure enough in the house-furnishing department of that vast emporium, Greg found what he wanted. The salesman wondered perhaps that any one should pick out a window-cleaner's ladder for a Christmas present, but Greg was not worrying about what the salesman might think. With a couple of sheets of store paper wrapped about

it, and tied with twine, the ladder was sufficiently disguised, so that there was little danger of the most zealous policeman's suspicions being aroused by the sight of it.

As he and Hickey tied it on top of the flivver outside, Greg said with a chuckle: "Burglary made easy!"

Hickey shivered. "Don't use such ugly-sounding words!" he begged.

They went on. Greg offered Hickey a cigar. "We have time on our hands now," he said. "Light up and let the old girl trundle home at her ease like a lady."

The phantasmagoria of Houston Street was spread before them again. Here was Christmas shopping of the humbler sort. End to end the push-carts extended along the curb lighted by smoky kerosene flares and displaying an amazing variety of wares from sets of "genuine imitation ermine furs" down to apples pickled in brine. The pavement was literally packed, largely by reason of the fat shoppers who took up the room of three or four.

Coming towards them they perceived a stir of excitement in the throng. A big policeman was slowly forcing his way through, presumably urging before him some unfortunate they could not see. In the policeman's wake was a struggling procession of those who were trying to get a look. The quality of excitement in their faces suggested that the affair was something out of the common.

As Greg and Hickey passed abreast of the policeman the crowd opened for a moment, and they had a brief glimpse of the man he had in charge. They saw the slight and sagging figure of a young man with small features. His face was greenish; he shambled along with eyes half-closed. His hat was gone, and to their surprise they saw that his clothes were drenched. They were near the river.

"A would-be suicide," said Greg. "Poor devil!"

An odd little grunt escaped from Hickey, and he brought the cab to a stop with a jerk.

"What's up?" asked Greg.

"That—that face," stammered Hickey.

"What of it?"

"I've been looking for it for three days by your orders. That's the fellow with the little black mustache, who hired me on the pier that night."

Greg was effectually galvanized into action. Slipping out of his seat, he said: "Turn the first corner to the right, and wait for me in the side street. I'll look after him. He doesn't know me."

Greg ran down the roadway until he got in advance of the policeman; then forcing his way through the crowd, who gave way before his determined air, he fronted the officer.

"Beg pardon, officer. I think I know this man. What's he done?"

Greg's good clothes and assured air were not without their effect. The policeman was disposed to be complaisant. "Attempted suicide. Jumped off a Houston Street ferry, he did. A deckhand pulled him out."

The crowd, delighted to receive exact information as to the affair, waited open-mouthed for more. The prisoner glanced at Greg with indifferent, lack-luster eyes. He said nothing.

"He's soaking wet," said Greg. "And at this time of year——"

"I'm keeping him walking," said the blue-coat. "And the station is but a block away. We'll give him blankets there."

Greg fell into step beside the policeman. "Poor devil! Are you obliged to lay a charge against him?"

"They always do. Attempted suicide's a crime."

"But nobody's ever sent to jail for it."

"If I let him go he might try it again."

"Four days to Christmas, officer. Let me take care of him. I'll give him a square meal and a bed. I've got a cab around the corner. I'll take him home in that."

Voices from the crowd said: "Aw, let him go. It's Christmas. He ain't harmed nobody but himself."

The blue-coat was a bit nettled by the implication of hard-heartedness. "'Tain't nothin' to me," he said. "Come on to the station, and if the loof'nant says all right, all right."

"I'll be there," said Greg. "You take him on, and I'll get my cab."

Greg and Hickey doubled back through the next street and were already at the station-house door when the officer arrived with his prisoner. Greg had no great difficulty in persuading the good-natured officer at the desk to let the wretched young man go. The inconsistency of arresting a man for trying to kill himself cannot but be apparent to all. It is something that he cannot be prevented from doing if he wants to. A mumbled promise was extracted from the prisoner that he would not try it again, and he was handed over to Greg's care.

Wrapping him in the lap-robe, Greg bundled him into the flivver and they drove off amid the plaudits of the crowd gathered around the station-house steps. The young man did not come face to face with Hickey. Greg felt a little shamefaced that the people should think he was playing the part of the good Samaritan.

"If they knew!" he thought. "It's only out of the frying pan into the fire for him, poor wretch!"

As the cab started the young man never so much as looked up. He half sat, half lay in the corner of the cab like an old man in whom the last spark of life is almost quenched. His eyes were open, yet they saw nothing. He seemed to be quite indifferent as to where Greg was taking him; he seemed not to care whether he were in jail or out again. Greg, who had never seen a human creature so beaten down, scarcely knew how to act towards him. His heart was touched by the sight of such utter wretchedness, but to offer him sympathy would have been both cruel and hypocritical. On the other hand he could not hit the man while he was down by letting him see that his crime was known. For the present it seemed best merely to try to restore him by warmth, food and sleep, until he was better able to meet his fate like a man.

The young man himself broke the silence. "You would have done better to let me go," he muttered. He spoke with a slight foreign accent.

"Buck up!" said Greg. "Nothing's so bad but what it might be worse." To Greg while he uttered them the words sounded hollow, addressed to one in this young man's position, but he had to say something.

"I suppose I ought to thank you," said the other with weary bitterness.

"You needn't trouble about that," said Greg grimly.

"If you want to do me a real kindness, stop the man and let me out. I can still walk to the river."

"Mustn't talk like that," said Greg. "There's food and warmth waiting for you. Let that do you for the present."

Hickey drove into the yard, and Greg hustled the young man directly into Bessie's kitchen. Bull Tandy and Ginger McAfee were sitting there one on each side of the table, smoking and enjoying their unwonted evening of leisure. Bessie the monumental was wiping dishes. They had been discussing the case all evening, and still had plenty to talk about when lo! Greg provided them with a fresh sensation. The two men stared at the ghastly and bedraggled figure with pipes half way to their mouths; Bessie held plate and towel in the air.

"Good land! who is he?" she exclaimed.

"Tell you later," said Greg. "Help me get him in bed, and to put some hot food and drink in him. Is Blossom back?"

He was not.

Bessie promptly took command of the situation. "You, Bull, go up-stairs to Greg's room, and light the oil heater. Ginger, fetch me a pail of coal from the cellar. Greg, you fill the kettle at the sink and go into the store and get a can of soup. That's the best for him." Bessie herself vigorously shook the fire and opened the draft.

"Poor fellow, you've been in the river, I see," said she. The river is always ominously present in the minds of those who live near. "Take this chair close by the stove until the room up-stairs heats up."

The object of this solicitude accepted it apathetically. He huddled in the chair that was placed for him as if his backbone lacked the pith to hold him straight. He made no effort to speak. While they were bustling about on their various errands he was left alone in the room for a moment. To get him out of the way, Bessie had put his chair on the far side of the stove. This brought him facing the door into the yard, and when Hickey, having backed the flivver under the shed, came in, the young man's eyes fell full upon him.

They were brought running from various directions by the sound of a choking cry followed by a fall. They found the young man lying face downwards on the floor. Hickey was standing with his hand still on the door, scared halt out of his wits.

"Lordy! I clean forgot the sight of me would be a shock to him," he stammered.

"It had to come," said Greg grimly. "We couldn't go on making out to be his friends."

The young man was insensible. They carried him up-stairs and put him in Greg's bed, wrapped in all the blankets the house afforded. Bessie heated bricks in the oven and placed them about him. Hickey was dispatched in the flivver for a doctor.

The doctor came, brought the patient to, and upon hearing all the circumstances, prescribed a small portion of the soup, which Bessie by now had hot upon the stove. They forced it down his throat. He seemed utterly distraught, shaking and moaning Spanish words. Before leaving, the doctor gave him a hypodermic to induce sleep.

Greg said he would watch beside the bed until it should take effect. The patient still twitched and gasped like a creature beyond all control; yet when the others left the room he opened his eyes and asked sanely enough:

"Who are you?"

Greg told his name. "It would take a long time to explain who I am," he added. "You'd better try to sleep."

"You know me?" he asked.

"Yes, your name is de Silva."

"What do you want of me?" the other asked hoarsely.

"Nothing at present except to put a little life into you."

"In order to take it away from me later?"

Greg, taken aback, said: "It isn't your life that I want."

The poor wretch shuddered. "I thought I saw a man down-stairs—or did I dream it? A cab-man——"

Greg saw nothing was to be gained by further concealment. "You saw him," he said. "It was the cabman you engaged on the pier the night the *Allianca* docked."

The young man raised himself on his elbow. "Then all is known?"

"Pretty nearly all."

He fell back. "Well—I'm glad," he said weakly. "The worst agony is over."

Presently he opened his eyes, attacked by a new fear. "Who are you?" he demanded. "And those others downstairs? *His* men?"

"Whose?" asked Greg, perplexed.

"De Socotra's."

"No, by God!"

The recumbent figure relaxed. "Detectives, then? I don't mind that."

"Not detectives, either," said Greg. "I'll tell you this much—I'm after de Socotra. I know he's the principal in this affair, not you. I only want you as a means to get him."

"You'll never get him," said de Silva with hopeless assurance. "He's not a man like others; he's a fiend out of Hell."

"That may be," said Greg grimly. "But just the same I mean to get him! Better not talk any more. Let yourself relax."

"I've got to talk. I've kept it in too long. I'll go out of my mind if I don't talk. I think I'm losing my mind anyway I've been in Hell the last three days. Couldn't think what I was doing. But only of him. This is what they call being haunted maybe. Not like books. All of a sudden his face comes between me and what I look at—nice old face with a half-smile and quiet eyes. Oh God! Oh God! I never can forget it now——!

"I never set up to be any better than I was. It isn't the first job I've done for different men. I sort of got in the way of it young. Men sent for me when they wanted something nervy done. I could get away with anything because I was little and thin and looked harmless. I had nerves of steel until this happened. I was proud of my reputation."

"Good God!" interrupted Greg aghast. "Do you mean to say that murder was your trade?"

"Well, why not? It takes more nerve and cleverness than holding down an office stool. I liked the spice of danger. And anyhow the men I put out before this one only got what was coming to them. They were no better than them that wanted it done. Fair game. I don't give a damn for any of the others. They don't trouble my sleep. But this one—Oh God! he's *got* me! ...

"I didn't know him beforehand. I was sent down from New York to Central America to get next to him. They told me he was a blackguard that was trying to raise the niggers to cut Hell loose down there. I was to get the job as his secretary because I spoke Spanish and English, and come back to New York with him. The job was to be done here.

"Well, we were on the ship together almost a week. That was what queered me. He wanted to make friends, see? He wouldn't let me alone. God! it raked me up and down with little sharp points—his friendliness. It started me thinking, and I wasn't any good to myself any more. He wasn't a preacher, nothing like it. Just a jolly old gentleman who could tell a story in the smoking-room as well as any man, and laugh till his fat sides shook. He liked me; that's what got me. I couldn't make it out. Nobody ever liked me before. He was always trying to make me talk about myself. God! it scared me what I found myself telling him! I told him lots of funny things—at night on deck. He didn't mind; he didn't blame me. He would only say: 'Well, life's a queer affair!' He didn't stop liking me. And I killed him! Oh God, how I hate myself! ...

"When we got to New York I was in no shape to carry out my job. My nerve was gone. But I couldn't turn back then. Always prided myself I never failed to pull off a job. I thought I could work myself up to it. And I did it. But my hand shook. He looked at me as I gave him the needle. Just one look!"

"How did you do it?" asked Greg.

"With a hypodermic needle. In the jugular here"—he put a finger on his throat. "There was curare in it. What the San Blas Indians dip their arrow-points in. Kills like a hammer-stroke. De Socotra gave me the needle and showed me how. But I bungled it. The cabman heard something and stopped by the curb. My nerve was gone. I beat it."

"Where did you go then?" asked Greg.

"I went—I don't know—I went—I went——"

The voice trailed off. The narcotic was taking effect.

CHAPTER XVIII

BLOSSOM'S REPORT

Greg heard a new voice in the kitchen. De Silva was now in a heavy sleep, and he went down to investigate. Blossom's failure to turn up had made him very anxious.

This was the boy from the drug-store to say that Greg was wanted on the telephone. Greg went back with him.

Over the wire he heard Pa Simmons' old voice:

"Say, Greg, I'm sorry, but I lost his nibs, the Spanish bloke. On the level I couldn't help it. He took after Blossom and a girl, and I took after him, but they all got in the subway, and I couldn't leave me old boat in the street while I traveled all over town in the subway, could I?"

"Hold on! Hold on! Begin at the beginning!"

"Well, I was on'y waiting a few minutes in Eighty-third Street when his nibs come out of that house, you know, 311. He got in his cab and went back home; through Eighty-third to Broadway, up Broadway to Ninety-fourth and down to the Drive, me following. Well, while we was going through Ninety-fourth, I see Blossom and a good-looking girl coming along on the sidewalk. His nibs in front, he musta seen 'em too, for he stops his cab and slips out and takes after them on foot. They didn't see him. Well, I went on a little way, turned around, and followed the whole bunch around to the Ninety-sixth Street subway station.

"Blossom and the girl went down, his nibs follows them, and I follows his nibs. We goes to the down-town platform. On the platform Blossom gets wise to me, see? And when his nibs ain't looking I gives him a little sign that that is his nibs, see? Blossom gets it all right. Well, a train come along then and they all got in. But I couldn't leave my cab. I went back to Stickney Arms, but his nibs ain't come home yet. You told me to call you at nine. What do you want me to do now?"

Greg considered a moment. "If his wife is alone in the apartment he's pretty sure to be back soon. Better stay on watch where you are. Call me up again in an hour."

Greg returned home in no little anxiety. It seemed like a gratuitous stroke of ill luck that de Socotra should just have happened to run into Blossom. Blossom was a good fellow and loyal without a doubt, but he could scarcely be expected to prove a match for the astute de Socotra. And almost two hours had passed. Greg would have given something to know what had happened. But all he could do was wait.

A few minutes later Blossom walked in the kitchen door. Nina was with him. One look in the man's face told Greg that nothing serious had happened; on the contrary the morose and jejune Blossom looked fairly rejuvenated.

"The little black book?" cried Greg. "Have you got it?"

By way of answer Blossom held it aloft. A cheer went up in the kitchen.

"Thank God!" cried Greg. "Now we're all right!"

Bessie was standing, arms akimbo, taking it all in like a comical solemn child. The temptation was too much for Greg. Before she knew what he was doing, Greg had seized her round the waist and waltzed her—or rather swayed her, for it was impossible to move her from her firmly planted stand. The men roared.

"Bessie! Bessie!" cried Greg. "Did you hear that, you dear little thing. We have it!"

"Go along with you!" said Bessie, giving him a little push—and he went along, flat against the wall.

He snatched the little black book out of Blossom's hands and hastily turned the pages. It was all in Spanish, of course. He could not read it.

"Hold your horses," said Blossom warningly. "There's maybe something funny about that. Wait till I tell you."

"What happened?" asked Greg sobered. "It looks all right; letters, affidavits, just what Estuban said."

"In the beginning everything went off all right," Blossom began. "Miss Nina, she went up to the apartment, and after giving her a minute I followed her to the service entrance. She let me in and told me she'd squared herself with the old lady all right. She went and told the old lady the piano man had come and I got off my song and dance about Mr. Fairweather and the christening and all."

"Merriweather was the name," put in Greg.

"Oh well, any kind of weather was the same to her, being Spanish," said Blossom. "Miss Nina, she translated it to her. At first the old lady looked doubtful. She said I'd have to wait till Mr. Soakoater come home. But when I told her I had three more calls to make up in the Bronx, she said she guessed it was all right. She was a nice old lady, not naturally suspicious like. She was all broke up about the little Miss being took away.

"She stayed in the parlor and watched while I worked. I had to take the whole back off the piano. There was sixteen screws in it, four to a side, and every blame one of them stuck. I was sweating with nervousness before I got the last one out, expecting to hear his nibs in the hall any moment.

"When the little book dropped out on the floor, 'What's that?' says the old lady. 'There it is!' says I, real quick and glad-like. 'My list of customers that I lost the last time I was here! I been looking everywhere for it.' 'Let me see it,' says she. 'Sorry, ma'am!' says I, 'it's confidential; we ain't allowed to show our lists to anybody.' Say, she was easy. It was a shame to lie to her. She let me get away with it.

"Well, say, I put on that piano-back quicker than I took it off—only one screw to a side. Then I beat it for the basement. I breathed easier when I got out.

"I waited down-stairs for Miss Nina, and the two of us made tracks for the subway at Ninety-sixth Street. Somewhere on the way back the Spanish gent must have picked us up, though I didn't notice him at the time. Miss Nina and me was talking. I first got on to it that there was something funny when we was waiting on the platform. All of a sudden I see Pa Simmons there looking like a lost dog offen his cab.

"I recollected that Pa's job was to trail the Spaniard, so I looked cautious-like around for him. There wasn't many on the platform and the only one that could be him was a tall guy with his head behind a newspaper. All I could see was his elegant creased pants and his fancy shoes. You had said he was a swell dresser, so I guessed this was him. And afterwards I caught Pa's eye, and he gave me a sign that it was him.

"Well, a train come in and Miss and I got in one door, and the Spanish gent in another. Don't know where Pa went. Miss Nina had not got on to it that we was being trailed, and I didn't tell her because I thought she'd be scared and let on. He was at the other end of the same car.

"Well, all the way down town I was thinking how I could shake him. I remembered the crowd along Houston Street, but I didn't want to risk bringing him so close home. I remembered there was a gang of Christmas shoppers on Fourteenth Street too, so we got out there and walked west. There's a big nickelodion on Fourteenth Street—you know, a long hall with penny-in-the-slot phonographs and move-em-pitchers that's supposed to be naughty but they ain't. It runs right through to Thirteenth. I steered Miss Nina in there. She didn't like it, thought I was trying to put something over on her, so I had to tell her the Spaniard was after us. Say, it made her a little weak in the knees.

"I was hoping the Spaniard would wait outside for us, and we could sneak out the back way, but not on your life! He followed us right through. So we went on down Thirteenth, and I cut into the back entrance of a big store, hoping to lose him in the crowd. But he stuck closer than a brother—up-stairs, down in the basement, out on Fourteenth Street again. By this time he must have guessed of course that we were on to him.

"Next I went back to the subway again. I took him up to Times Square, but I couldn't shake him in the crowds there, neither. Well, I tried the subway once more and this time I had a bit of luck. There was a big crowd coming and going, and as we got down to the down-town platform there was a train on each side, express and local. The local was just opening her doors.

"I steered Miss Nina aboard the local, and the Spaniard got on by another door. I watched my chance, and just as they were ready to close the doors of the express I grabbed the girl, hustled her across the platform and into the other train, and the door closed behind us. It took the Spanish gent by surprise. He run too, for the next door, but it closed in his face."

"Good work!" said Greg.

"Wait a minute! I ain't told you the funny part yet. The train started and we was carried right past the Spaniard close enough to touch him only the other side of the glass. Well, I couldn't help having a bit of sport with him. I knew anyway he knew what I'd been up to as soon as he went home and the old lady told him. So as we passed by I held up the little black book; like that, right before his nose."

"The deuce you did!" cried Greg delightedly.

"Wait a bit! It didn't get across like I expected. He give me the laugh first. Yes, sir, threw back his head, and laughed fit to die. What do you know about that?"

"Just a bluff," said Greg.

Blossom shook his head positively. "No, sir, I know a real laugh when I see it!"

"But here is the book," said Greg.

"Just the same, he thinks he has us, somehow."

Blossom's words carried conviction, and Greg's feeling of triumph was considerably dashed. "I wish Estuban was here," he said.

CHAPTER XIX

THE ABDUCTION

Though he had seen him but on the one occasion, Greg had more confidence in Estuban than in any of the taxi-drivers, good fellows though they were. He much desired Estuban's help on the dangerous expedition he had planned, and waited for him as long as he dared. But one o'clock drew near without any sign of him, and in the end Greg had to go without him.

He was in difficulties when it came to choosing a man in Estuban's place. They all wanted to go; each man loudly and shamelessly proclaimed his own superior qualities. Greg finally decided to take them all. It was possible he might need them, and if he did not, they could remain in concealment in the cab. He swore them by a mighty oath to obey him in the smallest particular.

Meanwhile during the evening the old car had received a grooming like an athlete before his supreme race. From all the cabs in the yard the most nearly new tires were borrowed; every nut was screwed home, every wire tested. With black grease they smudged the license plates so that the numbers were illegible. Nor did they fail to test the extension ladder. Afterwards it was put back in its paper and tied on top of the flivver.

On the way up-town all rode inside. The front window was allowed to remain down, so that Hickey could share in Greg's instructions and exhortations. While he talked to them Greg was sizing up his men. They showed their excitement in characteristic ways. Bull Tandy smoked deep, and there was a calm and delighted smile on his face; Blossom whistled incessantly through closed teeth; little Ginger twisted on his seat like a restless schoolboy. "I'll pick Bull for the closest work," thought Greg.

When they got to the corner of Columbus Avenue and Eighty-third Street, Greg said to Hickey: "Drive all the way through the block and come back again, so that we can get a look over the whole ground."

It was a long block down to Amsterdam Avenue, more than a furlong. A slight hill rose towards the middle of the block, and descended beyond. As Greg had expected the neighborhood was absolutely deserted, scarcely a light to be seen the whole way. Number 411 was near the beginning of the block, the Columbus Avenue end. All the windows were dark, but a dim light showed in the doorway, likewise in the doorway of the connecting house.

Half-way through the block, that is to say, at the top of the little hill, they came upon a stationary figure, an officer, but one whose gray coat differed from the uniform of the city police. He was leaning back with his elbows propped on a stone post, one heel cocked up on a step, and his club dangling from its thong.

The hearts of all went down at the sight. Uncomplimentary epithets were directed towards the innocent officer in the performance of his duty.

"Damned unlucky!" muttered Greg.

At the end of the block Greg directed Hickey to turn the corner and stop, until they could decide what was best to do. The broad, unbeautiful expanse of Amsterdam Avenue was as empty as the side street. It was like the avenue of some dead city, where the lights had been left burning.

"What did you make of him?" said Blossom. "Not a regular cop."

"Worse," said Greg, "a private patrolman. I had forgotten that the residents of a private block like this often club together and hire a man from an agency to keep watch. He'll be there all night, damn him!"

"What are you going to do?" asked Ginger anxiously, "give it up?"

"Not on your life!" said Greg grimly. "Let me think a minute."

All four of them waited with blank minds for Greg to give them a cue.

"We must create a diversion," he said finally.

"A what?" asked Bull Tandy.

"Attract his attention elsewhere; draw him off."

"I get you," said Ginger. "Get up a fake burglary or something down at this end of the block."

"Exactly. That'll be your job: yours and Blossom's."

Ginger's face fell. "Have a heart, Greg! S'posin' we git five years apiece for it."

"You don't have to be the burglars. You can be the honest citizens who discover the crime."

Ginger looked relieved. "Lay it out to us, partner."

"Listen carefully. First give Hickey three minutes to get back through Eighty-fourth to Columbus again. Then you show yourselves in Eighty-third Street. Choose the last house on the north side. I don't know who lives there; that doesn't make any difference. Well, run out into the middle of the street and look up at the windows. Run up the front steps and down again. Run in and out the area way. The idea is to give plenty of action, see?"

"Well, the cop is standing up at the top of the hill where he can look down both sides his beat. He'll soon get on to you two milling around down there, and he'll run down to see what's the matter. You tell him you were walking up Amsterdam when you saw a peculiar light in the basement of that house, and looking through the windows you saw a fellow snooping around with a flashlight; handkerchief over his face, hat pulled down—you know the stuff. And afterwards he went up-stairs. Fix up the story any way you like. You can tell a good story, Ginger.

"The cop will probably send you around to watch the rear while he rouses the household and makes a room-to-room search. It's hard on the people, but it will bring a little excitement into their dull lives, anyway. As soon as you get the cop all worked up you make a quiet sneak, see? I only need a couple of minutes to pull off my trick. Long before the excitement down here dies down, we'll be safe away."

"We're on," said Ginger and Blossom.

Greg, Hickey and Bull drove around the block and returned to the corner of Columbus and Eighty-third, where they stopped the cab before turning into the side street. They could still see the private patrolman at the top of the hill and they waited. Beyond him they could not see for the hill, and they had the satisfaction of knowing that once he ran down the other side he could not see them.

Presently they chuckled to see him straighten up and dart away down the hill. The scheme worked.

No one was in sight within the four blocks that they commanded. They cut the ladder from its wrappings and Greg and Bull took it, leaving Hickey with the flivver. The engine was left running. Hickey was to run up to them when Greg gave him a flash.

Greg and Bull were each armed with two short lengths of wire. Reaching the two houses, Greg took 411 and Bull 413. Running down the area steps they wired the iron gates of the basement entrances fast to their frames. Then springing up their respective stoops they wired the two handles of the double doors together. All this took but a minute, and effectually safeguarded them against a surprise from within the houses. This done, Greg carried the little ladder up the steps of 413 and planted it under the bathroom window. The street remained empty and silent.

While he worked Greg kept the tail of an eye on the windows of Amy's room. He was not rewarded by a sight of her face. He hoped she was watching from farther back in the room. The bathroom window was raised an inch or two from the bottom. Bull stood on the sidewalk with the handkerchief in one hand and the flashlight in the other, ready to signal to Hickey the instant Amy appeared.

When the ladder was in place Greg nodded to Bull—all this was carried out in the full light of the moon and of a street lamp almost in front of the house—and Bull let the handkerchief flutter to the pavement.

They waited. The seconds passed. The suspense was almost more than mortal nerves could bear. Greg holding himself taut was glad that it was Bull he had with him. Bull had no nerves. The seconds passed, and there was no sound or movement from above. The sickening conviction took shape in Greg's breast that something had gone wrong. Amy of her own free will would never keep them waiting at such a juncture.

Suddenly Bull with a warning gesture darted noiselessly down the area steps. At the same moment Greg heard brisk footsteps coming up the street. Somebody had turned the corner from Columbus Avenue. Greg swiftly telescoped the ladder and carried it inside the vestibule. Closing half the storm door, he concealed himself behind it, and lived through a horrible moment or two. Suppose this person were bound for the Sanitarium?

But he passed by whistling softly, all unaware of the drama he had interrupted. Greg had a glimpse of his disappearing back; a young back with a debonair swing to it, a lover, perhaps, returning from his lady.

They had to wait until he mounted the steps of one of the houses above. Then Greg joined Bull.

"Something's gone wrong," he whispered. "I'm going in to see."

"Into the house! Good God!" said Bull.

Greg was no less appalled by the task than he. "Got to be done," he said. "Go down and get Hickey. Let him bring the cab up softly. If we signal he'll come up with the cut-out roaring. It's all or nothing within the next three minutes. If I am not out again by the time you come back with Hickey, you are to follow me in. Are you game for it?"

Bull nodded. "I am, if you are."

Bull left him. Greg looked up and down. No one was in sight. He mounted the steps and brought out the ladder again. In the light of the street lamp he felt as conspicuous as a naked man in a dream, yet to put the light out would have only been to call attention to the spot where it had been. To tell the truth he had no stomach for this job, but his resolution held him to it. Amy depended on him.

With a thumping heart he mounted the ladder. It creaked like a rusty wheel. But no matter if he waked the entire block now, he had to go on. At the top he put his hands under the window and threw it up. There was no time to open it with care. It would all be over in a minute anyway. He flung a leg over the sill and entered the bathroom. A rapid survey of the windows across the street revealed no scared white face watching him.

The door into the bedroom was closed. He opened it as softly as he could. The light from the street lamp below was thrown strongly on the white ceiling, and its reflection filled the room. He could see perfectly. The sight was photographed indelibly on his brain; Amy lying motionless in her bed beside him, and across the room Bianca sitting up in a cot bed, her eyes fixed upon him wide with terror. She was too terrified to scream; a little gasping cry escaped her; she had no breath for more.

Greg sprang across the room, and clapping a hand over her mouth, bore her back on her pillow. His lightning glance at Amy told him she had been drugged, and he felt no compunctions in dealing with this other woman. Bianca struggled but feebly; terror held her in a partial paralysis. Greg's ears were stretched for sounds from the house. He heard quick, soft steps approaching the door, and his heart misgave him. There was a little tap.

"Miss, did you call?"

Greg held his breath. He expected her to come in. How could he deal with two women? She did try the door, but it was locked. Greg's pent breath softly escaped. After a moment the steps retreated. He heard the scrape of a chair on the bare floor. Evidently there was a nurse stationed at a desk out there.

Greg glanced over his shoulder at Amy. He was scared by the stillness of her pose, like a lovely effigy on an old tomb. But the sound of her breathing reassured him. It was too loud. Assuredly she had been drugged—not without a struggle, he was sure. The thought of his delicate little Amy struggling in the grip of a brutal strength made his breast burn. He could have strangled Bianca without remorse.

Bianca's struggles were growing stronger now. She was doing her best to bite him. It seemed to Greg that Bull had had plenty of time to get Hickey. What could be the matter? Suppose Bull's nerve failed him when it came to entering the house. Suppose the policeman came back, or another passer-by. Greg's nerves were at the cracking point.

Then he heard the flivver coming. It passed and stopped just beyond the door. In his imagination he measured the steps that Bull must take to the foot of the ladder. Would he dare mount it? He listened in an agony of suspense. At last he heard it creak and dared to breathe a little. But Bull's heart might fail him at the window! His own had failed him! The silence was too long! No! there stood Bull's bulky figure in the bathroom doorway. A little sob of relief escaped Greg.

Greg beckoned him close with his head. Indicating Amy he whispered: "Pick her up. Wrap her well in a blanket, and carry her to the window. Pass her to Hickey. When they reach the pavement, give me a little signal and I'll come."

"There's a fellow seen the ladder and run back for a policeman," Bull whispered hoarsely.

"Then hustle! Hustle!" whispered Greg.

The heavy man moved with a surprising celerity and noiselessness. Rough as was his exterior there was a gentle strain in him; he gathered up Amy as tenderly and unselfconsciously as if she had been a little child.

Bianca had ceased to struggle, and in his eagerness to follow the movements of the other man Greg relaxed his vigilance for a second. With a sudden cat-like twist she freed her face from his hand. A piercing shriek escaped her.

Greg quickly silenced her, but the mischief was done. After a second's breathless silence an uproar arose through the house. The nurse ran to the door and rattled it and beat upon it. Other doors opened and slammed, and running feet were heard throughout the house. In different parts of the house the insane patients infected with the excitement began to scream.

Bianca, encouraged by the sounds of approaching help, began to struggle with redoubled energy. She fought with every fiber of her being, like a cat in a snare. Greg was more than a match for her in strength, but scarcely in quickness. She got her head free again, and screamed:

"They're taking her out of the window. Go to the street!"

A voice in the hall said: "Break in the door!"

Running footsteps receded down the hall.

Bull had disappeared with Amy. It was no time for Greg to linger. If Bull did make him a signal, he couldn't hear it in that uproar. Releasing Bianca he ran for the bathroom window. Springing up, she followed, screaming incessantly.

Bull was barely over the sill, and Greg had to wait. Bianca clawed at his back, but he scarcely felt her. He heard the door of the bedroom go in with a crash, and waited no longer. Thrusting Bianca out of the way, he scrambled over the sill. He and Bull landed in a heap together on the stoop. Greg pulled the ladder from the window, just as hands reached out to grab it.

Hickey, bearing the inert figure of Amy, had all but reached the cab. In both the houses now they were furiously striving to burst open the wired doors. The fat doctor in negligee attire was at a parlor window. Throwing it up, he let himself over the sill, and dropped into the areaway. Other men followed. Greg and Bull ran for the cab. From the corner below came the sounds of more running feet and the shrilling of a police-whistle.

Into the flivver they piled, somehow, anyhow. Hickey had dropped Amy on the seat, and was already at the wheel. As Greg and Bull laid hands on the car, he let the clutch engage. The little car sprang ahead. The policeman, seeing them likely to escape, fired his revolver into the air. Hickey grunted and pulled the throttle lever all the way down. The exhaust roared. A second shot struck the asphalt behind them and ricocheting made a dent in the back of the car. A third shot went wild. Then they passed out of range.

They breasted the little rise, and plunged down the other side. Here they met the private patrolman running towards them. Blossom and Ginger were not to be seen. There was a harrowing moment as they passed this officer. Would he shoot? But if he had a gun, he was too confused to draw it. He flung his night-stick at the wheels of the flivver, but it caromed harmlessly off. They reached the corner and turned.

After a brief mad course around many corners they reached one of the Park entrances. There was no sign of any pursuing car and they slowed down. They breathed freely again.

Greg said grimly: "Well, if you fellows wanted excitement, I hope you're satisfied."

"I am," said Hickey fervently. "Me for a rest cure, now."

"Makes me feel like a boy again," chuckled Bull.

CHAPTER XX

EXIT SENOR SAUNDERS

Before they got home Amy began to awaken from her unnatural sleep. Greg gave her over to the care of Bessie, who had him carry the little figure up to Bessie's own room, where by methods known to herself she completed her restoration.

Greg learned that during his absence Pa Simmons had sent in a message that de Socotra had returned to his apartment about ten in company with a young Spanish-American whose description suggested Henry Saunders. A little before midnight de Socotra had come out again, leaving the young man within, and Pa Simmons had followed him to the house on East Seventeenth Street, where presumably he still was.

No word had come from Estuban. De Silva still lay in his deep sleep.

As soon as Amy had recovered she asked for Greg. He found her sitting up in bed, pale, great-eyed and smiling. Bessie, it appeared, was not without a secret, feminine fondness for pretty caps and negligees. Producing such articles from a hidden store, she had dressed Amy up like a French doll. After a few moments, the good-hearted Bessie made believe to discover an errand down-stairs, and left them alone.

But they had nothing to say to each other that any one might not have heard. There was no constraint; they gave each other their eyes freely, but they instinctively hung back from the deep waters of speech. They had been through too much to-night; Nature demanded a let-down. Their eyes had reached an understanding, their tongues wagged irresponsibly.

By and by they heard the disturbance incidental to a new arrival in the kitchen below. Amy, recognizing the timbre of the voice, looked at Greg and said:

"Henry."

Ginger McAfee came running up-stairs. Though invited to enter, an excessive delicacy constrained him to deliver his message from the other side of the door.

"It's the young Spanish gent wants to see Miss. Him that come to the yard yesterday morning. Bull's watching him till she says what to do with him."

Amy looked at Greg again.

Said he: "Might as well get it over with."

She nodded. "Let him come up," she called to Ginger.

Señor Henry rushed into the room, and oblivious to the presence of Greg fell on his knees beside Amy's bed and reached for her hand. "Amèlie! Amèlie!" he cried. A flood of Spanish followed. Gone was the high-bred disdain. His yellow face worked with the uncontrollable emotion of a weak nature.

For some obscure reason Amy blushed and glanced uneasily at Greg. He, no less uncomfortable, looked away.

"Get up," she said curtly to the other. "Speak English."

Señor Henry obeyed neither command.

"I shall not answer you unless you speak English."

He made the attempt, but it was not easy for him to express his overmastering emotion in the unfamiliar tongue. The stammering effect of it all was: "Come away! This is no place for you!"

"This is where my friends live," said Amy coldly.

It was lost on him. "Come away! I have a cab down-stairs."

"Where to?" asked Amy dryly.

"Back to Señora de Socotra."

"And Señor Francisco? No, thank you."

"Let me take you to a hotel, then."

"In this? I have no other clothes."

Señor Henry's feelings were too much for him. He relapsed into Spanish. Amy clapped her hands over her ears.

"Speak English!" she commanded.

The dark-skinned youth, guessing that the English was for Greg's benefit, shot a glance of purest hatred across the bed. To Amy he said: "Tell the Señora the truth, and she will leave Francisco."

"And die of a broken heart," said Amy. "I'd rather kill Francisco."

"But you cannot remain here among these people."

"Remember, you are speaking of my friends," Amy warned him. "Answer me a question. How did you know you'd find me here?"

"I guessed it."

"That's not enough. How did you guess it?"

"Well, Francisco asked me to spend the night in his apartment, so that the Señora would not be left alone. He had to be out late. Bianca telephoned from the sanitarium that you had been carried off. What was I to do? I didn't know where Francisco was. I dared not tell the Señora what had happened. Bianca said it was——" he jerked his head across the bed, "so I came down here."

"You knew then that they had put me in a private madhouse," said Amy relentlessly.

He shrugged.

"Perhaps you thought I was mad?"

"I did not. I told Francisco it was an outrage. Nothing I could say would move him. What was I to do?"

"What steps did you take to get me out?"

"Francisco swore to me that it was only for the night. As soon as he could arrange to get a private car, he said, he would send us all home together."

"Why did Francisco put me in that place?"

Señor Henry shrugged again. "Surely you know that. He had learned that you were working against him in political matters. I warned you, you know."

"You mean criminal matters," Amy amended.

Greg spoke for the first time. "Ask him how Señor Francisco learned of your activities."

Señor Henry's shoulders and eyebrows were agitated together. "How should I know?"

"Did you tell him?" Amy asked directly.

He sprang up. "I did not tell him! I swear it! You insult me by asking such a question!"

Amy turned to Greg. "What do you know?"

Greg answered coolly: "He told him, right enough."

"It's a lie!" cried Señor Henry, turning a little yellower than his wont. "I might have known who put that idea into your head! Would you take the word of this—this cabman, against mine!"

Greg laughed.

"When could he have told him?" Amy asked Greg.

"This afternoon when Señor Francisco started from the apartment for the train, he met Señor Saunders at the door. Señor Saunders entered the cab with him, and they started down-town together. He told him then. That is why Señor Francisco came rushing back in the state that you saw him."

The Spanish-American youth fell back. Rage and fright made his weak face hideous. A cold sweat had sprung out on his forehead; his teeth were bared. "It's a lie! a lie!" he repeated. "I never saw Francisco until afterwards. How do you know so much about my movements!"

"I drove the cab," said Greg simply.

Señor Henry stared at him speechlessly.

Amy very quietly started to pull a handsome ring from her finger. It was tight; it did not come easily. Both men watched the action with a fascinated gaze. She finally held out the ring towards Señor Henry. He refused it with a passionate gesture. She let it drop on the floor.

"Go!" she said.

He burst out in desperate appeals, reproaches, excuses, all in Spanish. Amy turned wearily away.

Greg stood up. "You've had your answer," he said harshly. "Go, before you're helped out."

Señor Henry stopped short, stared from one to another, biting his lip, then turned, and rushed from the room as violently as he had entered. They heard the front door slam behind him.

Amy covered her face with her hands. "I'm so ashamed!" she murmured. "To think that I could ever have thought—even for a moment—that!"

"Forget the mannikin," said Greg calmly. "He means nothing in your life."

Greg heard Estuban's voice in the kitchen and hastened down-stairs. Their eyes brightened at the sight of each other like old friends. Estuban quickly explained that he had been carried as far as Philadelphia by the express on which he had expected to find de Socotra, and had been obliged to wait there several hours for a returning train.

"What has happened here?" he asked eagerly.

"Quite a bit," said Greg dryly. "We've got both the girl and the book out of de Socotra's hands. That is to say, we got a book."

"The little black book!" cried Estuban, his black eyes gleaming. "Let me see it!"

Greg handed it over, watching for Estuban's verdict with more anxiety than he cared to show. Estuban hastily turned the pages. What Greg read in his face confirmed his worst fears; amazement, incredulity, anger.

"This is not it!" he cried. "He has fooled you! This is an impudent substitute manufactured out of whole cloth!"

"I was half prepared for that," said Greg gloomily.

Estuban went on: "This is what de Socotra meant to carry to the President. Look! testimonials of respect to His Excellency; addresses of felicitation from public bodies of every class in Managua; the Santiago Chamber of Commerce; the Planters' Association; The Rubber-Gatherers' Union! The last is a masterpiece; listen! 'The Rubber-Gatherers' Union of Managua, happy in their situation on a fertile soil under a liberal government, desires to express to his Excellency, the President of the United States,' etc., etc. My God! what sublime impudence!"

"Then our work is still to do," said Greg grimly.

"Do you know where de Socotra is at this moment?" asked Estuban with a dangerous glitter in his eyes.

"At a house on East Seventeenth Street, the headquarters of his gang. He got that book there earlier in the day."

"It was made there under his direction, no doubt, and the original is presumably there."

"If they have not destroyed it."

"They would scarcely do that unless they thought it was in danger of falling into our hands. Think of the handle it will give them against those who dare oppose them in Managua. The unfortunate ones who made these affidavits will be marked men hereafter."

Greg looked around the kitchen at the men who were awaiting the outcome of this talk, and looked back at Estuban. The corners of his mouth turned up with grim humor. "Let's go and get it," he said suddenly.

Estuban's hand shot out to meet Greg's. "My idea, too," he said with satisfaction.

"We have four good men here," Greg went on, "and a fifth is watching the house now. With the exception of de Socotra himself, that gang is not formidable. Their morale is poor."

"What do you propose?" asked Estuban.

"The simplest plan possible; to get into the house by force or by trickery, and hold them up. Are you armed?"

Estuban nodded.

"They got a gun from me on our last meeting. I'll see what there is in our outfit here."

Greg and Estuban were talking low-voiced in a corner of the kitchen, while the others waited. All thought of sleep had been given up for this night. Even Bessie, infected by the general excitement, had yielded to their solicitations in so far as to prepare a small-hour supper. The clock had just struck three.

"Boys," said Greg. "Are you game to turn another trick before daylight?"

"Try us," said Bull, grinning.

"Me and Blossom was done out of the best fun before," said Ginger.

Greg briefly explained what had to be done. It appeared that their appetites were only whetted for danger. They jumped at the chance. Even Hickey, encouraged by the size of the attacking party perhaps, did not bewail his fate this time. It transpired that both Blossom and Bull possessed revolvers. Greg borrowed Blossom's and let Bull keep his, unloaded.

"You won't mind if I empty out the shells?" he said. "Estuban and I feel that we ought to take the responsibility of any shooting that may be necessary."

Bessie, who had taken everything in, disappeared into the store, and returned with a small object which she offered Greg. Said she: "If you're going to break into the house—mind, I didn't say I held by any such foolishness, but if you're going to do it anyway, better take my glass-cutter. It may come in handy."

"Bessie, you've got a better head than any of us!" cried Greg—"or maybe you're more experienced in house-breaking."

"Go along with you! Mind you bring it back safe. I can't sell window glass without something to cut it."

When they were ready to start, Greg ran up-stairs to bid good-by to Amy. He told her what they designed to do.

It was at the hour of the night when human vitality is at its ebb. The plucky lip trembled. "Must you?" she faltered. "On top of everything to-night?"

"It must be at once, while he is off his guard. He does not yet know of your escape."

"If I could only go too! But to wait here in suspense—how can I endure it?"

"Oh, this is a simple job."

"Simple! You don't know Francisco."

"I must go. Send me with a smile."

She smiled. "I want you to promise me something," she begged. "You mustn't be angry."

He looked his question.

Her eyes searched his deep. "I want you to promise me you will not kill Francisco. I could not have that. After all he has cared for me for nine years, and he is the husband of the one I love."

There was more implied in this than was spoken. Greg understood. "I promise you," he said gravely,— "unless it is a question of defending myself."

"Do not think that I mean to let him go free," she said; "he shall be punished, terribly punished; but it must be in the way that I set."

CHAPTER XXI

UP-STAIRS AND DOWN

Leaving all cabs at home this time, they proceeded in couples by different streets to a rendezvous at the northeast corner of Stuyvesant Square. Greg and Estuban walked up First Avenue to Seventeenth, then west to the meeting-place, thus passing the house that was their objective.

Their examination of it revealed these salient facts: there was no light in any window; the basement windows

were protected by iron bars, the basement door by an iron gate, while above, before the front door, heavy oak storm-doors were closed. In short, a wholly unpromising prospect.

"We need an ax to get into this," said Estuban dejectedly.

"We'll have to try the rear," said Greg.

The question then was how to get around to the back. The whole block presented an unbroken brick front from First Avenue to the Square.

At the Square they joined the other men and Pa Simmons who was there with his cab. The latter reported that de Socotra had not left the house.

"Damn glad you come," said he. "I'm at the end of my wits, how to keep watching that house without the police force getting wise to me cab. I watches from this corner for awhile, then runs around the block and takes a stand down by First. Then I come back again. But there's a cop down there's got his eye on me already. I don' know where to go now."

"You can be our mobile scout," said Greg. "Keep moving. Drive through this block every minute. We'll signal you if we need you."

Pa Simmons drove off.

At the corner where they stood there was a modern apartment house. A space of three feet separated the back wall of this building from the side wall of the first dwelling. This crack offered the only discoverable opening into the interior of the block. As the house they were seeking to enter was the sixth from the corner, it meant that they must climb six back fences to reach it.

"Bull, how are you on climbing fences?" asked Greg.

"O.K., if somebody will hold me overcoat."

"Hand it to one of the fellows. Estuban, Bull and I will go over the fences and break in the back way. You other fellows hide yourselves up and down the block here, but choose places where you can watch that house. If anybody comes out you are to jump on him and frisk him for the little black book, see? If it isn't on him let him go. If we get in the rear all right, and want your help, one of us will come to the front door, and saw his arm up and down so, like a semaphore."

There was a flight of steps down to the rear basement-door of the apartment house. An eight-foot fence separated the narrow yard here from the yard of the first dwelling. Greg and Estuban boosted Bull up on top; Bull from the top and Greg at the bottom hoisted Estuban up; then the two already up each reached Greg a hand. Once up they found the way was easier than they had expected. There was a longitudinal fence separating the yards of all the houses on Seventeenth Street from those in Sixteenth. This fence was topped by a three-inch plank along which Greg and Estuban were able to walk upright. Bull, less sure-footed, straddled it and hunched himself along. At one of the back yards a cautious householder had set his fence with great spikes against cats or marauders. Here they had to drop down and go around. The sky was overcast and it was very dark. Few lights showed in the back windows.

They reached the sixth yard at last and silently dropped to earth. The back of the house facing them at first glance showed no gleam of light, but upon looking closer they saw that the principal room on the second floor was lighted. In two of the three windows on this floor cracks of light showed around the edges of the opaque blinds that had been pulled down. Two windows and a door gave on the yard. The windows were barred, so they could be left open in hot weather, but the door had no outer protection, and glass panes had been let in the upper panels.

"Here's where the glass-cutter comes in handy," murmured Greg. "Good old Bessie!"

They wrapped a handkerchief around the tool to deaden the sound as far as possible. Nearest to the lock of the door Greg traced a square big enough to admit his hand. There was nothing to do but let the piece fall inside.

"If the sound of it brings them we'll already be in," said Greg grimly.

He struck the outlined square a light blow with his fist and it tinkled to the floor within. Thrusting his arm through the hole he drew the bolt and turned the key. They stole in. Greg gave his pocket light a swift flash around. They were in a kitchen, a disused kitchen; the range was gray with dust, the shelves empty.

"Wait here a minute till we see if they were alarmed by the sound," whispered Greg. "Keep on this side away from the windows."

They waited, holding their breaths to listen. Not a sound was to be heard through the dark house except the rats scurrying behind the plaster.

Satisfied at length that the broken glass had passed unnoticed, they proceeded to investigate their surroundings. Four doors faced them; two gave on cupboards, the third on a short passage ending in the front basement room, while the fourth opened on the stair hall. The other room on this floor was as empty as the kitchen. Though so far there was no sign of human usage they were struck by the warmth of the house.

"They don't stint themselves coal," whispered Greg. "Let's drop our overcoats."

A door under the stairs gave on steps leading to the cellar. A gaslight had been left burning down here. They saw the furnace that supplied the heat, but there was no person in the cellar.

Greg left Bull on guard on the basement floor. "If anybody gets past us up-stairs, don't let him get by you without frisking him for the book. If they come too fast for you, call for help."

Greg and Estuban stole up to the main floor. Two long parlors front and rear opened off the hall. They were dusty and empty like the rooms below. At the head of the next flight of stairs a crack of light showed under a door, and a murmur of voices came down to them.

Greg whispered to Estuban: "Creep up stairs and listen. It may be valuable to us. I'll call the other men in."

With infinite caution Greg unchained and unlocked the two sets of doors and stepped out on the stoop. The block was empty. But there were eyes out. For when Greg gave the prearranged signal three figures appeared from the shadows opposite and noiselessly hastened to him. He drew them inside the house and shut the doors.

Hickey was sent to help Bull because there were two ways out from the basement to be watched; Blossom was left at the front door; Greg and Ginger stole on up and joined Estuban at the turn of the stairs. Putting his lips to Greg's ear Estuban breathed:

"We're just in time. They're breaking up here. There are not more than four men with de Socotra in there. The rest have already scattered. He's giving these their final instructions now."

Greg whispered back: "Is the door locked?"

"I don't think so. There's no key in the other side. Now that you're here to back me up I'll try the handle."

"Wait a minute. Front and rear bedrooms in these houses usually communicate. Ginger, go in the front room and stand guard. Take my flash."

Estuban yielded first place to Greg. Greg tried the door. It gave. Slamming it open the two entered the room with their guns before them.

"Hands up, gentlemen," said Greg.

There were four men; three seated in various attitudes about a table near the window, and the fourth, de Socotra, arrested in the act of pacing back and forth. The table was littered with papers. Several valises stood about the floor. The three sitting men, Abanez and Alfieri were two of them, flung up their hands without a sound as if impelled by an electrical current. Not so de Socotra. His nerves were under iron control. He actually laughed. With his eyes fixed

on Greg's eyes 'he coolly drew a cigarette case from his waistcoat pocket, took a cigarette, tapped it finically on the lid, and stuck it between his grinning lips. Returning the cigarette case, from another pocket he produced a match, struck it on his sole, lighted the cigarette and flicked the match away.

"Ah, our good friend Mr. Parr again," he said mockingly. "Really, Mr. Parr, you ought to be in moving pictures. Or perhaps you are. To what do I owe the pleasure of this call?"

If he expected to rattle Greg he mistook his man. Greg saw a tell-tale bulge over the man's right breast, and that was all he wanted. Matching the other's tone, he said:

"You're a remarkable man, Señor de Socotra. I didn't want to lose touch with you. To-night I have brought an old acquaintance of yours with me."

De Socotra for the first looked at Estuban, and his eyes changed. The smile became a thought strained, but the voice was as cool as ever. "Ah, Estuban! How did you get out of jail?"

Estuban was incapable of this grim jesting. It was his first sight of the man responsible for the murder of his best friend, and his eyes burned. He answered de Socotra in Spanish. Whatever it was he said, it bit through the elder man's veneer of scorn. De Socotra snarled at him.

"Put up your hands," said Greg. "I shall not tell you again."

De Socotra obeyed. But his expression altered. He looked beyond and between Greg and Estuban and suddenly cried:

"Seize them both, Milio!"

In spite of themselves they looked behind them. Even as he turned, Greg was half sensible that it was a trick, but the subconscious impulse was irresistible. There was no one there, of course. They turned back. De Socotra was in the act of springing towards an open door in the corner. Like a flash Estuban's pistol sought him. Greg knocked his hand up, and the bullet went through the ceiling. De Socotra disappeared. The other three men, green with terror, never moved.

"Keep them covered," Greg shouted. "I'll get him."

He ran out through the hall and into the front room crying: "Hold him, Ginger!"

But he and Ginger only collided with each other in the empty room.

"He didn't come this way," gasped Ginger.

At the same moment back in the hall a door banged open. They ran out. An open closet door between the two rooms showed the way he had escaped. There was no sight nor sound of him. There were two other rooms on the floor, a bathroom presumably and a hall room, but he had not had time enough to get a door open and closed again, nor could he have gone down stairs for there was no sound from Blossom at the foot.

At the instant Greg made up his mind that he had gone up, a small bright beam of light flashed athwart the upper flight and threw a circle on the side wall. From above a voice said mockingly:

"Yes, I'm up here, Mr. Parr. Come on up. When you cross that light I'll give you something to bring with you."

The voice did not come from the spot whence the light issued. Evidently he had laid his light on the floor and retreated from it. For an instant Greg hesitated. Then it came to him what to do. Extending his body on the steps, pressing close to the rail where one on the upper landing could not see him, he snaked his way up a step at a time until he was within striking distance of the light. Taking careful aim, he fired. The light went out.

At the same moment he let his body relax and slid back down the stairs. But no answering shot came as he expected. Nor was there any sound of running feet above. De Socotra as usual was bluffing. While the light lay on

the floor he had stolen away. Listening intently Greg heard some little sounds from the fourth and top story of the house. Snatching his light out of Ginger's hands he sprang up the stairs. Ginger followed at his heels.

In the hall on the top floor stood a ladder leading to a scuttle in the roof. They heard de Socotra upon it working desperately to raise the scuttle. But they were too quick for him. As they mounted the last flight he jumped down and ran into the back room. There all sounds ceased.

Greg paused at the head of the stairs. It was a ticklish job to follow an armed man into a dark room. He tried to figure out what de Socotra would expect him to do, so he could do the opposite. He had left the door open behind him; was it to tempt Greg in? Greg determined to try to take him in the rear.

Leaving Ginger crouching at the turn of the stairs, he stole along the hall and ever so carefully opened the door of the front room. In case his man were inside he flashed his light in to draw his fire, but there was no sound. He went in, holding his light off to one side of his body. The room was empty. Absolute silence pressed on the house so full of men.

There were two doors in the back wall of this room. Greg cautiously opened the first. This floor was planned differently from the second floor. He found himself in an extra middle room with a skylight through which showed the low-hanging clouds faintly rosy with the reflection of the city lights.

Returning, he tried the other door and found himself in a long closet or passage leading to the rear. He dared not flash his light here for fear of giving warning of his coming. The passage was as black as Erebus. The heaviness of the air convinced him that it was closed at the other end. He crept on all fours feeling with his hand before him, half-expecting to lay it on a human figure, half expecting momentarily to be met with a blinding flash and a bullet.

He was stopped at last by a door which must lead into the room into which de Socotra had fled. He listened with his ear to the crack but could hear no sound from the other side. If this door were locked all his trouble would go for nothing. He found a match and inserted it carefully in the keyhole. It passed freely through. The chances were it was not locked.

If the man were still in the room there was no possibility of getting this door open without giving him warning; so Greg took no care, but suddenly flung it wide. He stood back and let his light shine through. Still it drew no shot.

Yet de Socotra was in there. Greg heard him run for the hall door. Greg sprang after him, but de Socotra got the door closed before he could prevent, and Greg heard the key turn in the lock. He heard Ginger tackle the man, as he ran around through the passage to the front room.

Little Ginger was no match for this antagonist. De Socotra must have shaken him off with ease, for ere Greg could reach the front room door that, too, was slammed and locked. The middle room door was already locked and the key on the other side. Greg heard de Socotra vault over the stair rail and run on down.

Ginger shouted a warning through the house to Blossom, and waited to liberate Greg. This took him a little while, because De Socotra had tossed away the keys at random. Greg shouted to Ginger to open the middle door, but in his excitement Ginger did not get the sense of it. He struck innumerable matches until he found the key to the back room.

Meanwhile de Socotra had leaped down two flights of stairs unhindered, for Estuban dared not leave the three men he was covering. On the third flight de Socotra saw Blossom waiting for him at the foot and went over the rail. He dropped in the middle of the hall and ran into one of the parlors. Here, as Blossom chased him in and out the different doors, he began to shout for help in tones of mock fear.

These cries were too much for Bull and Hickey on the floor below. Locking the doors at which they respectively stood guard, they sprang up to the parlor floor. This was evidently what de Socotra wanted. He led them all a chase through the dark rooms. They collided with each other and wasted their strength in vain struggles, thinking they had the fugitive. When he saw the way clear de Socotra ran on down the basement stairs.

By this time Greg and Ginger reached the first floor. They heard de Socotra running wildly back and forth in the basement below. Bull and Hickey had had the foresight to pocket the keys of the two doors and he could not get

out. All the windows in the basement were barred. As Greg leaped down the basement stairs with the other men tumbling after he heard the cellar door bang open. There was no way out of the cellar except by the coal-hole.

"We've got him now!" he cried.

He was well assured that if de Socotra had had a gun he would have used it before this, and he followed unhesitatingly. At the head of the next stair he heard the furnace door clang and his heart sunk like a stone. The gaslight in the cellar was still burning brightly. De Socotra stood by the furnace stroking his mustache, panting a little, but smiling still. His hands were empty.

Disregarding him for the moment Greg flung open the furnace door. On the bed of cherry red coals the little black book was already furiously blazing. A hand thrust in to rescue it would have been shriveled to the bone. There was no suitable tool handy. Greg had the inexpressible mortification of seeing it fall apart and dissolve in the flames. An involuntary groan broke from him. De Socotra laughed.

Greg flung around furiously, his gun up. "Damn you! I ought to shoot you like a dog, you murderer!" he cried.

"But you won't," said de Socotra coolly.

It was true. Greg's pistol arm was rendered impotent, but not, as de Socotra thought, because he was intimidated. He turned away gritting his teeth.

The other men were crowding into the narrow cellar, staring open-mouthed at de Socotra, and waiting for a signal from Greg how to act. After them came Estuban who had by this time succeeded in searching and disarming the three men, and had locked them in their room on the second floor.

"Where is the book?" cried Estuban.

"Burned up," said Greg heavily.

Estuban was hampered by no promise to spare their adversary. His gun went up. Springing forward, Greg flung his arms about him. They struggled, while their men looked on at a loss how to act. No one noticed that de Socotra had maneuvered his position until he now stood under the gaslight. His hand shot over his head, and they were plunged in blackness. Before he could be stopped de Socotra gained the stairs. Trying to follow him, they jammed helplessly together. He slammed the door at the top and locked it.

With their combined weight it was only a moment or two before they burst it out. But de Socotra was already half way up through the house. They reached the top floor to find the scuttle open to the sky. There was no sign of him up and down the roofs.

Greg reluctantly called off the pursuit. "We'll only rouse the neighborhood. He has some way of retreat known to himself. Let the last man through hook the scuttle so he can't come back this way."

They left the three Spanish-Americans to make their way out as best they could. If de Socotra failed to return to their aid, they could always throw up the windows and call on the neighbors. It would be up to them to explain how they came to be in such a plight.

It was a dejected little crowd that made its way back through the dark, cold streets to Bessie Bickle's. Estuban was furiously angry at being balked of his purpose.

"Why did you stop me?" he cried.

Greg was not quite frank in replying. "I couldn't help myself," he said. "Richly as he deserved it, I couldn't stand by and let you shoot down an unarmed man."

"We'll never get him now," muttered Estuban, and relapsed into a sullen silence.

Greg's own state of mind was not an enviable one. To be so nearly successful and then have his man flout him to his face, and get away laughing—it was too much! His heart burned in his breast. Promise or no promise, he knew there would be no peace in life for him until he had squared accounts with that smiling scoundrel.

As soon as they opened the kitchen door they saw from Bessie's pale face and shaken manner that something fresh had happened on this night of nights.

Thinking of Amy Greg's breast went cold. "What is it?" he demanded.

The answer relieved his worst fears. "He's gone," stammered Bessie, "the Spaniard up-stairs."

"Dead?" said Greg astonished.

"Aye, he's dead all right. I went up just now to have a look at him. He's lying there——" Bessie shuddered. "I left him till you come."

"And Amy?"

"She's all right. Asleep. She don't know."

"Send one of the boys for the doctor," said Greg. "I'll go up alone first."

The light in Greg's room was still burning. De Silva was lying on his back on the bed his eyes open and staring.... Small wonder Bessie had been frightened. One arm hung down over the edge of the bed, the hand lying palm upward and open on the floor. A little bright object had rolled from the nerveless fingers. Greg picked it up, a hypodermic needle.

On the bureau its case lay open. Beside the bed for the needle it held space for a vial of some blackish fluid; no doubt a further supply of the poison that killed with a lightning stroke. Under the little shagreen case was a folded paper addressed in pencil to "Gregory Parr." Greg opened it with fingers that trembled a little and read:

"I kept the needle. I ought to have used it first, but it takes nerve to jab yourself. It was easier to jump overboard. I can use it now. When we started for New York the old man gave me a little book to carry. Important papers were bound in it. I never read them. They were made out in duplicate. He carried one set and gave me the other. I meant to give them to de Socotra, but I didn't want to after. I didn't know what to do with it. I hid myself in a cheap little hotel the day after, the Alpha House, — West Broadway. I had room number 19. I slit the mattress and hid the book in the stuffing. I suppose it's there yet if you want it.

"De Silva."

The reaction from discouragement to hope was sudden. Greg had to read the note twice before he realized what it meant. He resisted his first impulse to shout the joyful tidings down to Estuban. Better not raise his hopes until the prize was actually in hand. Greg scarcely gave another thought to what lay on the bed. This discovery dwarfed the importance of the poor wretch's end. Five o'clock of a winter's morning though it was, he could not wait a moment before going in search of the little book. He put the needle in the case and the case in his pocket, and determined to keep his own counsel for the time being. If the doctor was willing to issue a death certificate without full information, so much the better.

To those in the kitchen he merely said: "I have to go out for an hour. If the doctor says all right, send for the undertaker. Hickey, drive me over to West Broadway, will you?"

Within the time he had set Greg was back with shining eyes. In the kitchen the disconsolate crowd sat much as he had left them. Ginger and Blossom slept with their heads on the table. Bull, Blossom and Pa Simmons were talking in whispers by the window. Bessie moved heavily around on her interminable chores. Beyond the stove sat

Estuban in an attitude of utter dejection, elbows on knees and head between his hands. At the noise of Greg's entrance he lifted his lack-luster eyes. Seeing Greg's beaming smile a resentful scowl lined his brows.

"You seem well-pleased with yourself," he muttered.

Greg without saying anything held up the little black book before him. Estuban gasped and hung undecided for a moment. Then springing towards Greg he snatched it from his hands and scanned the pages with burning eyes.

"This is it!" he cried. "Thank God! we have him now!"

CHAPTER XXII

NEMESIS

On the afternoon of the day following these events Amy and Greg alighted from the flivver at the door of the Stickney Arms. Their pale composed faces masked a great inner excitement for they knew that Francisco de Socotra was at home. It had been Amy's idea thus boldly to beard him in his lair. Ever since she had got up that morning the direction of affairs had been in her hands. Greg looked at the little creature with a new wonder and respect.

The hall-boy Frank received them with a broad grin not unmixed with slyness. The new clothes that Bessie had got Amy made her look like a bride perhaps. Clearly Frank's explanation of this visit was that they were returning, married, for the parental blessing. Therefore he looked both disappointed and puzzled when they sent up their names: Miss Wilmot and Mr. Parr. Word was quickly returned that they were to be shown up.

A new maid opened the door to them, to whom they meant nothing. They were ushered into the handsome living-room of the apartment where Señor and Señora de Socotra were both waiting. Amy was quickly received into the other woman's arms who patted her and wept and babbled incoherently. De Socotra, whatever his feelings were, received them with a happy parental smile that was perfection. His welcome included Greg. Not by the slightest sign did he betray any consciousness of the events of the night before.

Greg thought grimly: "He feels that he can afford to smile since the body of his victim is reduced to ashes, and the damning evidence of the little black book destroyed too. Wait a bit, old fellow!"

While Amy and Señora de Socotra murmured together, Señor Francisco made bland remarks on the weather, his wicked eye twinkling at Greg as if to invite him to enjoy the situation. He offered Greg one of the incomparable cigars. Greg, reflecting that all this was for the benefit of the gentle, kindly little lady who had harmed no one, took it.

"Last night I pointed a gun at him and to-day he comes back with a cigar," he thought. "Life's a funny affair!"

Amy said to Greg deprecatingly: "I am lying to her, poor dear! I am telling her that I was so much better to-day that they allowed me to come out for a little while in your care."

"Admirable!" murmured de Socotra.

Señora de Socotra shyly nodded and smiled at Greg, and said something to Amy that was evidently intended to be repeated to him. There was a charming, child-like quality in the little lady that was wholly irresistible.

Amy said: "She asks your pardon that she cannot speak your language. She wishes me to thank you for taking such good care of me."

"She thinks you're one of the keepers," chuckled de Socotra.

Through Amy Greg made his best compliments to Señora de Socotra.

Amy soon rose to go. Her adoptive mother clung to her piteously and would not let her go until Amy promised to return the next day, "perhaps to stay." De Socotra accompanied them into the hall, expecting no doubt to learn there the real object of this call. Nor was he disappointed.

"Francisco," said Amy coldly, "it is necessary that Mr. Parr and I discuss with you what is to be done."

"Come into my room," said de Socotra.

"No, we cannot talk here while mamma knows we are still in the house. We want you to come to us in Gibbon Street."

De Socotra elevated his fine eyebrows. "That *would* be thrusting my head into the lion's mouth!" he said humorously.

"Are you afraid?" taunted Amy.

"My dear, the bravest man has to exercise ordinary prudence or the days of his bravery would be few!"

"Mr. Parr saved your life twice last night."

"Another time he might not be so fortunate."

"Francisco, I pledge you my word that no harm will come to you while you are there, and that you will be allowed to go as freely as you come."

De Socotra looked at Greg.

"I add my word to Miss Wilmot's," said Greg stiffly. "Moreover there is no objection to your bringing any friend or friends with you, as many as you like."

"But if I still feel obliged to decline this charming invitation?" said de Socotra mockingly.

"You will not decline it," said Amy.

"Why will I not?"

"Because in that case I will be obliged to tell mamma the whole truth about what has happened. I am taking all this trouble for the sake of sparing her. If you will not help me in that, then affairs must take their course regardless."

"What affairs?" asked de Socotra with a great parade of innocence.

"What is the use of making pretenses among us three? We know, and you know that we know."

"But no one else knows," was the smiling reply. "And there is no proof in existence."

"You don't know what proof we have. Come to Mrs. Bickle's house and we will lay our case before you. You can then decide whether or not you care to accept the conditions that we lay down."

De Socotra hesitated. Bravado and simple curiosity struggled with the man's sense of prudence. Above all he was a gamester.

"When do you want me to come?"

"It is four now. We will expect you between five and six."

"Very well, I'll be there."

Upon the stroke of half-past five de Socotra drove up to Bessie Bickle's in a taxi-cab. He bade the man wait. Amy and Greg met him at the front door. He came alone.

"You are a bold man, Francisco," said Amy.

Amy had changed to a black dress which set off the unrelieved pallor of her skin like alabaster. The little creature now had a consecrated air like a priestess that added inches to her stature. Greg, who was wretchedly ill at ease, regarded her with a kind of awe. She was the leader now. A strange hush brooded over the little house. The shutters of the store were up.

Amy led the way up-stairs. De Socotra, notwithstanding his pretended assurance, was impressed by the change in her dress and manner. All the way up he talked lightly to conceal his uneasiness.

"What an odd retreat you have chosen! I thought we should never get here. My chauffeur had never heard of Gibbon Street, nor any one else for that matter. What shocking streets we came through. Picturesque though, if one cares for that sort of thing."

No one paid the slightest attention to this babble. At the head of the stairs Amy opened the door of Bessie's bedroom and passed in. De Socotra was still talking as he followed her. Greg was behind him.

"Houston Street reminded me of Rome, Rome in Juvenal's day with its——"

The sentence was caught up on a gasp. It was never completed. Bessie's room had been transformed into a little mortuary chapel. Everything in it had been removed and the walls hung from ceiling to floor in grim black draperies. The effect was startling in the extreme; it had been designed to startle. In the center of the room, the sole object it contained, rested a plain black coffin on a severely draped bier. Six tall candles stood about the head lighting the face of the corpse strangely. It was the face of de Silva—peaceful, waxen, and faintly yellow.

Greg fascinated watched de Socotra. Amy disdained to look at him. Her gaze was bent like Nemesis on the poor clay. De Silva's face showed a dignity it had never known in life. One saw the man he might have been. Stilled now was the wild spirit that had been touched too late by kindness.

De Socotra's bronzed face turned gray, and a network of tiny dark veins showed under his skin. One realized the man's age. He breathed like something hurt. But he kept his back straight and his gaze never faltered from the dead man's face.

"Where did you—where did you—" he began twice, but did not finish.

Amy without speaking pointed to a note pinned on de Silva's breast. De Socotra, seeing that he was expected to read it, came forward. His nostrils twitched, a pained look showed deep in his eyes; one guessed that it afflicted him with nausea to approach the body of his hired assassin, but his iron will was not yet broken. He stooped, and in the light of the candles began to read with a sneer. It was the note de Silva had left for Greg.

As he realized what it implied, de Socotra sharply straightened, and for an instant looked wildly around like a trapped creature. But he quickly controlled himself. He turned his back on the coffin.

"So this is your proof," he said, and God knows what effort it cost him to bring it out so nonchalantly; "but he's dead, too!"

"Follow me," said Amy.

She opened the door that communicated with Bessie's parlor. An overpowering breath of sweetness was wafted forth. She passed in. De Socotra followed to the door, walking steadily, but with a gait somewhat stiffer than his wont. At the door he put out a hand to steady himself. His eyes looked wildly around the next room, and he drew back a little as if his flesh refused to be subjected to a further horror.

This room, too, was a resting-place of the dead, but with a difference. Great, many-branched candlesticks stood around this rich bier flooding the room with a pale gold light. Roses pink and white and red were everywhere; sheaves of roses heaped on the coffin and strewn on the pall.

Amy's expression was very different as she stood beside this bier. She was still a marble woman, but it was a marble head of grief. Her hands involuntarily went to her breast. She gazed down, oblivious alike to de Socotra and to Greg. Greg looked at her and experienced the meaning of adoration.

De Socotra's horror-stricken eyes were fixed on the ceiling. Anon they darted frantically from side to side like rats threatened by fire. In the end he had to look. His eyes were dragged in agony to the dead man's face. A groan was forced from the bottom of his breast. At that moment the debonair scoundrel's spirit broke. His head fell forward, his limp arms dropped to his sides.

He saw the face of Antonio Bareda beautiful in death. The lips seemed to be on the point of breaking into the old friendly smile; there was a slight lift to the eye-brows that suggested light and humor lurking behind the lowered lids. The wrinkles of age were all smoothed out. The happy warrior slept the long sleep.

"Come closer," said Amy remorselessly.

The broken man had no thought but to obey. He approached the coffin's foot on sinking knees. The change in his face was shocking. He saw that the dead man held clasped in his hands the little black book in which was bound up "the happiness of a whole people," but de Socotra regarded that indifferently now.

He whispered hoarsely: "It is enough. I understand you." Turning, he made his way towards the hall door like a man struggling against a crushing power, like a swimmer at the last gasp.

"Wait!" said Amy.

Reaching him, she held out the little shagreen case. "Something of yours that I wish to return to you," she said with dreadful meaning.

Greg shuddered. De Socotra dropped the case in his pocket.

At the foot of the stairs he paused again. Without looking at Amy he murmured: "Will you come back—and stay with mamma?"

"If I do not find Bianca there."

"I shall send her away at once."

"Very well. I shall be there to-night."

When the door closed behind him Greg burst out: "You cannot go! It is too horrible!"

"It must be gone through with," she murmured.

Early next morning Greg, who had paced his room the night through, received the expected summons. Francisco de Socotra had been found dead in his bed. Heart-failure, the doctor said. How should he have noticed the tiny needle prick on the man's throat? The needle itself had been destroyed before he came.

Señora de Socotra was a piteous figure. Later in the day she insisted on seeing Greg to thank him for his kindness at so dreadful a moment in a strange land. Overwhelming as was her grief there was no bitterness in it. She spoke of it as simply as a child. Amy with the tears running down her cheeks translated for Greg.

"If you could have known him as I knew him! So good a man, so kind and true! Like a knight of olden times; my knight! I could not live without him, did I not feel that he had left me a work to do. He has left a great fortune,

they tell me. Every penny of it shall I devote to good works in his memory! If I cannot be happy I can at least find peace in building a worthy memorial to his dear name."

When they left her Amy said: "You understand now why I acted as I did?"

"I understand," Greg said.

CHAPTER XXIII

CONCLUSION

The news of the deaths respectively of Antonio Bareda and Francisco de Socotra reached Managuay simultaneously. Many surmises were given rise to, but the truth never became known—or at least it was never published. The bodies of the two citizens arrived on the same ship and their funerals were held on the same day. Little inconvenience was thereby caused, for there were few in Managuay who desired to attend both ceremonies. One cortege was followed by the rich and the great whose sleek countenances bore the conventional expressions of grief; while behind the other followed on foot an endless procession of the weeping poor.

De Socotra's wife and adopted daughter brought his body home, and on the day following the funeral Señora de Socotra in memory of her husband presented to the republic the magnificent estate of Casa Grande with its famous *Jardin des Plantes* to be held in perpetuity for the benefit of the people. Señora de Socotra and Miss Wilmot (as the younger lady was thereafter to be known) then departed for Paris to arrange for the magnificent mausoleum that the bereaved widow designed to erect.

The simultaneous deaths of these two men left Managuay's political situation very unsettled. The government, deprived of its strong man who had ruled for so long from behind the curtain, scarcely knew where it stood; the people having lost their champion were too apathetic to take advantage of the government's weakness. For a while things went on outwardly as before. Then it became known that the United States minister, a well-meaning, weak soul, who had been an involuntary tool in the hands of the exploiters of Managuay, had been recalled, and one Gregory Parr appointed in his place.

When in due course Mr. Parr arrived the people were surprised by his youth. He brought with him as secretary a Managuayan, Mario Estuban, and the poor people took heart. On the occasion of his first call on the President of Managuay Mr. Parr displayed a knowledge of the internal affairs of the republic that appalled the functionary. Further, Mr. Parr made certain representations that resulted in the hasty resignation of the President and his entire government, and a new election was called.

During the interim influential gentlemen, both Managuayan and American, called on the United States minister, and it was rumored that heated interviews took place. The minister remained polite and unyielding. At the same time currents that were set in motion in Washington to have him removed failed of their effect.

As election day drew near a United States cruiser made a visit of courtesy to the harbor of Managuay. The sailors were received with the wildest enthusiasm by the crowds. She remained until after the event. No armed force was landed; her mute presence in the harbor was sufficient. For the first time in years the Managuayans voted as they pleased. A truly popular and representative government was returned, which promptly got down to the work of correcting the abuses of the former régime. Curiously enough business was not ruined as had been so freely prognosticated. Dividends continued to be paid while the workers sang at their work. Capitalists discovered in Managuay as elsewhere that oppression did not even pay.

Towards the end of the winter Señora de Socotra and Miss Wilmot returned to Santiago de Managuay.

Amidst the misty verdure of the *Jardin des Plantes* under the great moon of the tropics sauntered a happy pair pressed close together.

"When did you start loving me, Greg?"

"When you touched my arm outside the garage, and asked me if that was my car."

"But I was in boy's clothes then."

"My heart told me you were not a boy.... When did you start loving me?"

"On the way home in the cab from Bessie's when we quarreled so violently. I cried all night."

"Oho! Then the way to reach your heart is by quarreling with you!"

"Oh, it wouldn't work now. I see through you too well!"

"I love to have you see through me! How sweet it is to have you laugh at me and love me still!"

"I like to have you love me, but I'm not sure that I like to be laughed at. Perhaps you can teach me to laugh at myself."

"I don't want you any different. It's such fun to tease you, Red-head!"

"I'll bleach my hair!"

"You couldn't bleach your red-headed nature! ..."

"What became of the old flivver, Greg?"

"I brought it with me."

"Brought it with you!"

"Yes, and Hickey. I intended to surprise you. Hickey had a longing to travel. He is now driving Taxi No. 1 in Santiago, and learning Spanish mornings. When the old car will no longer run we'll build a little private museum for her in our back yard. When we get old we'll go look at it together and remind each other of the brisk days of our youth."

"We'll never grow old inside anyway...."

"Amy, dear, there's one thing that troubles my peace."

"What is that?"

"De Socotra's money."

"It was all left to mamma."

"But I suppose it will come to you in time. How could we take it?"

"I have thought of that. We needn't take it if you will help me lie once more and for the last time."

"How?"

"I have been trying to persuade mamma to buy herself a sufficient annuity and then devote all the rest to philanthropic works. She objects that she must make provision for me. But if we allow her to think that you have sufficient——"

"I see. I haven't a cent, you know, really, except the salary of a minor post in the diplomatic service. Aren't you afraid sometimes?"

"Never! My dearest dear! I know you will win a proper place in the world for you and me! It's fun to begin on nothing."

"Oh, I do love you!"

"I love you so!"

THE END

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