GALANTY GOLD

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YOUNG MODERNS BOOKSHELF

GALANTY GOLD

by

Victor MacClure

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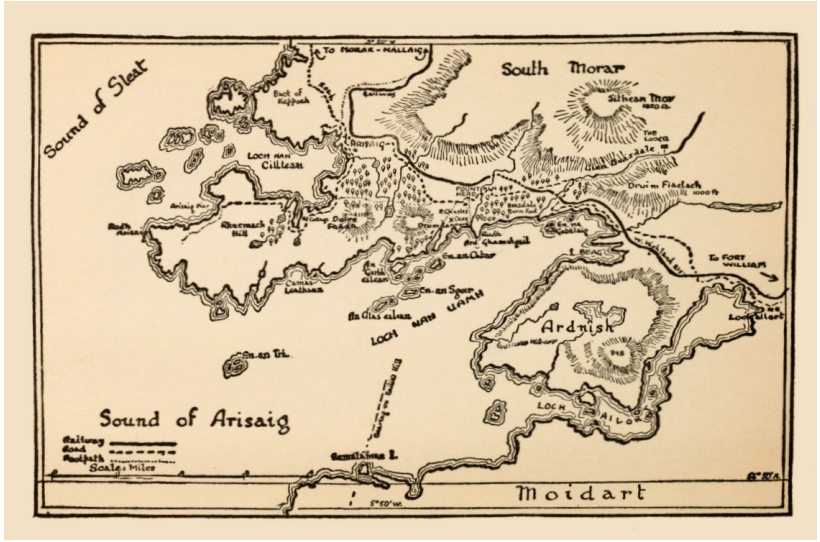


CHAPTER I
THE GIRL PURSUED

ON a clear October day, when the still waters of the loch mirrored in almost exact replica its steep brown sides on Ardnish, and caught again the flaming of autumn in bracken and tree, on that road which skirts the loch-head under Sithean Mor, two men came running at a steady trot.

For the beauty of the scene on either side of them they seemed to have no eyes to spare. They were intent, concentratedly intent, on their business. They were dressed alike for their business—this apparently absurd business of trotting doggedly along a Highland road. Both wore heavy gray sweaters that came high about their necks, loose flannel trousers in need of cleaning and pressing, and leather shoes that looked decrepit, but which, in actual fact, combined suppleness with strength. Here, however, resemblance between the two men ceased.

One was a shortish man, a few inches over five feet, but broad with it and muscularly perfect. A huge cap, vividly checkered, was pulled down over his brown face, redeemed from stark ugliness by the sleepy kindness of his eyes and an air of irrepressible good humor. The other, perhaps an inch or so under six feet, in his own way had the same perfection of physique that characterized the smaller. He was greyhound to the smaller man's bulldog. Broad and deep of chest, he was narrow of waist and hip, and from the springiness of his action most apparently well-legged. The head above the gray sweater was shapely. It was crowned by an uncovered thatch of thick and waving hair, which had the flaxen light and the reddish gold shade of ripe corn. And where his companion's face was rescued from ugliness by its expression, his was saved from an almost effeminate beauty by the stern blaze of his blue eyes and a certain ruggedness in the modeling of his features.

They came trotting down a long dip in the roadway to a flat stretch. The tall man touched his companion on the shoulder.

"Turn now, Punchy!" he ordered. "Do a sprint backwards!"

"Right you are, sir!" the other grinned.

Quick as a flash he came about and began running backward at a speed which every second seemed to promise a tumble and a crash on the back of his head. But nothing of that sort happened, even though the taller man, running forward, kept increasing the pace.

“Splendid, Punchy!” the tall fellow encouraged. “Good boy! Let up now. You’ve done enough, I think.”

The man called Punchy cast a glance behind him as he slowed up.

“Let’s do a bit more up this rise, sir,” he said. “It’s rougher going, besides bein’ uphill, an’ it’ll test my feet a bit more—”

“Go ahead, then,” the other replied. He really meant “Go on running backwards.” The little man nodded and picked up speed again. “No more than fifty yards, Punchy,” the tall man warned.

Fifty yards farther on the tall man signaled a halt, and the two came to a stop on the crest of the rise. They crossed to a low wall by the roadside and sat. Both were breathing easily in spite of the exercise.

“Very well done, Haggart,” the tall man commended. “You’ve become almost as nimble backwards as you are facing forward—and that’s saying a great deal. You mustn’t do much more to-day. Don’t want you to get stale.”

The little man chuckled and kicked his heels exuberantly.

“Stale!” he exclaimed. “I feel as if I could run from here to Edinburgh an’ then fight six Kid Craiks!”

He jumped to his feet and began dancing about the roadway with lightning shifts of his feet, sparring the while with an imaginary opponent, raining blows from both hands on the empty air. From his seat by the roadside his companion watched him keenly.

“I want to see that left rather more, Punchy—and straighter!” he urged. “Good! Now a right hook—tap him in the ribs—uppercut him—good! No, don’t mix it with him—he’s a spoiler, remember—stand him off, boy—use that left, won’t you? Oh, pretty—pretty! You’re fifty per cent. quicker than you were a month ago, Punchy—

“Why, what’s the matter?” He broke off as the other came to a sudden halt and dropped his hands to gaze open-mouthed down the hill. “Not out of wind, surely?”

“Out o’ wind, sir!” Haggart breathed. “No, sir—but—there’s a girl there—down the road, Mr. Dugald—”

The tall man turned to follow the open-mouthed gaze. He was in time to catch a glimpse of the figure of a girl as she sped across the roadway below to dart among the trees separating the road at that point from the lake. The glimpse was momentary, but in the clear light of that October day it was enough to leave him with a clean-cut impression. A lithe figure he saw, set off by a neatly cut jacket of black velvet and a trim tartan skirt. The knee-boots of black leather or rubber emphasized rather than hid the shapely legs, and the dark blue beret pulled saucily aslant lent piquancy to the charm of a healthy olive pallor, red lips, straight brows of jet over wide-set dark eyes, in a sweet oval of face. The impression, caught in the mere moment when the girl cast a startled glance up toward him and his companion ere the trees hid her, fixed itself in the mind of Dugald Torrance as if it were etched there.

"Now, I wonder where she comes from?" he murmured. "I don't know—"

"Maybe she's from the big hoose," suggested Haggart.

"I hardly think so. There's nobody there at the moment except the winter staff—"

"Well, maybe she's one of the servant lassies—" Haggart began, then changed his mind. "Auch, no," he amended. "That wisnae a servant-girl, sir."

"I'd have said not. A striking-looking girl—"

"What's she jowkin' in among the trees for?" Haggart debated with himself. "Nipped across the road like a whit'rick, so she did. Playin' at boy scouts, maybe. Queer, a' the same—gey queer!"

"Strange, yes," his companion agreed. "It is too late in the year for visitors—and she doesn't look like a local girl—unless the local girls have taken to buying their clothes from Princes Street."

"Maybe she comes from some big hoose down by Arisaig, or by Ardnish—"

Torrance shook his head.

"There aren't any," he said. "At least, none where I don't know the people. No, she's a stranger—and, anyhow," he added, "it is none of our business, Punchy."

"Naw," Punchy admitted reluctantly, "but a body can't help wonderin'. Huh! Jowkin' in among trees like that! It fairly threw me aff ma shadow-stuff, so it did. I'll jist—"

He was beginning to dance about once more, when a sharp exclamation

from Torrance pulled him up.

"Ssst! Come back here a moment, Punchy!"

Torrance pulled his companion back into the shelter of a bush that overhung the low wall, and with a gesture bade him look down the road. From the woodland to the landward side three men had come out into the highway, separated from each other by intervals of about fifty yards, but obviously acting together. The man nearest the watching pair spread out his hands in what looked like an order for the intervals to be kept, then pointed to the spot among the shoreward trees where the girl had gone. With a sweeping gesture he next signaled that a wheeling, fan-like movement was to be made down through the trees to the loch-shore—or at least, so the watchers interpreted it. Then, without a sound, the three men crossed the road and stealthily entered the wood.

II

With open mouth and wrinkled brow, Punchy Haggart gazed up from under the peak of his atrocious cap into the face of his tall companion. From the spread of his sturdy, slightly bowed legs to the cant of his head on his thick neck his whole attitude was reminiscent of a bulldog that inquires in silent puzzlement of its master: “What, if anything, do we do about this?”

“Fishy, yes,” Dugald Torrance replied to the mute inquiry. “So fishy, in fact, that even at the risk of being looked upon as—as— What’s your name for people who pry—?”

“Nosey Parkers!” Punchy suggested.

“—as Nosey Parkers, Punchy, we really must investigate. When it comes to seeing three men of exceedingly alien appearance—”

“Dagoes!” said Punchy, and spat over a hunched shoulder in a way that was vulgar—but expert.

“—Dagoes, then—following a really marvelous girl—tracking her, we might say—through the wood by the side of an almost deserted Highland loch, things become too fishy to be left alone. We take a hand in the game, Punchy —whatever it is.”

Punchy rubbed the knuckles of a clenched fist.

“Uhuh!” said he. “But how?”

“From the direction the girl took,” said Torrance, “we may gather that she was making for the green strathie at Beasdale foot. We therefore go up the road a trifle and put ourselves between her and her pursuers where the wood thins.”

“Uhuh!” said Punchy with an air of relish. “And then?”

“Well—and then, Punchy, we act according to circumstance. At the moment I fancy we simply dawdle through the thinner strip of wood, conversing in friendly fashion. When we reach the shore, from which, incidentally, we can keep an eye on wood and road for some distance, we become innocent and childlike. We indulge our juvenile instincts, perhaps, by playing ducks-and-drakes with flat pebbles on the inviting waters of Loch nan Uamh.”

“Cheese-oh!” Punchy said disgustedly. “Jist pap stottin’ chuckies intae the

loch? No' at the Dagoes?"

"Not at the Dagoes—at least, not to begin with," Torrance smiled. "Come along, Punchy!"

On silent but swift feet the two sped up the road until they came to a place where the narrow wood thinned out into a mere line of trees. A steepish drop ran down from the road through withered bracken to a stretch of mossy turf. Beyond that lay a width of heavy shingle and then the brown loch waters. The roadside at this point afforded a coign of vantage, and Torrance put a hand on his companion's shoulder to detain him for a moment or two while they spied.

"Your Dagoes must be strangers to Loch nan Uamh," said Torrance, "or they would have made for this part of the roadway. That's where our local knowledge gives us an advantage."

"They're makin' in this direction," Haggart said excitedly. "Can ye no' see that man out by the shore?"

"I can see him all right, Punchy. If you were a Hielan'man instead of being a Lowlander—a mere *Gall*, little better than a Sassenach—you'd see the other two higher up in the wood."

"D'ye see the lassie?" eagerly.

"Unless she has gone to ground like a frightened hind," said Torrance, "she isn't in the wood. And I don't think she was that sort of girl—"

He turned to peer to the right along the shore.

"I don't see her," he said, "but I'll wager she is well away by now. Look below there—in the bracken at the foot of the slope! I think I can make out a trace of some one having passed in a hurry."

"That sort of light kind o' smear, sir?"

"The same. Let us wander down quietly. These hunters are near enough to see us now, and our appearance may disconcert them a little."

They sauntered down the slope to the edge of the bracken, where Torrance examined the ground.

"Yes, Punchy," he said, "I think the lady has passed this way—she, or some one not heavy-footed, not many moments ago. We don't appear to be examining the ground, Punchy," he said warningly. "We rather appear to be interested in arboriculture. Yes, we make rather good foresters, I think. Avoiding all temptation to gaze in the direction of the Dagoes, my dear Punchy—they seem, by a casual glance, to be disconcerted in the way

anticipated—we turn our close attention to the young tree that is so handy. (Yes, they really are a trifle disconcerted, these hunters—they are inclined to bunch and consult together. A revelatory symptom.) And dropping into the Swiss Family manner, Punchy, we inform ourselves that this is a specimen of the genus *Larix*—a conifer, you will observe, Punchy, but distinct from the *Abies*, or firs—"

"Auch, sir!" pleaded Haggart "I wish you'd stop kiddin'—Ah'm all of a dither!"

"Unworthy of the true and earnest forester, Punchy," Torrance chided, with a sorrowful shake of his head. "Doesn't it warm your arboricultural bosom to note the straight and beautifully tapering stem? (They really are disconcerted, the hunters. They've quite given up the idea of beating the wood. There's something deliciously comic in the way they are trying to appear casual.) If it had a little more shelter this might grow into a rather fine larch, fellow timber-merchant—but the salt wind—ah, the salt wind! It has stunted many a promising tree, oh, brother woodman!"

"They're sneakin' along this way," said Punchy.

"Sneaking is the apt term. Well, we saunter along the shore in the like direction. I'm sorry, Punchy. I know you had set your heart on a nice game of 'stottin' chuckies'—"

"Auch, Mr. Dugald!" protested Punchy.

"But arboriculture, Punchy—our science must come first. If we are to excel as foresters we must eschew these childish pastimes. Far better for us to wander along the wood's edge—incidentally keeping the hunters on the sneak behind us—and quietly pursue our art. Do we wander, Punchy?"

"I suppose so," the other grumbled. "Huh! Talk about *me*! When you start talkin' like print a body always knows you're simply spoilin' for a fight. Uhuh! An' here you are, wi' a fight loomin' up something splendid, strollin' away from it as if the idea gi'ed ye the scunner!"

Dugald Torrance grinned as they turned to saunter along the edge of the wood.

"What a pugnacious forester!" he gibed.

"Catch me wearin' a fancy sash an' a comic hat, an' prancin' about the streets on a white horse wi' a lot o' banners! Silly goats!" said Punchy disdainfully. "Ha'e your joke if ye like, Mister Dugald. There's nithin' o' the Free Forester about me, but if pugnacious means that I'd like fine tae belt a

couple o' thae Dagoes across the kisser—then I'm pugnacious. An' so are you," he added, "for all your kiddin'."

Punchy sounded so genuinely aggrieved that Torrance hastened to smooth him down.

"Perhaps you're right, Punchy," he admitted. "In ordinary circumstances a free-for-all with the Dagoes, as you call them, might have its merits. And I don't say that I wouldn't enjoy it. But at the moment it is too risky."

"Risky!"

"Yes. I said risky. You might get a foot into a rabbit-hole and twist an ankle—or one of these fellows might get busy with a knife. You know what these Dagoes are," said Torrance mischievously.

"Bluidthirsty dogs!" said the virtuous Punchy.

"And where would your fight be to-morrow night if you twisted an ankle or got an inch or two of steel between your ribs?" Torrance argued. "I suppose you really do want that Featherweight Belt?"

"Chinks! Dae Ah no'?" breathed the little fighter. "Crivvy dick!"

"Very well, then. If you're going to meet Kid Craik in good trim to-morrow night at the Grassmarket there must be no rough-house business. Besides, we have no real ground for picking a quarrel with these strangers. We don't know definitely that they were after the girl. We don't know anything about the business. The fact, of course, that they are still content to sneak along behind us gives them away. If they had any justification for chasing her—if they were chasing her—they wouldn't pull up on our account."

"Auch, they were after her all right," said Punchy.

"I believe they were," Torrance agreed. "And I'd like to know why. But as it turns out we have spoiled their game as effectually as if we had set about them. By this time the girl is well over the burn, with the choice of so many ways that it would take an army, let alone three men, to find her. And if she wanted to hide, where better in the world could she go to earth than round Loch nan Uamh—this 'loch of the caves'?"

"That's a fact," Haggart nodded. "She has only tae jowk intae the cave Prince Charlie had—though it's fitter for a badger or a cat than a human bein'—an' thae Dagoes'd look for her in vain." He apparently liked the savor of the phrase, for he repeated it unctuously: "Aye—in vain!"

To hide an amusement that might have offended the little fighter, Torrance

cast a glance behind him.

“The hunters apparently have realized the fact,” he said. “They have given up the chase.”

“So they have,” said Haggart. “Good for us, Mr. Dugald! We’ve diddled them fine!”

“That being the case,” Torrance commented, “we may think of our own affairs. By the time we have got back to the road and climbed Druim Fiaclach, you’ll have done enough for the day, Punchy. Lunch, and then a good sleep for you. Beyond a gentle walk to-night, and perhaps a spot of shadow-fighting in the morning, I shan’t let you do any more till you get into the ring.”

“What you say goes, Mr. Dugald,” the boxer agreed. “I must say I’m in awful good fettle.”

“That’s good, Punchy,” Torrance said absently. He was looking in the direction which he believed the girl had taken, turning now and then to see what progress her pursuers were making in their retirement.

The two men waited on the loch-shore till all sign of human movement was gone, then they turned up by the wood to the roadway. They were silent now, and the silence dwelt with them until they were more than half-way to the lonely shooting-box that Torrance had rented on the slope of that ridge called Druim Fiaclach. It was Punchy Haggart who broke the silence.

“I wish,” he said wistfully, “I wish I knew what thae villains were aifter the lassie for, Mr. Dugald.”

Mr. Dugald came out of a brown study.

“So do I, Punchy,” he admitted.

“I’m awful uneasy in ma mind about the whole thing, Mr. Dugald,” the little man went on. “You see, sir—though we only got the littlest glimpse of her—a body could safely bet she was a terrible nice young lady.”

“Yes. I should think it would be a safe bet, Punchy.”

“Uhuh—aye,” said Punchy reflectively, but with a shrewd glance at the face of his companion. “An’ to see a terrible nice young lady hunted by a parcel o’ Dagoes—well, it’s no’ quite the thing. I mean tae say, Mr. Dugald, it’s no’ a thing a man wi’ ony spunk could let rest?”

Dugald Torrance dropped a hand on the little man’s shoulder, and shook it in friendly understanding. The action was apparently sufficient answer to the boxer’s roundabout inquiries, for Punchy grinned contentedly and set himself

to the hill-climbing in renewed silence.

III

Dugald Torrance, known in society as the Master of Morar by reason of his heirship to the barony held by his father, was not the man to dismiss from his mind the queer happening which so exercised the tender heart of his adherent, Punchy Haggart. It was natural to him to oppose the combative exuberance of the little boxer with an attitude of calm detachment. But at heart, as, indeed, Haggart had maintained, the strange spectacle of the girl pursued—as it seemed—by three men of suspicious and alien appearance aroused in him a very definite feeling of indignation. In spite of the homily he had delivered to Punchy on the folly of a rough-and-tumble, his whole instinct had been to fight. If the interposing of himself and Haggart between the three men and their quarry had not been effective, combat most likely would have ensued. Torrance knew that he would have gone to any length to stop the pursuit of the girl.

The affair left him worried and not a little curious. It worried him to think that the dark-eyed girl might be in danger, and he was curious to know what underlay the affair. He was curious to know whom the singularly attractive girl could be. And it deepened his sense of unease to remember in how sparsely populated and wild a district the possible persecution of the girl was taking place.

Loch nan Uamh lay in that part of the Western Highlands which juts out under Skye, and is opposed by the strangely named islands of Eigg, Muck, and Rum. There was no township on the loch itself, and of human habitation at all there was none, save for an isolated house or two on the northerly side and one considerable mansion at the loch-head. Some four miles along the road westerly were the scattered dwellings of Arisaig, and three miles in the other direction the still fewer houses of Lochailort. Only a mile of the narrow road which follows the West Highland line to Mallaig hugged the top of the loch, and from that on the south side stretched the sheer cliffy edge of Ardnish, while on the north ran out some six or seven miles of island-fretted coast-line, alternating in woodland, barren rock, peat hag, and mere bog. A sea-arm girt by beauty such as might stop one’s breath, but a scene of such isolation as to make the idea of the hunted girl a thing that touched on terror.

Inquiry of the few servants about the shooting-box under Sithean Mor could elicit no information regarding either the girl or the strange men who pursued her. From this Torrance knew definitely that the girl could not have

been long in the district, for gossip travels fast in the Highlands, and the advent of such a personality would have been news indeed. And the same held good as concerning the three men.

In the uneasiness that held him, Dugald Torrance could not rest after lunch. He saw the protesting Punchy to bed for his regulation afternoon nap, and took himself at speed down the glen to the loch-side.

Dugald knew Loch nan Uamh better than the average townsman knows his own street. The summers of his childhood had been spent in exploring its shores and its surrounding hills. And in the vacations from Eton and the University it had drawn him back to it against the attractions that were opening to him in other parts of the earth. Thus he had come to know its every accessible nook and cranny, and its paths and ways to the last sheep-track.

His knowledge of the contours of the loch-side led him straight to a small promontory on the rockier northern shore. Rudh Ard Ghamshgail was not much of an eminence, but from it one could see more of the shores at one time than from any other point. As a boy he had regarded it as his own particular coign, the flat rock on top where he had lain so often in the sun to watch the seals as they played about the little islands close by.

It would have been hard for any one, unless actually stalking him, to have seen Dugald reach his eyrie. The fact that the strangers of the morning might be about made him cautious. Even as he moved he seemed to fuse with the landscape. And once on his rock only the eagle or the hawk could have discerned him.

As he lay there in the first few minutes it almost seemed that the shores were deserted. But at last he knew for certain that some human was about. A little family of sea pigeons rose from beside one of the loch islands in the distance, a mere cluster of black dots shooting across the brown water some few inches above its surface. He waited with his eyes fixed on the spot where the birds had risen. A coble came slowly from behind the distant island.

Eyes less keen than Dugald’s might have recognized one of the figures in the boat—the close-fitting beret and the velvet jacket. It was the girl who had crossed the roadway below him and Haggart in such strange circumstance that morning. With her in the boat, and pulling it slowly by the clumsy oars, was a small boy. As they progressed slowly, the girl seemed to be engaged over the stern with a taut rope. It looked as if she were dragging for something.

And then, almost as by instinct, Dugald knew he was not the only watcher of the girl and her companion. It was no movement of birds that told him so, but merely the woodsman’s sense that said there was something strange in the

undergrowth some distance along the shore. He watched carefully.

"Yes—I thought so," he said to himself a moment or two later. "There you are, you brute, just this side of An Garbh Eilean! And I'll bet myself a sovereign that your mates are somewhere about, too."

He apostrophized a head which was poking out now quite definitely from the undergrowth he had suspected. He let his gaze travel back to the girl in the boat. It seemed impossible that she could know she was being watched, for she was giving an undivided attention to the handling of the drag-rope. If she knew that she was being watched her command of herself was marvelous. The small boy and herself might have been alone in the world as far as nonchalance counted.

Dugald watched for a moment or two longer. The certainty he had that all three men were on the loch-side deepened, and there rose in him an urge to warn the girl somehow. And he hit on a method of doing so. If the girl knew she was watched the warning would do no harm, and Dugald calculated that it would at least reveal to himself whether he was right or not about the presence of the three. He rolled over and brought himself into a kneeling position behind a natural embrasure in his rocky cup. With a trick of his boyhood's days, he put four fingers into his mouth and sent a shrill and penetrant whistle echoing over the loch.

The effect was almost startling in immediateness. The man in the undergrowth by An Garbh Eilean came head and shoulders out of it, and two others rose in separate positions among the nearer rocks to look at each other. The girl in the boat looked up hurriedly from her occupation with the rope and cast a quick glance about her. On the instant she saw the three men so easily brought from cover and it was obvious now to Dugald that she had not known they were spying on her. A word to the boy at the oars, and the boat was backed. In a few seconds she had the drag-iron aboard and had taken an oar with her companion. Then, with an ease and skill which showed both she and the youngster understood a small boat, the coble was pulled along the northward shore to disappear at good speed behind the farther islands of the loch.

Dugald chuckled contentedly over the success of his stratagem. In a little, if the girl and her companion were going far along the loch-side, they would come again into his view. Meantime he could turn his attention to the discomfited Dagoes.

They were now completely out of their concealment, and were signaling frantically to each other. The one who had been farthest out and among the

undergrowth began to run along the shore in the direction taken by the coble. He could make no speed, however, from the nature of the ground—rock-strewn shingle which alternated with spurs of boggy moss.

"Yes, run, you slob!" murmured Torrance. "Run that way a bit farther and you'll be up to the thighs in the bog!"

The other two men were scrambling toward another small promontory that lay between Dugald and the north shore.

"Fine!" Dugald encouraged them, under his breath. "Just try to cross that nice green piece, and the whole lot of you will founder!"

It happened just as he anticipated. The man farthest out was the first to sink, but his fellows were only a second or two after him. And they all began yelling together. Full twenty minutes had elapsed before they got themselves out of their difficulties and came together on solid ground to argue angrily, with furious gesticulations. And then it seemed that their mutual recrimination died, as they obviously fell to discussion on whence had originated that betraying whistle. It was a problem too deep for them, apparently, or perhaps they began to feel the acuter discomforts of soaked and muddy clothing. At any rate, for the second time that day they gave up pursuit of the girl and took themselves off disconsolate, up the path through the woods toward the Mallaig road.

In the meantime Dugald had seen the coble pass beyond the loom of the islands and turn in behind a small cape some three miles from him.

"Camas Leathann," he told himself. "There's no house there for miles round. Which means, probably, that they are going to climb over the hill to Arisaig."

The idea comforted him. In Arisaig the girl would be reasonably safe for the night. Dugald waited until the three men were out of sight. Then he rose from his coign and took to a path that would bring him ahead of them ere they reached the road.

CHAPTER II
THE “DAGOES”

DUGALD TORRANCE, in getting ahead of the three men as they came up through the woods to the Mallaig road, had no object other than to discover where they were going to put up for the night. At the point where they would come out into the road they would be three miles nearer Arisaig than Lochailort. These were the nearest places where strangers were likely to find accommodation. There was a good hotel at Arisaig and a decent inn at Lochailort, and after these nothing offering hospitality nearer than Morar one way and Glenfinnan the other.

If the men made for the nearer Arisaig, toward which the girl most likely was making over the hill, he felt that he would have to do something in the way of giving her warning. It would mean that he would have to cut through the woods that lay under the roadway and get to Arisaig before them.

The day was already turning to dusk. In another hour or less it would be dark. It most likely would take some time to discover where the girl was located, and to find some way in which she could be safeguarded. And in the meantime responsibility for Punchy Haggart was looming large.

Punchy was due to fight next evening in the Grassmarket of Edinburgh an eliminating contest for the Featherweight Title in Britain. If Torrance was away too long from the shooting-box which was their training-quarters it was almost certain that Punchy would come to look for him. And that might mean trouble, for Haggart was too unused to life in the Highlands to be allowed to wander off definite roads. It was almost certain that this child of the Glasgow slums would lose himself, almost certain that he would get stuck in some morass. The Master of Morar knew the affection and devotion that the little boxer held toward him. The realization rather embarrassed him sometimes, and sometimes amused him, even as it warmed him. It was equally certain, therefore, that prolonged absence from the quarters on his part, especially in view of the importance Punchy attached to the happenings of the morning, would deprive his adherent of all ability to keep still.

Torrance was in a quandary. On the one hand, all his instinct of chivalry

bade him dismiss every consideration but that of helping the girl. On the other, the thought that Haggart inevitably would come to look for him, and that the little man might get drenched, if not lost forever in a bog, could not but give him pause. In the lesser event, he had to remember that boxers at the apex of their training were apt to be sensitive beyond normal. A slight cold was enough to spoil the work of weeks of conditioning. Half an hour in the intense cold of a Highland night while soaked to the skin would put Haggart, strong though he was, beyond all chance of winning his match next evening, even if he were fit to enter the ring. And the loss of all these weeks of training, to say nothing of the loss of the contest, would just about break Punchy Haggart's heart.

With these considerations warring in his mind Dugald reached the point where the path from the loch-shore met the road. A stile over a wall ended the path he himself had taken, but Dugald did not make use of it just then. He went up inside the wall and sought the cover of some shrubbery, from which he could watch the junction of path and road.

He had not long to wait for the arrival of the three. They came up the path within a minute of his taking cover.

They were arguing about something—what it was exactly Torrance could not make out. One of the men, he who was doing most of the talking, had a distinctly foreign accent. From the fact that all his "s's" were hard, and that he had a tendency to emphasize and broaden the final "o" in such a word as "condition"—which seemed to occur frequently—Dugald was led to believe that Punchy's description of the men as Dagoes was justified where at least one of them was concerned. The odd accent bespoke a habitual use of Spanish. For the others, there was hardly enough to judge them by. One was a tall man who said little, and that in a voice too deep and indistinct to reach Torrance. The other was indistinct in a lighter key.

If gesture went for anything, however, all were in a state of acute discomfort from the sodden condition of their clothes. The argument was brief. It seemed to Torrance that they had some thought of going toward Arisaig, but that they had taken rooms at Lochailort, for in spite of their discomfort they made for the more distant hamlet. Before they turned toward Lochailort, Dugald caught a few odd words which gave him a hint or two to chew upon.

"Edinburgh," "come back as soon as we can," "train in the morning," "eight-fifty-something," and "Arisaig."

When they had gone Dugald allowed a minute to elapse before he climbed the wall and followed them. His own way to the shooting-box included a mile

and a quarter of the road they were taking, and for that length he could keep them in view.

As he followed them to the place where he had to turn off into the glen under Druim Fiaclach, he turned over the hints he had gathered.

If, as it seemed, they were going to Edinburgh in the morning worrying about the girl might be temporarily shelved. Temporarily only, for it appeared that they were to come back as soon as they could. They were all going to Edinburgh. The "we" had been comprehensive. The two more vocal had used it. If either had intended remaining there should have been a "you." The "we," of course, might exclude the taller man who spoke so little. He might be left to continue the pursuit of the girl. There was that possibility, and it was one that Torrance turned over in his mind very closely.

Of the three men, this tall man of few words looked the most dangerous. In spite of hunched shoulders and a tendency to slouch, there was a knitting of frame and muscular covering that suggested some athleticism. The Master of Morar, always news to a section of the Press by reason of his recognized skill and frequent appearances in the squared ring, was not likely to err in such judgment. "The Fighting Peer," as sporting journalists more familiar with Bell's *Fistiana* than Burke's *Peerage* delighted to call the Hon. Dugald Torrance, was too familiar with the type to mistake a scrapper. The man looked a thug, but he obviously was a man of his hands. Dugald had a faint idea that somewhere he had seen the man before. It was an idea which had been recurring in his mind since the morning, but which was dismissed as the recognition of a type rather than of an individual.

If this tough specimen, then, were to be left in the district danger for the girl was hardly lessened. If anything it was probably increased. The day's first encounter with the three had shown that, while the other two were inclined to circumspection in their actions, this taller man needed holding in. In the morning Dugald had fancied that, if the thug had had his way, the intervention of himself and Punchy between the girl and her pursuers would indeed have been resented physically. After the first moment of disconcertion the bigger fellow had seemed to urge an encounter. In his apparently casual but really keen observation, Dugald had seen the others vote for dissimulation. Without the other two to keep him in check the girl would be in actual danger from such a ruffian.

Torrance arrived at a decision before he turned up the glen. If the taller man did not arrive with the others, as the plan appeared, on the Arisaig platform for the eight-fifty-something train for Edinburgh, then Torrance himself would give up the trip. It would be a most terrible disappointment to

the faithful Punchy, for it was a great thing to the little boxer that the Master of Morar had promised to act as his second. But Dugald hoped Punchy's disappointment would find solace in the idea that "the terrible nice young lady" would have the protection Punchy so distressfully felt she needed.

And, having got this length, Dugald went farther in resolve. It might happen that there were more than three men after the girl. There might be one or others in Lochailort. He made up his mind to stroll with Punchy later on to the Lochailort inn—the seven-mile saunter over Druim Fiaclach and back would do no harm—and determine the exact composition of the gang. If there were more than three, and any of them were left in the Arisaig district in the morning, going with Punchy to Edinburgh would still be denied him.

The resolution brought him to the glen-foot. In the gathering dusk he stood for a minute to watch the three plod disgustedly Lochailortward. Then a bend of the road hid them, and he walked up the glen to make his peace with Punchy Haggart.

II

"Of course, Mr. Dugald, sir, Ah'm disappointit," Punchy admitted soberly. "Ah've been lookin' forward tae seein' you in ma corner jist as much as tae this ither step on the way tae the Belt. Ah'm a man o' few wurrds," said Punchy—as loquacious a fellow as ever pulled on a five-ounce glove, "but Ah must say if Ah couldn't grin an' bear ma disappointment for the sake o' an awful nice young lady like yon, Ah'd be nae mair worthy tae pit on the Lonsdale Belt as tae grow a Charlie Chaplin moustache!"

"I felt sure you'd look at it that way, Punchy," said Torrance, with as solemn a face as Punchy's attempt at simile would permit him.

"You've decided quite right, Mr. Dugald," Punchy went on. "If it comes tae the bit Ah'll jist nip down to Edinburgh on ma own. Ah'll knock Kid Craik stone ginger in the second or third round—then Ah'll nip over tae Waverley an' catch the midnight train back tae bear a han'."

"I'm afraid there isn't a midnight train, Punchy," said Torrance.

Punchy's grin subsided—as much as it ever could subside. It was plain that he had been seeing himself in a dramatic *rôle*, dashing across Scotland at midnight. Then the grin slid back.

"Auch, weel!" he amended. "First train in the mornin', then. Of course, it may turn out that all three go to Edinburgh. An' we may find when we get tae the inn that there's no more o' them. In that case the young lady'll be safe until we get back. Thae rascals canna get back before we do."

"That is true," Dugald said heartily. "Let us hope it turns out as we want it. I'd simply hate to miss seeing you knock Craik 'stone ginger,' Punchy. That's a pathological condition quite outside my experience. Let's go and chase up Mrs. Maclean with the supper, so that we can get down to Lochailort and back again in good time for bed."

The information they gathered in the inn of Lochailort cheered them up a little. The landlord, a great admirer of the Master of Morar, was nothing loath to give them all the information he could regarding the three men, especially as he looked upon those customers with some disfavor. He knew nothing of their business in Arisaig. They had arrived before noon on the previous day without warning, and had spent most of their time studying a map of the district and making inquiries about roads and features round Loch nan Uamh. Two of them

definitely were foreigners, one of them being unable to speak either English or good Gaelic. The third, an Englishman, could speak the foreign language—whatever it was—that was familiar to the others. There were only the three.

They had been out all day, the landlord said, telling Torrance what he already knew, and had apparently been exploring the country off the made roads, for they had arrived back to the inn in a deplorable state of muddiness and ill-temper. Their clothes now were drying in front of the kitchen fire, while the three were sitting wrapped in blankets in one of the bedrooms, where a fire had been lit for them and their supper carried to them. It was unlikely that they would appear in the public part of the inn that evening.

"Well," said the landlord, by way of conclusion, "to-morrow will see the last of them, I hope. If they ever come back here I'm afraid we'll be too understaffed to accommodate them."

"All three are going to-morrow?" Torrance demanded.

"They've given up their rooms. And a car is to take them to Arisaig station for the eight-fifty-six."

Dugald turned to exchange a glance with the now quite radiant Punchy.

"Thank you very much," said Dugald to the host. "They were acting very strangely to-day on the shore of Loch nan Uamh. Haggart and I needed a walk, so we thought we might as well look in and see if any one knew what they were up to. It looks odd to see people of their sort in Arisaig—especially at this time of the year."

With this explanation, which was no explanation at all, he and Punchy took their leave, and set off homeward under a clear sky and a bright moon.

III

Torrance and Haggart set out betimes to walk to Arisaig station on the following morning. A boy had gone ahead with their baggage on a panniered shelty. When they reached the station it was deserted except for the "collector"—as the station-master is called on the Highland line—their baggage-boy, and a porter. Dugald bought two first return tickets and listened with smiling patience to the collector's semi-humorous dissertation on the felicity of being rich. Then with Punchy he turned down the platform in order to cross to the "up" side of the rails.

At that moment a motor-cycle came ripping up the hill from the Arisaig cluster of houses. It was efficiently handled by a girl, behind whom, riding a-pillion, was a small boy who balanced easily as he clutched a small suit-case.

"Jinks!" gasped Punchy. "This is gaun tae complicate maitters, Mr. Dugald! It's *her*!"

It indeed was "her." Though the saucily-slanted beret was replaced by a close-fitting helmet-sort of brown felt, and the figure was wrapped in a loosely-cut coat of Highland tweed, there was no mistaking the clean oval of face, with its dark eyes and shapely red lips, nor the lithe movement of the sweetly-fashioned body as she dismounted from the machine.

It was apparent that the girl and the small boy—unmistakably brother and sister—understood each other thoroughly. The girl took the suit-case with one hand and passed her free arm about her brother's shoulders to give him the only quick caress that his boyish dislike of demonstration would permit. It was charming to see, that intensely human relation. The pair of them, packed full of affection for each other, and on the boy's part that affection swelled to bursting-point by admiration for his splendid sister, but all manifestation of their feelings strictly tabooed. Funny, too, their relation, from the fact that it was instantly betrayed to the kindly observer by their very effort to conceal it.

There was to be no prolongation of farewell between the pair. The boy mumbled a word or two, and chucked a nod and a grin at his sister as he swung to the saddle of the machine, already turned and beginning to run downhill. And it was only for the slightest instant that the girl watched him go. Then she turned and came into the station.

Torrance and Punchy, who had missed nothing of the arrival and parting of the brother and sister, were already on their way to the other side of the rails.

By tacit understanding there was nothing in the world, apparently, in which they were so little interested as the appearance of the girl. They were silent until they got well along the “up” platform and fell into admiration of the way in which the name of the station was set out in white stones on a panel of green-painted cement.

“She may be going merely to Fort William, Punchy,” Torrance pointed out. “Shopping, perhaps.”

“What’s the suit-case for, then?”

“To carry her purchases, it may be.”

“Uhuh—aye!” Punchy grunted doubtfully. “Well, we’ll see. But even if it’s only tae Fort William she’s gaun, thae Dagoes’ll be on the same train, mind. Ah hope they miss the dam’ thing!” he said spitefully.

“Small hope of that, Punchy. They still have a good minute or two,” said Torrance.

As they stood talking, the object of their concern came out of the ticket-office and walked down the platform to cross to their side. She went past them, head erect, as if she saw nothing of them, but one more knowledged in women than either of the two innocents who were so interested in her would have guessed that she could have given an exact description of them. She went into the waiting-room farther down the “up” platform.

Minutes passed. A few people drifted into the station, people intending to travel, but the greater number merely for the interest of seeing the train go. The signal dropped, and it began to look as if Punchy’s spiteful wish was going to be realized. Then, just as the engine-whistle of the approaching train was heard round the bend, a car ran up to the station, and the three men came tumbling out of it. They were still in the ticket-office when the train drew up. The collector had jumped back across the rails in front of the train in order to supply them with tickets. Torrance and Punchy got into the same carriage as the girl, but separated from her by several compartments. The collector and the three men were yelling as they ran down the other platform. They came round the front of the engine, their baggage bumping their knees as they ran, and were bundled without ceremony into the leading carriage of the train.

“Now,” said Torrance, who had watched the proceedings from the window, “much will depend on whether they and the girl go into the breakfast-car. As it stands, they don’t know that she is in the train. The breakfast-car is between them and the girl. We go along and eat, Punchy. If they should turn up and the girl comes in, we must try and act somehow to screen her. We’ll leave it to the

inspiration of the moment. Come along."

As it happened, they had no need to concern themselves. It may have been that the three men breakfasted in the third-class section of the restaurant-car, or that they had already broken their fast in Lochailort. Nor did the girl put in an appearance. The train rolled along past the head of Loch nan Uamh, scene of yesterday's adventures, past Lochailort, and through the glen that separates Morar from Moidart. In the succeeding vistas of unsurpassable beauty and grandeur that met their gaze, the two Scots almost forgot their preoccupation. Towering heights, already capped by thin smears of snow, rising in dark majesty from the mirroring waters of island-dotted lochs, round which the trees flamed in their autumn foliage, from the bright gold of the feathery birch to the bright blood-red of the beech. Straths lying russet, with swathes of the coolest green. The dark purple of distant conifers, the shapes in gentian blue of far-off peaks, the white plumes of mountain torrents, the creaming rush through the rocks of umber rivers—they composed and dissolved and composed again in picture on picture, each vying in loveliness with the last, until heart and mind were glutted with beauty.

Punchy Haggart was moved to expression of his appreciation.

"An' there's folk," he said, "that *likes* tae live in the Gorbals!"

Torrance smiled, but said nothing. Yet the Highland heart of him was stirred anew, and though he was looking upon this beauty for the many hundredth time it came to him as freshly as if it had been his first impression. This Lochaber was the land of his fathers. There was no inch of it that he could say was his, but yet he had in it an inalienable heritage.

The train ran by Glenfinnan and Locheilside. It soon would be wheeling into Fort William, where there might be need of them. They left the breakfast-car and went back to their compartment.

At Fort William Dugald got out of the train, ostensibly to buy newspapers, but in reality to keep an eye on events. He had a vague idea, if the girl should get out, of screening her from the eyes of the three men forward in the train. How he was going to accomplish the feat he did not quite know, but he meant to try it.

The girl, however, remained in her compartment. One of the three men got out, the Englishman. He came down the train some distance before he saw Dugald, and that brought him up with a perceptible start. He hesitated for a moment, then walked with a negligent air over to the bookstall. Dugald gave him time to do his buying and saw him go back to the forward compartment before walking over to make his own purchases. When he turned about he saw

that the other two men were staring out of the window in his direction, while the Englishman stood on the platform.

Once again Torrance conceived the idea that he had seen the taller man somewhere, but as hitherto could not fix the place. It puzzled him, and kept on puzzling him when he returned to his seat, after waiting until the guard's whistle sounded. He mentioned the matter to Punchy.

Punchy looked up from the pages of the Scots *Express*, through the sports news in which he was hunting for mention of his approaching fight.

"Which o' them is that, sir?" he asked. "Which is it that ye seem tae mind?"

"The tallest one—the one that slouches."

"The one that looks like a ham fighter?"

"That's the fellow. Have you any feeling of remembering him?"

Punchy sucked a breath in through half-closed lips and teeth—a purely Scots negative. Then he shook his head slowly.

"Nuhpff!" said he. "But then, ye see, I got no more than a glint o' him on the shore, the way that you kept me lookin' at yon bit tree!"

He returned to the pages of the *Express*. After a moment his face widened in a satisfied grin.

"They've got me in print!" he said delightedly. " 'Kid Craik will find a for*mid*able opponent in Punchy Haggart at the Grassmarket this evening. Craik will have to extend himself to the limit of his powers if he is to beat this doo—daw—douchty—this doughty little Scot, who is'—auch, tae hell!" Punchy broke off, red-faced. "This chap's been in the butter-tub wi' a shovel!"

But, despite his modest protest, he read on avidly. Punchy really liked public praise as much as any prize-fighter alive. Next moment he gave a shrill yelp.

"Hey-hey-hey! Caldas!" he exclaimed.

"Caldas?" Torrance repeated, frowning.

"Ricardo Caldas—accordin' tae the *Express*—he's fightin' the night at the Grassmarket tae!"

"Caldas! Why, of course—that's the fellow! We saw him fight in the bull-ring at Valencia—a nasty brute!"

"Aye, a bad yin—heel o' the glove, elbows, an' his heid—whenever he got

on the referee's blind side. Dirty dog! The ither Spanish chaps fought clean—a treat tae see—but this!" Punchy looked for a place to spit, found none, and thought better of it. "What I'd like to know, sir," he went on, "is what's the dirty messan daein' up in Arisaig?"

"I'd give a good deal to know that, too, Punchy."

"An' what," Punchy fumed, "is the black-chinned greaser daein' chasin' yon nice young lady?"

"I'd give a lot to know," said Torrance.

IV

Just after two o'clock the train pulled into Queen Street station in Glasgow. All the way down the line Torrance and Haggart had kept watch over the girl. At lunch in the restaurant-car they had put themselves in a division between her and the door by which the three would enter if they came. It happened that the girl was given the first seat in the car facing the engine, which meant, since the train had faced about at Fort William, the seat farthest away from the door by which her quondam pursuers would enter. They did come in, after the girl had taken her place, and curiously enough at a moment when Dugald found it necessary to block the gangway with his wide shoulders, noticeably widened further by the tweed overcoat which it gave him a great deal of trouble to remove. In fact, he did not get it off at all until the three men were seated in the division farthest away from that occupied by the girl. Then again, when the waiter stood by the girl's table to take the money for her bill, Dugald found the coat troublesome to reassume. By the time that the girl quitted the restaurant-car the chief waiter was helping to screen her exit by lending his aid in the gangway with the fractious garment.

It had been the intention of Torrance and Punchy to break their journey at Glasgow, where the Master of Morar had business to do. The presence of the three men and the girl on the train, however, led them to make other tentative plans. If it happened, as was possible, that the girl remained in the train to go on to Edinburgh, only Torrance was to stop in Glasgow while Punchy continued on duty. This was settled only after Haggart promised that he would exercise guile and go warily, abandoning all thought of force. He was merely to see that the girl met her friends, if any, or got into her cab or tram without interference. Then Punchy was to go straight to the hotel and rest quietly until the arrival of Torrance by a later train. As Punchy was well under the stipulated weight there was no need for him to weigh-in until he was ready to enter the ring.

Their plan, however, proved to be unnecessary. When the train pulled up in Queen Street the girl was almost the first passenger to alight. With her suit-case in hand she went swinging unconcernedly from the station long before the men in the carriage farther back gave evidence that they, too, were going to break their journey in Glasgow. In fact, it looked more like as if they had descended to the platform merely to stretch their legs. What decided them, apparently, to break the journey was the advent of a friend. And the advent of this friend had such an odd look about it that Torrance and Punchy felt they

ought to watch the thing out.

It was just after the girl had disappeared from the arrival platform that the friend turned up. He came up the train in a hurry, peering into each compartment, until hailed by one of the three with a shout. At the shout, the new-comer darted up to the trio and began talking at a great rate, pointing the while to the exit from the station. For a moment the three men stared at him bewilderedly, as if inclined to argue. Then his earnestness had effect. The three men dived back into their compartment and began to haul out their cases.

"Now what exactly," mused Haggart, "is the big idea?"

"Once more—I'd give a lot to know," said Torrance. "It is hardly possible that this new fellow saw the girl, recognized her, and came running along to tell his friends?"

"If you ask me," Punchy said judicially, "onything's possible in this parteekler shinannigin. This new stiff wis comin' tae the train tae see the Dagoes, onywey. That's plain. He's yin o' the gang. So what way would he no' reckonize the girl that the ithers ha'e been up in the Hielan's tae chase aifter?"

"Sound reasoning, Punchy!" said Torrance.

The four men came hurrying down the platform in such haste that they even missed seeing Torrance and Punchy.

"I'm after them, Punchy!" exclaimed Dugald. "Look after the cases like a good fellow. Bung them into the left-luggage office, and come after me to the main exit. If I'm not there it will be because I have followed them. In which case go to that address I gave you—Frisken's—and wait for a 'phone call from me. Failing that, be here for the five-forty-four for Edinburgh!"

"Right ye are, Mr. Dugald!" cried Punchy. "Run like blazes, sir!"

Dugald went speeding down the platform. He was held for a moment at the barrier to show his ticket, but he got through in time to catch up with the four men at the station's main entrance. They were standing in a bunch, gazing up and down the street, but turning now and again to earnest consultation. The latest addition to the party became reassuring about something, till finally the other three nodded to each other like men who have agreed to accept facts. The original three picked up their luggage and accompanied by Number Four returned to the station precincts. Dugald watched them go to the left-luggage office, where they deposited their traps. At this moment Dugald was rejoined by Punchy.

“Listen, Punchy,” said Torrance. “I don’t believe they have any idea where the girl has gone, but they have a notion, I think, that they will be able to pick up her trail again when they want to. At any rate, they are reassured about something. I’m going to leave this to you, while I go and see these people—Frisken. Just hang on to their trail for a bit. Don’t let them guess you’re after them if you can avoid it. If there’s anything you think I should know, ring me up at Frisken’s. Their number is Douglas seven seven—oo—five—”

“Douglas double seven double-o-five. Right, sir!”

“I’ll be finished by four, I expect, but I’ll wait until you ring me. If you don’t, I shall meet you here in good time for the five-forty-four.”

“Right, Mr. Dugald. Leave it to me!”

“Remember above everything, however, that you have a fight to-night. Don’t tire yourself, boy.”

“Auch, Ah’m as fit as a flea, sir—but Ah’ll watch.”

The men were returning to the main entrance, and Dugald took himself off. It took him until half-past four to finish his business, but he delayed for another quarter of an hour in conversation, talking boxing with his business acquaintance. Then a call came through from Punchy.

“Ah’ve had nothing to do, sir,” said the disconsolate voice over the wire. “Ah’ve jist wandered roun’ the main streets o’ Glesca’ kind o’ aimless-like, trailin’ thae perishers. There’s never been a glint o’ the young lady, or onything tae gi’e a body a hint. An’ now we’ve jist wandered back like glaikit stots in the direction o’ Queen Street. They’re in a tea-room in Buchanan Street now, all safe an’ sound—so Ah jist cam’ along tae a box tae gi’e ye a ring.”

“Go back to the tea-room and wait for me there. Where is it exactly, Punchy?”

“That’s difficult to explain in a few words, sir. But Ah’ll wait for you at the north-east corner o’ St. Vincent Place and Buchanan Street crossin’, where Ah can keep ma eye on the tea-room door at the same time.”

“Good man, Punchy! I’ll be with you!”

Dugald drove up to the rendezvous in a taxi.

“They’re still down there, sir,” Punchy volunteered, “drinkin’ coffee. If we liked to nip downstairs we could jowk intae the next alcove without bein’ spotted. And then—mebbe we might hear something tae our advantage.”

Punchy put forward the suggestion with great earnestness. There was a

conspiratorial, secret-service flavor about it that seemed to tickle his fancy. Dugald considered the idea.

"Di'mond cut di'mond!" Punchy urged with relish.

Torrance laughed.

"Come along, then!" he said. "We can do no harm. After all, they'll see us on the train again."

They were able, as Punchy had suggested, to slip into the alcove next to the quartette without being seen. Dugald ordered tea for two, with poached eggs on toast for Haggart. While they waited for their food a boy came up to the next alcove and gave a message. Next moment Number Four of the quartette went past them, making for a telephone-box in the corner of the tea-room. In a minute or two he came back, and the two Scots heard him say in explanation to his confederates:

"It was Lola. She was able to follow the girl—"

Torrance and Punchy exchanged a glance, and clutched each other to ask mutually for strict silence. They heard fragments only, but these were revealing enough.

"To a marine dealer's . . . proves it . . . going, as I told you she would . . . -ty-four . . . her mother . . . sure to have it with her . . . other half. . . ."

The deep voice which Torrance recognized as that of Caldas interrupted impatiently.

"*. . . que no habla español? Qué pasa?*"

Then came the quick mutter of Spanish, apparently from him who was bilingual.

". . . brother's writing. . . ." The voice of the fourth man came in gusts again. ". . . important . . . get them both, of course . . . sure to carry them . . . in the train . . . you and Lola, Stowe . . . the trick."

"*San Dios!*" Again the impatient voice of Caldas. "*Qué es lo que dice el? Qué pasa?*"

And again the quick low mutter of Spanish. And a question from the man called Stowe, the Englishman.

". . . a store . . . to be sent to the five-forty-four. I tell you it's sure . . . the trick in the train. *We've got to get it!* Or rather—*both*!"

"*Bueno!*" another voice said loudly, and with a cynical laugh. "*Es muy*

capable la Lolita, verdad?”

Dugald’s clutch on Punchy’s arm tightened. His face was suffused with anger.

“We must get out before them, Punchy!” he whispered.

He signaled the waitress, who came over at once.

“Aw!” said she, in the soft, caressing accents of the prettier Glasgow voice, as she saw Punchy’s hardly touched eggs. “Are your eggs not nice, sir? Would you not like me to—”

“The eggs are fine,” declared Punchy, “but we’ve miscalculated our time. Quick wi’ our bill, see! We’ve a train tae catch!”

“. . . *los dos papeles* . . .” came from the next alcove. “. . . *pergamino antiguo*. . . .”

Torrance and Haggart got out into the street.

“What’s up, sir?” Punchy gasped excitedly.

“Some deviltry’s up!” returned Dugald. “They’re after something the girl is carrying. Two papers. An old parchment or something. They’re going to attempt robbing her on the train. There’s a female in it, some woman called Lola, whom they consider very capable—in deviltry, I suppose!”

“Cheese!” breathed Punchy. “We’ll ha’e tae stop that!”

CHAPTER III
THE FIRST TRICK

WHEN the Master of Morar and Punchy Haggart got back into the station Torrance, mindful of the little boxer's coming ordeal, sent him to the refreshment-room to complete the meal which had been discarded in the tea-room.

He himself got their baggage out of the left-luggage office and carried it up the platform, where the express for Edinburgh was already drawn up. There was just under half an hour until departure time. He did not attempt to secure a seat, but stationed himself at a point whence he could watch the barrier and the greater length of the train. This, however, after satisfying himself that the girl had not arrived.

Minutes passed. People began to crowd on the platform, and the train began to fill. Punchy joined Torrance in his vigil.

Some ten minutes before the train was due to depart the four men came up the platform together. The two watchers, with their coat collars about their ears, got into the shadow at the side of a luggage lift. They saw the quartette come to a halt at a compartment not far up the train and shove their luggage in to preëmpt the corner seats. They grouped themselves about the carriage door, talking little, but turning expectant glances toward the ticket-barrier.

Some little eddying among them and an intensification of their interest in the barrier showed the watchers that something was about to happen. They expected to see the girl come through the wicket. But it was not the girl that had caught the attention of the four.

A woman came hurrying along the platform. She carried one of these round hat-boxes of patent leather that women affect nowadays, and under her arm a bundle of papers and a chocolate-box. With the fit of her dark clothes, the cant of her black hat of some lustrous material, her black silk stockings and the flimsily smart shoeing of her neat feet, her *tout ensemble* was distinctly foreign. This was emphasized by the hair, bleached to brassy tint, which peeped from under the turban hat on either side of her face, and by the heavy rings that depended from her ears. But for the hardness of expression and the

artificiality of make-up her face might have been beautiful in an aquiline way.

As she came abreast of the four she cast a hurried glance behind her to the barrier. Reassured in some way, she went over to the men and began talking hurriedly, but never taking her eyes off the wicket. Number Four of the quartette did most of the talking to her. He pointed to the man called Stowe, and to the other who spoke Spanish and English. The woman nodded understandingly, and began walking alone up the platform casually, as if looking with no great hurry for a seat.

Number Four dived into the carriage, and Torrance could see him fumbling in a small leather case. He came to the platform again, and quickly passed something in a silk handkerchief to the man Stowe, who pocketed it swiftly. And still the gaze of all of them was concentrated on the ticket-barrier. Torrance guessed that they were all waiting for the girl.

The girl arrived at the barrier. A boy came up to her there and handed her a loosely-woven basket of cane, such as is usually employed for the carrying of flowers or fruit. She smiled at the boy and tipped him, then with the basket under her arm and her suit-case in hand she came at her graceful and swinging walk up the platform. Immediately Number Four of the quartette and the Spanish pugilist, Caldas, dived into the carriage, leaving the other two to huddle in the doorway hiding their faces.

Up the platform the woman Lola—as Dugald guessed her to be—was still wandering about idly. The girl from Loch nan Uamh came in line with her, passed her, and chose a compartment in a first-class carriage toward the front of the train. The two men were joined on the platform by Caldas and Number Four, and the lot of them were staring toward the woman Lola. It was obvious that the casual flick of a small white handkerchief which the woman gave in taking it from her handbag was a signal, for immediately Stowe and the English-speaking Spaniard began to walk toward her. The woman got into the same carriage as the girl.

“This is where we move, Punchy!” said Torrance. “Take the bags up the train and get into the compartment next to the girl, if possible. Keep on the opposite side of the platform until you’re near the compartment. With your height you won’t be much noticed through the crowd. I’ll get in at the back of the train and come up to you by the corridor. In that way I may get past Caldas and the other unseen.”

Punchy nodded and went on his way. Stowe and the other were climbing into the compartment occupied by the woman Lola and the girl. The remaining two still were staring up the platform, but as Dugald started to move behind

them they decided to get into their seats. This was Dugald's chance. He dodged quickly across and got into the corridor of the carriage ahead of them, then made his way forward to join Punchy.

Haggart had secured the corner seats on the corridor side of the compartment next to that of the girl. It happened that the carriage was turned corridor side away from the platform, and the two passengers who had already taken seats in Haggart's compartment had placed themselves in the corners to the platform side.

The train started. Torrance guessed that there would be no attempt on the girl until the train neared Edinburgh, and probably not until after the ticket-collector had been along to gather the tickets. As far as Dugald could remember, the train would stop at Falkirk and Linlithgow, so that the tickets would be collected after the latter. But he did not allow anything to chance. The train had no sooner started than he was in the corridor and peering unobtrusively into the compartment next door.

The girl was seated with her back to the engine in the corner farthest away from the corridor. The woman Lola had the seat next to her. Opposite the girl was the Englishman, Stowe, while the other man sat facing the woman.

The train raced on through the darkness. Dugald found it was unnecessary for him to peer directly into the compartment, which involved the danger of being discovered. In the outer window of the corridor, against the blackness of the night, there was a well-defined reflection of the compartment's brightly lit interior. He merely needed to stand opposite his own compartment, with his hand in the proper position, and he could see anything that happened as far as three of the occupants were concerned. The only person he could not see properly was the Englishman, Stowe. To have included that individual in his view he would have needed to put himself against the window next to the Spaniard, and that he did not wish to do. His back would have attracted attention.

The maneuvers of the conspirators began with the woman making overtures of companionship to the girl. She drew attention to the magazines she had with her, and offered the girl her choice. The girl merely shook her head in a way which was polite, but at the same time indicated that she preferred her own company and her own thoughts. She sat with her gloved hands in her lap, her head turned toward the scarcely varying blackness that raced past her window.

At the ill-success of this gambit a significant glance seemed to pass between the woman and her two confederates. The woman turned her hands

palm up in a tiny gesture expressive of slight despair over British reserve.

For some time no other approach was made. The train began to slow up for Falkirk, and Dugald went back to his seat lest some one entering there should try to take it. It was not so much the possible loss of his seat that concerned him. He merely hoped to increase the chance that perhaps some woman boarding the train at Falkirk would prefer the carriage containing the woman and the girl to his with its four men—two of whom were smoking rather pungent pipes.

He was half of a mind, when the train moved on again, to barge into the compartment next door. He considered the idea seriously. If he did take a seat there it was quite unlikely that the confederates would make an attempt on the girl in his presence. But intervention might warn the gang that he was definitely opposed to them. There was no overt excuse for taking a seat which would involve the raising of the arm-rest in the middle of either side. A fussy woman might do so—such as he had hoped might enter at Falkirk. But that he, a grown man, should indulge in such a proceeding when the train was not absolutely full would be simply to betray his interest in the girl. He did not want to do that—yet.

So far he had not given the gang any reason to suspect him of interfering with their plans. Such intervention as he had made would look, he believed, more the result of accident than of design.

So far, also, it appeared that the girl from Loch nan Uamh had no suspicion against the three in her compartment. There was not the slightest strain or tension in her attitude. She sat with her chin resting on her hand, supported from an elbow on the window-ledge, showing a profile lovely both in shape and in serenity of expression. Incidentally, Dugald remarked from his view-point in the corridor that the gentle curve of her neck above the spread of her coat collar was strikingly beautiful. She was invested with the calm that arises from self-reliance and a just amount of pride. She was aloof, but in no way surly. She was complete mistress of herself. It seemed impossible that she could show such perfect poise if she suspected the other occupants of the compartment.

After all, Dugald remembered, there was no real reason why she should suspect them. The woman who had trailed her in Glasgow most likely was too skilled in espionage ever to let her quarry be aware that she was being followed. It would merely be a matter of following the girl to the flower or fruit shop where the contents of the basket were purchased, and of keeping out of sight till she had left the shop, when discreet inquiries on the ground of friendship with the girl might be made. As for the two men, it was unlikely that

the girl had had a direct or close enough view of them round Loch nan Uamh to recognize them again. They had carefully chosen the two most commonplace of the gang to support the woman, leaving the one conspicuous member, Caldas of the big frame and the slouch, well hidden in the after part of the train. This perhaps explained the precipitate dive of Caldas and the fourth man into the carriage on the appearance of the girl. In parenthesis, it looked very much as if the girl had been likely to recognize Number Four. He had been very careful to keep his head turned from her view.

It would be better, Dugald decided, even at the expense of danger to the girl, to let the three make their attempt on her. It would warn her, definitely. On the other hand, if he barged into the compartment and spoiled the attempt by his mere presence, there would be no very concrete ground on which to warn her later. And this intervention, as he had already pointed out to himself, might reveal to the gang that he was opposed to their machinations.

Dugald decided to stand by.

II

At the first development of it Dugald did not know whether there was anything sinister in the offer of chocolates, by which Lola made her next endeavor to get the girl's confidence.

It was so naturally done. The girl's quiet refusal was met by a smile, and a sort of gentle animation which could not be called insistence, but was rather a semi-humorous and not unwinning plea against suffering a mild disappointment. The woman was a finished actress. Expression, attitude, the use of her hands, all indicated the self-confessed older woman appealing to a younger not to resent a friendly overture. The taking of one chocolate would give pleasure. Just one! urged eye and hand and smiling lips. See!—the deft fingers selected a foil-wrapped sweet from the top layer—there was the best, the most tempting chocolate in the box! Wouldn't the charming girl please a perhaps silly foreigner by taking it? And who ever expressed so simply a half-childish disappointment as Lola, when the girl still gently refused?

Lola expressed her disappointment to the world at large with the slightest raising of her shoulders. Then her smiling glance traveled to the two strange gentlemen on the opposite side of the carriage. Had they ever, asked head and hands, seen such disappointment as hers? Would it be too bold if, *par example*, she were to offer . . . ? If the gentlemen would be so good-natured . . . ? Perhaps if they accepted a bon-bon, the so-charming girl might discard her obduracy . . . !

The box was held across the carriage invitingly. Dugald noticed that the outlying, foil-wrapped sweet was not chosen by the gentleman across the way. He also saw, for he had turned about for a clearer sight, that the slim fingers, with their filed and red-enameled nails, signaled what looked like a warning against any of the foil-wrapped sweets, and a recommendation of the plainer sort.

The gentleman in the other corner also obliged good-humoredly. When the box was drawn back the foil-wrapped rows were still intact.

Dugald became certain in his own mind that certain of the sweets were drugged.

In apprehension he watched the box offered once more to the girl. He felt like yelling to warn her when he saw the comedy business recommence.

“Wouldn’t the so-charming English girl,” said the pantomime, “now that the gentlemen had so good-naturedly given a lead, not change her mind?”

And once again the deft fingers selected a foil-wrapped sweet to set temptingly by the other.

Dugald was at a loss how to act. It might be, if he followed his inclinations and rushed in to warn the girl, that he would discover merely a mare’s nest. It could easily be that he was mistaken about the chocolates being drugged. The whole thing might be innocent, if not in ultimate intention, at least as concerned the sweets—a single overture for the gaining of the girl’s confidence. What looked like a signal regarding the foil-wrapped sweets might have been accident, and the selection of the two nothing but an indication of the best in the box.

These considerations flashed through his mind at lightning speed as he watched. He had just decided to risk everything and rush in if the girl chose one of the perhaps forced bon-bons, when he heard the girl’s voice.

“I don’t care for chocolate, madame,” it said clearly and sweetly, “but to please you I’ll take just one—the smallest and plainest, please.”

“Ah, but no!—surely a pretty one!” cooed Lola. “*Voilà! Regard-moi une bâfre à c’roupin-là!*”

Dugald whistled softly, in spite of his anxiety.

“That should give the woman away!” he murmured. “The French of the Rue Berger!”

The girl’s reply came clearly.

“This little one here, madame—or I must have none.”

And the box came back with the foil-covered sweets intact. The woman Lola gave a moue that was half a smile, but there was a significant flicker in her eyes as she glanced at the two men.

Torrance breathed freely again, and resumed the less dangerous spying through the medium of the reflection.

The train ran into Linlithgow.

III

The halt at Linlithgow gave Torrance a chance to speak to Punchy, who had been sitting on tenterhooks throughout the journey. The little boxer was on edge to know what was happening, and when Dugald, in a few words, told him in the corridor of his suspicions regarding the chocolates, Punchy was hardly to be restrained from rushing into the next compartment and "settin' aboot thae divils!" Dugald's quieter counsels prevailed, and Haggart went back to his seat to fidget, while Torrance resumed his watch.

The ticket-collector came along the corridor some miles beyond Linlithgow. He passed on. If the attempt on the girl was to take place on the train it would have to be made quickly, for in about fifteen minutes the train would be drawing into Waverley station at Edinburgh.

The first move, Dugald conceived, was made in the shutting of the door to the corridor. The next when Lola pulled down the blind by her side and when the Spaniard, with a show of politeness, as if humoring the eccentric lady, pulled down both his and the one over the door.

This might have been Dugald's cue to act, but he waited. He had seen when the door was slid to that its catch was rather feeble. He decided to introduce to the proceedings something of a comedy touch which might irritate the conspirators, and also have the effect of wasting time. He slid over to the catch side of the door and, with an eye trained past the edge of the blind on the Englishman, Stowe, gently pushed back the catch-lever, and as gently rolled the door open on its easy-working runner. He saw Stowe glance over impatiently. Once again the door was pushed to.

The train was vibrating somewhat, so that the catch was actually rattling. Keeping time to the vibration, he joggled the handle till the catch slipped, then rolled the door back.

Still another time the door was pulled to, and still another time he repeated the operation. By now the man in the opposite corner was glaring. There was a signal in his eye as he looked across to the woman Lola.

Just once more the door was pulled shut, and Dugald had a feeling that this time there would be no gentle joggling of it open. His anticipation proved to be right. When he put a finger on the catch he found his tentative pressure resisted. The woman was holding the door!

He could see that Stowe was fumbling in his overcoat pocket, and everything in the man's attitude, a tension of his every feature, indicated as plainly as if he had yelled it that the moment was *now*!

Dugald put his fingers about the door-catch, and his mind was registering everything he could recollect of the general disposition of people and things in the compartment—the lighting-switch in particular. He still watched Stowe, and he saw the man's hand come stealing out of his pocket. He caught a glimpse of a silk handkerchief.

The light in the compartment went out!

At the same moment Dugald threw his weight against catch and door, dragging it out of the woman's clasp. He barged against the metal rod by which the door-curtain was held down, bending it, so that the curtain rolled up with a snap. He stumbled into the compartment, the light from the corridor streaming in with him. And as he came, Stowe's hand flew to the open window beside him. Dugald thought he saw the flutter outside of a colored silk handkerchief.

In the air of the carriage there floated the sweet, sickly-pungent odor—faint but perceptible—of chloroform.

IV

For a moment or two the four occupants of the compartment stared at Torrance in silence. The girl from Arisaig was the coolest person there. Her calm look seemed to inquire if Dugald was drunk, or mad.

Some one, the Spaniard probably, for he was next the switch, put up the light. By then the look of dismay and guilt that Dugald imagined in the dimmer light he had surprised on the faces of the conspirators had vanished. Torrance had backed again into the doorway so that he could watch all three. The woman Lola was staring up at him with just the faintly alarmed sort of wonder which would have been natural in an innocent woman on such an intrusion. The Spaniard, who had been half on his feet in the middle of the carriage, so that Dugald bumped into him, was sitting diagonally across his seat, lolling into the corner, and trying to look innocently surprised. Stowe was giving an impersonation of a pompous citizen justly indignant at an inexplicable piece of rowdyism.

"What sort of way is that to come into a carriage?" he demanded. "Haven't you any better manners than to—to—"

Dugald allowed himself to smile. He sniffed the air.

"Smells rather of hospitals, doesn't it?" he suggested.

"If you mean the air smells of the inhalant I use for a chest affection," the man said coolly, "let me tell you that you made me jerk the bottle out of the carriage window. I hold you responsible for that."

"Perhaps you're better without it," said Dugald. "An inhalant that has so much chloroform in it"—sniffing—"can't be good for any one. Well, well! And so I made him throw the pretty little leather-covered bottle out of the window! What a pity—what a pity!"

"Leather-covered bottle? It was nothing of the—"

"Dear, dear!" Dugald said mildly. "Not a leather-covered bottle? How foolish to carry an inhalant with so much chloroform in it in an uncovered bottle! Don't you know that chloroform loses its virtue when exposed to the light?"

"Chloroform? I don't think you know what you're talking about, young man. My medical adviser may have introduced chloral in some form—"

“Your medical adviser!” exclaimed Dugald. “Did his prescription recommend the inhaling of the mixture in the dark, I wonder?”

“In the dark? I—”

“And in a railway carriage—with the blinds down?” Torrance insisted.

The woman Lola interposed.

“It was I who wished the blinds down, m’sieu’,” she said. “As for the light—perhaps the gentleman opposite—”

“Who, of course, is a stranger to you,” Dugald suggested.

“But of course. He perhaps saw that I wished to sleep until we reached Edinburgh—”

“There being quite time to have a refreshing nap in the few minutes before reaching Waverley—yes?”

“Look here, young man!” Stowe blustered. “Just what are you driving at? You come bursting into the carriage—!”

“Making you throw a bottle out of the window—quite!” Dugald said calmly.

He stepped into the compartment, raised the arm-rest between Stowe and the Spaniard, and sat himself in the space so created.

“You ask me what I’m driving at. I’ll tell you,” he said crisply. “You came, all three of you, into this carriage with set purpose—you, your Spanish friend on my right, and the lady in the corner who wishes to be taken for a Frenchwoman, but who speaks the French of Les Halles—”

Lola darted a look at him which was full of venom.

“—and that with a Spanish accent. Your pretense since entering the carriage has been that you are strangers to each other. I ask the young lady in the corner if that is not the impression you seemed to wish to give her?”

He turned to the girl with a look of inquiry. She now had discarded her attitude of aloofness, and was regarding him interestedly.

“That is certainly the impression I had,” she said, “that they were strangers to each other.”

“Yet you two,” he indicated the men, “traveled down this morning together from Arisaig—”

The girl in the corner stirred a little and leaned forward.

“You were talking together with two other men outside a carriage farther back in the train. In fact, you have left your luggage in their charge. The lady who speaks the French of Les Halles with a Spanish accent spoke to you when she came into the station before passing up the train. She did not take a seat until the young lady in the corner came along, when she joined her. She signaled to you with a flick of her handkerchief, and you then came along and joined her.”

“You’re dreaming, my young friend!” Stowe said contemptuously.

“I am wide awake, Mr. Stowe—and *don’t you call me your friend*!” Dugald suddenly blazed. “That’s to say if you want to keep a whole head on your shoulders!”

“Don’t you threaten me, young man!” Stowe said fiercely, his hand moving swiftly under his jacket to his arm-pit.

“A pistol—and chloroform!” Dugald grinned. “Quite the regulation bad man from the dime novel! Tut-tut! I won’t hit you, or throw you out of the window—at least, not until I’ve shown you that your game is blown upon. Your medical adviser apparently does his own dispensing, and he doesn’t mind doing it in a railway station, because the bottle you threw—or was jerked from your hand—out of the window was passed to you by one of the men at the back of the train.”

“Stuff and nonsense!” grunted Stowe. “Mere imagination—what should I be doing with chloroform?”

“I make a further flight of imagination,” Dugald replied imperturbably, “and accuse you of attempting to chloroform this young lady. I will admit, however, that you did not mean to do so until your first plan for making her insensible failed.”

In an involuntary movement the woman clutched at the chocolate-box.

“You see!” said Torrance. “The lady gives you and herself away! That was unworthy of her reputation for efficiency. She clutched the chocolate-box because the sweets she tried to force on the young lady were drugged!”

“*Qué jerigonza!*” said Lola, with a shrug.

“As I said—the lady is Spanish—like our stranger on my right.”

Torrance looked the woman straight in the face.

“You say I am talking rubbish,” he said. “Very well. Let me select a sweet from the box you grabbed so quickly, and then let me see you eat it.”

The woman's hesitation was hardly momentary. Then quite calmly she took the lid off the box and held it out.

"But, certainly," she said sweetly. "I would do anything to dispel the—the hallucination of the poor young *señor*. Madness always arises in me a great sympathy. Choose, then!"

For a moment Dugald pretended to hesitate in his choice. He knew perfectly well that the woman was bluffing, and his brain was racing to discover how. He raised his eyes to hers, and in a flash he understood. She was a drug-addict, and swallowing a dose that would have sent the girl to sleep meant nothing to her. The woman read his thoughts, and snatched the box away—but too late to prevent Dugald's fingers from closing on one of the foil-wrapped sweets.

"On second thoughts," he said coolly, "I shall not put madame to the rather theatrical test of swallowing her own poison. I shall be more humane—or shall we say, more scientific? I shall have the chocolate analyzed."

From the flash in her eyes he realized that there could be no doubt regarding the result of the analysis.

Dugald turned to the girl in the corner.

"You see?" he said. "I don't know what it is they want from you. It is none of my business. But it is obvious that they are after something. They are such poor conspirators that they have given themselves away from the first time they opened their mouths—accusing themselves by their excuses. We shall be in Waverley in another couple of minutes. I suggest that you hand them over to the first policeman you see. There's sure to be one on the platform."

"No," the girl said firmly.

"You have sufficient evidence against them," Dugald pointed out. "There is this sweet, and I have no doubt that the bottle and handkerchief could be picked up on the line somewhere this side of Linlithgow."

"I don't want to hand them to the police. You cannot be sure—"

"I have a friend in the next compartment who has seen all their movements."

"I don't want to call in the police," said the girl obstinately. "Everything you have said may be true—though I can hardly bring myself to believe it—"

"That's right, young lady," Stowe said heartily. "Who would believe this lunatic?"

The girl regarded him with complete contempt.

"I should have said," she went on to Torrance, "that though I find it hard quite to believe the story, I do believe it sufficiently to be glad that you came into the carriage when you did. At the same time, I would infinitely rather that the police were left out of it."

"Besides," sneered Stowe, "when you talk of handing people over to the police—who's going to do it, hey?"

"If I have another crack out of you, you pot-bellied slob," said Dugald, his Highland temper getting up, "I'll smack you so hard that you won't know whether you're in Edinburgh or last Tuesday! Yes!"—as Stowe's hand went to that arm-pit—"pull your iron, if you really have the pluck, and in spite of the young lady I'll hand you over to the police myself—on a charge of carrying firearms to the public danger!"

The train was drawing into Waverley.

"Sit still, all of you!" Torrance ordered. "If I see any of you within a hundred yards of this young lady as she goes out of the station, I'll make you wish you were back in Barcelona stews before Primo cleaned them up!"

"That's the wey tae talk tae them, sir!" said a voice from the doorway in the corridor.

"Ah, Punchy!" said Torrance. "Look after our luggage, will you, while I see this young lady out of the station unmolested? Keep an eye, at the same time, on this refuse here, and join me at the hotel entrance."

He picked the girl's case and her basket from the rack, and opened the carriage door.

"Come!"

"Thank you," said the girl, as they walked along the platform. "Tell me, are you always as sure of yourself as this? I mean, do you always act as if your own way of doing anything couldn't help being right?"

The masterly feeling that had animated Dugald seemed to ooze out of his fingers at the sound of that cool, gentle voice.

"Oh—well, no," he stammered.

"Because, you know," the girl went on, "it might happen that I felt in no need of an escort—or a porter—mightn't it?"

"Oh, yes—easily," Dugald said lamely. "But—in the train—you—"

“I am not under-valuing what you did for me in the train—even though I can’t think I was in the danger you imagined. I’m really grateful,” said the girl, “for that. But I have a feeling that I have been picked up, rather like my case and my basket, and am tucked under a strange arm—”

“I’m sorry,” mumbled Dugald. “I didn’t mean to—”

The girl by his side suddenly gave out a ripple of laughter. The friendly sound of it gave Dugald an odd sensation about the diaphragm.

“I’m a mean cat,” said she contritely. “I ought to be pouring out thanks to you—but thanks, like Macbeth’s ‘Amen,’ stick in my throat—always. A not very nice limitation to have to one’s character.”

“Don’t you try to thank me,” said Dugald.

“But I do. I really am grateful—and it is very nice to have an escort—especially such a capable one. Only—I do hate being bossed in any way. I simply loathe it, in fact.”

“Most sensible people do. But I wasn’t trying to boss you. I do believe you were in real danger. These two men were in the three that followed you yesterday morning on the Arisaig road.”

The girl half stopped.

“Oh!” she said faintly. Then after a distinct pause. “Were you one of the two men by the wall up the road—one of you was dancing about?”

“That was me—and the little fellow whom I told to bring our luggage.”

“I saw you this morning on the Arisaig platform—but—well, you didn’t look like the man I saw by the wall as I crossed the road.”

“Same man, I assure you. Listen! I do believe you’re in some danger—”

“I begin to think that I am,” said the girl soberly.

“And I’d like you— You want a taxi, I suppose?”

“Yes, please.”

“This one should do—I want you to promise, if you can—I mean, if you don’t feel you’re being bossed— Where do I tell the man to drive you to?” asked Dugald, as he helped her into the taxi.

“South Inverleith Avenue—Sunart is the name of the house.”

Dugald gave the driver the direction.

“Go on,” urged the girl, as he closed the door on her. “You were asking me

to promise something?”

“I want you to promise that—that—”

“I don’t feel I’m being bossed,” she assured him.

“Well—that you won’t go out and about Edinburgh without escort—until I see you again,” said Torrance.

“It happens that I shall not be going out at all until to-morrow some time,” she said. “My mother is not very well. I shall remain with her all evening.”

“And may I come and talk with you to-morrow?” Dugald asked humbly. “There’s a lot I’d like to tell you—about these men—that woman.”

“I’d like to hear it all. Yes. Call to-morrow morning. My name is Jean Macleavar.”

“Thank you! Mine is Torrance—Dugald Torrance.”

The taxi drove off, and Dugald turned to see what had become of the enemy. There was no sign of any of them among the thinning crowd. But some few yards away, with the cases at his feet, his sturdy legs apart, and his jaw shot forward grimly, was Punchy Haggart, in faithful guard of the rear lines. And for all the world like the most conscientious of bulldogs.

CHAPTER IV
THE SQUARED CIRCLE

IN the Grassmarket that evening, despite the events that had so broken the normal routine of the day, Punchy won his contest in good style. In the first round, after stopping a left hook with his eye, which blackened and closed, he began to tempt his man into tactics which were designed ultimately to leave a clear road to the vital spot on the chin. As well as height, Punchy was giving weight to Craik, and his whole aim was to get the other to come down to him.

In the second round it was evident that Punchy's strategy was succeeding. He was warned by Torrance not to hurry matters, but to wait until the moment was really ripe.

That moment, if not exactly ripe, reached reasonable maturity in the third round—and Punchy gave a demonstration of what he called knocking a man "stone ginger." Craik unloosed a dropping shot aimed for Punchy's chin. Punchy side-stepped, coming erect, and shot out his left. Evasion, the straightening, the shift of foot, and the blow rippled so speedily together as to seem one movement. The timing was perfect. The blow connected with the exact spot on Craik's chin. Craik reeled, then came forward staggering, to drop on his face with arms outspread. Ten seconds later Punchy Haggart had the right to challenge the Featherweight champion.

In the dressing-room, while the doctor attended to his eye, the scarce-breathed Punchy apologized to his trainer for not stopping the blow which had done the damage.

"It might have been dangerous, Punchy," Torrance admitted. "But it was the only piece of carelessness you showed. How came you to run into an easy one like that?"

"Thinkin' o' something else," grunted Punchy. "Twa o' thae Dagoes were sittin' in the ring-side. Caldas for one."

"I saw them. But that should not have put you off."

"Well, Ah kept thinkin' o' them. Ah was wishin' it was Caldas—big as he

is—that Ah was fightin' instead o' Craik. If ye noticed, Ah had swung roun' facin' them when Craik cam' forward wi' that one?"

"Yes. I suppose you had."

"Well, just then Caldas flipped out a white hanky, an' sort of twirled it roun' in the glare o' the arc. It made me sort of turn to look. That's how Craik cam' tae land yon beezer."

"You think Caldas did that deliberately?" Dugald demanded angrily.

"It seemed kind o' calculated tae me—when I come to think o't."

Dugald grew hot.

"I'd like to knock the blighter's head off!" he fumed.

It was as if the Fates heard him. At that moment the clamor of the crowd in the hall suddenly hushed. It was not the half cessation of noise that might have indicated the appearance in the ring of an announcer. It was a definite silence.

The doctor looked up from his ministrations.

"Something wrong out there," said he.

"Sounds like it," Torrance agreed.

The noise of the crowd picked up again, then a second came bursting into the dressing-room.

"You're wanted doctor, at the ring-side!" he shouted.

"Why—what's the matter?"

"Conn O'Hagan has hurt his foot—twisted his ankle. Somebody left a sponge on the steps up to the ring an' Conn slipped on it."

"I'll come," said the doctor, and patted Punchy. "That's about all I can do for you, boy. It will be rather badly discolored for a day or two, I'm afraid."

Left alone in the dressing-room, Torrance and Punchy stared at each other significantly.

"Auch, you wouldn't, sir," said Punchy, hesitating between shamefaced eagerness and half distaste. "Would ye, though?"

"I'm more than a little inclined to—if they can't find any one else."

"Auch, mebbe they've got a substitute for O'Hagan," Punchy said, trying to look hopeful. "They're practic'ly sure to have one."

"I shan't offer, of course," Dugald said regretfully.

“Well, no—a gentleman like you couldn’t offer, sir,” Punchy agreed, with a great air of nice judgment. Then he beamed: “They might ha’e the lip tae ask ye, though!”

“O’Hagan’s foot may be all right—”

“Uhuh—there’s that. But, of course, that Caldas is a dirty one. If you—if it did come tae the bit that—well, whoever fights him’d need to watch out for roughing. Of course, as far’s actual boxin’, or fightin’, is concerned, you could plaster the blackguaird easy. An’, of course, we packed your slips and shoes and things in wi’ mine—so it’s almost providential, so tae speak—”

How long the pair of them might have dodged about with the subject it is hard to say. Just then the hall-manager and the promoter came into the dressing-room and over to Torrance. With some hemming and hawing, they got down to what they were after.

O’Hagan’s foot was badly hurt. It would be days before it would be better. Unfortunately, there wasn’t a man in the hall that could really face up to Caldas, who came from the Continent with a reputation for two-fisted fighting. The crowd would be annoyed if Caldas didn’t appear. Of course, there was no question of the Master of Morar *fighting* Caldas, but it would please the crowd—and very likely save serious uproar—if Mr. Torrance would just run through some exhibition rounds with Ricardo Caldas. The manager and the promoter felt they could look to a gentleman with the “sporting” reputation of Mr. Torrance to help them out of a hole . . . it wasn’t for nothing that Mr. Torrance was known as “The Fighting Peer.” . . .

Punchy went quietly over to his bag and brought out Dugald’s fighting-kit.

II

Before a minute had gone of the first round, Dugald knew he was up against one of the dirtiest fighters that ever got on the blind side of a referee. The evil smile that crossed Caldas' face when the referee introduced to him the Honorable the Master of Morar left Dugald beyond doubting that the Spaniard knew all about his interference with the plans of the gang. "The prettiest and cleanest amateur at his weight that ever put foot in the ring," said the referee, ignoring the fact that English was Greek to the Spaniard. Caldas spat.

His first onset, his favorite attack as it turned out, came perilously near to foul fighting. It was a rush with left-right ripped low to the stomach, as close to the belt as was allowed. Dugald met it by the very tactics that he had instilled into Punchy—a nimble step back, side-step, and a left to the face. If Dugald had not had in mind that this was nominally an "exhibition" bout, his first blow might have been the last in the fight. He led to the forehead rather than to the chin. As it was, the blow staggered Caldas.

Dugald never carried anger or animus into the ring. Despite his dislike for the man, his intention, once the gong had sounded, softened down to a desire to give the Spaniard the fullest opportunity to show his paces. He meant to hit cleanly rather than savagely—to box forcefully rather than fight. But he was given no chance to show consideration. From the start the Spaniard indicated that he was out to get Dugald, to pay off the score the gang had against this interfering *chulo* who thought he could fight. Low-swung blows, the heel of the glove in clinches, the screwing of a bullet-head against the face—anything dirty that might get past the referee. The crowd saw perhaps a fraction of it, and yelled its distaste. And, strange happening in an exhibition bout, the referee warned Caldas repeatedly.

In the second round Dugald's temper flamed. He was too skilled in ring-craft to let it flame blindly, so that he forgot all care of himself or grew unwary. It flamed into that cold rage which belongs peculiarly to men of the North, that contained anger which is most terrible in this of all the races of the earth. In a clinch which Dugald could not avoid Caldas deliberately jerked his head against Dugald's mouth, splitting his lip. The referee jumped forward to touch Caldas on the shoulder. His hand fell on Dugald's outstretched glove.

"Leave him, Mungo!" Dugald commanded, over Caldas' shoulder.

He slithered out of the clinch, drew Caldas into another of his rushes, and

seemed to run away from it—backward. Caldas came on, blundering with the unexpected quickness of the retreat. Smack! He ran into a straight left that sent his head back with a snap. Smack! A right-cross with every coordinated ounce of thirteen stone behind it caught the uplifted chin. Caldas seemed to spin in the air. He fell against the ropes and toppled loosely right over to the floor outside the ring.

Dugald walked over to his corner where Punchy already had climbed, dumb with the admiration that a glint in Dugald's eyes forbade him express aloud.

"Take off my gloves, Punchy," said Torrance. "Tchah! Why did I consent to mix it with that ruffian? I feel soiled, and as if all the waters in Morar could not cleanse me!"

He tore impatiently at the gloves Punchy had loosened, tossed them into the ring, and pulled on the tweed coat that had served him for a dressing-gown. Then without a look at the announcers who were swarming into the ring beside the referee, or at the knot of men working over the unconscious Caldas on the floor of the hall, he stalked up the gangway to the dressing-room. Men near the gangway clawed at him to pat him on the back. He shouldered them off. And to one who dived in front of him to shout, "Good on you, Dugal', boy!" with beery breath, he turned such a look of blazing anger and disgust that the man shrank back in sheer fright.

"That's my last fight, Punchy!" he said, when they reached the dressing-room. "I'll never, never put on the gloves again. Heavens! The shame of it! to be mauled about by such a dirty ruffian!"

"We're not *all* dirty ruffians, Mr. Dugald," Punchy said timidly. "There's *some* o' us fight clean, sir."

The anger fell from Torrance at the sight of the little man's hurt expression. He smiled wryly with his damaged lip, and passed an arm about Punchy's shoulders quickly.

"Thank Heaven for that, Punchy!" he said. "I know it, too. You will go on with the game, fighting cleanly and without malice, and you'll be world's champion at your weight one day. And I'll help you. But for myself, I'm through with it. I'll never put the gloves on in public again. Now, let's say no more about it, lad."

Thus the Master of Morar, with a heavy sense of shame upon him. He almost shuddered with it. Yet, if this same fight, with all its mauling, had taken place two days before, it may be questioned if Dugald Torrance would not

rather have enjoyed spoiling the worst of the Spaniard's mean tactics, if he would not have exulted even in the superb blow that finished the fight.

Such, however, is the difference that can be brought about in a man's taste by one pair of dark eyes. The thought that these particular eyes might have been watching him, the accessory, unwilling or not, to the provision of a brutalizing spectacle for a not altogether savory audience—it was that that made Dugald feel like shuddering.

III

"That was a nasty clip you gave the Spaniard, Mr. Torrance," said the doctor, as he applied medicaments to the injured lips.

"Mph!" grunted Dugald uninterestedly.

"That's what made me so long in coming to attend to you," the medico chattered. "We took so long to get the fellow round. Humph! I don't know that butting isn't worse for a lip than a sound smack with a glove. You'll look far from pretty for a day or two—"

"Oh, damn!" said Dugald.

"Yes—either of the two you gave the fellow would have done his business —"

"Probably it was the fall to the floor that hurt him most."

"When a man's unconscious a fall of that distance isn't likely to hurt him —unless he falls in such a way as to snap a bone," said the doctor. "The chappie was all relaxed as he fell. That right-cross of yours might be called supererogatory. The left would have been sufficient for the dirty tyke."

"Mph!" said Dugald uneasily.

"By the way," the doctor said casually, as he packed his bag, "I have a notion that you'd better look out for Caldas' pals. They don't bear you any goodwill. Perhaps they thought it safe to breathe their intentions of rather lurid vengeance in Spanish. But it happens that I spent some years in the Argentine, so I know a word here and there. While I was getting Caldas round they didn't hesitate to threaten you strongly. It sounded out of all proportion for the mere fact of knocking a dirty fighter out. There was something about a—well, that's none of my business! I'll just say that I'd watch out for a sandbag about the occiput. I'd keep out of the darker wynds of Edinburgh, if I were you. However, that, like your right-cross, may be supererogatory. I can think of nobody quite as capable of looking after himsel' as you. Might I shake you by the hand, Mr. Torrance? Ah! Thank ye! Good night! An' good night to you, Haggart—makings of a champion about you, perhaps. Och-aye!"

And the little doctor bustled off.

To gain the street Dugald and Haggart had to pass the dressing-room occupied by Caldas. The man Stowe was lounging against the door. As Dugald

came along he stepped into the passage.

“A word with you, Mr. Torrance!” he said.

“You can have nothing to say that would interest me, Mr. Stowe,” said Dugald. “Stand aside, please!”

“Don’t get cock-a-hoop about a lucky blow, young man. In condition Caldas would eat you. You’ve butted in on affairs that didn’t concern you. You’d better butt out again as quick as you can. If you don’t—then watch out. That’s all!”

“That being all, perhaps you’ll get out of my way.”

“Watch out, Mr. Master of Morar!”

“You become tedious, Mr. Stowe—may I trouble you?”

“I warn you!” Stowe panted.

“At inordinate length,” said Dugald calmly. “It invites me somewhat to handle dirt for the second time this evening.”

“Dinna file your hands, Mr. Dugald!” said Punchy. “I’ll jist gi’e him a bit shove wi’ the bag!”

Very prosaically he pushed the suit-case against Stowe’s waistcoat and exerted a little pressure. Stowe staggered back into the doorway. Dugald and Haggart walked past.

“We’ll get you for all this, Torrance!” Stowe shouted. “Look out for yourself!”

“A man of very limited conversation, that,” said Dugald, as he and Punchy got into the street.

“Oh, Ah don’t like that man!” Punchy declared, quite seriously. “Fffp-no! Ah wouldnae trust him as far’s Ah could throw him!”

“Strange! You have exactly expressed my feeling about him, Punchy.”

IV

As Dugald, very conscious of a much enlarged and discolored lip, drove up in a borrowed car toward Inverleith Park, he was acutely concerned about the affairs that made Jean Macleavar the object of the sinister interest of such a crew. It was indicative of the acuteness of his concern that he had with him in the car as additional bodyguard, Punchy of the vari-colored eye.

That the Stowe-Caldas-Lola combination would have given up their conspiracy against the girl seemed impossible. If anything stuck out of the warnings that Stowe had been at such pains to give, it was that the game was still afoot. Whatever it was that Jean Macleavar had, and the gang wanted, the balking of their attempt in the train to secure it most likely would have intensified their desire. It was to be expected that their plots would become deeper laid. They would go about their schemes with greater care, and employ methods even less scrupulous than the using of chloroform or drugged sweets. It all meant that if the girl had been in danger on Loch nan Uamh side, and on the journey to Edinburgh, she certainly would be in greater danger in the future.

Dugald tried to dismiss from his mind all speculation on what Jean Macleavar was up to, or what it was that the gang wanted to get from her. That was her own business, he felt, until she thought to take him into her confidence—if, he added to himself, she ever did think of taking him into her confidence.

Dugald added the proviso with a touch of haste. The girl Jean was not at all the sort of person to rush into confidence with a complete stranger. He judged that she was much too self-reliant to wish readily for help. He imagined that she was a girl, on the contrary, who would keep her affairs in her own hands to the last, most dangerous moment.

Dugald wanted very much to bear a hand. Though she had started out on her venture apparently with only one small boy as helper, it might be that she could call on a number of hefty males, brothers or relatives—or friends. It was impossible, he thought with a touch of despair, that a girl with the attractiveness of Jean Macleavar could have reached her early twenties without having attached several men to her train. Dugald despised those supposititious attendants. He felt perfectly sure that they were a bunch of brainless weaklings—quite unfit to be protectors of such a girl. The fellow for the job was the resourceful chap called Dugald Torrance. But the difficulty might be to get the girl Jean to see it.

The car ran slowly along South Inverleith Avenue. Sunart proved to be a comfortable detached house of modest dimensions, with a garden about it, unpretentiously arranged. As Dugald walked up the path to the door he felt that the occasion was momentous. Everything depended on this interview.

With a folded handkerchief held to his damaged lip, he pressed the bell. A maid appeared.

"This is not the dentist's," she said promptly. "He lives next door; but you'll have to go down to George Street, because Mr. Dumphail doesn't work at home."

"I don't want the dentist," said Dugald, through the handkerchief. "I am calling to see Miss Macleavar—"

"Oh! You'll be Mr. Torrance, then! Come in, sir. Miss Jean is expecting you. Have you hurt your mouth? I thought it was the toothache," she said in the interested fashion of some Scots servants, as she ushered him into a sitting-room. "I'll tell Miss Jean."

Dugald was standing in the middle of the room, his handkerchief still held to his lip, when Jean came in. He fancied he saw her hesitate a moment before giving him her hand, and he was keenly aware that her manner was rather cold.

"Have you hurt your mouth?" she asked unsympathetically.

"Had an accident," Dugald said from behind the handkerchief. "My lip is split and swollen—a nasty sight."

"Sit, won't you?" said Jean, still quite without feeling. "You didn't tell me last night that you were the Honorable the Master of Morar?"

"Well, one doesn't—"

"And known as 'The Fighting Peer'?"

"That's just a silly name applied to me by people who don't know any better."

"I have been reading about you," said Jean, unfolding the newspaper she had brought in. Dugald felt the color mount in his cheeks. He saw that the particular report was one that Haggart had shown him that morning, one in which the brutality of the fight was unduly emphasized, without any credit given to himself for clean boxing.

" 'The Fighting Peer,' " Jean read the headline, " 'knocks Caldas clean out of the ring!' So that was the accident where your mouth was hurt! Fighting! 'Brutal Exhibition,' " she read. "Last night you hit a man so hard that it took

nearly fifteen minutes to bring him round—”

Dugald got to his feet and took the handkerchief away from his mouth.

“I simply refuse to let you accept that sensationalized version, Miss Macleavar,” he said quietly. “Too much depends on this meeting—”

“How?” she demanded.

“That I hope to show you. I’m not going to let you think me a brute without protest.”

“Facts are facts,” Jean said, tapping the paper.

“They can be garbled. I went into the ring last night to give an exhibition with this man Caldas. Although he had played what looked like a dirty trick on my good friend, though my body-servant, Punchy Haggart—”

“That nice little man who was with you last night? A fighter, too!”

“He is going to be a world’s champion. Come to the window and look at him, Miss Macleavar. He’s in the car outside—”

Jean rose and crossed to the window. Punchy caught her movement out of the corner of his eye. He turned to grin.

“Why!” she said, “you’ve let them bruise his poor eye!”

She regarded Dugald with indignation.

“That wouldn’t have happened but for the man I fought. Listen, please! In spite of the trick Caldas did on Punchy, and in spite of—well, of another grudge I had against the man, I went into the ring with every intention of boxing fairly. I did box fairly. I’ve never fought any other how but fairly. But this man, Caldas, did everything he could that was mean and dirty—everything he thought he could get past the referee. At last he butted me with his head in a clinch—so I knocked him out. But I didn’t knock him clean out of the ring. He fell through the ropes. And I’ll tell you one thing more, Miss Macleavar—you’re not the only one that is disgusted at the fight. I am, myself. Last night was the last time I’ll ever fight in public.”

Jean looked at him curiously for a moment.

“That other grudge you had against the man,” she said slowly, “was it a private grudge?”

“Well—yes—in a way,” Dugald said evasively.

“This man Caldas is a Spaniard, isn’t he?”

“Yes,” Dugald admitted. He hated the idea of gaining credit—or of appearing to have wished to gain credit—from fighting Caldas.

“One of the men who you thought were after me in the train last evening?”

“Yes.”

“Both the men in the carriage were much smaller than you—”

“This fellow wasn’t. He was one of the two at the back of the train—one of the three that came after you by Loch nan Uamh. A biggish fellow. In fact, I was conceding him about a stone in weight.”

“Perhaps you had an idea you were fighting for me?” Jean suggested coldly.

Dugald shook his head.

“No,” he said frankly.

“But, according to the paper, you volunteered to fight this man. Took the place of some one who hurt his foot?”

“They asked me to.”

“But, apart from what he did to Punchy—to Mr. Haggart,” Jean insisted, “you had a grudge against this Caldas. The grudge had nothing to do with me, then?”

“Well, it had. I disliked the man because he was one of the gang. But once I got into the ring I forgot all about you—”

“Oh?”

“Yes. But I didn’t forget what he did to Punchy—because, you see, he kept reminding me of it by his dirty tactics. Then when I hit him finally I was thinking of nothing except that he was one of the rotten beasts that give a first-class game a bad name, and of my split lip—split by a vicious butt with the head!”

Jean made a quivering sound on a sharp intake of breath.

“Oh, beastly! Beastly!” she cried. “Fighting like wild animals. Oh, I’m sorry, Mr. Torrance. I know you weren’t to blame. I’m sure you kept to the rules. Only—I never have understood why you men should fight. I had a brother—once. Hamish loved boxing and fighting. He was always coming home with a black eye or a bruised mouth. He once had his nose broken. He never had a bruise that I didn’t feel in my own flesh. Poor Hamish! I’m sorry I misjudged you, Mr. Torrance—the paper account sickened me. I was angry,

too, because—because I thought you had punished the man for my sake—that you were making a public exhibition of revenging me. It made me feel dirty—soiled."

"I felt like that, too—last night," Dugald confessed. "That's why I'm never going to box again in public."

"I'm glad to hear you say it—and you mustn't let that nice little man, Mr. Punchy, fight again either!"

Dugald looked at her whimsically and shook his head slowly.

"I'm afraid," he said, "that it would be demanding too much of a sacrifice from Punchy to ask him not to fight again. And if—as I hope—we are to become friends, Miss Macleavar, I'd like you not to suggest such a thing to him. You see, the instinct for boxing in Punchy amounts to genius. He is the genuinely born glove-fighter. A rarity. He has set his heart on being champion of the world at his own weight, and if you, having become his friend, were to suggest that his aim was unworthy, it would just about break his heart. Besides, it would be asking him to give up a fortune—in money. He is not likely to make one any other way."

"I was silly, of course, when I said that!" cried Jean.

"No. Only kind-hearted. You simply don't understand this boxing stuff. Punchy, in the common phrase, wouldn't hurt a fly. He would die rather than do a mean thing. I'll swear he gets as much fun out of taking a clever punch as in giving one. And I know he has never fought a man yet but he has wanted to hug him when it was all over. We men—we're queer beasts, Miss Macleavar."

"I think," said Jean slowly, "that you can be very nice beasts, too."

What she meant was that Dugald pleaded better for another man than he did for himself.

V

Dugald had recounted all he knew about the gang.

"So it was you," said Jean, "that sent that whistle out across the loch?"

"Yes, it was me."

"Why?"

"Because I was certain you were being watched. I wanted the watchers to expose themselves to you."

"It worked very well. The whistle made me look up, and then, of course, I couldn't help seeing the three men. But why," she insisted, "were you watching me?"

"I was rather watching the watchers," said Dugald.

"Why were you watching the watchers?"

"The fact that they had been after you in the morning—"

"I didn't realize definitely that they were after me. I only wanted to get out of their way and join Iain—my brother, you know—who was waiting for me at Drumdarroch. Yes, the fact that they were after me—?"

"It made me uneasy. There are not so many people about Loch nan Uamh side as would make the pursuit of a solitary girl by three men a thing of no moment. Neither Haggart nor myself liked the look of it at all, so after lunch I came down to the loch to see if they were still about."

"You weren't curious to see what I might be doing?" Jean demanded.

"Not except in so far as there might be danger to you from these men."

"And when you saw myself and Iain in the boat on the loch—when you saw what we were doing, that did not make you curious?"

"It had been less than human not to wonder. But curious, no. Unless, or until, you choose to tell me what you were doing it can be none of my business, Miss Macleavar," Dugald said gravely.

"But you thought it your business to whistle and warn me?"

"It's any man's business to see fair play," said Dugald.

She took her hands from the knee which she had been nursing as she

questioned him, and rose.

"Ah!" she cried, "I like that, Mr. Torrance! It seems to be a passion with you to see fair play. Oh, I'm terribly bothered—terribly. Except for little Iain I have none to help me—none to trust!"

She turned to him swiftly.

"As you are a Highland gentleman, Mr. Torrance," she said earnestly, "on your soul and honor, you have no knowledge of what I was doing in the loch?"

"On my soul and honor, no," said Dugald. "But since an oath to me is a matter for the strictest truth, a matter that will bear no quibble, it may be that I have tried to guess, that I could not help guessing."

One hand flew to her heart, and the other to her lips. For a moment or two she stared at him apprehensively.

"What have you guessed?" she asked in a low voice.

"Please listen," said Dugald. "I have come into your affairs as any man in the circumstances might have come in. I don't think any man with decency in him could have kept out. Since I came in I have heard talk from these rascals—I know them to be rascals—of getting something from you. '*Dos papeles,*' they said, and '*pergamino antiguo*'—two papers, an ancient parchment—"

Her eyes widened, and color came into her cheeks.

"I saw you dragging in the loch. I have known Nan Uamh from childhood. I know every legend, every tradition, that the people of Arisaig possess. You bid me swear to you that I have no knowledge. And I refuse to quibble. All my life I have heard of the Spanish ship that is sunk in Loch nan Uamh."

Still staring at him, she let her hands drop to her sides.

"It is not necessary that you should tell me if my guess was right," Dugald said gravely. "As I say, it can be none of my business what you are doing—what it is you have to guard—until you choose to give me your confidence. You say you are alone—that you have none you can trust. I believe you are in danger. One solitary girl and a boy, however brave, can do nothing against four unscrupulous men and an equally unscrupulous woman. Keep your secret. Tell me nothing. But let me, since I have come into your life in this haphazard fashion, give you the help of a true man—of two true men, for my causes are Punchy Haggart's—who will keep faith with you."

There still was doubt in her eyes as she looked at him, but there was, too, the dawning of hope. She turned away from him, and stood for a long moment

in thought. Suddenly she looked up.

“Would you and Mr. Punchy run me up to the Castle?” she said quietly. “I want—I’d like to visit the Shrine.”

CHAPTER V
THE MACLEAVAR HERITAGE

FOR any one whose blood might hold the smallest tincture of the Scot it were impossible to stand unmoved in that Memorial and Shrine which tops the Rock of Edinburgh. Here, with the subtlest blending of Gothic and Renaissance, the spirit of Scottish architecture is epitomized by the genius of Robert Lorimer in a work of supreme art. There is pride in every line of it, but not a stone that brags. Inside its austere shell it glows with color, so that it is like a jewel, but there is not a ray of a reflection that dramatizes emotion. It is a sweet, lovely statement of a nation's sacrifice. No more.

In the symbolism that threads it and makes it a unity there is no glorification of War, nor any vociferation of Triumph. It symbolizes rather the virtues that War brings forth: Self-sacrifice, Fortitude, Courage, Patience, Hopefulness.

This is a great work of art, and as in all great works of art the true inner meaning that is the designer's secret lies deep. It is not to be probed in a passing glance. One can only stand dumb before its mystery, and drink of its charm and its fascination, catch a little of its serene philosophy, and be lifted up by its God-given inspiration.

II

Dugald Torrance climbed with Jean Macleavar up the Castle slopes to the Memorial. Between them, since they left Inverleith Park, few words had passed. And the silence stayed with them until they came into the Hall of Honor. At the Shrine Jean paused and raised her eyes to the figure of St. Michael, which is suspended from the great boss of the vaulting above the casket that holds the names of Scotland's dead.

There, with her eyes uplifted, Dugald left her. He knew that she wished to be alone.

He went out into the square and waited for her.

When she came out they went together down past St. Margaret's chapel to the corner of the citadel where stands the old cannon that is called "Mons Meg." As they stood there, looking out across the deep valley which divides the Castle from Princes Street, Jean began to talk to him.

"I go there," she said, nodding up to the apse of the Shrine, "whenever I feel disturbed or sorry for myself. I go there when I find myself distressed about my brother, Hamish. No, no," she went on, as if in answer to Dugald's glance of sympathy. "My brother's name isn't written in any of the rolls. There isn't any very near kin of mine remembered there. Hamish may be alive now. I think I should feel it in my heart if he were dead. I don't pretend to be psychic. I'm too matter of fact for that. But, somehow, I do think I would know if Hamish were dead. I think I'd come to know it in the Shrine. Seven years is a long time to wait for some one you care about, and as the days go by without a sign if Hamish is still in the land of the living, I often am gripped by a dreadful doubt. I take myself and my doubts to the Shrine. It never fails to bring me serenity."

She turned about to place her hands on the old gun and look up at the gray building.

"Hamish, you see, is so wrapped up with the story I shall have to tell you that it seemed I'd have to get as close to him as I could before deciding to trust you. Please don't think I'm daft. It almost seemed as if I could consult him. It may only be that up there, in the quiet, lifted so high out of the petty little affairs of ordinary life, I can set my mind to clearer thinking. I didn't know until we came up here whether I could trust you or not. I wanted to. Now I just know that I can."

“Thank you,” said Dugald.

“It all has to do, as you have guessed, with the galleon that is sunk in Loch nan Uamh. But to show you what warrant there is for believing in what may appear a daft, far-fetched idea, I’ll have to go right back to the very beginning. What do you think,” she broke off suddenly, “of my name?”

Dugald took his key from her own of deep seriousness and avoided the cheap chance of small gallantry.

“Macleavar?” he said. “It is not a common name.”

“You have the Gaelic, I think,” said Jean. “Take it as it is written, rather than as it is pronounced, and what do you make its meaning?”

“I don’t know that my Gaelic goes as far as that,” Dugald murmured, “but let me think. In Gaelic it would be *Leabhar*—and that of course means ‘book.’ ”

“Son of the Book—yes. In the Koran,” Jean went on, “protection is expressly provided for the ‘people of the book’—as the Jews were called. My people, it is known, were originally Jews of learning and culture, who were either expelled from Spain, or left it of their own accord because of the persecutions of the Inquisition at the end of the fifteenth century. They were Christianized Jews, but that did nothing to save them—in fact, it put them in greater danger, from accusations of secret Judaism. There were ‘signs,’ you may remember, by which this heresy could be detected in them.

“My ancestors came to Scotland, and set themselves up as teachers and doctors. In some cases they became clerks to the heads of clans. I suppose they must have brought with them great Talmudic knowledge—knowledge of the Scriptures—so that it was easy for people speaking such a poetic language as Gaelic to dub them ‘Sons of the Book,’ in imitation of the Arabian Koran.”

Jean held out her hand, on which was a signet ring. This bore a crest.

“You see,” she said, “the crest of the family: ‘a domed tower, with a flag, proper.’ The dome would almost suggest an Eastern origin, but if that were not enough, the motto is in Spanish: ‘*Una torre fuerte*.’ That, I imagine, is an abbreviation for either ‘The name of the Lord is a strong tower,’ or ‘the Lord is a strong tower from the enemy.’ I want you to have everything there is as evidence that my story is not too far-fetched.”

“I hardly needed that,” said Dugald. “The story of the Spanish Jews in Scotland is well established. There are many variations of your name, you know. Still, it interests me a lot to hear it from you. Please go on.”

“Three-quarters of a century went past,” Jean said. “A great-great-great of mine was scribe to a chief in Glengarry. He was a generation or two removed from the original settlers, but he seems to have retained some of his Spanish characteristics. At any rate, he knew the language. The Spanish Armada was dispersed in 1588, and one of the ships was wrecked in Loch nan Uamh. There seems to have been only one survivor, or at least only one that was recorded. He fell into the hands of my ancestor, who treated him with great humanity and kindness. The Highlanders then were mostly Catholics, and had not, of course, the deep-rooted horror of the Spaniards that the Protestant English had. It must have been that the shipwrecked Spaniard was grateful to my ancestor, for he told my great-great-great, as a secret, that the wrecked galleon contained a store of money and plate. The Spaniard did not live long. My ancestor was left in sole possession of the secret.

“Peadar Mac Leabhar Clann Dòmhnuill, this ancestor, had two sons. He set down on a parchment—a small scrap of parchment—the secret of the galleon, with bearings and directions showing the exact spot where it was sunk, and this parchment he divided in two, diagonally. He gave a half to one son and a half to the other. The story is that there was strife between the two sons, and the father thought that interest might bring them together, because through the division of the parchment it was only by acting together that they could go after the treasure. I don’t know how, in those days without diving apparatus, they were to go after the bullion. I have an idea that this old Peter looked into the future and saw that one day mechanical progress would make recovery of the treasure possible. However, that isn’t the story. What is important is that the two sons of Peter never came together. One, the eldest, and my forebear, remained in Scotland, while the other went, for some reason, back to Spain. His descendants are in that country now.”

“Ah!” said Dugald, as if light had come to him.

“Wait!” said Jean. “If you think that these Spaniards of the train episode have any real connection with the descendants of Peter you are mistaken. The Mendizábals are too great a people—my remote kinsman the Conde de Torreblasco is too great a gentleman—to do anything underhanded.”

“You know your kinsman, then?”

“I have never actually met him, but I have heard from him,” said Jean. “I wrote to ask him if he did not think it time the two branches of the family came together and completed the parchment. I told him that a clew had come into my hands—I’ll come to that later—which might lead me to the treasure without his help, but that I thought it merely right to tell him of my intention. He replied in the most courteous way. The Mendizábal half of the parchment

had been lost. He did not know where it was, but that he would have search made for it. In the meantime I might do as I liked. The Spanish ‘Sons of the Book’ were too prosperous to need to hunt for sunken treasure. He would be glad if his Scots kinsmen could profit from it.”

“The Spanish half of the parchment may have fallen into the hands of the gang, then?”

“That might be. I don’t know. The Conde thought it could only be mislaid. He thought it worth while, at any rate, to start a search.”

“H’m!” said Dugald doubtfully.

“I wouldn’t mistrust the Conde of Torreblasco for all the money in the sea!” Jean said almost wrathfully.

“I’m not asking you to mistrust your kinsman,” Dugald soothed her. “I’m thinking of that gang!”

Jean nodded.

“I think of them too,” she said. “I don’t see how else they were drawn to Loch nan Uamh—except through the parchment. But it doesn’t matter, really. They can’t act without our half—and I don’t need theirs.”

“You don’t need theirs!” said Dugald. “How is that?”

“I was coming to that,” Jean replied. “This is where my brother Hamish comes in.”

III

“Hamish,” said Jean, “is my half-brother, really. But though he is my stepbrother and more than ten years older than me, we were always the greatest of friends. I can remember him as the fine big brother whose kindness never, never failed, who always had the right sort of joke on the tip of his tongue, and who always knew what a little girl was thinking and could understand. You may imagine the admiration I had for him.

“When the War broke out I would be about eight or nine, but Hamish already was a man. He had distinguished himself in Oriental languages, and the authorities made use of his gifts. He was in the Near East mostly—here, there, and everywhere. He would get home sometimes, tanned to the color of mahogany, and at first his talk would be of Armenia and Kurdistan and Arabia. But as the War went on the intervals between his visits would be longer, and then he would talk to me of such magical places as Kabul and Bokhara and Samarkand. The work he was doing went on after the War, and it seemed then to take him to Russia.

“One summer—it would be eight years ago—he had long leave, quite six weeks, and we all spent the time in Arisaig and round Loch nan Uamh. It was great fun. We spent most of our time about the loch, looking, or pretending to look, for our galleon. Hamish would joke about it sometimes, but I think that at heart he was as keen about the thing as I ever was, and believed in it as thoroughly. He sometimes would say that when his job was finished he would settle down to systematic search. He was going to get our Spanish kinsman to join in.”

“Let me interrupt you a moment,” said Dugald. “Was your brother about my own height, but sparer of build, with intensely black hair and a rather aquiline nose?”

“Aquiline?” Jean laughed. “His nose was a joke between us—it was such a beak. With his brown face and his brown eyes he would have passed for a Turk at any time.”

“But your hair wasn’t black then?”

Jean looked at him with some surprise.

“How did you know that?” she asked. “It was almost flaxen when I was a baby; then it turned a reddy-brown and gradually darkened. It would be reddy-

brown in those days at Loch nan Uamh."

"I remember you, then. The tall, dark man, very brown and wiry, with a little girl, very leggy, with dark hair that had tawny tints in it, as his constant companion. I always wished I knew the dark man. He looked such a—well, there's only one word for it—a much-abused word—such a *sahib*."

"Oh, yes. That was Hamish!" cried Jean. "And me!"

She stared at him for a moment, wrinkling her brow.

"Why, yes!" she exclaimed at last. "You were the boy in the kilt!"

"No great distinction, that," grinned Dugald, "when so many round Loch nan Uamh wore the kilt."

"Ah, but you were different. The kilt seemed natural to you—and then, you were so fair in contrast to black-browed me and Hamish. I think it wonderful that we should meet in this way—but we'll talk of that later. Let me go on with the story."

"Please do," said Dugald. "I should not have interrupted."

She smiled at him.

"I'm glad you did," she said. Then she took up the thread again.

"Hamish was away a long time after that Arisaig summer. He told me that most likely he was going to Russia, but we did not hear from him for about a year. There was a lot of trouble in Russia then, and I imagine he must have been somewhere on the Indian border.

"One night just over seven years ago—a terrible night of storm and rain—I was about to go to bed. This was in Edinburgh here—at Sunart. I heard some one whistling in the lane at the back of the house, or in the garden. It was a little Gaelic song, a funny little tune that Hamish and I used to whistle as a sort of secret call." Jean pursed up her lips and whistled the tune softly. "Hamish always played up to my romantic ideas.

"I thought at first that I was mistaken, but as the lilt was repeated I put on a raincoat and went out into the back garden. I found Hamish there, hunched up by the wooden gate that leads from the garden into the lane. He was soaking wet. It seemed he had been there for hours, waiting for me to hear the call.

"He did not want to come into the house in case the servants should see him. He told me that he was in some danger, that he did not want it known that he had been in Edinburgh. I was not even to tell my mother. He was very pressed for time—it had taken him so long to attract my attention—so that he

had only a moment to write something that I was to keep. I was to hold it for dear life for seven years, then I was to go to Loch nan Uamh and act on the directions that were on the paper. ‘There’s money,’ he said, ‘in Loch nan Uamh.’

“There, in the dark, with the rain pouring down on him, he wrote something on a sheet of his note-book. He could not find a pencil, but I happened to have one in my coat. Oh, the bad luck of it! The pencil I gave him was one of those abominable copying ink things—I have never used one since!—and as fast as he wrote the rain smudged his writing. I’ll let you see the paper by and by. There’s only a word or two that is decipherable.”

“Oh, hard lines!” said Dugald.

“It’s all my fault!” she cried. “If only I had never had that silly pencil! But there’s enough on the paper—there must be enough on the paper,” she said fiercely, “to let me see what Hamish meant. It is only a word or two, but with these and my half—our half—of the parchment there should be enough to let me find the treasure.”

“What, do you think, made Hamish ask you to wait seven years?”

“I don’t know,” Jean said unhappily. “It may be that Hamish wanted me to grow up before I did anything. You see, I was only a kid of fifteen that night in the garden. I know from the hard way he hugged me—it was just as if he told me I was the only person he felt he could trust. He just hugged me once, and kissed me. Then he sort of melted through the gateway into the lane. It is seven years since that night—and I haven’t had a direct word from Hamish in all the time. It makes me very unhappy. Hamish meant to come back before the seven years were up. I know he did. I feel sure—just certain inside myself—that Hamish is still alive. But I think of all the dreadful things that may have happened to him. I know he took his life in his hands when he went among those tribes in Asiatic Russia. He may be a prisoner—in some dreadful hole. I’ve read of prisoners being put into cages on a wall—”

Dugald murmured something he meant to be consolatory and reassuring.

“You said you’d had no direct word from him,” he said after a moment. “Does that mean you’ve heard indirectly?”

“A cousin of mine, Harley Seagar, came to me with a story of having met Hamish at Barcelona,” Jean replied.

“At Barcelona? When was this?”

“Some months—nearly a year—after that night in the garden. I don’t quite

like Harley Seagar. He is a son of Hamish's mother's brother—"

"Then he isn't your cousin—"

"No, but he claims the relationship. He and Hamish were a lot together before I was born. I don't think Hamish liked him much either. That's why I could hardly believe his story of having met Hamish in Barcelona. He said that Hamish had been ill of pneumonia, and that he had nursed him through it. What should Hamish have been doing in Barcelona? And why, since he was within reach of a post office, did he not send word to me?"

Dugald pondered the question for a moment.

"He might have sent you word. The Spanish post office six years ago was not quite so reliable as it is now. As for what he was doing in Barcelona—isn't it possible that he was trying to get in touch with your Spanish kinsmen?"

"The Conde says no. He has never met Hamish."

"What, exactly, did this pseudo-cousin—this Seagar—say to you about your brother?"

"Nothing to the purpose. He said that Hamish sent his love to me—which was unlike Hamish. If Hamish had sent word to me, he would have sent a definite message. Harley made the most of his having nursed Hamish, but he was very eager to know if Hamish had left any papers in my charge—"

"M'm!" grunted Dugald suspiciously. "But you told him nothing, of course?"

"How could I tell him anything?" Jean demanded. "Hamish left that smudged paper with me as a trust. I haven't told Mother of it, even. I had to fight myself to confide in you; but the seven years are over, and I do need help."

"I'm glad you could bring yourself to trust me," said Dugald. "I am rather interested in this Seagar fellow. What was his line of inquiry about your brother having left papers in your charge?"

"He suggested that Hamish had asked him to help me. That made me suspicious at once. Hamish had said I was to wait seven years. If he had wanted anything done, or had sent any one to help me, he wouldn't have left it to word of mouth from somebody who didn't know what direction help was wanted in. Hamish would have given me a direct sign."

"Pretty sound reasoning for sixteen!" commended Dugald. "And jolly brave, too!" he said to himself.

“Did Seagar know anything about the Spanish galleon?” Dugald asked.

Jean shook her head.

“Nothing definite. He had heard talk, maybe, about the family, of a Spanish galleon in some Highland sea-loch—but that’s about all.”

“Not that it was Loch nan Uamh?”

“I’m sure not. Hamish himself did not see the parchment until he was twenty-one. But he wouldn’t have told Harley Seagar, anyhow. I know he wouldn’t. Harley has always been inquisitive about the galleon. Bit cheeky, don’t you think, considering he hasn’t a speck of Macleavar blood?”

“How often do you see him? When did you last see him?” asked Dugald.

“Oh, he’s always turning up. I suppose I last saw him about three weeks ago. He has business in Edinburgh sometimes.”

“Any business with Spain?”

“Must have. He deals in fruit,” said Jean, and went on suddenly: “You aren’t suggesting—”

“It’s suspicious, isn’t it? He has connections with Spain. He is always inquiring about the galleon. He comes back from Barcelona with questions about your brother having left papers in your charge. The members of the gang that tried to dope you are Spanish. They talk about you having *two* papers—one an old parchment and the other ‘in her brother’s writing.’ Surely it all points to this precious pseudo-cousin of yours being in the plot?”

Jean’s eyes widened in something of horror.

“I don’t think—I can’t believe,” she said slowly, “that Harley Seagar would stoop to— My goodness! The sneak!”

“You have to remember that there was a fourth man in the gang. It was he who handed the thing I took to be a chloroform bottle to that fellow Stowe. When you came up the platform at Glasgow he hid himself—as if he were afraid of being recognized. It is a hundred to one,” said Dugald earnestly, “that your pseudo-cousin is Number Four!”

“I can’t believe it!” Jean exclaimed. “I’ve always thought Harley Seagar was a sneak—but that he’d tell any one to chloroform me—I can’t believe it!”

“Listen! Is this Seagar fellow a slimmish man, thin-faced and grayish of complexion? Has he a thin nose, and does he wear a mustache that is no more than a black streak?”

“That might be a description of him,” Jean admitted. “It is very like him.”

“Then we’re so much to the good in information,” Dugald decided. “To this extent we know where we stand. Number Four of the gang, and possibly the main instigator of its doings, is Harley Seagar!”

IV

They went down from the Castle heights to the Esplanade, beyond which, in Castle Hill, Punchy Haggart was patiently waiting for them in the car. They drove back to Inverleith Park, stopping on the way to let Jean send a telegram to her small brother, Iain, at Arisaig: this to tell him not to expect her in the morning. Her journey south had been made principally to procure in Glasgow a more efficient dragging apparatus than that which she had been using. But having come all the way to Glasgow she had felt that she ought to run over to Edinburgh to see her mother, who was ailing. Although Mrs. Macleavar was well looked after by her sister, Jean's aunt, she was inclined to be querulous about Jean's absence in the Highlands, and Jean had made up her mind to leave Iain to his own resources for still another day.

"He should be safe enough," she told Dugald. "He's really a very capable boy—splendidly shrewd. Besides, I don't think the gang will go back to Arisaig as long as I remain in Edinburgh."

"I don't imagine they will," Dugald agreed. "Which brings me to another point. I don't like the idea of you being alone in that house, except for four women—three, if we leave out your mother as unable to help you in case of need. I'd better take it in turn with Punchy to keep guard."

But Jean would have none of the idea. She did not propose to stir from the house until eleven next day. It was not likely that the gang would make any attempt on the house, but if they did the two servants were capable Scotswomen and her aunt was not easily scared.

"I couldn't leave you to keep guard in the street," said Jean. "And if I had you into the house to stay for hours—you and Mr. Punchy alternately—Mother would begin to worry. I can't let her suspect there's any danger for me in this business. And how else could I explain the presence of strange men in the house?"

She still would have none of the idea, even when Dugald pointed out, as the car pulled up outside Sunart, what looked uncommonly like the English-speaking Spaniard of the train episode slinking round a corner.

"I shall be perfectly safe," she said. "Call for me at eleven to-morrow. If anything should happen before that I'll telephone you at your hotel. But don't, for goodness' sake, sit about the hotel in expectation of a 'phone call. If I do need to telephone I can leave a message for you."

With this Dugald had perforce to be content. Nevertheless, he could not keep from worrying. He felt that activity on the part of the gang was by no means at an end, and, despite the crudity of the attempt in the train, he imagined that the next move would be more subtle, more difficult to anticipate and so defeat.

As he drove out of South Inverleith Avenue he took the corner by which he thought he had seen the Spaniard disappear. But he caught no sight of the man.

After lunch he and Punchy strolled about Princes Street and the other main thoroughfares in the expectation of running across some member of the gang. They drew blank. And in spite of Jean's prohibition they walked, after a while, toward Inverleith Park. They contented themselves with spying along the road where Sunart stood, keeping out of view of the windows. The road was quiet. There was not the slightest suspicious sign.

"I don't like it, Punchy," Dugald said as they walked back to the center of the city. "It is much too quiet for my liking. I have a feeling that something is being brewed by the gang."

"I canna say I'm easy in my own mind, sir," Punchy returned. "If ye ask me, I say you've about hit it. Thae divils! I think you'd better let me stroll round South Inverleith Avenue twa-three times aifter dark. You could sleep easy then, and I'd tak' my rest to-morrow, leavin' you to keep your eye on Miss Macleavar—"

"We must think of something, Punchy," Dugald agreed. "I feel very uneasy."

They got back to the hotel to find that Jean had been telephoning. Dugald got through to her.

"Would you come up at once?" she said without wasting time.

"As quickly as a car will bring me!" said Dugald.

He and Punchy ran out of the hotel to the garage. They bundled into the car and drove as fast as the traffic would permit to Sunart.

Jean was waiting for them. She had a couple of telegrams in her hand.

"Some of the gang are back at Arisaig," she said. "This wire is from Iain."

Dugald took the flimsy from her fingers.

Two foreign birds about look like Tuesdays Iain

the message ran.

“Tuesday,” said Dugald. “That was the day you were on the loch—the day before yesterday. Do you think Iain would be right in his recognition?”

“He is very quick-sighted; besides, he says ‘foreign birds,’ ” said Jean, in distress that she tried to hide. “What foreigners are likely to be there but the same ones?”

“None,” Dugald replied. “They must have left Edinburgh in the early hours. We can only follow their lead, and catch the four-thirty express in the morning. It would be no quicker to go by car. The roads beyond Fort William are terrible in the dark, to say nothing of those before there. Let me see. Falkirk, Stirling, Dunblane—turn right before Killin—there’s no quicker road. We’d have to go by Dalmally to Connel Ferry—then Balachulish—cross the water to North Balachulish—it’s all of two hundred miles with the twisting and turning. We might be held up at the ferries. But, still—we might save an hour or two. It is courting a smash to speed on these roads—oh, blow! We can do it!”

“There’s this!” said Jean, and she gave him the second telegram.

It read:

Urgent you should come here at once matter great importance wire time arrival Pio Mendizábal Centro Ibero-americano Westcent London

“Pio Mendizábal?” said Dugald. “Is that—?”

“My kinsman, the Conde de Torreblasco,” Jean replied. “Perhaps he has found the missing half of the parchment, and wishes to give it into my own hand.”

“Surely that can wait?”

“I’m thinking. If the Conde has the other half, the gang has nothing to work from. What is the use of us working blindly from our half, and Hamish’s smeared note, when we can get at the treasure directly with the whole parchment?”

“But Iain?” asked Dugald in surprise.

“I hadn’t forgotten my small brother. There’s nothing to be got out of him. He doesn’t know where the papers are. As for the danger he may be in, I’m—I’m taking you at your word—you and Mr. Punchy—that you want to help me. If you could go to Arisaig and take care of Iain—I’ll give you a note which will make him welcome you—I could go to London with an easy mind.”

“By yourself?”

“Why not?”

“But think of what happened on the train coming to Edinburgh!”

“I could risk that. I’d simply lock myself into a sleeper—and nothing could happen to me in London,” said Jean.

“I’m not so sure of that,” Dugald replied. “The gang will be on the look-out for you. They may have some spy we don’t recognize. I won’t let you go to London alone!”

Jean’s chin went up.

“*You* won’t let me?” she said pointedly.

“I *can’t* let you,” Dugald amended. “Anything might happen to you in London. Give the gang some credit for ingenuity. We don’t know that this supposed wire from your kinsman is genuine—that it isn’t a plant on the part of the gang—!”

“What should they know of the Conde?”

“What should they know of Loch nan Uamh, if it comes to that? But they were there, all the same. If they know of your half of the parchment, we may bet they know of the Mendizábal part.”

Jean looked only half-convinced. She knitted her brows.

“But Iain?” she said.

“Punchy will be an efficient guard,” said Dugald. “Eh, Punchy?”

Punchy drew himself up to his five foot three, and caressed a fist.

“I’d like tae see the man that’d hurt the laddie wi’ me about!” said he.

Jean smiled at him gratefully, but still looked doubtful.

“Iain’s telegram doesn’t show any feeling of being in danger. It is a masterpiece in compression and calm. He isn’t a bit rattled. He’s only telling you something he thinks you ought to know—the scout!” Dugald argued.

A warm light came into Jean’s eyes for a moment, then her brows knitted once more.

“How would Mr. Punchy go?” she asked.

“The minute Mr. Dugald is done wi’ the car, I’m off!” Punchy said, with dramatic fervor.

“Steady, Punchy!” Dugald laughed. “I don’t know that I’ll let you drive to Arisaig. By night—alone—on roads unfamiliar and often dangerous—I don’t know about that!”

“What for no’, Mr. Dugald?” Punchy asked stubbornly.

“Why, man!” said Dugald, “you might lose yourself—if not smash—and arrive in Arisaig some time next week!”

“Auch, sir!” Punchy pleaded. “Don’t say no, sir. I’ve got a good Scots tongue in my head. For Miss Jean’s peace o’ mind I ought to get there the quickest way possible. Say yes, sir! Ye can easy pencil me out a map—an’ I’ll mak’ short work o’ thae ferrymen!”

Dugald grinned. In imagination he saw Punchy, the forceful, hauling protesting boatmen from their beds, willy-nilly.

“All right, Punchy,” he conceded. “But for Heaven’s sake go cannily!”

The little man danced in glee.

“We,” Dugald turned to Jean, “catch the ten-fifty to-night for King’s Cross. That will get you into London before eight to-morrow morning. Go and pack what you will need, and I’ll take your case down to Waverley in the car and arrange for your berth. Meantime, Punchy and I will fix up communication arrangements and so forth, and go over his route. He can get out in about half an hour’s time, and we’ll meet in Waverley—no, I’ll come and fetch you in time for the train. Does that meet with the G.O.C.’s views?”

“The G.O.C.,” said Jean, as she made for the door, “like many another G.O.C.—leaves the spade-work to her capable Chief of Staff!”

CHAPTER VI
THE KIDNAPING

THE night express for London sped to the Border. Jean Macleavar, snugged comfortably in her berth, lay awake letting errant thoughts chase themselves through her mind. She was anxious about her brother Iain, but the idea of that sturdy little man, with the kind ugliness of face which was so much more likeable than good looks, racing through the Highland darkness was splendidly reassuring. She had insisted on seeing Punchy start, and it almost seemed that her fingers still tingled from the grip given them by his curiously knobbly hand.

"Ah'm your man, Miss Jean!" Punchy had said. "You can trust me, lady!"

And she, not much given to exhibiting her feelings, had wanted, to her own surprise, to pat his oddly gnarled cheek. She found something pathetic, something strangely disturbing, in the loyalty that flickered for a moment in his sleepily kind eyes. Even in that poor bruised eye.

What was there, she pondered, in this friend of a mere day's knowledge that made her trust him so securely? What was there in both these men—in this tall and ruggedly handsome Dugald Torrance—that made her feel as secure as if she had known him—them—all her life? She had wanted to trust Dugald even before he revealed himself as the slim, fair-headed youth in the kilt, who had always looked so wistfully at herself and Hamish when he passed them that summer in Arisaig.

"Mean little beast I was that summer!" Jean chided herself regretfully.

She had often thought to smile at the boy in the kilt. What had kept her from doing so was a reluctance to share Hamish, even for a moment, with a stranger. She had wanted her big brother all to herself.

"Selfish little cat!" she reproached herself. "As if there wasn't enough splendor about old Hamish to go round!"

Jean dug her clenched fist into her ribs through the bed-clothes.

And now, she thought, the boy in the kilt, grown to a tall and capable man,

was repaying good for evil. Somewhere along the corridor of the coach he was ready at hand if anything happened to her. Not that anything could happen to her. Dugald Torrance had been scrupulous to see that none of the gang were about Waverley or the train when they started. But it gave a nice feeling of security to think that he was close at hand.

Jean wondered if he was sitting up in his berth. She hoped not. She hoped he had gone to bed properly. She hoped he would go to sleep and not bother about her. He had done enough for her already. Got the tickets, carried her luggage, tipped the attendant to keep an eye on her door—done everything!

It was time the poor man had a rest. She hoped he had a lotion, or something, to bathe his poor hurt lip—!

Funny that a man so kind, so grave ordinarily, so ready to laugh, too—funny that he should have delighted in fighting. And that splendid little man, that nice Mr. Punchy—he fought for his living! Queer things, men—very queer. But nice—smelt of manny soap, tweed, good Egyptian cigarettes. Like dear old Hamish.

Jean clicked out the light, said for Hamish—and for Iain—a more hopeful prayer than she had said for many a day, snuggled down into the clothes, smiled suddenly into the darkness for no accountable reason—and drifted into sleep.

She was just aware as she drifted off that some one came lightly along the corridor and seemed to pause by her door, then paced as lightly away. The sleeper-attendant, she thought happily, was obeying Dugald's instructions.

Dugald Torrance paused by Jean's door. It was securely locked, he saw. And, having thus satisfied himself that she was safe, he went back to his corner seat in the nearest first smoker.

At frequent intervals he repeated his inspection. The men in the other corners of the smoker thought him a confounded nuisance. But he looked too formidable to be told of their opinion.

II

The train steamed into King's Cross right on time at twenty minutes past seven. Dugald came to fetch Jean. She, looking as if she had turned out of her own room, but feeling not quite perfectly groomed, added a mark to Dugald's account of favor that he was scrupulously shaved and clean of linen.

"You slept well?" Jean asked.

"I've rested splendidly," he equivocated. "And you?"

"Like a top. I'm half ashamed. Fell asleep well before midnight and didn't wake until the attendant called me," said Jean. "I might not have a care in the world!"

Dugald smiled contentedly, and led the way to the station hotel. They had wired to the Conde that Jean would be ready to hear from him at the hotel any time after ten o'clock. This arrangement, Dugald had pointed out, would give Jean time to have a bath and to deck herself out fittingly for meeting her noble kinsman. It would also give her time to have an unhurried breakfast. So that Jean went straight to her room, and Dugald to his. They breakfasted together.

Some minutes after ten a page-boy came to Jean and told her that one "Seenyor Mendisbubble" had called to see her. Jean rose from her seat in the lounge and went forward to meet a middle-aged man, heavily built and of good height, and quietly dressed. He carried a gray hat and gloves in one hand and a gold-headed cane in the other. This was the one small piece of ostentation in his get-up. He was grizzled of hair, and had that blueness of clean-shaven chin which is common in men from the Peninsula. His complexion was sallow, his eyes very dark and set close together in dusky sockets. His nose was considerable, regarded as a prominence, and it was slightly twisted. Dugald, the suspicious, saw nothing about him to dislike.

As Jean went up to him the man deftly put his cane under his left arm, and bent over her hand in a graceful way.

"Señor Conde?" said Jean.

He came erect with a flash of white teeth.

"Cousin Pio, shall we not rather say?" he suggested, smiling. Then his dark gaze traveled with Jean's to Dugald, who was standing by. He frowned a little.

"Cousin Pio, then," said Jean. "I wish to introduce you to the Honorable

the Master of Morar, Mr. Dugald Torrance. Mr. Torrance—my cousin, Don Pio Mendizábal, Conde de Torreblasco. Mr. Torrance," she explained hastily, for the Conde's eyebrows had gone up a little as he shook hands with Dugald, "is helping me in my venture."

"Ah!" said the Conde.

"He saved me from considerable danger," said Jean, and in a few crisp sentences described the situation in which she found herself, and how Dugald had interposed. The Conde was indignant, impressed, and duly commending of Dugald's behavior, all just as he should have been.

The three found seats in a corner of the lounge.

"Were you surprised to get my telegram from London?" the Conde asked conversationally. "Or had you already read in the papers of my arrival?"

"No, but I wasn't surprised by your wire," said Jean. "The only thing surprising about you, Cousin Pio—I wonder if I may tell you?"

"Please do."

"Then it is that you are so young. I had the impression that I was going to meet an elderly man—quite an old man, in fact."

The Conde flashed his perfect teeth.

"Ah!" he said. "My writing, perhaps? I write the old-fashioned Spanish script—"

"No, not so much the writing as the phrasing. It was so grave, you see?"

"When one translates from one language into another, as one writes, the phrasing is apt to become heavy—especially from a formal language like Castilian—*verdad*?"

"You speak English as if you thought in it, Señor Conde," said Dugald.

"You flatter me, Mr. Torrance!" the Conde smiled.

Dugald was not so sure. He had certainly got from Jean the impression that the Conde de Torreblasco was an old man. He was looking for flaws in the man. But everything, down to the ready use of the correct address of himself, was exactly right. The only thing wrong so far was this claim to translate from Spanish. The Conde did speak English as if long familiarity allowed him to think in it.

The Conde got down to business. First he had to be assured that Dugald was fully in Jean's confidence.

It was the Mendizábal half of the parchment which had caused him to telegraph to Jean. It had been found—in an old book in his library. Having some business with the Embassy in London, he had brought the parchment with him. It was now in a safe at the house he had rented just beyond Wimbledon. He proposed that they should all go out—he included Mr. Torrance in the invitation—and take lunch at the house. It would be what was called a house-warming, *verdad*?

"It will be interesting to see what is made of the joining of the two halves—after all these years—the Mendizábal half and the Macleavar half," said the Conde.

"Yes," said Jean. "The end of long strife between the Sons of the Book!"

Just for a brief moment the Conde looked bewildered.

" 'The Sons of the Book!' " he said. "Ah, yes—of course the old name!"

He rose from his seat.

"With your permission," he said formally, "I shall now go and telephone to my house. I shall also have my car brought round. We drive to Wimbledon together—not?"

Dugald waited until he was out of sight, then he turned to Jean.

"Good Lord!" he said. "You don't carry that parchment with you?"

Jean smiled and shook her head.

"The parchment," she said, "is safely hidden, together with Hamish's note, where nobody in the world could find it."

Dugald stared at her.

"You certainly gave the fellow—the Conde, I mean—the impression that you had it with you. You gave me that impression, too."

"I meant to give that impression," Jean said demurely.

"Then you don't quite trust the—"

"The fellow? No, not quite. He may be all right. But I have a definite impression, and can't shake it off, that the Conde de Torreblasco should be a very old man. If this is my cousin, and he really has the parchment out at Wimbledon, I can easily apologize for my deception. He will understand that having been almost chloroformed and drugged I have every right to be careful. After all, I have not *said* that I had my half with me."

"No," Dugald grinned, in spite of a rising anxiety, "you simply touched

your heart—as if the paper lay over it."

"That was all," said Jean.

"But, heavens!" breathed Dugald, "don't you see what we may be running into? The whole gang may be in this house—if the man's a fake!"

"Except for the two in Arisaig," said Jean. "Isn't it better to call the bluff—if it is a bluff?"

Dugald was thinking of the possibility that he might have to fight—if this Conde were a fake. He was not scared by the possible odds there would be against him. He was afraid that harm might come to Jean. He was unarmed. He would have to trust to his two fists. It depended on the odds, but he felt he had every chance to overcome them—if he went warily. He would have to do everything to disarm suspicion on the part of the supposed Conde, but at the same time keep a very open eye for the exact moment.

He did not let Jean see anything of his fears. He smiled at her.

"Very well," he said. "You are G.O.C."

The Conde was long over his telephoning. He came back full of apology for making them wait.

"Your English telephone," he said. "It is even worse than your papers say of it. How long do I not take to speak with Wimbledon—*madre mia*! But finally all is arranged. The automobile will be here in a few minutes, and we shall have a nice lunch."

The car was a big limousine, not quite of the latest fashion, but a comfortable machine none the less. It was driven by a uniformed chauffeur, a dark and silent man, from whose eyes it was difficult to catch a direct look. Dugald took a seat beside this driver, while Jean sat with the Conde at the back.

The car rolled down from St. Pancras to Westminster, thence by way of the Embankment and Battersea Park in Wimbledon direction. The Conde and Jean were chatting in a desultory way at the back of the car. Dugald, in his seat by the taciturn driver, was taking advantage of the open wind-screen to let the air blow on his bared head. In spite of the hold he had on himself, he felt himself half dozing. He was suffering from the effect of two nights of broken rest—that of his fight with Caldas, when consideration of Jean's danger kept him awake, and the night just past, when he had sat up in the train to guard her.

The car ran up the hill past Wimbledon Park Golf Club, took several corners, and entered into a quiet road that seemed to promise emergence to the

common at the top of the hill from Putney. Dugald did not know the district well, but it came to his mind that a more direct road might have been found—unless, of course, the house rented by the Conde were actually in this particular avenue. This seemed to be the case. The roadway was bumpy, but the driver was bringing the speed down lower than the roughness made necessary.

The Conde was leaning forward now toward the front seat.

"I am not yet familiar with the appearance of the road," he murmured in Dugald's ear. "And Manuel is no better. A house named 'Solares'—*a la izquerda, Manuel*—!"

Dugald was peering at the houses to the left.

"*Más despacio aun, Manuel!*" the Conde was saying. Then in a loud, sharp tone: "*Ahora!* Now!"

Dugald heard a faint gasp from Jean—then the earth flashed into sheets of flame and countless shooting stars. For one brief instant tearing pain seemed to split his skull, and as he flung himself up and round in the last flicker of his consciousness, he knew that the supposed Conde had hit him behind the ear.

III

Dugald Torrance came to himself in unfamiliar surroundings. He was lying on a broad chesterfield in a strange room, staring up at a heavily enriched ceiling. His head was all pain. It gave him excruciating stabs of agony to turn his head or even his eyes, but in spite of the torture he gazed about him.

The room had all the richness that its ceiling promised. The walls were covered to a good height with stamped leather, and against them stood heavy pieces of furniture that looked Jacobean, but were somehow not English. It came to him slowly that the general impression of the room was Spanish.

"Spanish—Spanish?" he muttered. "There was something—!"

His collar had been removed, and his shoes, but save for this he was still in his clothes. His head was resting on a white pillow.

"What? Spanish?" He struggled to find recollection. He tried to sit up in order to gather his scattered wits, but the pain in his head increased as he rose from the pillow. He schooled himself to calm, schooled himself to rest back on the pillow, to relax. He concentrated on remembering this essential thing that was fighting to come to memory. And it suddenly came to him.

"Jean! Oh, God—yes! Jean!" he groaned.

Once again he tried to sit erect, and nearly slid back to unconsciousness with the pain. He resorted to cunning. It was absolutely essential that he should get to his feet, he thought, there was so much to be done. He turned over gingerly on the chesterfield and let his legs slide off it. Gradually he slid to his knees, then gripping the arm of the settee, he tried to pull himself to his feet. Waves of sickness passed over him, the pain in his head became a roaring. He set his teeth, and got a foot under him. He heard the noise of a door softly opened behind him, and then a sharp exclamation. A gray-headed man, dressed butler fashion, came running round the chesterfield, and put an arm under his shoulder to help him to rise.

"Oh, sir! Oh, sir!" this butler fellow cried. "You've come to? Don't attempt yet to get to your feet. Sit on the settee, sir. You're not yourself!"

"What place is this?" Dugald demanded sickly, as he sagged to a sitting position on the settee. "And what have you done with her, damn you all?"

"You're not yourself—you're not yourself, sir!" the butler pleaded. "Don't try to talk. All in good time, sir—all in good time!"

“Will you tell me what place this is?” Dugald insisted.

“You are in a house named Solares, sir—”

“Solares!” Dugald gritted through his pain.

“Yes, sir. In Wimbledon Rise Avenue—”

“Solares—that’s what he said, that confounded Conde!”

“Sir!” the butler protested. “The Conde has not said a word to you. He was waiting until you came to. I was to tell him when you did.”

“Well—tell him now!” Dugald said grimly. “If you could give me a spot of water first—?”

“Water, sir—yes, sir—a little brandy with it?” The butler skipped to a little table already set with drinks at the head of the chesterfield. “A little brandy, sir?”

“No. Water,” grunted Dugald. “You can’t dope that very well.”

“Dope it, sir!” gasped the butler man. “I don’t understand you, sir—you are not yourself yet. I’ll—I’ll—just go—and inform the Señor Conde—!”

He pressed a glass of water nervously into Dugald’s hands, and hurried softly from the room.

Dugald sipped the water gratefully. Though his head still ached woefully, he felt less sick and more master of himself. He was puzzled at his position. What had been the idea of knocking him on the head when he was quite willing to enter the house? What was the whole idea? Was this precious Conde in league with the gang that was working against Jean? And where was Jean?

He heard the door open again and looked up to see an old man coming to him. This was a tall and slender old man who carried himself with fine dignity. The hair was silver-white over a strongly chiseled face of the color of old ivory. The nose, strongly aquiline, but thin and sensitively nostriled, jutted out from under a straight line of jet-black eyebrow, by startling contrast to the silky silver hair the most remarkable feature in an entirely remarkable face. The whole presence of the man spoke of race, culture, breeding, scholarship, and of distinction. It brought Dugald shakily to his feet.

The movement quickened the pace of the old man. He held out a thin, protesting hand.

“Nay, nay!” he said quaintly. “I beg of you do not rise. You have been strongly hit upon the head with a heavy thing. I pray you keep seated!”

His terminal “s’s” were hissed, and those at the beginnings of words inclined to have a preliminary vowel (“e strong”). Beyond that his English was perfectly spoken, if the words were quaintly chosen. His voice was somewhat shadowy.

Dugald sank back into the chesterfield.

“Who are you, please?” he asked.

“I am Pio Mendizábal, Count of Torreblasco in Spain,” said the old man.

Dugald stared at him dumbly.

“And this is your house?” he asked.

“It is the house of my friend, Señor Urgetty, from whom I have hired it for a time I remain in England. Whom am I pleased to address?”

“My name is Dugald Torrance, called by courtesy the Master of Morar,” said Dugald.

The old man bowed gravely, and sat himself on the chesterfield beside Dugald.

“You are in distress, Mr. Torrance. You are bewildered. Pray be easy. You are in a friendly house,” he said. “Let me explain. I find you on my return from my morning walk lying unconscious on the footpath. I am something of a medico, I. I see you have been struck badly behind the ear. I call my servants, and make them bring you in here. You confuse my butler by talking of me. Before to-day I had not the pleasure to know you. There is a mystery here.”

His manner was so kind, so gentle, so genuine and sincere, that there could be no doubting his bona fides. Yet Dugald, still half bemused, sought for a proof.

“Señor Conde,” he said, “the blow which knocked me unconscious was given by a man who called himself Pio Mendizábal, Count of Torreblasco—”

The old man’s fine brows knitted sternly, but he merely waved his hand for Dugald to continue.

“So that if I ask a proof from you, you will forgive me? Tell me of your ancestry. What were you called originally? What is your connection with Scotland?”

“It is no proof to tell you that, Mr. Torrance,” the old man half smiled. “It is common knowledge. But—we were of the Sephardim. We went to Scotland. We were there, as in Arabic Spain, ‘The Sons of the Book’—the Mac Leabhar.”

He held out his hand. A ring upon it held a cabochon of lapis lazuli, engraved with the domed tower.

Dugald flushed.

"I do beg your pardon, sir," he stammered, "for my doubt of you!"

The fine old hand rested on his own.

"I am indeed Pio Mendizábal," the old man said gravely. "Do not ask pardon for doubting it. Tell me of this man who claimed my name. You are a friend, is it not, of my Scottish kinswoman, Jean Macleavar? See, I have even here, in my *cartera*, a letter from her—"

Dugald made no more bones about it, Jean's estimate of her Spanish kinsman's worth and character were so palpably right. This was a man who would stoop to nothing mean or underhand. A probity almost passionate shone in the dark old eyes. Dugald told the story from the beginning. The Conde listened with unwavering attention, refraining from all trivial interruption. When Dugald made an end of the recital he sat in thought for a while. Then he spoke quietly.

"It connects," he murmured. "It is *de común acuerdo*. Tell me, my friend," he said keenly, "this man who impersonates me—is he of good height, largely made? Is he in the hair like fractured iron, and of skin *palido*—how do you say?—sallow? Are his eyes close, as dark as my own, but surrounded with stained skin? Is his nose big and twisted?"

"You have described him exactly, sir."

"It is, then, José Vargas, who was my servant. He leave me some months ago. If he says he found the parchment in a book in my library, it is probably a true word he speaks. He stole it. At the dictation of his villain friends. A cunning rascal! But not so cunning, because his cunning brings you to me.

"Let us see if we can follow his thoughts? He knows that I have hired this house. He sees it in the journals. He thinks that perhaps you have seen it also. So he says he will not risk driving you to another place. But he over-reaches himself in cunning, for he adds to your young strength the wit of an old man who knows him. We act together—and at once! It shames me to think that my neglect has put my young kinswoman in danger. But indeed I was waiting to hear if the search in my house in Spain was successful. Come! We act at once. I shall telephone to your clever police and ask them to trace this Vargas!"

"No!" Dugald said promptly. "I feel certain Miss Macleavar would wish us to leave the police out of it, sir."

The old man, who had risen eagerly, turned to gaze at him.

“But it may be dangerous for her,” he said gravely.

“She is so independent, sir. Once before—after that train incident—I suggested the police. She was very strong against it,” Dugald explained. “I am certain she would wish us to try everything before appealing to them. Heavens! My head! I can’t think!”

The Conde became instantly sympathetic. He helped Dugald to a dressing-room, and there with bathing and some cooling lotion he took away much of the pain. The old man was more than “something of a medico.” He seemed to be exceedingly skilled. He talked about fearing concussion, and examined Dugald anxiously. Finally he decided that Dugald might be allowed to enter into consideration of plans for the detection of Jean’s prison, and for her rescue.

IV

Little after noon Dugald had started on the plan contrived by Jean's kinsman and himself for her rescue. First he took himself back to the King's Cross hotel at the quickest possible speed, and in a street not far from it he struck a bargain for the hire of a motor-cycle in good condition. In a slop-shop he bought himself a second-hand, but clean British warm, such as used by drivers and motor-cyclists during the War, a gaudy scarf, and a cap. His shoes too obviously had come from a decent last, so he also bought a remade pair of bluchers in the same district.

His next move was to consult the telephone directory, in order to look up the address of the Centro Ibero-americano. He cursed himself for not doing so before taking the fake Conde at his word, and so studying the field before letting Jean get into danger. A place that had a telegraphic address was almost certain to have a telephone. The Centro Ibero-americano, he found, was situated in a street not far from Seven Dials.

It was not a very prepossessing club, this Centro—a very queer edition of that handsomely-housed meeting-place for Spaniards which is in Cavendish Square. It was up a narrow stair, the doorway to which stood between two rather frowsty shops. The door was closed and had a curiously unused look. On it was fixed a letter-box plate of crumpled and black-painted zinc, which bore in white letters the legend: "Centro Ibero-americano." There was a bell-push at the side of the door. Dugald stuck a finger into it and kept the button down for some seconds. He waited a minute or two, then pushed the button once more. Still there was no answer, though he could hear a bell ringing upstairs.

Dugald went into one of the frowsty shops and made inquiries. An adenoidous and dirty little man with a perfect valance of mustache was verbose, but not very helpful. The club had been raided some time back, and there was nobody about in the usual way. A couple of men had gone upstairs the day before and had been there for some hours. They were waiting for messages, it had seemed, for once or twice a telegraph-boy had called. There had been nobody there that morning.

Dugald had hardly expected luck from the Centro Ibero-americano. The address, to begin with, and then the unused appearance of the place, had forbidden him to hope. He had another string to his bow. He had looked up a second address in the telephone directory—the address of one Harley Seagar.

Harley Seagar did business, it appeared, not far from Covent Garden.

Dugald did not go direct to this new address. He dodged in about the traffic round Covent Garden, patiently avoiding the huge lorries and horse vans which took up all but the smallest of passage-room, and the porters who scurried about this passage-room with stacks of baskets, or sacks, or crates of fruit on their heads. One porter informed Dugald that he and his "busted gramophone" were a "blinkin' noosince!"

"Busted gramophone is about right, chum," Dugald grinned. "I'm going to sell it and buy a crystal set. Happen t've seen anything of Mickey Larne, mate?"

" 'Oo d'yer mean? Mick Larne as scraps a bit?"

"That's the bloke—featherweight," said Dugald. "Little ginger feller!"

"North side o' the Garden you'll mos' likely find 'im. I've seen 'im sometimes in that coffee-'ouse under the arches—next the N.S.C. Not much on that side, myself—see. Uses a nouse this side. But I 'ave seen 'im there, mate."

"Thank you, chum!" said Dugald. "I'll have a look. G'by!"

Dugald found Mickey Larne, quondam sparring-partner to Punchy Haggart, and had a long talk with him. They talked earnestly, and made certain arrangements. While they talked Dugald was able to watch the entrance to Seagar's office from a position selected by Larne.

"You don't look too good yourself, mister," said Larne. "Off color?"

"Got a clump behind the ear with a sandbag or something this morning," Dugald replied. "Feel a bit cheap."

" 'Ad'nything to eat recent?"

"Not for an hour or two—"

" 'Arf a mo' then!" exclaimed Larne. "I'll gityer somethin'!"

He darted off and came back presently with a steaming cup of beef extract, a slice of bread, thick with margarine, and a couple of soft-boiled eggs beaten up with salt and margarine and bread in a cup.

"Scoff that, guv'nor!" said he. "Put a bit o' 'eart into yer!"

Dugald thought he had never eaten a better meal. He ate it, leaning on his borrowed cycle, while he watched the entrance to Seagar's office.

He felt sure that Jean's cousin was Number Four of the gang, and he was pinning his faith on the chance of seeing the man. That the man was in London

—a point which he had doubted—he became certain in the afternoon, for he telephoned the hotel and got word of a telegram from Punchy Haggart in Arisaig.

Iain safe and sound great pals already knows my record and yours just two here Stowe and Caldas Punchy

the wire went.

Dugald was betting that Seagar was in London. The absence of any of the gang from round South Inverleith Avenue or Waverley platform the night previous, and that day's disaster, indicated that the storm-center had shifted south.

The Conde had insisted on seeking the aid of the Spanish Embassy to find out where the man Vargas might be located. The man, as an alien, would have had to register with the police, and the Embassy could make inquiries discreetly. Dugald telephoned the Conde in the afternoon, but there was no news.

Late in the afternoon Dugald got the lead he wanted. He saw nothing of Seagar, but that his instinct had been right was proved. A car drove up to the office entrance, and a man got out. It was the taciturn chauffeur of the morning. The car was the old-fashioned limousine of the morning.

The chauffeur went into the building, and remained there for some time. Meanwhile Dugald, his head throbbing now with the excitement of the chase he felt was about to begin, renewed his counsel with Larne. The chauffeur came out at last and got into the car. It moved off.

Dugald kicked the starter of his machine and threw himself into the saddle. The chase was up.

CHAPTER VII
THE RESCUE

WHEN the car began to slow up in Wimbledon Rise Avenue, Jean Macleavar was not particularly suspicious. In fact, she had begun to think she had been unduly cautious about the man at her side, and she was a little worried over having deceived him about the parchment being in her possession. In the desultory conversation between them the "Conde" had spoken interestingly to her of his home in Spain, of an old house in Barcelona, and of a castle on a rock-cliff farther down the Catalonian coast. She was to see them one day. It interested her deeply to learn how the Spanish descendants of old Peadar Mac Leabhar had prospered, and with the growth of her interest not much room was left in her mind for suspicion.

It seemed the most natural thing in the world that the "Conde" should lean forward to direct the saturnine chauffeur, even that he should rise eagerly from his seat. It was only when she saw a snaky black tube depending from the "Conde's" cuff, and saw his arm sweep back, that she understood. It was then that what was meant to be a scream, but what, in fact, was merely a strangled gasp, rose in her throat. She threw herself forward, but it was too late. The black, snaky tube, with all the force of the "Conde's" thick arm behind it, had already fallen on Dugald's unprotected head. She saw Dugald rise, swinging a blow that toppled the impostor over against her with a crash. Then dimly she perceived that her helper had sunk inert into his seat again, unconscious.

The crash of the impostor against her had knocked the breath from her, and long before she had any chance of action the "Conde" had her about the neck, his large hand over her mouth, and was pinning her down in the seat beside him. She struggled gamely as she fought for breath, but had little chance against so heavily built a man as her assailant.

Into her ear the man was pouring threats of what would happen to her if she did not keep quiet. It was a stream of words so foul and obscene that she could only dimly understand their import. They made her cringe sickly even as she fought.

Meantime she was aware that the chauffeur had sprung from his side of the

car and run round to the other. He was dragging the limp Dugald out through the door. The sight made her redouble her efforts.

Suddenly the brute who held her shifted his grip, and twisted her so that she fell forward to the floor of the car. Next moment her head was roughly shoved into the stifling folds of a rug on the floor and a heavy weight was pressed painfully into her back. She felt the jarring of the car doors being banged shut and then the jolt of the car starting. Still, with her lungs aching for a full breath, she feebly tried to struggle. Her strength suddenly went from her. She lay limp.

The weight was slowly lifted from her back, tentatively. She knew it would return if she moved. Then the folds of the rug were unwound from her head.

"Listen, you!" the voice of the impostor said menacingly. "You've had a taste of the treatment you'll get if you struggle any more. The more trouble you give me the worse it will be for you when we get you where we're taking you. I've told you. You're a sensible girl. You know that men don't take risks like this without being ready to take a lot more. You struggle again, and you'll get a whiff of something that will take all the fight out of you. I don't want to do that unless I must. But if I have to do it you'll be glad to drown yourself when I'm done with you. I'm warning you. Your good looks won't save you, cousin of mine!"

"I'm no cousin of yours!" Jean gasped. "You impostor! You've killed my — You've killed Dugald Torrance! And you'll hang for it!"

The man chuckled grimly.

"The pretty boy got a bump on the head—no more," he said. "By this time he'll be staring at the sky and wondering what struck him."

"Then look to yourself, you beast!" Jean retorted. "It won't be with any treacherous life-preserver that Dugald will hit you, but you'll think a house has fallen on you!"

"Ah, yes. He's a great fighter, but a little eel-skin filled with shot was too much for him—that thick-headed lover of yours!"

"He's no lov—" Jean began. Then, because the red tide was creeping into her face, she hid it in the folds of the rug.

Over her the pseudo-count was sniggering.

Huddled up on the floor of the car, Jean lay stiffly still. The car, she could feel, was racing at good speed. She tried to fix on the right course of action, whether she should attempt to escape or not. To attempt it there in the car

would mean the renewal of a struggle that nauseated her, and she had neither the weight, strength, nor skill likely to make the endeavor successful against so brutal an opponent. If it led to her being chloroformed, as the man's threat seemed to indicate, then she would be infinitely worse off. She wanted all her wits about her. Something might happen that would give her an advantage.

She lay still. At the recurrent thought of the impostor's sniggering suggestion about herself and Dugald her face flamed again. The memory of Dugald's livid face as he turned, as by instinct, with his last flicker of consciousness to fight in her cause became vivid in her mind. The wonderful gallantry of it!

It was all her fault, she told herself bitterly. She had not only rushed blindly into the trap that Dugald had tried to warn her against, but she had let herself be lulled out of suspicion by the impostor's talk. If she had not been so blind Dugald would have been on the alert.

Ah, Dugald had been on the alert! The blame was hers. She had not played her part. If she had only screamed a second or two earlier there might have been a different ending to the use of that shot-filled eel-skin. But she had never been able to scream. The few times in her life when some stupid terror had gripped her the noise had always stuck in her throat. So it was all her fault that she was lying huddled on the floor of the car with this miscreant sniggering over her; all her fault that poor Dugald lay back there in that quiet road, staring up at the sky with blind eyes.

Membranes at the back of Jean's throat gathered into a lump. She buried her face in her hands on the rug.

"That's right, pretty cousin," cooed her captor. "Better to give in!"

He tapped her on the shoulder.

"Now, listen to me, *querida*," he said. "I'll tell you what I'll do. If you'll just hand over the two papers you're carrying—the old parchment and the note your brother gave you—I'll stop the car somewhere handy and let you go!"

Jean stiffened.

"It will be quite easy for you," the man went on in oily tones. "I won't look. You can quite easy undo your dress and get out those papers—"

"The papers are where you'll never find them—you or your gang!" Jean replied.

Her shoulder was roughly seized, and she was as roughly turned to face the man scowling down at her.

“None of that!” he snarled. “Don’t you play about with me, see! I’m giving you more chance than you deserve. You can’t get away, and if you don’t hand over the papers now they’ll be taken from you, even if you’ve to be stripped to find them!”

“I tell you I haven’t got the papers here—and I’m glad to think it,” Jean returned with a brave face that belied her sinking heart. “They’re where you’ll never find them!”

“Where are they?”

“I’d cut my tongue out before I’d tell you!”

The man gave vent to an unprintable Spanish blasphemy.

“You’d be glad to cut your tongue out if it meant escaping what’s coming to you!” he snarled. “I’ve half a mind to give you a whiff of chloroform and have no more trouble with you! But I can wait. And you’ll wish to all the saints you’ve ever heard of that you’d taken the chance I’ve offered you!”

The taciturn chauffeur threw a word or two in Spanish over his shoulder. Jean’s captor snarled something in reply.

“You’ve got about three minutes to decide,” he said to Jean. “If you were not—*San Dios!*—if you were not *un cachito de gloria* you’d find me not so tender. So be thankful for your looks—and take your chance!”

Jean dived back in memory to all she had ever read of Spanish—and she found a word.

“*Perrezuelo!*” she said through her teeth. “You mongrel cur!”

The man started as if he had been shot. In their stained sockets his eyes glazed with anger. For a long moment he gazed at her, almost stupidly.

“*Muy bien!*” he said thickly. “*Así sea*—so be it, miss!”

Then, oddly, he touched the brim of his hat with a forefinger.

II

The car slowed and wheeled, and from the sound Jean knew it was running over loose gravel. She caught a glimpse of trees through the windows above her, and she guessed that they had turned into some avenue leading to a house. So it proved. The pseudo-count touched her on the shoulder.

"We're at our destination," he said. "I'll tell you now that it would be useless for you to yell. We're miles away from the nearest house, and if you yell you'll be roughly handled. So don't do it!"

The car came to a stop. Jean caught the merest glimpse of a façade of stone-painted plaster. She was dragged to her feet, and instantly the rug was whipped over her head. She felt herself dragged up some steps. Then a door was banged loudly, and ominously, behind her. The rug was taken from about her head.

She was standing in a gloomy entrance-hall. Facing her was the woman of the Glasgow-Edinburgh train, the woman known as Lola.

"Ah!" the woman purred. "We 'ave 'ere the leetle miss who will not touch the bon-bons. 'I don't care for chocolate, madame.' " She imitated the stiff speech of Jean in that encounter. "Ah, yes! So sweet—so gentle! But all the time as if she 'ad eat' the poker!"

She laughed metallically, and swept a glance to the men behind Jean.

"But w'ere—but w'ere," she asked in exaggerated surprise, "is the so 'andsome, but so interfering young man—the man who speaks of my French as from the Rue Berger?"

The man who had impersonated the Count said something rapidly in Spanish. Lola smiled savagely.

"So-o-o-o?" she said, with a malicious and long-drawn upward inflection.

There came the rattle of another explanation in Spanish from the man beside Jean, a lengthy explanation. At the end of it Lola nodded grimly.

"We shall see," said she. "If she is lying I'll soon find the papers, and we can turn the fool out quickly—some quiet place. If not, then she must be made to speak. Leave it to me!"

She turned to Jean.

“You will come with me, leetle miss who will not eat chocolate,” she said sneeringly. “Follow!”

For a second Jean hesitated as the woman went up the stairs, then she realized that to refuse would simply mean a struggle with the men. The odds were all against her. She pulled herself erect and went after the woman.

Lola led the way round a half gallery at the top of the stairs to a passage which ran away from the upper part of the hall. The passage seemed to lead to an isolated part of the house. The woman opened a door at the end of this passage and showed Jean into a big room with a low ceiling. It contained no furniture save a single bed like a hospital cot and one plain wooden chair. Through the uncurtained window, a primitive casement, Jean saw a set of thick bars that practically sealed the opening. Beyond the bars were louvered shutters, closed, so that the dim light in the room came merely from that reflected up through the slats.

Lola saw Jean’s glance toward the window.

“You need not look there, miss. There is no escape for you by the window,” she said harshly. “If you do as you are told there will be no need for you to try escapes. You will be freed. You must give me the papers that are in the breast of your dress.”

“I have told your bully already that I have no papers,” Jean said quietly.

“It would be good for you not to offend with words,” the woman replied coldly. “You say that you have no papers in your dress. You are sure of that?”

“I have told you.”

Lola nodded.

“Well, then,” she said, “we shall prove it. Take off your clothes!”

“Never!” said Jean, flaming.

“It would be wise to do so. If not they will be torn from you—by Vargas and friend Manuel!”

“Oh!” Jean shuddered. “I tell you I do not carry the papers!”

“And I tell you that we shall prove it—”

“I swear it!” gasped Jean.

Lola snapped her fingers.

“You made Vargas believe you had them. If you deceived him so much the worse for you. You will not deceive me. Do as you are tol’!”

Jean looked about her wildly for a means of escape. There was none, except by the door. She sprang past the woman and made for that. Lola laughed harshly.

"Yes, open it," she sneered, as Jean struggled with the handle, which was old and worked badly. "It is not locked. Open it—and run into the hands of the two men. They will like very well the job to make you naked. There is also another man. He would be please' to look on, I think!"

Jean gave up struggling with the handle. She came back into the room a little.

"Lock the door, then," she panted. "And let me keep the key—"

"There is no key, but there is a bolt," Lola smiled. "Satisfy yourself, leetle prude."

Jean shot the bolt. For a moment she thought of attacking the woman. She knew that she was twice as fit through tennis and an outdoor life, and that Lola, unless armed in some way, would have little chance against her. But the idea of physical encounter made her feel sick. She loathed contact even of the slightest with all but two people in the world—her mother and Iain—and the degradation of the struggle with Vargas still was upon her. Still, she counted the chances of escape if she could overpower Lola.

It seemed, however, that Lola read her thoughts, for she smiled wryly.

"No, no," she said. "It would be not wise to try, my dear. It would only mean Vargas and Manuel in the end. They are waiting to hear me call. Come! Be sensible!"

Jean left the door.

III

Some hours later Lola sat on the cot in the room where Jean was imprisoned. She was plying a needle deftly to restore the lining of Jean's hat, which had been ripped out in the search for the papers.

Jean sat on the one chair, well away from the cot. She had had nothing to eat since breakfast-time, and was feeling the need for food. They had brought in a small table which, it was promised, would be laid with a decent meal just as soon as she told the hiding-place of the papers. This she stubbornly refused to do.

"But you are foolish, *querida mia*," Lola said gently, "as foolish as you are beautiful."

In spite of her self-control Jean made a movement of distaste.

"Ah, yes!" breathed Lola, "you are sweet. The so rough, but so handsome, young man, he is lucky to win you. It is a lovely gift you present him with yourself. He is not good enough for you, even if—as they tell me—he will be a lord one day. At your age I myself was thought to be beautiful. But I was not half so sweet as you—"

"I'd rather have your threats than your flattery," said Jean.

"Sweet—but hard," Lola commented. "I tell you the truth of yourself. I do not flatter. Beauty I adore. It stirs me. At your age I adored my own beauty. But I was not a half so lovely as you. If I could be your friend—"

She rested the hat on her knees and sighed deeply, gazing at Jean the while.

"If I could only be your friend!" she repeated. "I do not wish to hurt you. I am not my own master in this. I am driven by—ah, never mind! It hurts me to see you sad, so hungry. Just one word or two—a whisper—and you need be hungry and sad no more. You can be free. You can eat. Just one leetle whisper!"

Jean laughed shortly.

"If hunger was all you had to fear!" Lola went on. "If hunger was all I feared for you! These are hard, cruel men who drive me. They will stop at nothing to wring the secret from you."

"I'll keep it if they kill me for it!" said Jean quietly.

"*Éa!*" Lola exclaimed. "To be killed—it is nothing! But to live—with nothing left to live for! That is the cruel thing. Ah, do not be stubborn, my leetle one! Vargas is not joking when he threatens you. There is not one terrible thing he told you that he will not do to you if you refuse to speak. He is a fiend. Already he becomes impatient. I cannot hold him longer. Listen! I am your friend—"

"You have a strange way of showing it, Madame Lola," said Jean.

"I am your friend," Lola insisted, and her eyes actually grew moist. "If I was harsh it was because I wanted to save you from Vargas. I want now to save you from him. If you are stubborn I shall not be able to hold him back. I would let you go—if there was a way of escape. But there is none. He keeps the keys of the house. The windows are all shuttered. I tremble to think of what would surely happen if I tried to smuggle you out—if we were caught. My leetle influence over him would be gone. I tremble for you—"

She left the cot and came over to Jean with hands outstretched in pleading. And now there were real tears in her eyes.

"Ah, *querida mia*!" she pleaded. "I cannot suffer that you should destroy your life—your beauty! Vargas means what he says. Think of it, child! I beg you—see!—on my knees I beg you—!"

She even seemed about to kneel. Jean sprang to her feet, recoiling.

"Oh, beastly, beastly!" she cried. "To act like that—tears in your eyes—for such a rotten purpose! This man Vargas is vile, but you are viler, because you cloak your vileness with a show of friendship! Leave me, please! I will not tell you! Your beastly threats are not so beastly as your tears. But neither will make me tell. I simply won't. And that's my last word!"

She turned away from the woman at that and walked to the shuttered window. She did not see the black rage that congested in Lola's eyes or the snarl that bared the feline teeth. There was a long silence in the room. Then Lola, for all the rage that smoldered in her eyes, spoke in a voice that was distilled sweetness and sorrow.

"I have done my best for you, child," she said. "My power over these men is limited. I cannot come again. For your sake—because I am your true friend—I will try to keep Vargas from you. How long I can keep him, who knows? A few minutes—an hour—perhaps two hours. I will plead for you. And you will remember when you hear the feet of Vargas at your door—in a few minutes—in half an hour—an hour after this—you will remember how I tried to save you. I give you one more chance. Then I go. Remember, you will wish

to tell at the last moment; but when you hear the feet of Vargas, *it will be too late*!”

Jean did not move or turn from the window. She heard Lola whimper pitifully. Next moment she was alone.

IV

More than an hour after Lola's departure Jean was still standing by the window. She had pulled back the casement so that she could breathe the night air that came up through the louvered shutters. Now in the darkness about her she was shivering—not from the cold entirely, but because she felt her spirit close to breaking.

As she stood there with her two hands stiffly clenched on window-bars her ears were strained for the sound of footsteps.

Not once, but more than half a dozen times at incalculable intervals, she had heard footsteps outside her door. Sometimes they would sound from far away and come nearer. At others they would suddenly spring up from close by. Once they would be hasty, and again they would be deliberate, slow. They would slow up and scuffle on the threshold of her room. They would die out before reaching it. Once the handle of the door rattled suddenly, with no preliminary sound of feet. At another time the feet sounded from far away, she heard them grow louder and louder, stop deliberately at the door, and then heard the handle slowly turned.

She knew that they were torturing her, and snatched a grain of comfort from the thought. If they went to this elaboration of mental cruelty in order to break her spirit it surely meant that they wanted to avoid physical coercion. Yet, though she set her teeth against any slackening of her will, her mind played continually on the vile and indecent threats of Vargas. She heard again that dimly comprehended flow of impurity, and shuddered at the unspoken interpretation of it given her by the woman. So that her whole purity of mind and heart shrank in unnameable horror. In spite of her utmost effort of will she could not but quiver at every footfall, she could not but cringe in every fiber of her taut-held body at the turning of the door-handle.

To give herself courage she tried to keep her mind on her brother Hamish, and at times she would whisper his name. But Hamish was miles away, eating his strong heart out, perhaps, in some awful prison. Dugald Torrance seemed nearer. She tried, but could not contrive, to bring his name to her lips. She had failed Dugald, led him into a trap in sheer bravado, in mere recklessness. She saw again the curling impact of that black snake of lead on his defenseless head, saw his splendid body sag limply, and she wondered pitifully and pitiably where he lay. It seemed to her, in spite of Vargas' easy sneer, that none could recover from such a blow. No. She could not whisper his name into

the darkness.

Yet it was Dugald's name that sprang to her lips when at last the door behind her was suddenly opened. She tore her hands from the window-bars and turned swiftly to face the unspeakable terror.

The room was filled with light. At the first moment she could not see what faced her; then her eyes told her that Lola stood in the doorway, her hand on the switch that Jean had failed to use, though she knew it to be there.

Lola looked at her keenly for a moment or two. She nodded in a satisfied way, then suddenly put out the light. Her voice, chill and quiet, came through the darkness.

"Vargas will come to you. He will come to you soon—stubborn leetle fool!"

The door closed.

For a moment Jean swayed on her feet, in reaction to her terror. Then she tensed herself and sprang across the darkened room to the switch. As she groped for it a hoarse chuckle rose in the darkness, and it seemed to come from the very center of the room. She found the switch. The room was flooded with light. She stared about her wildly. The room was empty.

Once again Jean summoned up her spirit to tautness. She shot the bolt of the door and turned to examine the room as coolly as she could. There seemed to be no aperture about walls or ceiling whence that chuckle could have come. It might have come only from a door that was in the wall by the empty fireplace—the door of a cupboard, to all appearance. Did it, she asked herself, lead to another room? Was a new variant to the torture devised for her here? She put a foot out from the corner in which she was half crouching, urging herself to cross the room and investigate. And as her weight came on her foot the board under it gave a little. It creaked loathsomely—with a hoarse chuckling noise.

In her relief Jean laughed almost hysterically, her breath coming in hurtful gulps. Tears sprang to her eyes and trickled down her cheeks.

"I mustn't! I mustn't!" she told herself. "I can't lose a grip of myself now—I mustn't!"

And then the dreaded footsteps began to sound again. Deliberate they were, starting from far off, coming nearer and nearer. They seemed charged with purpose now. Jean crouched back in the corner, her fingers tight about the all too tiny door-bolt. The steps came steadily nearer. She heard them pause

outside. The door-handle turned slowly, and pressure was put against the door. A few seconds' pause, then a man's weight was thrown against the panels. The door bulged ominously.

"All right, girl," said the voice of Vargas. "I go to get a lever. There is no need for hurry or that I should exert myself. Wait!"

Jean heard his footsteps go off. Her throat was dry, and her heart was pounding enough to hurt. Her whole body was chilling with a deadly nausea.

Some one whistled in the garden. She only faintly understood that the tune was familiar. The whistle rose shriller.

"No, no! Dear God—it can't be—who could whistle that but Hamish? No, I'm not hearing right!"

Under her breath she tried to repeat the words to the tune:

"*Bha mi'n raoir an choille—Chaoil le mo ribhin og—*"

She ran to the window, tried to call down through the slats of the shutter. All she could get into her throat was a gasping squeak.

Down in the garden the whistle still went on. Ah!—the tune was not just right! What could she do to signal?

She ran back across the room to the light-switch and pushed it up and down frantically. Down in the garden the whistle stopped. If she could only remember the Morse that Hamish had taught her. It was Dugald down in the garden—that was why the tune was faulty! Now bless the chance that had made her tell Dugald of the old signal between her and Hamish! The Morse letters—how did they go—and would Dugald understand?

She started to manipulate the switch, rather jerkily, trying to flash the one signal that nearly all the world of men would understand—the S.O.S.

"Dot-dot-dot-dash-dash-dash-dot-dot-dot! Dot-dot-dot—dash-dash-dash—dot-dot-dot!" she flickered. Then, as best she could remember, she signaled "J-E-A-N! S-O-S! Q-U-I-C-K!"

Down in the garden the whistle rose once more—the old tune.

In the passage the footsteps began to sound again. They came to the door. There was the sound of an instrument scraping against it. The door bulged. The bolt and lock began to go. *Cr-r-rack!* Screws began to fall on the floor. Jean turned out the light, grasped the door-handle, and put her weight against the door. It came against her, free from bolt and lock. Just for a moment or two she resisted the pressure that was put against it. Then she sprang away, pulling the

door open suddenly. Some one—she took it to be Vargas—came sprawling into the room. She jumped past him and ran down the half-lit passage.

She reached the half gallery and, as most people will in a blind rush when alternative turns are presented, instinctively turned to the right. The way to the stairs was to the left. In the passage the feet of Vargas were already pounding in pursuit. She found herself in the impasse that ended the gallery. She turned about, but it was too late. Vargas was already between her and the stairs.

Vargas let out a yell of glee, and came toward her menacingly. But as he came the sound of altercation at the entrance-door in the hall below brought him to a sudden halt.

V

The English-speaking Spaniard who had been with Lola and the man Stowe in the train between Glasgow and Edinburgh was sent reeling back from the entrance-door.

Across the hall the taciturn chauffeur was running to his assistance. The woman Lola was standing by the hall fireplace, her hands at her throat.

Vargas, in the gallery by Jean, was clasping the gallery rail irresolute. He had forgotten Jean, it seemed, and Jean had almost forgotten him in the interest of the scene below.

First through the main-door came Dugald, his jacket off and his shirt-sleeves tucked back. At one side of him, a little behind, was a small, stocky man, who reminded Jean oddly of Punchy Haggart; at the other was a bigger man, broken-nosed and gnarled of face, who walked with a slouch, on feet as delicately placed as a cat's. The three came into the hall like a phalanx.

Then, behind the three, shutting the door and taking up a post by it with an ebony cane held like a sword, was a very tall and willowy old man, with hair of flossy-white and thin black eyebrows like a streak. This old man, whose face was like that of some archangel on Mount Sinai, chucked his soft hat into a corner in the most business-like way in the world.

The Spaniard who had been driven from the door recovered. He joined the chauffeur in the rush at the phalanx of three. Dugald took the brunt of that rush. His fists shot out. The two Spaniards spun apart, to be taken care of separately by the wings of the phalanx. The chauffeur fell to the lot of the broken-nosed man, while the other was engaged by the stocky little fellow. Both Spaniards were faring badly.

Vargas let out a curse. He turned and gripped Jean roughly.

"Into this room, you!" he grunted, and tried to snatch her away from the gallery rail into a doorway behind her.

Jean clung desperately to the rail. She tried to yell to Dugald, but the disability that possessed her from childhood still kept her practically dumb. Then she saw Dugald look up. Instantly he was on the run to the stairs.

Vargas, too, saw Dugald coming. He released Jean and stooped to pick up a tire-lever he had dropped, with which he apparently had been operating on the door of Jean's prison. Jean saw his purpose and, quick as a flash, had her

foot on the lever. It was only for a moment or two that Vargas scrambled on the floor in trying to snatch the lever away, but these moments were valuable. Before Vargas threw his shoulder against Jean, making her stagger away from the lever, Dugald was on the gallery level, and Vargas' advantage of attacking him as he came up the stairs was lost.

Vargas turned to face Dugald. The tire-lever glittered as it swung in the air, and Jean's hands went to her mouth as Dugald came on at a run, unhesitatingly. Down went the lever in a glistening arc. But Dugald's head was nowhere near its line of descent. He side-stepped so suddenly and at such speed that Jean could not follow his movements. She merely heard the *smuck! smuck!* of his fists on the face of Vargas and saw the Spaniard go limp and sag in a huddled mass by the gallery rail.

"Oh, Dugald!" Jean gasped, "you've killed him!"

Dugald grinned.

"He'll be all right in a minute or two," he said breathlessly, and he darted to look over the rail at the scrimmage below. "Golly!" he exclaimed. "Down the stairs, Jean—quick!"

He kicked the tire-lever through the rails. Next moment he was over them himself and had dropped to the floor below.

As she ran along the gallery to obey orders, Jean saw why he had taken such unceremonious leave of her. The two Spaniards had retreated to the fireplace and laid hands on the fire-irons. Brandishing these weapons they were now advancing on Dugald's two fighting-men. Lola was still crouched by the fireplace.

Meantime, the Spaniards were being reënforced. A terrifically stout man had appeared from somewhere carrying a broom-handle, and was waddling along by the side of the hall toward the tall old man at the door.

Jean saw Dugald run out from below the gallery. He made for the chauffeur, who had the poker, and jumped like a wild cat on the man's back. The poker flew sideways and crashed through a window. As the man came down with him, Dugald put out a knee and brought the man's head against it with a thump. The chauffeur lay where he fell. At the loss of his companion the other Spaniard turned on Dugald with upraised shovel. From his kneeling position Dugald threw himself at his assailant's legs, but not soon enough to avoid a clip with the shovel on the head. The man staggered and fell, to be pounced on by Dugald's two scrappers, who methodically bumped his head on the parquet flooring till he, too, lay still.

The blow from the shovel was a glancing one and almost spent when it landed on Dugald's head, but it happened to catch him on the spot already damaged by the shot-filled eel-skin, and it make him woefully giddy. He staggered as he came to his feet, and Jean, now downstairs, ran over to support him.

"I'm all right!" he protested. "Just a bit dizzy—that's all! Christopher!" he exclaimed. "Look at that!"

At the far end of the hall, by the doorway, the enormously stout fellow with the broom-handle had crept up to the tall old man. He was making ineffective lunges with his weapon at the old man, who was parrying them deftly with his ebony cane. The old man was smiling, apparently enjoying the play with his opponent. As they watched, the old man looked up, took in the fact that the main fighting in the hall was all over, and went into action on his own account.

He put aside a poke from the broom-handle and took a nimble step forward with cane and arm in a straight line. There was a howl from the fat man as the cane prodded home in his midriff. His broom-handle clattered to the floor, and he turned and ran waddling, hugging his middle, back whence he had come. Nobody interrupted his flight. It would have been to spoil a welcome comic relief to the tensity of the situation.

"Who is he, Dugald?" whispered Jean, between tears and laughter. "Who is the splendid old man?"

Behind them they heard swift feet and the flutter of silk skirts. They turned. Lola was making her exit from the scene.

"Let her go, Dugald!" Jean said. "Tell me who the fine old man is, please!"

The old man was already coming down the hall toward them. He bowed gravely and courteously to Jean.

"Let me introduce you, Jean," said Dugald, "to the real Son of the Book. Your kinsman, Don Pio Mendizábal, Conde de Torreblasco!"

VI

Rescued and her rescuers were in the library of the Conde's rented house. Dugald's two henchmen, having fed and sampled the cellars of the Conde's friend, were about to be driven back to London in the Conde's car. Jean was thanking them once again for their help.

"Tell me your names once more," she said. "I want to fix them in my mind. I shall feel ashamed if I ever forget them."

"Michael Larne, miss," said that individual formally.

The man with the broken nose grinned widely. He took Jean's hand into an oddly misshapen fist.

"They call me Smiler Binns fer usual, miss," he said. "But if Mick's doin' the grand, why shouldn't I? You'd better 'ave it all. Horatio Marmaduke Binns —very much at your service, miss."

"I'll remember your fighting names, because you fought for me. Mickey Larne and Smiler Binns, I'm terribly grateful, and I'll never forget!"

"Ar—it were nothin', miss!" protested Mickey.

"Any little thing like that at any time, miss," grinned Smiler. "Notice took of the smallest orders an' thankfully received."

And so the two stalwarts went on their way, ushered out by Dugald.

When they had gone and Dugald had returned to the room the Conde turned to Jean seriously.

"I cannot think it wise, Jean," he said, "to let these bad people escape the police. You are—do you say?—laying up trouble for yourself, I think."

"How could I prosecute them without making public the secret of the loch?" Jean argued. "It is not my secret, remember. It belongs to Hamish."

"Surely you could prosecute them for imprisoning you?"

"It might be necessary to say why they locked me up," Jean said. "To explain their motive."

"Then, I myself might have accused José Vargas of stealing from my house —and the others could have been arrested as his accomplices."

"It was your half of the parchment he stole, wasn't it?"

“I suspect that. Though I charged Vargas, and he denied it, I remain sure that he did.”

“He wasn’t carrying it—none of them was carrying it,” Dugald put in. “I don’t believe it was in that house.”

“Supposing Vargas did steal it,” Jean argued still, “how could you accuse him of it without betraying the secret? I don’t want to make things difficult. I feel I’ve made things difficult already. If I hadn’t been a fool Dugald wouldn’t have got his head hurt—”

“That was my fault,” Dugald interrupted. “I was half asleep.”

“—and I wouldn’t have been stolen away,” Jean went on, shaking her head at Dugald. “And you wouldn’t have had all that trouble to rescue me. How did you manage to track me so quickly?”

Dugald explained that he had watched Harley Seagar’s door, and followed the car from it to that isolated house out toward Epsom. He had gone back to Wimbledon to the Conde’s, and from there had got Mickey Larne, by telephone, to come out and bring Smiler Binns.

“It is well that Mr. Torrance acted for himself,” said the Conde. “If he had not you would still be waiting in that house, my child. I thought, through the Embassy, that I could have your police find Vargas. But I discover that he is not a Spanish subject. He is—pah!—a Scorpion.”

“What’s a Scorpion?” asked Jean, bewildered.

“A Spaniard born in Gibraltar—of mixed parents. A bad breed. So you understand the man is technically a British subject. He need not register, as we aliens must,” the old man smiled. “If we had depended on the police—”

The Conde shrugged his shoulders slightly.

“That may be an argument for what I say,” Jean snatched. “If we were to be held up with prosecutions and what not—and it would be no good in the end. I want to guard the secret. I feel I must. I don’t want the police.”

The Conde looked at Dugald, as who should say, “Well, now!” Dugald merely grinned.

“Be it so, my child,” said the Conde. “But you must not think you have done with that band of evil people. They will be quiet for a day or two, perhaps. Then they will understand that you are not seeking the aid of the police. And they will another time begin their tricks.”

Jean sat in silence for a long time, then she looked up frankly.

"You must both think me a silly fool," she said. "I can't help that. If I'm unreasonable—then I'm unreasonable. But I simply cannot, cannot bring myself to let you ask for police help. I'd hate all the publicity of it. I'd loathe it. I'd sooner give up the whole thing, and wait till Hamish gets back—if—if he ever gets back. But now, since I have twice refused to see the danger Mr. Torrance warned me of, and am asking him to face some more—by leaving the gang free, that is—I feel I ought to release him from his promise. I shall not think less of him if he takes it back. I'll always be grateful to him, and—and proud to be his friend."

"I'm not taking back any promises. Quite frankly, I'd much rather beat these swine without the help of the bobbies," said Dugald. "And," he added, "I've been called Dugald for the last hour or more. I've come to like it. Why the sniffy 'Mr. Torrance' all of a sudden?"

"I wasn't being sniffy!" cried Jean.

"Yes, you were being sniffy. You became positively brittle and all up-stage and things," Dugald said severely, but with a grin. "And not only that—you—"

He broke off suddenly at a loud wail from Jean.

"Oh, why—why are you all so gug-good to me?" she wailed. "You, Dugald—and that nice Mr. Punchy—and these two nice fuf-fighters—and Cuck-cousin Pio?"

The surprising young woman was in tears. Dugald stared dumbfounded. The Conde dropped into the settee beside her and signed to Dugald to make himself scarce.

"And fuf-four days ago I had only Iain in the world!" cried Jean.

Dugald stole out of the room. Last thing he saw was Jean with her head on the old man's shoulder and the Conde patting her soothingly.

To Dugald, in the small sitting-room to which he had fled, there came some minutes later Simkins, the Conde's butler, bearing a tray.

"Compliments of the Señor Conde, sir, but he thinks a weak whisky-and-soda would do you no harm," said Simkins.

"I seldom—if ever—touch whisky, Simkins," said Dugald. "But, Simkins, do you know anything about girls?"

"I believe, sir," said Simkins, "that there are certain learned people who have written as if they could explain all about girls. Speaking as a father, sir—I have three fine girls—and as a man of some experience, I'd say these learned

writers rush in where angels might fear to tread."

"Good for you, Simkins!" said Dugald.

"Yes, Mr. Torrance. There is such a thing, sir, as attempting to explain the inexplicable. With most of the animal kingdom one might, from long observation, get to know what any animal would do in certain circumstances and under certain conditions. The exception is the female human. The one thing on earth one can never be sure of, Mr. Torrance, is just what a woman will do next."

"Simkins," said Dugald, "it is a shame to use such a phrase to a polished reasoner like yourself—but—you certainly have spilled a bibful! Give me a very long, but not too strong, whisky-and-soda!"

CHAPTER VIII
THE RETURN

THOUGH JEAN had put such a strict embargo on calling in the police, Dugald did not see why the leader of the gang should not be told that his identity was discovered. In Dugald's view the real instigator of the activity against Jean could be no other than her cousin, Harley Seagar, Number Four of the train episode. It would be absurd to allow the real villain of the piece to go smugly ahead on the idea that his part in the plot was unknown.

To confront Seagar with the proof of his villainy might be to scotch his activities. Seagar would hardly be likely to work openly against his young cousin. Dugald knew from Jean that Seagar had always pretended to great friendship for her.

So far Seagar had contrived to keep himself well in the background. Except for his appearance in the train between Glasgow and Edinburgh, he had not been seen. Dugald had been at some pains to discover from the Conde if the man had ever come near him, but the Conde knew nothing of Seagar. The gang's information regarding the missing half of the parchment could only have got to it through Seagar, and it must have been he who had urged Vargas to steal it—if Vargas had stolen it. Of this the Conde could not be sure. The search he had started for the parchment still was going on both in his house in Barcelona and in the castle on the Catalonian coast.

In her eagerness to get back to Arisaig and her small brother, Jean would have taken the first train available. Against this the Conde and Dugald managed to persuade her. The hours she had put in between her kidnaping and her rescue had been enough to exhaust her physically and mentally. The Conde prescribed a long night's rest, and turned her over to the care of his butler's wife, Mrs. Simkins. Her luggage was brought from the hotel to her.

So that on the Saturday morning Dugald was free to carry out his plan of confronting Seagar. He took himself down early to the street running off Covent Garden and marched up the stairs to Seagar's office.

He was informed by a smart and pretty typist that Mr. Seagar was not in

town. Dugald asked when he was likely to return.

"Most likely he'll be here on Monday," said the girl. "He's sure to be."

"But he is back from Edinburgh, isn't he?"

The girl shook her head.

"He is still there," she said. "I expect he'll come down by the night train to-morrow."

"Oh!" said Dugald. Then casually: "Seen anything of Mr. Vargas lately—or Mr. Stowe?"

The girl stared at him in a puzzled way.

"Vargas—Mr. Stowe?" she repeated. "I don't know the names—"

It was Dugald's turn to stare. He did, scanning the girl's face narrowly. But her expression was one of genuine puzzlement.

"I'd have thought you knew them both. Vargas is a biggish man—Spanish, dark round the eyes, with a fairly prominent nose a bit twisted."

She shook her head slowly.

"Is he a friend of Mr. Seagar's?" she asked.

"Goodness, yes," said Dugald. "Why, I saw his car outside your office yesterday. I didn't see Vargas—I was in a bit of a hurry—but I did recognize his chauffeur. I said to myself that Vargas was probably in seeing Harley Seagar. That's what made me ask."

"Is this Mr. Vargas in the fruit business too?" the girl inquired. "Because, you see, he might have been calling on some one else on this stair. There are several other fruit people in the building."

"That's very likely. Well, thanks very much. Good morning!"

"Who shall I say called?"

"Oh, don't trouble to note it. I'll be seeing Mr. Seagar one of these days."

"Still—"

"Well, then—Torrance is the name—Torrance. And you can say, if you like, that I called about the house near Epsom. I know all about it, tell him—and I'll go into the thing thoroughly at the first opportunity."

So Dugald took himself downstairs again.

He was very much at a loss. That the typist in Seagar's office did not know

either Vargas or Stowe he was perfectly convinced. From his judgment of her he believed that she was a completely straightforward, business-like girl, smart as the crack of a whip. Her answers had come without hesitation, save in those instances when his questions had puzzled her. There had been no attempt to fence with him, nor the slightest sign of suspicion on her part.

There was the chance, of course, that Vargas and Stowe were using other names. But, on the other hand, his description of Vargas to the girl, though slight, had been accurate and full enough to bring the man to mind if the girl had ever seen him with Seagar. The girl had been genuinely trying to help. Dugald was sure of it. Then the gang themselves used the names of "Stowe" and "Vargas" in referring to the two men. It was extremely unlikely that either used pseudonyms in their relation to Seagar.

If the chauffeur had not been in the building for the purpose of speaking to Seagar, to whom then? It stretched coincidence rather far to suppose that the gang had dealings in the building with some one unconnected with the only man from whom information regarding the Macleavar parchments could have been obtained. It was too hard to believe that Seagar, having his office in the same building as somebody in touch with the gang, was innocent of all contact with the miscreants. It simply meant, then, that there was still another member of the gang—this person who linked Seagar with it.

If this were so, the constitution of the enemy force became rather formidable. Caldas and Stowe in Arisaig, Seagar in Edinburgh, Vargas, the chauffeur Manuel, Lola, the Spaniard of the train episode—that was seven. The Covent Garden go-between—eight all told, if one left out the enormously fat man of the house near Epsom. Eight. And against these were opposed a mere five, if one included the small boy Iain and the Conde, whose participation in the struggle most likely would be to a great extent consultatory. It made the odds rather strong.

So Seagar was still in Edinburgh! The communication system between the members of the gang seemed to be well organized. The enticement of Jean to London and her kidnaping had been well thought out, in spite of the absence in the North of the gang-leader. Jean had received the supposed telegram from the Conde while two at least of the band were in Edinburgh, Seagar and the Spaniard, seen in South Inverleith Avenue on Thursday morning. Of course, the woman Lola could have carried detailed instructions to London by train leaving Edinburgh on the Wednesday night, but the whole plot indicated a dove-tailing and accuracy of arrangement that touched on genius. The one flaw in the gang's preparations was the use of the same building as that in which Seagar's office was situated.

Dugald held his breath for a moment at the thought of this lucky flaw. But for it there might have been no finding of the Epsom house, no rescuing of Jean. Besides Seagar, there was another member of the gang who preferred the background—Number Eight—this person, man or woman, who was to be found in the same building as Seagar. Who was this Number Eight?

II

After the frustration of their schemes by the rescue of Jean it was not too much to expect that the gang would be in a state of hectic activity this Saturday morning. It was unlikely they would guess that Jean had refused to set the police after them, and in all probability they had vacated the lonely house near Epsom long before this time. Number Eight, whoever he or she might be, would have been informed at the earliest possible moment of the previous night's *débâcle*. There must have been, Dugald imagined, a rather hurried consultation. The means by which he and the Conde had contrived so quickly to follow them up would be discussed, and it would be valuing the combined intelligence of the gang too cheaply to imagine them missing the point of the followed car. The point once grasped, it would come to them that the car had been picked up by Covent Garden. They might wonder whether the picking up of the car had been accident or prescience, but they would never risk a return to Seagar's office building.

There would be little use, therefore, in Dugald keeping watch outside the Covent Garden office, as he had contemplated. Without some member of the gang as a link there could be little hope of identifying this Number Eight. The identification of Number Eight would have to be left to future chance. That was to say, if the gang continued plotting against Jean.

Dugald had no illusions on this last point. Since Jean put an embargo on police interference there was no means by which the activities of the gang could be stopped, if they chose to carry on with them. It was evident, from the number of the gang alone, that Seagar's crowd believed the galleon treasure worth fighting for. It was big enough, they believed, to split up among eight. It was good enough to justify expenditure on railway journeys galore, hired houses, cars, and what not. That they would be diverted from their purpose by the setback of the previous evening was far from likely. All that could be hoped from the win of rescuing Jean was that they might mark time for a day or two, lying low. The thing to do at the moment was to snatch the opportunity for getting ahead of the enemy.

Dugald was walking placidly toward the post office in Southampton Street in order to telephone to Jean at Wimbledon, when a thought struck him that put him almost on the run. In persuading Jean to rest, he had told her that it only meant a delay of twelve hours in reaching Arisaig. What was the point, he had argued, in catching a train at a quarter to five in the morning, which would get

her to Arisaig just in time to go to bed? Surely it was wiser to husband her strength, especially after the strain put upon it, and catch the seven-thirty train from King's Cross in the evening, sleep on the journey, and get to Arisaig just after eleven next morning? Nothing much could happen to Iain in the meantime, with the faithful Punchy as watchdog, and the two members of the gang who were in Arisaig would be able to do nothing very effective toward discovering the secret of the loch.

What Dugald had forgotten was that the day was Saturday. No trains are allowed to disturb the Sabbatical hush of the Highland Sunday, so that his calculation that Jean could be in Arisaig by half-past eleven next morning was quite at fault. The seven-thirty from King's Cross did not run on Saturday night. Jean had trusted in his capability to make arrangements, and he had let her down. She would be very much upset at having to moon about in London until Sunday evening. What could be done to get her to Arisaig by the time promised? The last train for Mallaig left Fort William, he remembered, somewhere about eight o'clock at night. To connect with that one would have to be in Glasgow by three-thirty. It was possible, of course, to get to Glasgow or Edinburgh on Sunday morning, and Punchy could bring the car down to meet the train in either town. But that would mean reaching Arisaig late on Sunday.

Dugald got through on the 'phone to the Conde's house and confessed his mistake to Jean. She forgave him readily and sweetly, but he could detect the anxiety in her voice even over the wire.

"Listen, Jean," said Dugald. "I think I can see how to get you to Glasgow by three!"

"Oh, Dugald, if you only could!"

"I will," Dugald said determinedly. "Get your case ready at once, and ask Don Pio if he will have his car standing by to take you straight over to Hendon flying-ground—"

"Fly it—oh, splendid! How exciting, Dugald!"

"It's just after ten. If I can get the man I'm thinking of, and the right bus, we can just do it by getting away at twelve. Stand by till I call you again."

Dugald got busy.

Just over an hour later he was at Stagg Lane aerodrome watching a four-seater 'plane being warmed up. He was talking to the pilot, a man something younger than himself.

“Can we do it without a stop, Jimmy?” he asked.

“With a bit to spare,” said the pilot. “The only thing is, Dougie—don’t like the weather chart. Rough stuff about the Border—from the Cumbrians to the Cheviots. Very likely the same on the Lanark hills.”

“Which way?”

“Blowing up the Irish Channel—bung up the Solway.”

“Not enough to scare you, Jimmy?”

The pilot smiled faintly.

“No, not that,” he said. “May blow us off a bit. But you know as well as I do. If your people don’t turn up soon we won’t have much of a margin.”

“They’re on their way. I gave them the straightest route. They can’t be long now.”

He had scarcely stopped speaking when the Conde’s car swung into the flying-ground. Dugald went over to meet Jean and Don Pio, and brought them directly to the ’plane. No great time was wasted in farewells. The Conde and Jean most evidently understood each other. Jean, her eyes sparkling and her cheeks flushed with excitement, was wrapped up in a flying-kit many sizes too big for her. Don Pio kissed her hand like a young gallant, but patted her like a father giving his blessing. Then he wrung Dugald’s hand, and gave them both that beautiful God-speed of the Spanish:

“*Vayan con Dios!* Go with God, my children!”

They took their seats behind Jimmy Warren, the pilot. The engine explosions ran together in a rising drone. Jimmy dropped his hand to the mechanics, and the ’plane taxied forward. It left the ground, rose splendidly, and veered into a turn. Far below them the Conde stood bareheaded, his hat held out in farewell. The machine went into the straight course for Glasgow, nor’-nor’-west, a point west, at a steady hundred miles an hour. It was twenty minutes to noon by the control-board clock, and Glasgow lay some three hundred and fifty miles away in direct line.

III

The ’plane, a private one belonging to its pilot, was not provided with head-phones by which the passengers could communicate. But Dugald had brought a map, and as they flew he was able to point out to Jean the various stages of the flight. Thirty minutes brought them abreast of Northampton, a dark, smoky cluster away to the left. Leicester next, not much different from Northampton. Then the winding ribbon of the Trent, with Nottingham and Derby on either side. Presently, on the left ahead rose up the undulated contours of the Peak district, cloud-laden, with the ganglion of road and rail that was Sheffield on the right.

They were an hour and twenty minutes out from London. Dugald took out a pad and wrote a note for Jean.

“We are making good time—more than a third of our way already.”

Jean nodded her thanks, her eyes very bright behind the big glasses of the fur-rimmed goggles.

And then they were above the smoke-wreathed huddle of towns which was industrial Yorkshire—Huddersfield, Halifax, Bradford, and away on their right the indigo concentration of Leeds.

The ’plane began to climb, for they were coming to the northern uplands of the broad county, Cam Fell, Great Shunner.

“Shall we see the Lakes?” Jean wrote on Dugald’s pad. He shook his head.

“Perhaps Ullswater—but unlikely. Weather’s thickening up,” he scribbled. “Would you like a sandwich—coffee?”

They ate chicken sandwiches and drank coffee from a thermos; then Dugald relieved Warren at the stick, so that his friend could feed also. Below them the earth was being fast blotted out by driving clouds. Dugald kept the ship on the climb. Up and up they went, and now they could see neither earth nor sky, for the cloud-wrack was above and below them. A side wind was gathering in force from the west. Warren nodded and smiled to Jean, then went forward to take the stick from Dugald. She saw them consult together with lips to each other’s ears. Then Dugald came back to his seat. Before he strapped himself in again he saw that Jean’s straps were properly secured. Presently Jean saw for herself why he had done so. She did not need the faint-caught shout in her ear, “It’s going to blow!” The machine was beginning to lift and

toss. Above the steady drone of the engine, or through it, came the shrilling of the wind among the wing-struts.

For an hour and more they were lost to the world, the 'plane pitching and veering giddily through succeeding banks of driving cloud and gusts of stinging rain. It was bitterly cold. Sometimes, when the ship would give a particularly bad dive or veer, Dugald would put out a thick-mitted hand and pat Jean's knee. And always she would wipe the mist from her goggles to turn and assure him with a smile that she was feeling all right and not at all scared.

They came into a region of comparative calm. Dugald brought out the pad.

"Two-fifteen," he wrote. "We should be above the Border, but have drifted, I'm afraid."

"Can't be helped," Jean replied. "Topping flight!"

Dugald was consulting the map. Below them the clouds were breaking into patches, and above them the sun was shining brilliantly from a flat angle in the west. In the cloud-rifts the earth showed far below, and now and then a peak of hill would break through the fleecy screen. They could not fly at too low a height, Dugald explained. There were earth-humps about that reached twenty-five hundred feet.

Presently Dugald undid his strapping and crept forward to Jimmy's side. He pointed to a spot on the map. Jean thought that the machine changed direction. Dugald crept back.

"We're more than thirty miles off our course," he signaled. "Two-thirty, Glasgow ninety miles off. Sorry. But we may do it."

"Never mind. Splendid. Where are we?"

Dugald put his finger on the map, and ran it through Jedburgh, Selkirk, Peebles, following the course of the Tweed, then picking up the course of the Clyde. Much would depend, he indicated, on the weather encountered between the Moorfoot and Pentland Hills and the Laws of South Lanark and Peebles. The aerodrome they were making for was at Renfrew, the nearest spot to Glasgow where they could land with any comfort, but some eight miles away from the railway station at Queen Street.

"What times does the train leave?" Jean asked.

"Three-forty," was the reply.

"We can do it," Jean asserted on the pad.

Dugald nodded, but did not feel so sure about it.

At what must have been the upper end of Tweed-dale—they could only guess their whereabouts—they ran once again into evil weather, and now the wind was almost dead against them. Far below them the storm-clouds raced, layer upon layer, billow on billow, with up-flung wreathings like spume. The ’plane bucketed and tossed and veered, but Warren’s control of stick and foot-bar was cunning. On the whole he kept the machine on the climb. And just as well, for the racing masses of cloud below were heavily charged with electricity. Time and again great lumps opposedly charged came together and fused with a deafening roar and blinding flash. The drone of the toiling engine was lost in the crashing of thunder.

“Too concentrated to last,” Dugald managed to scrawl on the pad. “We should soon be through this.”

Jean nodded bravely. She could not help feeling scared, but she would have been ashamed to have shown it. Dugald’s smile, his quick pat on her knee, and the calm diligence of Warren over the controls reassured her.

But the struggle against the tempest was making havoc of their margin of time. Jean realized that the anxiety which Dugald must have been experiencing was more on this score than about actual danger from the storm. If they failed to reach Glasgow in time, Dugald would feel that he had let her down. She could not bear that he should be unhappy on this account. She caught at the pad.

“Don’t worry about the train, Dugald,” she wrote. “Done our best. Very grateful.”

Dugald gripped the hand that held the pad and squeezed it.

“Now, bless your kind and plucky heart, my dear!” he said, unheard. “You’re a little brick!”

It seemed presently that they had passed the worst of the storm. The thunder died down to a distant rumble. Great gaps began to show in the cloudbanks below. A minute or two later the drone of the engine suddenly ceased and the ’plane went into a long glide downward.

“Now we may be able to see where we are,” said Dugald into Jean’s ear. “If we’re anywhere near Renfrew we still have a good chance for that train.”

Jean peered past him to the clock on the control-board. It was showing nearly twenty-past three, and as the train left Queen Street at three-forty it was hard to see where the good chance of catching it came in. Still, if Dugald Torrance thought there was a chance, it was good enough for her. He was unstrapping to go forward to Jimmy Warren, and she did not bother him with

questions.

"Let's hope we are near Renfrew, then," she said simply.

The country that now showed in the cloud-breaks was one of green and bosky hills, disfigured here and there by the grimy sprawl of a mining village or the black out-throwing of coal heaps, the spidery straddle of mine-shaft machinery. Now and again there came the concentrated huddle of factories, with tall, slim chimneys that belched flame and smoke. Through all this wound the silver ribbon of river and threads of railway lay taut. Dugald came back.

"We've been luckier than we thought. That's the Clyde down below, and the dun smear over there is Glasgow. The wind that blew us off our course below the Border didn't rob us of much distance, really. The last hour has been the devil. Still, we'll be over the aerodrome at Renfrew in a minute or two now, and we'll have a good chance of catching that train."

The clock on the control-board showed almost the half hour. It must take a good few minutes still to effect a landing, and to get out of the 'plane. Jean was puzzled to know how Dugald could be so hopeful, but her chance of questioning him was stolen by the renewed firing of the engine cylinders.

The dun smear that was Glasgow grew up on the right and took form in serried rows of roofs, punctuated by the myriad spires of churches, and dominated by the great tower and spire of the University on Gilmourhill. Far beyond that rose the height of Maryhill, topped by buildings that had a strangely classic air. Nearer the river ran, with great dock basins and the stocks and slips of shipyards.

Now a little to the left ahead came up the huddle of another town, Paisley, with a smaller cluster to the right. Dugald's finger on the map rested on Renfrew, and moved to a green patch between the two towns. This was the aerodrome. A moment or two later the flying-ground could be seen in actuality.

The 'plane wheeled in a succession of circles, and the earth rose up to meet it. From a mast a long white cone held out showed the direction of the ground wind. A big sweep away from the aerodrome, then a distinct dive, and the tawny green of the landing-ground rushed up. Then it rushed past. Then came the faintest of bumping. The 'plane came to a standstill. Jean cast a look at the clock on the control-board. Its hands stood at a minute or two off three-forty—the time of the train.

"Don't stop to be polite to Jimmy—we've got to rush, Jean!" said Dugald. "Cheerio, Jimmy—thanks, old boy!"

“That’s all right, old son!” Warren replied.

“Good-by, Mr. Warren—thanks ever so much!” said Jean, with a feeling that this was a somewhat banal and inadequate acknowledgment of such service.

“Not at all, Miss Macleavar!” grinned Warren. “Over the side with you!”

Rather bewildered, Jean found herself hustled down a ladder and into a car. Men who seemed to have sprung up from nowhere hustled her, and piled her case and Dugald’s in with them. The car shot forward. Before Jean could get herself round to see what her quondam pilot was doing they were out of the flying-ground and racing through Renfrew.

“If we have any luck with the ferry,” said Dugald, “we can just do it!”

“But, Dugald,” Jean protested, “the train’s leaving the station by now!”

“Queen Street—yes,” Dugald said calmly, consulting his wrist-watch. “In three minutes’ time—three-forty-three. We pick it up at Dalmuir, just over the river.”

“Oh, I see!” Jean gasped faintly.

“But even if we miss it we still have a chance,” Dugald went on imperturbably. “Jimmy’s standing by until this car gets back to the field. If we happen to go back with the car he’ll take off again with us and buzz us over to Garelochead. We can easily overtake the train. But the field I’m thinking of to land in is not too good—just beside the line it is—and I’d rather we caught the train at Dalmuir.”

“I hope we do,” said Jean, just in the slightest degree exasperated by his casual mention of these exciting possibilities.

“Of course,” Dugald mused, “the real idea would have been to use a boat rather than a land-machine—or better, an amphibian. Then we could have gone straight to Arisaig. I don’t know that it wouldn’t be a good idea to get Jimmy to bring up an amphibian, anyhow.”

“Bring up a flying-machine—a sea-plane!” cried Jean. “What on earth for?”

“Might come in handy—searching the loch, you know. You can see things on the sea-bed better from a height.”

“Macleavar is my name,” Jean said pointedly.

“Eh? What?” Dugald stared.

“Not Rothschild,” she elucidated scathingly. “I’m not a millionaire. I’m poor.”

“Oh—I—I wasn’t suggesting you should hire a ’plane,” Dugald stammered. “I ought to have a ’plane myself. You see, I’ve got my pilot’s ticket.”

“I gathered that from the way Mr. Warren let you take his place.”

“I’m also on the Reserve—”

“Oh, yes?”

“So why shouldn’t I have a ’plane if I want one? And why shouldn’t I use it to help in this affair?”

Jean was between wrath and amusement—wrath at his notion that she could accept so much from him, and amusement at his casual way of thinking of an aeroplane as if it were, say, of as much moment as a wrist-watch. Amusement won, for there welled up under it in her heart the warmest gratitude for his generous interpretation of his own promise to help her. She laughed in a choked sort of way.

“Are you so terribly rich, Dugald?” she asked.

“Gosh, yes, Jean! I’ve got oodles of money.”

The simple answer to her half-joking question brought the color to her face. The reply, quite unexpected as it was, made her question seem brazenly direct. To her relief they came to the ferry, and in the interest of that the discussion lapsed.

They had luck with the ferry. It was about to put out from the Renfrew side, so that they were delayed the minimum of time. And the ferry was not crowded, which meant that they got quickly away on the other side.

They tore along by the docks and shipyards, through the grimy streets of Clydebank. As they ran up to the station at Dalmuir they heard a train come rumbling behind them.

Dugald snapped open the door of the car and thrust a bundle of notes into Jean’s hand.

“Out with you, Jean!” he cried. “Run like billyo—two firsts Arisaig. I’ll come along with the cases!”

Jean jumped to it without argument. She was still being held at the ticket hatch when Dugald went pounding past her with the cases. The ticket-collector at the entrance grasped the situation and swung open the door for Dugald,

running out to signal to the guard, who was ready to get his train out of the empty station. Dugald snatched open the door of a first-class carriage and slung in the cases. Jean came running after him. He hoisted her into the carriage and jumped up himself and pulled the door to with a bang. Then he turned to Jean with a grin.

"Partner!" he chuckled, "we've done it!"

Jean did not answer. She was staring at the people at the opposite end of the compartment. Dugald followed her stare. The grin died on his lips.

Their fellow-passengers were José Vargas and the bilingual Spaniard.

IV

Of the four in the carriage Dugald was the first to regain composure.

"Remarkable migration of vermin northwards," he said to Jean, casually and aloud. "They must have got out of London early—very early. Caught the four-forty-five this morning from King's Cross, probably."

For a moment Jean gazed at him, wondering what he was up to. Then she caught his vein and settled into her corner with an air that completely denied the presence of the two conspirators.

"Complete clearance of the rats from the house near Epsom," Dugald went on. "Concentration in Edinburgh, perhaps. Well, what do we do about it?"

"Oh—whatever you think," said Jean.

Dugald brought out the pad he had used for communication in the aeroplane.

"I think a telegram from Helensburgh or Craigendoran to the police at Crianlarach—or better, Fort William—is the idea."

"Isn't there time to get one off to Helensburgh from the next station?" Jean asked, playing up to him.

"Why, of course," said Dugald. "The sooner the better. I'll see the station-master at the next stop."

He scribbled a word or two on the pad.

" 'Chief of Police, Helensburgh,' " he read aloud. " 'Two criminals wanted by London police on train leaving Glasgow three-forty-three this afternoon.' That should do it. But to give it more force I'll just borrow my father's title for a moment and sign the thing 'Morar.' "

He did not over-act the pretense by using tones that definitely would carry to the miscreants. He simply talked casually, using merely enough voice to make himself heard by Jean above the noise of the train. But enough must have carried to the pair to inform them of his supposed intention. They were casting uneasy glances at each other and at the cases on the rack.

"To make assurance doubly sure," Dugald went on, "we'll just send a duplicate to the police at Fort William."

Once more he wrote on a leaf of the pad. He tore both pages out and

handed the second to Jean.

Iain Macleavar, Torr Cottage, Arisaig

Arrive Arisaig ten-fifteen, Jean

she read.

She nodded in a satisfied sort of way and handed the paper back to Dugald.

"Yes," she said. "That should do very well."

"We'll see," said Dugald, and lit one of his rare cigarettes.

As the train went on they chatted casually about books, about the few objects of interest that could be seen in the gathering dusk, still ignoring the presence of the two men in the other corners. But they could see that the two ruffians were growing increasingly uneasy, fidgeting, and exchanging whispers.

The train ran into Bowling station. Dugald gathered the two messages and got a piece of money from his pocket. He lowered the window and leaned out, looking for an official.

There was a scuffle in the other corner. Both men were on their feet and hastily dragging their cases from the rack. They barged out into the corridor and fumbled with the lock of a door on that side. The train drew up in the station and they clambered down to the rails.

At Dugald's hail a porter sauntered over.

"Could you send a telegram for me?" Dugald asked.

"Wi' pleasure, sir!"

Dugald handed him the message to Iain and a coin.

"I don't think the railway allows passengers to get out of a train on the wrong side?" he suggested.

"Eh? Wha got oot on the wrang side?" the porter asked, his official propriety outraged.

"Oh, a couple of men who were in this carriage got down to the rails just now," Dugald explained. "Suspicious, I thought it. Foreigners, too!"

"We'll see aboot this!" said the porter sternly. "It's clean against a' the by-laws. We'll sort them for this, so we wull!"

"But don't forget my telegram!" Dugald urged.

“Ah’ll no forget, sir,” was the assurance, as the porter danced back to signal “all clear” to the guard. “Gettin’ aff a train on the aff side! Scandalous—jist scandalous!”

The train began to move out of the station. Dugald sank back into his seat and tore the pretended message to the police into fragments. He let the fragments fall outside, then pulled up the window.

“Worked nicely,” he grinned to Jean. “I do hope they don’t get out of the station on that side. It would be too bad if they escaped the wrath of that porter. It will tax their ingenuity to explain their caper to him!”

CHAPTER IX
THE PARCHMENT SCRAP

JEAN MACLEAVAR and Dugald completed the journey to Arisaig without any further appearance of the enemy. The boy Iain and Punchy Haggart were waiting on the platform, both in the best of health and completely unworried over the continued presence in the district of Stowe and Caldas. Beyond some attempt at trailing Iain and Punchy the gangsters had left the boy and his bodyguard alone. Indeed the latter pair had found a good deal of amusement in the attempts at sleuthing them. It had been an easy matter for Iain, with his instinct for and his knowledge of the country, to lead the gangsters on wild-goose chases, by devious paths, where they found themselves engulfed in peat hag and bog.

The only thing the boy complained about, once his carefully casual reception of his sister was over, was that the local policeman was inclined to fuss about him not being at school.

"Silly old fossil!" said Iain. "As if fellows much smaller than me hadn't left school long ago!"

Dugald and Punchy had escorted Jean and her brother to the cottage on Loch nan Cilltean, where they were lodging. Iain had ordered supper for the lot, and they were all sitting round the table in the lamplight. The boy appealed to Dugald.

"Do I look sixteen or not, Mr. Torrance?" he demanded. "The silly old fossil wouldn't believe I was over fifteen—said I was too small."

"Stand up and let me have a look at you, then," Dugald said solemnly.

The boy obeyed, and Dugald quite gravely turned a critical eye over him, up and down. He got up, poked the lad in the chest, fingered his biceps, walked round him.

"H'm!" he said finally. "You're a bit of lightweight, perhaps—but nothing to bother about. It's pretty good stuff. Bobby must be a fossil right enough, or he'd see you were up to standard. How much are you over fifteen?"

“Five weeks.”

“Tcha!” said Dugald. “I’ll bet you’ll be two inches taller by your next birthday and more than half a stone heavier. What do you say, Punchy?”

“Naethin’ surer. An’ he’ll be a pairfect Hercul’s by the time he’s twinty!”

“Punchy’s trying to pull my leg,” Iain grinned, with a beaming look at the little pugilist. “But you aren’t rotting, are you, Mr. Torrance?”

“Goodness, no!” said Dugald. “I thought you wanted an honest opinion, and I’ve given it to you.”

If he definitely wanted to win the boy’s friendship, which is more than likely, it seemed that he had gone the right way about it. Iain reddened with pleasure and grinned triumphantly at Jean. Apparently his slightness was a sore point with him.

Jean had to explain her trip to London, for through Punchy she had told of the urgency of that supposed telegram from Don Pio. She tried to minimize the danger she had been in, to make light of the whole kidnaping. She had thought of concealing the real truth from her brother, but she felt that he should be warned of the menace there was in the operations of the gang. But between the indignant Iain and the completely scandalized Punchy with their fire of questions, her intention of minimizing the Epsom episode rather failed.

Her gratitude to Dugald led her into a graphic description of the fight in the lonely house, and that got both Iain and Punchy to the point of almost yelling with excitement. It put the seal on the admiration that Iain had already conceived for the fighting Master of Morar.

Since the coming to Arisaig of Punchy Haggart, the boy, for safety’s sake, had been living with the boxer in the shooting-box up Glen Beasdale. This at Punchy’s suggestion. In his admiration not only for Dugald, but for Punchy too, and in his desire to keep close to these heroes, Iain was led to a naïve suggestion. It was that the lodgings by Loch nan Cilltean were not safe for Jean, and that they should both take up their quarters with Dugald and Punchy in Glen Beasdale. Jean colored a little, but smiled at Dugald.

“I don’t think that would do, Soorock,” she said to Iain.

“I don’t see why not,” the boy replied. “And I wish you wouldn’t call me that silly name, Jean!”

“We can’t invite ourselves to Mr. Torrance’s house like that,” said Jean, and perhaps to disperse some awkwardness that might be in the air she added lightly: “And I like calling you ‘Soorock.’

“I’ve called him that since he was a baby,” she explained to Dugald and Punchy.

“It’s a baby name—dash it,” cried Iain, and he appealed to the two men: “Isn’t it?”

“I don’t know so much about that,” said Dugald. “It has a mildly astringent flavor that hits you off pretty well, old lad. But turning to the question of coming up to Glen Beasdale—I must say there’s a good deal in the idea.”

He turned to Jean.

“Iain’s right in a way,” he said frankly. “We can’t expect that the rest of the gang will keep away from the district. Even with these two men here it is dangerous for you—and for Iain—to be so far away from Punchy and myself. It is a good hour and a half’s walk from here to the shooting-box. Think how long it would be, if anything happened, before news reached us and we could get here. It would add to our strength if we could concentrate. And of course you and Iain would be welcome in Glen Beasdale. With a fight on like this it would be silly to think too much of convention. There’s Iain, and there’s Mrs. Maclean—dear old stout Mrs. Maclean—and her daughter to play duennas.”

Jean looked doubtful.

“Oh, Jean—let’s!” urged Iain. “I don’t see what you’re hesitating about!”

“I don’t suppose you do, Iain—but—”

“Look at it this way, too,” Dugald pointed out. “From here to Loch nan Uamh you’ve either got to cover four miles of road, or else climb over the ridge to Camas Leathann, and that’s pretty dirty going. It will be worse if the weather breaks. Whereas from Glen Beasdale down to the shore is just about a mile—and decent going at that.”

“It seems silly to hesitate when it means a twelve-mile walk for you and Mr. Punchy—”

“Every time they come over to look after us. Perhaps twice or three times a day, Jean,” Iain elaborated.

“Never mind that,” said Dugald. “It’s the time between points. I’m scared for you both.”

“Dugald—I mean, Mr. Torrance—won’t bite you, Jean!” the boy cried.

Jean got to her feet.

“No,” she said, “Mr. Torrance won’t bite me, Iain. I know that—”

“Do you think Punchy and I could find rooms near you here?” Dugald asked, as she still hesitated. “I can easily close the box.”

“I won’t let you do that,” said Jean. “I’m a fool. I’ll come to Glen Beasdale—Iain and I—if you’d really like to have us, Dugald.”

“I’d like it—and it will be better that way,” Dugald replied.

“Hooray!” said Iain, and he and Punchy solemnly shook hands on it.

“Come, Punchy!” said Dugald. “We must get over to the hotel for to-night. By the way, do you know where these ruffians have settled? At the hotel?”

“They’re in one of the houses at Fountain Head,” the boy volunteered.

“And a nice strategic position, too,” commented Dugald. “We’ll almost have to pass them every day. However, we may get round that. Come along, Punchy!”

“Right, Mr. Torrance!”

“We’ll be over for you in the morning,” Dugald said to Jean. “I’ll get a car. We might as well make the move at once. I’ll go over early to Glen Beasdale and have Mrs. Maclean make ready. Good night, Jean! Good night, Iain! Look after your sister, old lad!”

Iain nodded the fealty he was too shy to express aloud. It came too near exhibiting emotion, that.

Dugald and Punchy went out into the dark and made their way to the hotel. But only apparently. When the beam of light that came from the cottage door, held open by Jean to illuminate their way, was cut off by the door’s shutting, the two men stopped to hold a small conference.

“Stowe and Caldas were lurking in the station when the train arrived,” said Dugald.

“Fine. Ah ken,” was the reply. “Ah saw them, tae.”

“Did they expect the arrival of the other two that we scared off the train? Or was it Miss Macleavar they were looking for?”

“There was a telegram cam’ for them aboot five-forty-five,” Punchy said significantly.

“Um!” said Dugald. “Then I’m afraid, old friend, that we won’t get to bed yet a while.”

“You can go tae bed, Mister Dugald. I had a nap in the aifternoon.”

“No. Thanks for the thought, Punchy—but we’ll both keep watch awhile.”

“Uhuh! Ye would say that, Mister Dugald,” Punchy grunted.

They patrolled the road by the cottage for some time. Perhaps it was as well they did, for some twenty minutes after they had left the cottage Punchy collared a man who was creeping quietly along by the garden wall. Punchy was too wise to “mix it” with his capture. He simply gave a quick jerk with a twist to the coat collar he had grasped, and the man went tripping over his foot, to fall with a thump on the puddled road. Dugald flashed an electric torch in the man’s face.

“You can get up, Mr. Stowe,” he said quietly.

“Blast and blast you!” panted Stowe. “You’ll pay sweetly for this!”

“What! Haven’t you found another topic of conversation yet?” chuckled Dugald. “Where’s friend Caldas?”

“Nowhere about,” snarled the other. “I wish he was—to set about you!”

“Not *in vino*—but *in ira veritas*,” said Dugald. “You’re a poor plotter, Stowe. Learn to play poker, will you? Let him go, Punchy. Caldas isn’t about.”

Punchy stood back with Dugald, and Stowe got to his feet. With a muttered curse he sped off into the darkness.

“And so to bed,” said Dugald. “Nice weather, Punchy, for the autumn maneuvers!”

II

The good people of Arisaig and district were already in church before Dugald got back from Glen Beasdale, whither he had gone to inform Mrs. Maclean of her new charge.

“The old lady—Mrs. Maclean, that is—is delighted,” he told Jean. “The Glen is a bit lonely for her and her daughter. We can go over as soon as you like.”

“We’re almost ready, Iain and I,” said Jean.

“Then I’ll go and fetch the car I’ve ordered.”

“What about my motor-bike?” asked Jean. “If you take over Iain and the luggage I’ll follow you up on the bike.”

Dugald shook his head.

“I can’t let you do that,” he said, and broke off. “I’m sorry, Jean—I’m bossing you again!”

Jean smiled at him.

“You must boss me, Dugald,” she said. “So far, whenever you’ve wanted to boss me, you’ve been right—and I’ve been wrong. But tell me why I shouldn’t run the bike over to Glen Beasdale?”

“You’ve got to pass Fountain Head. Caldas and Stowe are there. We don’t know what they might be up to, you know. Better let Punchy follow us on the motor-cycle.”

It was done as Dugald arranged. About noon they were all installed in the lodge under Sithean Mor. Until lunch Jean was occupied in arranging the rather bare room allotted to her, and in setting out her brother’s things in the sort of bunk-room that he insisted on sharing with Punchy. Bustling round her, like a fat hen with an adopted chick, was stout Mrs. Maclean. Her daughter, Màiri, a sturdy lass with freckles and flaming red hair, found every chance that came to wander out of the kitchen and have another look at the visitors.

“Ach, now!” complained Mrs. Maclean. “If Mr. Tugald hed chist gifen us notiss we might have hed a nice lunch for ye. But ass it is, there’s naething put speldings simmered in milk and putter, wi’ a poached egg or twa forpye!”

“There are no fish I’m fonder of than speldings, Mrs. Maclean,” Jean

soothed her, “especially when they’re simmered in milk and butter and have a poached egg with them.”

Though Mrs. Maclean mourned the fact that there could be no “putcher’s meat” in the house until next day, and that her housekeeping was thus disgraced, the lunch she provided might have satisfied a king. Doctor Johnson expatiated on the spelding, a fish looking something like the finnan-haddock, but cured by the mere dipping in sea-water and exposure to the sun. Cooked in the generous Highland fashion it is ambrosial. Extreme politeness in dealing with the spelding is mere folly. One must chase the last drop of its liquor with a spoon!

After lunch, while Punchy and Iain went off on what the former called “some ploy” of their own, Jean took Dugald for a walk. She wanted to show him something, she told him, aside.

“Mrs. Maclean is a dear!” she said, as they walked down the glen, “and Màiri is another! Where did you find such treasures?”

“Mrs. Maclean was with my folks as a girl,” said Dugald. “She left us to be married, but her husband was killed in the War and she came back to us.”

“She’s a dear!” Jean repeated. “I’m going to be happy in Glen Beasdale.”

Dugald merely said formally that he hoped so, but he wished he had the pluck to offer her Glen Beasdale happiness for life. He was afraid, however. There was a casualness in Jean’s friendly treatment of him that bade him avoid precipitation in expressing the desire that was fast burgeoning in his heart and mind. He was glad to think that he had progressed in her confidence. She had told him that he must “boss” her. He hugged to that.

“Where now?” he asked, as they reached the road which, at the point where the burn met it, forked off in the legs of a hairpin bend.

“I’ll be guided by you,” said Jean. “Take your own way to Prince Charlie’s Cave.”

Dugald led the way obediently. They left the road and descended to the shore of Loch nan Uamh through the wood by paths that Jean had never dreamt of. For about half an hour they walked in the unembarrassed silence of understanding companionship, then they came out by the little green strath that lay beside Dugald’s favorite coign on Rudh Ard Ghamshgail.

“There’s the point I whistled from last Tuesday,” said Dugald.

“Was it only last Tuesday, Dugald?” Jean commented. “Five days ago! What a lot has happened in that little time! And you have a hidey place on top

of those rocks?”

“You shall see it presently. Over the burn here for the Prince’s Cave.”

“I know now where I am,” said Jean.

At the other side of the green flat, some distance inland from the water’s edge, rose the tree-crowned scaur in which the cave was hid. Without guidance it would be impossible for the passer-by to discover any cleft in the rock, which is tortured and hewn almost to the point of fantasy. One must clamber up by a hardly defined and twisting path, over rocks, before one comes to the cave entrance about fifteen feet above the strath level. The entrance is simply a hole big enough to let an average-sized man get in feet first. One has to enter feet first, for the cave dips down inside.

Jean found a piece of candle on a ledge just inside the entrance hole. She dropped into the cave and held out the candle-end for Dugald to light it. Dugald followed her.

There was hardly room for the pair of them to stand abreast, for though there was head-room the cave widened little beyond the width of Dugald’s shoulders. It extended, winding, into the ground perhaps a little under twenty feet, and at the far end was a sloping bank—the only dry place in the cave.

“I always imagine the poor Prince lying on that stony bank,” said Jean. “I can almost see him there, wrapped in his plaid, ready to start up at the first alarm like a deer from the bracken. Poor Prince Charlie! To think of him landing on this very shore from that French ship *Du Teillay*, and marching on, full of high hope, to plant his standard in Glenfinnan. Then, just a year afterwards, all hope lost and all his ambition frustrated, lying here like a hunted beast, waiting for the French ship to take him away!”

Jean sighed, with a far-away look in her eyes, then she shrugged.

“Ah, well,” she said abruptly. “We aren’t here to sigh over Bonnie Prince Charlie. Would you mind holding the candle, Dugald?”

Dugald did so, and she climbed to the top of the bank. High up in a narrow split in the rock to one side she fumbled for a moment. Then she slipped something small from the crevice into her pocket.

“Let’s get out, Dugald,” said she. “Where can we go that we won’t be disturbed? I can show you the parchment now.”

“Good life!” Dugald exclaimed. “You hadn’t it hidden in here, had you?”

“Where else would be as safe?”

“There might be visitors about—”

“Not this time of year. Besides,” said Jean, “nobody’d dream of searching in that crevice.”

“I don’t know so much about that. Supposing one of the gang had seen you dodging about this scaur of rock. The cave is marked on some maps. Well, mightn’t they think of the cave; and having thought of the cave, mightn’t they search every nook and cranny of it on the idea that you’d hid the papers there?”

“What a horrid idea, Dugald!” Jean quivered. “They’d never have thought to search that crevice. You can’t see it until you’re right hugged into the farthest angle of the cave.”

“You never know. If they got the idea to search, you can bet they’d search thoroughly. Frankly, it was a sort of daft idea.”

“You think it daft?” Jean said sweetly. “A silly girl’s idea?”

“Well—” Dugald hesitated. He expected a storm.

“It just shows how clever I am,” Jean went on, unruffled. “The daftness of the thing is its justification. Too daft for a lot of box-headed men to imagine!”

“Huh!” said Dugald. “That’s over the knuckles, if you like!”

They were at the mouth of the cave. Dugald clambered out first, so that he could give Jean a hand. But when he got out into the open he turned, still crouching, with a low hiss and a finger to his mouth.

“Listen!” he whispered.

Voices came up to them from the dell below the cave—men’s voices. They came nearer, were right under the cave, and seemed to stop under the cave. Then they went on. Dugald held out a hand to Jean.

“Quietly, now!” he warned her. And he pulled her up.

“Caldas!” he whispered. “And I do believe the other was Vargas. I’ll see. Don’t move, Jean—I’ll be back in a little.”

He crept down the path like a cat, and Jean marveled that a man of his size could move so quickly, and yet lightly enough not to disturb a stone. Jean waited, with the beat of her heart throbbing in her throat. The idea of Vargas so near brought back something of the terror that had encompassed her in the house near Epsom—how long ago?—not forty-eight hours. Minutes passed, and then she heard a low whistle. Dugald was giving her Hamish’s call, *Bha mi’n raoir an choille*. A second or two later he was by her side as if he had

sprung out of the ground.

"It was Vargas all right—Vargas and Caldas," he told her. "He must have come up by car during the night—probably he brought the other fellow with him. We'll see. At the moment they're making up by the coppice towards Drumdarroch. You wanted to go somewhere where we'd be undisturbed. Well, we can nip over now to Rudh Ard Ghamshgail and climb to my eyrie. They can't see us get there for a minute or two, and once we're there we can be as quiet as we like and watch them at the same time. How about that?"

Jean nodded.

A minute or two later they were in the rock-cup at the top of the little promontory. For a little Dugald watched the movements of the two gangsters.

"Ah!" he said presently. "They've left the loch-side, and are making up through the woods. They're going to Fountain Head most likely. We're quit of them for a bit, anyhow. Now, Jean, if you like—the parchment!"

Jean brought a small package from her pocket, a packet about the size of patience playing-cards wrapped in oiled silk. She undid the tape that held the thing together, and produced a folded scrap of parchment. She flattened it on her knee and held it out to Dugald.

"This," she said, "is the parchment that's been handed down from father to son of the Macleavars since the end of the sixteenth century."

III

It was a strange scrap of a document that Dugald was fingering. A dog-eared, triangular scrap of parchment packed close with a curious script that varied between neatness and disorder, as if a normally excellent writer had penned it under some sort of stress. The script in its style was marvelous for the time at which the parchment was said to have been penned, and for the place—Scotland. This old Peadar Mac Leabhar must have been a notable clerk, for his script had a definite pattern in all its letters. Old Peadar, thought Dugald, must have known something of the early printing introduced by the Germans into the country of his forefathers, Spain.

Dugald conned the scrap with intense interest. It was amazing to think that it had been written by a man, dead probably some four hundred years, but from whose blood this girl beside him was fetched. He tried to conjure up in his mind a picture of the patriarch, and for the life of him could see no face but that of Don Pio, the Conde de Torreblasco. He could see no figure but that of Don Pio. He saw the Conde, bearded, standing by a high desk, patiently setting down the words that now stared brownly from the parchment.

"It's a marvelous thing—the whole story, Jean," Dugald murmured. "What history beyond this of the treasure of Loch nan Uamh has this scrap of sheepskin carried? See!"

He held the scrap up to the light.

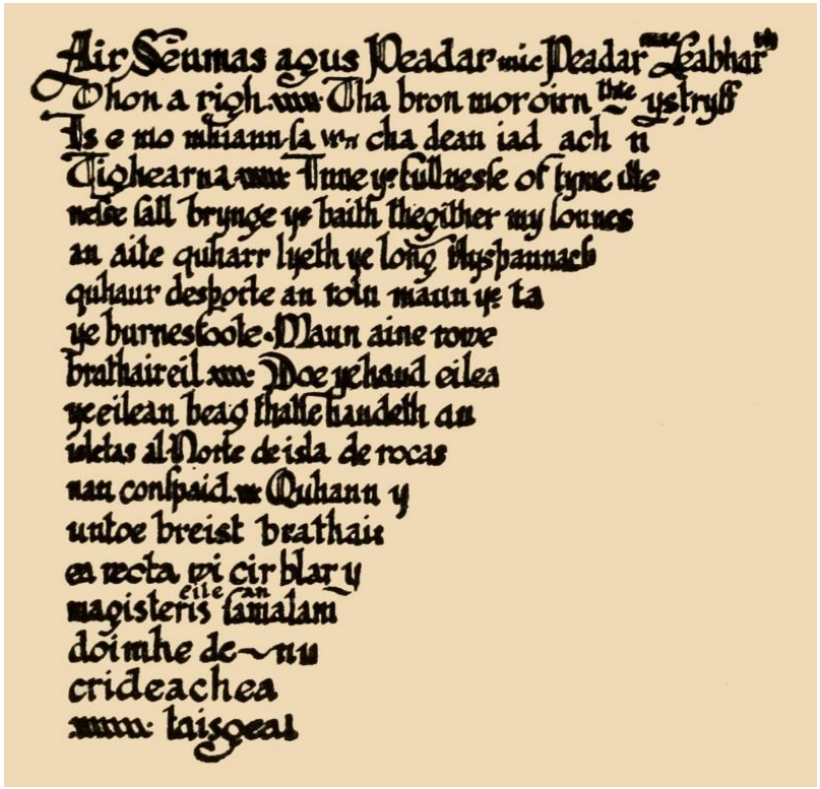
"What is it?" asked Jean, bewildered.

"It is palimpsest. Something that was on here has been rubbed off to make room for the loch secret."

"I never noticed that before," Jean murmured. "Yes, I can see traces of a writing underneath. You are quick-eyed, Dugald."

"Well, let us see what it's all about," said Dugald.

He spread the scrap on his knees and fell to deciphering the writing. The message had been cut in two, almost diagonally. What was left of it seemed a hardly comprehensible mixture of Gaelic, Scots, and Spanish—with one word of Latin.



" 'On James and Peter, the sons of Peter, Son of the Book'," Dugald translated. "The cut word of the first line seems to be 'bh' something. It might be a lot of things—'bha,' 'were', 'bho', 'from'—let's say 'from.'

"Next line: 'Ohon a righ'—'Alas! Great sorrow is on us'; then it goes into English: 'thatte ystryff.' Looks like the old boy's attempt at spelling 'strife.'

"This third line—there's a blob in the middle—but it seems to go: 'It is my wish—blob—they do not but n-something.'

"Line four: 'Tighearna—the Lord. In the fullness of time it—'

"Line five: 'something-ness shall bring you baith together, my sons—'

"Line six, Gaelic and Scots again: 'The place where lyeth the long'—phew! here's a word, 'Hyspannach—' "

" 'The long Spanish ship,' perhaps," Jean suggested.

"No, 'long' is Gaelic for 'ship.' If the word had been meant for English it would have been spelt archaic fashion," said Dugald.

"Line seven: 'where the seals disport you must ta—' probably, 'take.'

“Line eight: ‘the burn-foot. One must—’ What’s this?—‘One must rome’?

“I made it out to be ‘rowe’—row—like a boat,” said Jean.

“You’ve got it, I think,” Dugald agreed. “Next line we come to Gaelic once more—‘brathaireil’—‘brotherly.’ Then a decoration. ‘Do ye hold eilea—’ obviously ‘island’ or ‘islands.’

“Line ten: ‘the little island that holdeth the—’

“Line eleven: ‘little islands to the north of the island of rocks—’

“Line twelve, Gaelic again: ‘of the dispute. When y—’ probably ‘ye.’

“Line thirteen: ‘Untoe breist brathair—’ ‘Breist’ is a corker! It floors me. Might be Gaelic for ‘break’ or ‘broken.’ ‘Unto broken brother—’ ”

“It never struck me as being Gaelic,” said Jean. “I took it simply to be the Scots for ‘breast’—so that gives us ‘unto breast brother—something.’ ”

“Why, of course,” Dugald agreed. “The old boy keeps on urging his sons to be reconciled. ‘Unto breast brotherly,’ perhaps.

“Line fourteen, then. This is Latin or Spanish, Scots, and Gaelic. ‘Ea’ looks like the end of a word, then ‘recta’ is an adjective qualifying it. Latin or Spanish, ‘linea recta’ would seem most feasible. ‘In straight line,’ perhaps, ‘with white-spotted of face chest y-something,’ may be ‘and’ or ‘ye.’

“Next line, Latin: ‘of the master, island samalam—’ Why, Eilean Samalaman is over by Glenluig in Ardnish. You can barely see it from here. ‘Magisteris’? Follow my finger, Jean,” said Dugald, pointing over to Ardnish. “Do you make out the line of an island under the land?”

“Yes, I do,” said Jean.

“Then just a little to the left—do you see that hump on the hills behind?”

“Just the tiniest bit to the left?”

“Oh, less than five degrees!”

“I don’t understand that, but I see the hill you mean!”

“That’s Beinn a Bàillidh, the hill of the bailiff or bailie—or magistrate if you like. This looks like our first real clew. This, with the crest with the white-spotted face, should lead us somewhere.

“Line sixteen: ‘depth of nu—something.’ The line after, the old boy is back to his plea for reconciliation, perhaps, for ‘crideachea—’ most obviously is ‘hearts.’ The last word might be anything. The cut letter might be ‘d’ or ‘g,’

which would give us ‘taisgeal,’ meaning ‘a journey’ or ‘voyage,’ or ‘taisgeadan’ for ‘treasure-house.’ There’s another word—‘taisgeal’—which means ‘the finding of something lost.’ But since we know the idea of the message, let’s fix on ‘treasure.’

“Now let’s see,” said Dugald, bringing out his small writing pad, “just what we have, line for line.”

He wrote rapidly:

On James and Peter, the sons of Peter, Son of the Book, from . . .
Alas! Great sorrow is on us that strife . . .
It is my wish . . . they do not but . . .
The Lord. In the fullness of time it . . .
ness shall bring you both together, my sons . . .
the place where lies the Spanish ship . . .
where the seals disport you must take . . .
the burn-foot. One must row . . .
brotherly. Do you hold the island . . .
the little island that holds the . . .
little islands to the north of the island of rocks . . .
of dispute ye . . .
unto breast brotherly . . .
in straight line with the crest of the white-spotted face . . .
Bailie’s Hill the Samalaman Island
depth of (say) below . . .
hearts . . .
treasure. . . .

“Is that substantially what you made of it?” he asked Jean.

“I was not half so clever,” she smiled. “I never thought, for instance, of ‘magisteris’ in connection with Beinn a Bàillidh.”

“You don’t know the country as well as I do,” said Dugald. “We have no information here that it’s Loch nan Uamh that’s referred to. Seals disport in Loch nan Cilltean as well.”

“We’ve always thought of the ship as in this loch—and Hamish definitely said Loch nan Uamh.”

“Then there’s local tradition,” Dugald agreed. “Well, if it is Loch nan Uamh, you were about the right spot when you were in the boat last Tuesday. From the ‘row’ that comes in the next line we may guess that the thing one must ‘take’ is a boat. You take it at the burn-foot. The burn referred to might be the Borrodale or the Beasdale, or even the Màma or the Arnipol burns. But you’ve got to hold an island in the next line, and then there’s the little island that holds something, and three little islands to the north of the rocky island. The rocky island surely is Eilean an Sgòrr. It has three little islands to the north

of it. There wouldn't be all that fuss about islands if your line was outside them—all the islands, with the exception of Eilean na Gobhlaig, being well over to the north shore. The nearest little island to the three little islands is that next to Garbh Eilean—"

"There's Eilean an Trì below Camas Drollaman," Jean reminded him.

"I'm not forgetting that Island of Three," said Dugald. "I had it in mind. Because, you see, if you draw a line from the burn-foot—we always talk of the Borrodale mouth as the 'burn-foot'—to Eilean an Trì, you pass pretty well between the three islands above Eilean an Sgòrr, and the little island that hugs —or 'haudeth' An Garbh Eilean. Now it is just possible that on that line you come to a point where you get Samalaman Island in line with the Bailie's Hill, and at the same time can see the crest with the white-spotted face. And, by Jove!" Dugald exclaimed, "there's a possible explanation of the 'untoe breist'! Standing breast to breast, one brother was to see the Samalaman Island and the other the white-spotted crest!"

"Oh, Dugald!" cried Jean. "If you should be right!"

"We can try it, anyhow—to-morrow," said Dugald. "Now, if you please, may I have a look at your brother's paper?"

Jean took a second paper from the oiled silk package and handed it to him.

"There isn't much to be made of it," she said mournfully. "That beastly violet pencil!"

"Never mind," Dugald consoled her. "The littlest thing may be a valuable clew."

But indeed there was little to be got from the scrap torn from Hamish's note-book. His writing, very minute in any case and written in haste, had been so blurred by the rain acting on the violet ink that hardly a word was decipherable.

"I can make out, I think," said Dugald, as he peered at the scrap, "something about 'papers.' "

"There?" asked Jean, with a finger on a particular spot.

"That's it. Then there's this—'glass,' it looks like—'g-l-a-s,' anyhow. Did Hamish have the Gaelic?"

"Oh, yes. Languages were pie to Hamish."

"Well, this 'glas' may be Gaelic for 'gray.' Of course! He's referring to An Glas Eilean. That's just on our suggested line. Then there's 'allows.' I can't

make out whether that's a whole word or just part of a word. The blots are so thick about it."

"It might be 'shallows,' " Jean suggested.

"It might indeed," Dugald agreed. "Though old Peter uses 'depth,' this might well be some clew from 'shallows.' Well, then. Here comes 'aunch,' 'olsche,' 'goir,' 'broken-up and sli-,' '-rth-eas',' that's obviously 'north-east.' I say, Jean," he broke off, "might I have this to study for a bit?"

"I'd rather you kept it for me altogether, Dugald," Jean said, "and the parchment too. And I don't want you even to tell me what you do with them—where you hide them."

"It might be better to destroy them," Dugald suggested.

"Oh, no!" Jean said hastily, "we won't do that, Dugald!"

"Very well, then. I'll keep them safe. But I'm sure the parchment is as plain in your mind as if you were looking at it—and Hamish's paper too."

"Absolutely," said Jean.

"Right. Then I'm going to study Hamish's paper to see if I can get any sense out of it, and I'll get the parchment off by heart, too. When that's done I'll put both away safely. But thank you for trusting me, Jean!"

"No, no! It's thank you for being so dependable, Dugald!" she cried. "I don't know how I'm ever going to repay your kindness."

"Don't you try," grinned Dugald.

He grinned to hide the fact that his heart had begun to jump at this new proof of her trust in him, and of her gratitude. The luster in her eyes as she turned to him made his head swim. So, lest he should betray his secret too soon, he merely grinned in deprecation of her thanks. He stowed the oiled silk packet in an inside pocket. He carefully burned the transcript he had made from the parchment, then he got on his knees to spy out the land about them. Nothing was stirring that was human. He held out his hand to her to help her down from the eyrie.

"Better get back now, Jean," he suggested. "We can get over to Camas Leathann early to-morrow and try out this theoretical line. Your boat's still there?"

She nodded. They clambered down over the rocks and struck up through the woods by the way they had come to the shore. And there was silence between them once again.

When they reached the bend in the road where they must cross it to go up Glen Beasdale two men suddenly appeared round the curve from the direction of Arisaig.

If they had been members of the gang, Dugald, absorbed in his own thoughts, would almost have been caught napping. But the two men were strangers. It was obvious, moreover, that they were strangers in the district. Both were bearded, and their clothes looked foreign-made. The backward cant of their soft hats was foreign. Their cheekbones were prominent and high, their noses broad, their eyes aslant and narrow, and their skins were sallow and tallow colored.

They stared hard at Dugald and Jean as they went past at a quick walk which was almost a shuffle. Dugald returned their scrutiny, and watched them round the turn.

“More foreigners in quiet Arisaig,” he said.

“What were they, Dugald? Not Spaniards, surely?”

He shook his head, and the further reaches of the Baltic came into his mind.

“Northerners,” he said. “Riga, or the Gulf of Finland somewhere. I wonder what brings them to Arisaig?”

“So do I,” said Jean. “But I don’t care as long as they aren’t Spaniards.”

CHAPTER X
THE BRUSH WITH THE RUSS

PONDER as he might over it, Dugald could make little more of Hamish's paper than he had in the rock-cup of Rudh Ard Ghamshgail. He held it close to a lamp to see if a close, strong light would bring up any of the blotted words, but without success. He turned the paper about and gently rubbed it with black-lead, hoping that the pressure of the pencil had set some of the letters in relief; but here again he failed. Hamish was a delicate writer. That was the whole trouble. If he had written a large fist, with strong pressure, a good deal more of his message would have remained. But even in the haste of that night in the Edinburgh garden his writing had remained small and light. The rain had simply wiped it out.

Dugald thought he could make out the remains of a few additional words, such as "-egotia-," which he decided was either "negotiable" or "negotiate." But these remains were so far apart that they were of slight use to him when he tried to imagine the general tenor of the message. It was Hamish's opinion, he thought, that the galleon had piled up in some shallows, but had broken up and slipped back, apparently into deep water.

Loch nan Uamh abounded in shallows. The under-water contours of the map that Dugald had—it was not a particularly good one, for he had trusted in his own knowledge—showed the ten and five fathom lines generally close inshore, but round the island formations the shallows speared out from the land, mere ridges tying up the peaks that the islands were. A considerable drop in the water-level would have left the loch divided into three distinct long arms of the sea.

But, generally speaking, a ship wrecking itself in the loch would most likely pile up among the islets that clustered by the north shore. On anything but a south-westerly wind a ship driven helpless would run clear of the loch altogether. It would pile up well outside. The configuration of the coast-line made this clear. But once inside the loch, if the carrying wind held, the certainty was that a ship would run ashore on the islands.

The little archipelago was no more than a mile and a half long, and about

half a mile wide. Thorough dragging operations round it needed to be neither extraordinarily difficult nor prolonged. If, however, the ship had slipped back into deep water, then there was no saying how long or difficult the finding of it would be. If it had broken up too badly the finding of it might be nigh impossible.

All these possibilities and conditions were in Dugald's mind when, next morning, the Monday, he went over with Jean to Arisaig in order to cross the hill to Camas Leathann, where her boat was tied up. He drove over on Jean's motor-cycle, carrying Jean behind him a-pillion. Iain was left with Punchy in Glen Beasdale, and these two were to come down to the loch to join the others some time later. They were to look out for the car which Dugald was going to send back to Beasdale Burn-foot with the new dragging apparatus which Jean had ordered in Glasgow, and which was now lying in the goods-office of Arisaig railway station. They were to take delivery of the stuff where the road skirted the lake at Beasdale Burn-foot, and wait there on the shore until Jean and Dugald should have pulled the boat the four miles or so from Camas Leathann.

Having made arrangements for the delivery of the gear, Dugald and Jean went along to the point where the peninsula dividing Loch nan Cilltean from Loch nan Uamh was narrowest. They left the motor-cycle at the cottage where Jean had been lodging, and set out to climb the hill.

As they went Dugald explained his theories regarding the probable position of the lost galleon, and Jean agreed to the plan of action he suggested. They crested the hill and began to descend toward the cove where the boat lay. Dugald took the chance to point out the position of the islands which seemed to be mentioned in the parchment. He suddenly found Jean, whose interest had been as deep as his own, letting her attention wander. She was looking speculatively out to sea.

"Perhaps I'm talking nonsense," he suggested dryly.

"I'm sorry, Dugald. It's that steamer I'm thinking about—"

"Steamer?" said Dugald, and turned to follow the direction of her gaze. "What stea—?"

He broke off. Round by the outermost islands of the loch, the series of half-tide rocks known as Eilean an Trì, a small steamer was swinging into the sea-arm. At the three miles distance its rig was distinctly foreign. It was all hold, apparently, for the funnel and deck-housing were lumped astern right over the counter. The stack was very thin and tall, and the mast was a goal-post arrangement straddling the deck between the two long holds forward, a mere

support for the derricks that served the holds. She was in light ballast, seemingly, for the dirty red below the Plimsoll was largely out of the water. Indeed, her propeller blades were breaking the surface.

"A queer tub for these waters," Dugald commented. "What's she doing here?"

"That's what I was wondering," said Jean. "You don't see steamers like that even in the summer."

"Funny! She's making right into the loch. There's no place here where she'd be likely either to pick up or discharge a cargo. Her master may have made a mistake, or else he thinks there's anchorage here that will save him harbor dues. His saving instinct may cost him dear if it comes on to blow. With that amount out of water he might easily be blown on shore. However, it's none of our business, Jean. Let's get down to the bay."

They launched the boat and rowed out until they came to a line on which they could see, between the little island that hugged An Garbh Eilean and the three others above Eilean an Sgòrr, the point of Rudh Ard Ghamshgail beside which the Borrodale Burn ran into the sea.

"You see," said Dugald, "Eilean an Trì is on the line too. Keep me heading for Rudh Ard Ghamshgail. I'll row from Eilean an Trì. When we get to the position where Samalaman Island is under Beinn a Bàillidh we'll stop and see if we can spot anything that looks like a cock's crest, white-spotted on its face. I don't remember anything like that, but it may be some quite familiar object that struck your respected great-great-great that way."

He rowed on easily with the short clipping strokes of the practised coble-man. For a mile and a half he rowed, till he was well in among the islands of the little archipelago. Outside the island cluster the small steamer had passed him and gone up the loch. They heard her anchor go down, and they could see her lying-to some distance off their own objective, Rudh Ard Ghamshgail.

"That's a bit of a nuisance, Jean," said Dugald. "Or at least it will be if she's going to lie there very long. We'll have the whole crew leaning over the rail to watch us."

"Bother them!" Jean said. "What do they want to pick on our loch for?"

Dugald laughed.

"Maybe they're smugglers," he suggested.

"If they are they're very barefaced about it."

“H’m!” said Dugald. “I say,” he went on, after a pause, “we don’t seem to have any luck about the crest with the white-spotted face. And we’re going a long way before we put Samalaman Island under the Bailie’s Hill. If the galleon drove as far in as this she can’t be in very deep water. And driving in here must have been pretty near a miracle.”

“Do you think we’re off the track? Couldn’t she have got in here?”

“Oh, yes. There’s close on thirty feet of water here. But how she got in on this line without hitting anything beforehand was a wonder. Still, it might have happened. The sea plays strange tricks. Anyhow, if she drove in as far as this there’s a better chance that she’s still here.”

“Look, Dugald!” Jean broke in. “Wouldn’t you say that sticking up bit of rock looked like a cock’s comb?”

“That one in line with Doire Fhada?”

“Yes. There’s a patch or two of white on it, too.”

“It might be. I was looking for something bigger than that. Let’s row along farther till we get our other bearing. It doesn’t seem right, somehow. By the time we’re in line with the island and Bailie’s Hill, we’ll hardly be able to see that for the bulk of An Garbh Eilean.”

He rowed on farther.

“Now,” he said after a while, “we have Samalaman Island in line with the peak of the Bailie’s Hill. We can just see it round the end of Eilean an Sgòrr. And, by Jove!” he added, “that rock looks more like a cock’s comb than ever from here. The only thing is that it isn’t terribly white-spotted on its face.”

“Maybe the white parts have worn off in the course of time,” Jean suggested.

“That’s more than likely in four hundred years. The white parts may have been some softer stone in the basalt. We’ll have a look at it when we come back.”

He leaned forward on the rough oars, and pointed humorously with a rigid finger through the floor-boards, as it were, to the loch depths.

“Doubloons, Jean!” he chuckled. “Pieces of eight, emeralds, amethysts, and gold moidores!”

“Oh, don’t joke about it, Dugald!” cried Jean, her eyes ablaze with excitement. “Let’s hurry up and come back with the apparatus. I feel I can’t wait a minute longer to start the search!”

Dugald unshipped an oar and passed it aft to the tholes nearer Jean.

“Come along, then!” he smiled. “Give me a hand at stroke and set your own pace. But don’t catch any crabs!”

If Jean’s look had expressed real feeling rather than comic make-believe he had shriveled to the size of a dried lentil.

II

As they rowed to the point where the Mallaig-Fort William road hugged the loch they had to pass the anchored steamer. The name on her bows was in strange lettering.

“Greek?” asked Jean, over her shoulder.

“No—Russian,” Dugald replied. “That may explain the presence of the two men we saw yesterday. The steamer may have been at Mallaig.”

They rowed under the steamer’s bows. Two men came forward from the poop to look down at them interestedly over the rail. Presently a third man joined the two, and the three quite openly discussed the rowers.

“We’ve apparently made an impression, Jean,” said Dugald.

“M’m! I feel like a circus performer,” Jean said. “I wish they’d go away—bother them!”

“They can’t stay very long,” Dugald soothed her. “There’s no business for them round here. How can there be?”

“That’s just what makes me uneasy,” said Jean.

“Uneasy? Why?”

“I don’t know. I suppose it’s because I don’t want any strangers here at the moment,” she excused herself. “I don’t like Russians. I don’t like any foreigners just now. I’m on edge, perhaps, about the search.”

“They won’t interfere with us. Besides, we do our dragging to begin with where Eilean nan Cabar will screen us from them. We can really go ahead without bothering about them.”

“I’m a jumpy fool!” said Jean. She cast a glance over her shoulder to the shore. “Punchy and Iain are waiting for us, and they’ve got the stuff. There’s a big bundle at their feet.”

“Good!”

They beached at the meeting-place beside the mouth of the Beasdale Burn. Iain and Punchy came down to the water’s edge from the road, hauling with them coils of ropes, nets, and a tangle of oddly shaped irons. The boy was full of news.

“You should have been here quarter of an hour ago, you two,” he said. “This place is simply jumping with foreigners. There’s a new man with the other two—Stowe and Caldas. The three of them tried to stop Angus Neish, the motor-chap, with our stuff up at Fountain Head, so Angus said. But Angus wasn’t having any. He drove past them, being in a hurry to get down here with the stuff as you told him.”

“We knew about that third man, Iain,” said Dugald, with a look at Jean. “I don’t suppose they knew the stuff was ours. Probably they only wanted a lift.”

“Perhaps,” said Iain, “but did you see the two men that went out to that funny-looking steamer in a boat?”

“When?”

“A few minutes ago. They came round the bend of the road from Lochailort direction, soon after Angus had left the stuff with us. The steamer had just dropped her anchor, and they waved to her. They were funny-looking chaps, with flat sort of noses and greasy, yellowy faces, and they both had beards. After the first good look they had at us they didn’t bother much about Punchy and me. But they had a jolly good look at the irons and stuff—hadn’t they, Punchy?”

“Uhuh! They were terrible interested in thae ropes an’ things,” Punchy agreed. “Ah thocht for a minute Ah’d hae tae gi’e yin o’ them a daud on the lug—jist tae teach them tae min’ their ain business.”

“Well, well—and what then?” said Dugald.

“Oh, they stood and jabbered in some foreign lingo for a bit—about the irons and stuff, it seemed to be,” the boy replied. “Then a boat came from the steamer for them and they went out to it. You just missed seeing the boat by a second or two.”

“H’m!” said Dugald. “The steamer would be right in our line of sight as we came round by the Borrodale Burn-foot. Well, let’s get this stuff into the boat. Most likely there’s nothing in the affair but mere curiosity on the part of the Russian sailormen. Come along, boys. Let’s get this stuff aboard!”

They piled the truck into the stern of the coble, pushed her out, and while Punchy and Iain rowed them back toward the island group Dugald and Jean sorted out the apparatus. When they passed the Russian steamer they again had a gallery on the ship’s rail, four men this time, and Dugald and Jean now recognized two of them as the men they had passed on the road on Sunday afternoon.

“Those are the two who went out in the boat,” said Iain, “that two on the right. Greasy blighters!”

“Why, whatever have they done to you, Iain, that you should be so venomous?” Dugald chuckled.

“Blinking Bolshevists!” said Iain. “I just don’t like them. Go on, you!” he apostrophized the onlookers at the steamer’s rail, *sotto voce*. “Have a good look, will you? It should interest you to look at people who use soap!”

“Dinna thae aliens use soap, then, Iain?” asked Punchy from the bow.

“Not to wash with, Punchy,” Iain replied over his shoulder. “They use it to fry chops in. They rub it on their bread.”

“Keck-keck-keck!” Punchy exploded. He tugged with his oar at the empty air and fell off his thwart.

“Gosh, Punchy!” Iain turned on him severely. “What do you want to do that for?”

“Ah didnae go for to do it, Iain,” apologized Punchy. “Ye made me laugh jist as Ah wis playin’ ‘spung!’ wi’ the oar at the water!”

“Spoiling the procession—before a lot of soapless aliens, too! I’m surprised at you, Punchy!” said Iain. “Get up, man!”

Punchy came nimbly erect, and grasped manfully at his oar. The men at the ship’s rail remained unmoved by his antics.

“If it appears to you,” Iain apostrophized them once more, “that the able seaman in the bows caught a crab, you turnip-faced swabs, you’re wrong! Able Seaman Haggart was just about to play ‘spung!’ at the water when, unfortunately, I told him about you. If you think a man can play ‘spung!’ properly while thinking about you, just go and look at the weird things on your necks. At the top of your necks, I mean. The things you probably call faces—”

“Soorock!” Jean protested.

Iain ignored her, and turned to the grinning Punchy.

“Do you know why these melon-faced snoots all wear beards, Punchy?”

“Ah gi’e it up.”

“They simply daren’t shave. They look so like cheeses that they just can’t help cutting themselves.”

“Keck-keck-keck!” bleated Punchy.

“Don’t encourage him, Mr. Punchy!” Jean pleaded. “I don’t know where he picks it all up.”

“Picks it up!” echoed Iain. “It’s scientific observation!”—said he painfully, as the end of an oar biffed him in the neck.

“Auch! Ah’m awful sorry, Iain—Ah’m a terrible bad oarer!” Punchy apologized.

“Stick it, Punchy! One—two! One—two!” counted the boy. “What’s a biff in the neck more or less? One—two! One—two!”

In spite of Punchy’s unhandiness they made good progress. Like the athlete he was Punchy was not really long in picking up the stroke best for the coble. They reached the line of the burn-foot to Eilean an Trì, but refrained from dropping the drag until they were well inside the islands that screened them from the steamer. For an hour or so they worked carefully and absorbedly, but without any luck. On the rocky bottom the going for the drag was very rough, so that their labors were really arduous. Time and again they had to struggle to free the irons from some snag or other, and at times they brought up queer things from the floor of the loch. But nothing to indicate that definite wreckage, and especially wreckage of a galleon, lay there.

It was Iain who first discovered that they were being watched.

“Dugald,” he said suddenly, “the blinking loch-shore is alive!”

“Eh?” said Dugald, coming out of his absorption over the drag. “Alive, is it?”

“There’s a couple over there by An Garbh Eilean—and another couple among the trees along by the little point under Drumdarroch.”

“What? Four altogether? Are you sure?” asked Dugald.

“Well, I’ve been watching them for a couple of minutes,” said the boy. “I wanted to be sure before I told you. There are four of them right enough.”

“Where has the fourth man come from?” Dugald said to Jean. “There were Stowe and Caldas and Vargas—who’s the fourth one, and when did he arrive?”

“He may have come with this morning’s train. It is nearly half-past twelve now. And he may be either the chauffeur, Manuel, or that other Spaniard we don’t know the name of.”

“Or it might be that sneak, Harley Seagar,” Iain suggested. “One of the men under Drumdarroch looked like him—from the distance.”

“Sure it wasn’t Stowe?” Dugald inquired. “He’s not unlike Seagar, remember.”

“Stowe’s over there,” said Iain, pointing to An Garbh Eilean. “He and the dirty boxer.”

“I wish you’d told us sooner, Iain,” said Dugald. “We don’t want to give ourselves away, you know.”

“I saw them only a minute or so ago,” Iain returned calmly, “and you can bet they’ve been watching us longer than that. If we don’t stop dragging altogether how can we help giving ourselves away? Oughtn’t we to be thinking of what they’re likely to do if we do give ourselves away?”

“Iain’s talking good sense, Jean,” said Dugald. “We can’t stop the blighters from watching us, and we can’t very well give up dragging.”

“What do you suppose their plan is?” Jean asked.

Dugald considered for a moment or two.

“I suppose,” he said finally, “that they’ll watch until we strike lucky. Then probably they plan to get divers up here as quickly as possible and jump our claim, as it were. What they’ve got doesn’t seem to give them sufficient clew to work on, or they’d be on the loch dragging for themselves. Don’t you think so?”

“Seems feasible,” Jean agreed. “There’s no way of stopping them, is there?”

“I can’t see one, short of force, or putting the police on their track for what they did to you. You’ve got no legal right to the treasure, I imagine—only a sort of moral right.”

“I don’t want the police called in,” Jean said stubbornly.

“M’m! There’s something in the idea of force,” Dugald mused. “But we’re a bit short-handed to pull it off. Carry the war into the enemy’s country, eh? What does the brainy member of the party think of that?” He turned to Iain.

“I vote for that,” the boy said promptly. “Didn’t some old soldier-josser say that the surest defense was to attack?”

“Ye’ve always said that about glove-fechtin’, Mr. Dugald,” Punchy put in. “Fair threepit on it.”

“And what do you say to it, Jean?” asked Dugald.

Jean made a little gesture expressive of discomfort of mind.

“Fighting!” she said. “I loathe it! If I were to say ‘yes’ it would only be that I was inviting you men-folk to go and perhaps get hurt—asking you to do something that I detest—that I daren’t do myself. I should think, having seen you, that you must be a splendid fighter, Dugald—and I’m sure Mr. Punchy is terrible too. But how could you two men fight these four?”

“I say, Jean!” protested Iain. “Don’t you forget my contemptible share in the matter!”

“Oh, Soorock!” Jean shuddered, “you mustn’t think of fighting!”

Iain reddened.

“I don’t want to talk like Eric or Little by Little,” he said, half-confusedly. “I know I’m only half a man, but I’m the only man of the Macleavars that’s available. I can’t be kept out if there’s a fight. I’d want to go and drown myself if I let Dugald and Punchy do all the Macleavar fighting for me. Sorry, Jean. I know you’d be scared stiff for me. But there are things a fellow simply can’t do and think anything of himself. Isn’t that right, Dugald?”

“Absolutely right, old lad—and spoken like a man, too!”

“Hear! Hear!” said Punchy.

“If there’s a fight,” Dugald went on, “we’ll find you a part in it that’s up to your weight, Iain. Needn’t say, I suppose, that you’ll have to obey orders to the letter?”

“Oh, absolutely,” Iain promised.

“Then—it does come to a fight, Dugald?” Jean said sickly. “Isn’t there any other way for it?”

“Don’t you see, my child,” said Dugald, “that we’re right in an impasse? It is an absolutely sure thing that the Seagar crowd mean to jump our claim. We can’t go engaging a salvage crew until we’re quite certain there’s something to salvage. Haven’t we gone right into the matter, you and I, and haven’t you put your foot down on the idea of me engaging a crew off my own bat? Well, then. How can we prevent the enemy from bringing up a salvage crew once they get the notion that we’re on to something? And we can’t stop them watching us. We can’t stop dragging, either, or they’ll think we have found the galleon and act at once. That will be just as bad for us as if we’d really given them a lead, because once they’re here they’ll go on searching.”

“What will you do, then?” Jean asked.

“Run the swine out of the country.”

“What! You and Punchy and Iain?” cried Jean.

Dugald shook his head.

“Reinforcements can be got,” he said. “I’m going to wire for Mickey Larne and Smiler Binns. I’ve already made a tentative arrangement with them—”

Punchy suddenly smacked his knees with his two palms, and rocked himself back and forward on his thwart, hugging himself.

“Oh, good-oh—good-oh—good-oh!” he chortled. “Oh, dandy—oh, fine—oh, first-class! Oh, crivvy—oh, jinks—what a fecht it’ll be!”

“Darling Punchy—please, don’t!” Jean begged him. “It’s terrible to see you look like that!”

“Just a minute—hold your horses, everybody!” said Dugald. “Before we get to any scrapping I’m going to ask Don Pio to come up to Arisaig and give us his advice—if he wouldn’t think it cheeky, Jean?”

Jean shook her head positively.

“He wanted to come with us, remember. He’d be hurt, I do believe, if he found we had wanted him and hadn’t asked him,” she said.

“Good egg!” said Dugald. He brought out that inevitable pad of his. “We’ll send wires straight away to all three of them. First, let’s see what Mrs. Maclean has packed us for lunch, then we’ll drop you, Iain, and Punchy a bit this side of Camas Leathann, and you can nip over the hill to Arisaig with the wires. Better run over from the cottage on the motor-cycle. Don’t separate, with these people about. While you’re away, I’ll just settle a little bit of business that’s been in my mind for some days.”

III

They had lunched and put Punchy and Iain ashore with the telegrams and sufficient money to wire the two pugilists their fares. Iain and Punchy were to come back by road and rejoin the boat by Rudh Ard Ghamshgail.

"What was the business you had to attend to, Dugald?" asked Jean.

"I don't know that I can get down to it just yet," he replied, gazing along the loch-shore intently. "I think the enemy has withdrawn—probably for feeding purposes at Fountain Head. We'll just row over quietly by way of Drumdarroch. And in case there should be anybody still watching us, we'll make a pretense of dragging intensively—off the real line."

"Your business has to do with the gang, then?"

"I've never had a chance yet of meeting your pseudo-cousin—I mean Seagar—face to face. If this fourth man is he, I'll just take the opportunity now."

"If I know anything of Harley Seagar," said Jean, "he'll keep well hidden if we are anywhere near."

"Let him. I'll stalk him," said Dugald.

"What! Go right in amongst the four of them alone—and them with a grudge against you?"

Dugald smiled.

"Why not?" he said.

"This is where I become G.O.C. again," said Jean. She reddened and caught at a breath, but said bravely: "I just won't let you do it, Dugald!"

Dugald touched his cap gravely. The sweetness of having her command him so made his heart pound, and he wanted to tell her of it. But he had sworn to himself to finish the job he had undertaken before uttering a word that might reveal his feeling toward her. So he assumed a whimsical gravity to beguile her.

"With respect, my general," he said solemnly, "the job must be done some time. And if we unmask Seagar it may mean the drawing off of the gang. Why not now?"

"The danger of it!" she cried. "There would be only you against four—and

tire-levers and shot-filled eel-skins are to them what your bare hands are to you! Besides, Harley Seagar has gone too far in this to be scared off now. He'd rather I didn't know he was in it, I dare say, but he simply wouldn't care once I did know."

"You really think that?"

"I'm sure of it."

"Well, I'll leave it for the moment," said Dugald reluctantly. "But I must do it soon."

He made up his mind on the instant to face Seagar that very night. He was determined to go with Punchy and beard the whole gang in their lair.

"Let's go!" he said aloud. "We'll soon have to pick up Punchy and Iain."

They rowed along on a false line, making great business with the drag, and gradually working up to the woods by Drumdarroch. There they became aware that the watch from the shore had been resumed.

"There's a man keeps popping his head up over that particularly yellow bush," said Dugald. "Don't look up, Jean, but just have a glance toward the two beeches that are together, almost white in their trunks, and very slim. The bush I mean is just to the right of the line on them, but on the shore. Got it?"

"Yes," said Jean, still busy with the ropes of the drag.

"Watch it—and tell me if that is Seagar. Ah—now!"

"Yes, that's Harley Seagar," said Jean. "The mean villain!"

"He's all that," said Dugald. "But now we know—and that's all to the good."

He rowed on. Presently, for it was getting near the time when they should meet Punchy and Iain, he helped Jean to bring in the drag. They had done enough for pretense. They passed under the bows of the Russian steamer, and again they had their gallery of four on the rail.

They heard the motor-cycle up on the higher part of the road, and they knew that Punchy and Iain would be down in a little. The cycle would have to be hidden first in a secret cache at Glen Beasdale foot. They rowed to the spot where the highway touched the shore and beached the boat.

Once again Iain had news to tell. He and Punchy had seen two more men outside the cottage by Fountain Head. It turned out, by process of elimination, that these were the chauffeur, Manuel, and the unnamed Spaniard.

“All the vultures together,” Dugald commented. “Each afraid of the other making off with the spoils, probably. Just as well that we sent for the reënforcements, maybe. Seagar, Caldas, Stowe, Vargas, Manuel, and Señor Cosa—six. Quite a force! Well, let’s go and bewilder them a bit more. Let’s go and drag along the outside edge of the islands.”

“But the Russians?” objected Jean.

“Oh, blow the Russians—what can they know of Loch nan Uamh?” asked Iain.

Half an hour later all four of the party were repeating Iain’s question, but in a different tone. They had been dragging only a few minutes in full view both of the shore and the steamer when they saw a boat shoot out from behind the vessel. Four men were in the boat, and they came straight for Jean’s party.

“Hullo!” said Dugald, who was at the oars. “Looks as if we were going to have foreign visitors!”

The boat came over at a good pace, and was laid alongside them. The man at the tiller, a very swart, clean-shaven man, with great smoldering eyes glowering out under the glazed peak of an old-fashioned “deep-sea” cap, swept an insolent glance over the party.

“What are you doin’ here?” he demanded peremptorily.

“What concern is that of yours?” Dugald demanded in return. There was no mistaking the man’s tone, and it nettled him.

“I am askin’ you,” the man insisted fiercely. “What are you doin’ here?”

Iain, in the stern of the boat, took off his cap reverently.

“Ssh, everybody!” he said. “Stalin himself is here!”

The man did not acknowledge the gibe by as much as a flicker of the eye, but stared intensely at Dugald.

“I ask you a question, you!” he said. “You will answer it!”

“There you are completely in error,” said Dugald easily. “Whatever we may be doing is our business. Will you be good enough to attend to yours—and take yourself off?”

“I make this my business. You are dragging the sea-bottom. You will do so no more. I forbid it!”

“You may have the authority to forbid quite a lot of things in Moscow or Nijni Novgorod,” Dugald returned, “but it doesn’t run here. This is Scotland—

not Soviet Russia. Go away! Go back to the tin-kettle you call a steamer. Your Cheka attitude tires me!"

Next moment he was looking at the muzzle ring of an ugly automatic pistol.

"Untie that drag and let it sink to the bottom," the Russian ordered. "You shall not drag these waters!"

Dugald turned to grin at Jean, who was crouched tensely in the stern, very white of face. Beside her was Punchy, his feet well under him in readiness to act on a hint, but obviously uneasy at the idea of fighting on the unfamiliar element of water. Iain, more at home in the coble and quite master of himself, was trying to copy Dugald's air of amusement, but at the same time his hand was stealing gently down to the short boat-hook that lay under him on the floor-boards. Dugald let his grin travel round all the members of his crew.

"Quite a melodramatic gentleman!" he said gently. He turned back to face the Russian's pistol, and as he spoke his oar began to creep forward to position under the man's arm.

"Tush! Tush! Pistols, too! Really you mustn't! It isn't done in this country. And, besides, when you wish to bluff with a shooting-iron—"

"Keep that oar still!" the Russian commanded, drawing his arm back.

"—it's wise to pull back the safety-lever!" Dugald finished.

With a quick jerk he brought the oar out of the tholes, levering it on his knee, and drove it with full force like a spear at the Russian's solar plexus. The man gave a queer shrieking moan on indrawn breath and sagged into the bottom of the boat. The pistol flew out of his hand into the water. As his companions sat goggling bewilderedly at their disabled leader Dugald's oar was among them like a flail, and like a spear, thumping them, stabbing them. Dugald was on his feet now, taking advantage of the comparative steadiness of the heavy coble over their lighter skiff.

The two men at the oars of the skiff pulled frantically, haphazard, even as they cowered from that hewing, stabbing balk of wood. They pulled themselves out of danger, but brought the stern of the skiff within Iain's reach. With a yell he swung the stave of his boat-hook and brought it down with a thump on the shoulder of the third man, who lurched forward on top of the leader. Then the skiff drifted out of reach.

"Well done, Iain!" Dugald commended. "That just finished it!"

He dropped back into his seat and gazed at his companions perplexedly.

They all three stared as perplexedly at him, and in Jean's eyes he saw apprehensive inquiry. Dugald nodded.

"Yes," he said. "That's just it. What, for the love of Mike, have we dropped into now?"

He looked thoughtfully after the retreating skiff, then turned his gaze to the shore. Three of the gang were standing there, quite openly—Vargas, Manuel, and Seagar—as if transfixed by the late spectacle at sea.

"And that's flummoxed you too, apparently—or did you fix it up?" mused Dugald. "I don't think so, somehow."

He turned to his companions.

"After that, we can only hide our dragging-gear and take ourselves home," he said, with a special grin for Iain. "What says Soorock, dealer of doughty dunts?"

Said Soorock: "Let's call it a day!"

CHAPTER XI
THE FIGHT AT FOUNTAIN HEAD

IT was an oddly perplexed quartette that went up Glen Beasdale that afternoon following what Iain called "Navarino—or a Brush with the Russ." After that effort of schoolboy wit, even the loquacious Iain fell in with the general silence. He felt that to chatter would be to "show-off" after his commended stroke in the battle, so he confined himself to entrusting Punchy with the secret that the blow with the boat-hook had been aimed at his victim's head, but that he had been too excited to do the thing properly.

"Maybe it's jist as weel ye didnae hit him ower the heid," said Punchy in a low voice, lest Jean, in the lead with Dugald, should hear him. "Ye micht 'a' brained him, see? When ye lam a man ower the heid wi' a pole like yon ye've got tae dae it joodeecious-like—enough force tae pit him oot, but no tae kill, see? Ye're the lucky boy, though," he added enviously. "Ye did get in a whack. An' there was me, sittin' there like a lump o' potty! Tae blazes wi' fechtin' in a boat!"

"Bit of luck—that was all, Punchy," the boy consoled him. "I got the only chance that Dugald left. Golly! Wasn't he quick!"

Punchy humped a shoulder to indicate that Dugald's speed in action was nothing new, and trudged on in silence.

Ahead of them, Jean and Dugald were each trying to evolve a theory that would explain this new interference with the search for the galleon treasure. What did these Russians know of Loch nan Uamh, and how did they know?

In trying to connect up the Macleavar parchment with Russia, it was perhaps inevitable that Dugald's thoughts should turn to Jean's missing brother, Hamish. Hamish had had much to do with Russia. Might there not be some connection between that fact and the other of the Russian steamer and this man with the smoldering eyes? Dugald's mind refused to dismiss the idea. It kept harping back to it. He did not care to suggest the idea to Jean. Knowing her love for the absent Hamish, he feared that the suggestion that her brother was linked up in some way with these interlopers would simply be another thorn, perhaps more painful than any, in her already troubled heart.

If it was inevitable, however, that Hamish should come into Dugald's mind, it might have been a foregone conclusion with him that Jean would think of her brother.

"I can't help thinking, Dugald," she broke into his cogitation, "that Hamish is somehow linked with that Russian ship."

"It made me think of Hamish, too," Dugald admitted.

"It's making me terribly miserable. I feel that something dreadful must have happened to Hamish. How could anybody get wind of the galleon except through him?"

"There's Seagar's crew," said Dugald.

"It doesn't look as if Seagar knew anything about the steamer. If he did, we'd have seen him with the Russians, surely?"

"I didn't quite mean that. When you get a gang of rogues—eight or more of them—there's almost certain to be one inclined to blab. One of them may have given the show away—may even be double-crossing the others."

"But with Russians—why Russians?" Jean argued. "I don't think that's the explanation, Dugald. And yet—I don't see how they can have got anything out of Hamish. There never was any one so capable of keeping his own counsel. I know he wouldn't tell a soul about the galleon, or about the parchment. I could almost swear, too, that he'd never put the secret on paper."

"There are all sorts of possibilities," said Dugald. "Hamish might have thought he had an absolutely watertight, safe means of communicating with you, and it may have failed him after all. He might have sent you a message, and that may have fallen into the hands of this Russian gang—"

"No, no!" Jean said positively. "If Hamish had sent any message like that to me he would have left out the parts I already knew. I know Hamish. He's the wisest man alive—oh, dear! if he is alive! Why should he put down Loch nan Uamh when I already knew that? I simply cannot find an explanation—and yet—I feel positive—instinctively—that Hamish comes into this somewhere."

Dugald thought for a space as they walked on.

"Jean!" he said suddenly. "When you saw Hamish that night in Edinburgh, did he say that he had come from this district—from Loch nan Uamh?"

"No. I don't think he said where he had come from."

"Did you get the impression that he had come from here?"

“I got the impression that he had come from Glasgow. He said something about Glasgow. I gathered he had got to Glasgow from Russia. He did mention Loch nan Uamh, of course, because he said there was money in the loch. Hamish never said more than the barest word or two about himself at any time.”

“It comes to me very forcibly that these Russians are after something quite apart from the galleon. You say Hamish wouldn’t tell a soul about the galleon. I believe that. But there’s a leakage somewhere. You’ve got to remember that the Seagar crowd knew not only about your half of the parchment, but about the paper that Hamish gave you that night in Edinburgh. How did they get to that? Hamish let you understand that he was in some danger that night. How do you know that those he was in danger from didn’t spy on you both? It’s either that, and that Seagar was overheard in some den speaking of the parchment—perhaps in Barcelona, which was a perfect nest of Reds some years ago—and that two and two have been put together.”

“I don’t follow you, Dugald,” said Jean.

“Suppose that you were spied on that night. Some one knew you got that paper. This some one overhears Seagar talking of the parchment—perhaps he’s in some game with that crowd. He gives you away to Seagar—and then afterwards spills the beans to some Russian. It’s got to be something like that to explain how these Russians know of Loch nan Uamh. Either that or that the Russians are after something quite unconnected with the galleon.”

“What could they be after except the galleon?”

“Heaven alone knows,” said Dugald. “It’s a tangle whatever way you look at it. We’ve got to find out. That’s all.”

They went on up the glen in renewed silence, cudgeling their brains, when all at once they saw the housekeeper’s daughter, Màiri of the flaming locks, come running down toward them on flying feet.

“Something’s up!” said Dugald.

“Oh, Maister Dugald!” the girl panted, when she was within speaking distance. “There’s been a robbery up at the lodge!”

“A robbery, Màiri?”

“We don’t know what’s been stolen yet, sir—but the whole place has been ransacked. Just turned upside down. Your things, sir—Miss Macleavar’s, Master Iain’s, Mr. Haggart’s—ours, too—mother’s and mine—everything!”

“H’m!” said Dugald. “Sounds absolutely complete! The gang, Jean—after

the parchment!”

II

Màiri had not exaggerated. There was not a receptacle, from hanging-cupboard down to a mustard tin, that had not been searched. The floor of each room was littered with clothes and linen from drawers and trunks, and every pocket of the clothes was inside out.

"It looks like a—well, I don't know what it looks like!" said Dugald. "Even an earthquake couldn't have done as much. They're thorough, if nothing else, these ruffians."

Opportunity for effecting this disorderly search had been snatched at during the absence of Mrs. Maclean and Màiri. They had gone along to Arisaig to do some shopping, and had been gone some three hours.

"It iss some of these strangers that has done this," Mrs. Maclean declared indignantly. "The place iss full of strange, foreign people. They are on all the roads, and they are crowded on the loch. They have great cars, and there is a foreign ship anchored off Rudh Ard Ghamshgail. What iss the world coming to, I wonder! Ah, Maister Tugald, you will not be for blaming me, will you? We chest steppet town the road to Arisaig for some putcher's meat—it iss the putcher's day. Who would think that this could happen in quiet Glen Beasdale?"

"Indeed I don't blame you, Mrs. Maclean," Dugald said earnestly, for the good lady was nearly in tears. "I am thankful you were away during this visitation. The people who have done this are not above ill-treating a woman."

"The foreign woman that came here this morning had something to do with it," said Màiri. "She came to spy."

"A foreign woman came this morning?" Dugald repeated.

"An outlandish woman," Mrs. Maclean explained. "A painted woman with dyed hair. She wanted to see over the lodge, she said. She wanted to rent it next summer. I told her that you would never let the place, Maister Tugald."

"And quite right, too, Mrs. Maclean," said he. "You did not show her over the place, I suppose?"

"Indeed not!" said Mrs. Maclean. "I sent her away with a flea in her ear!"

"We may bet that it was Lola," Dugald said, turning to Jean. "Which completes the gang in Arisaig—except for the go-between in Covent Garden.

Seven of them! They are too many for the four of us to watch—I shall be glad when our reënforcements arrive."

He looked about him at the disorder of the place.

"I should think," he said, "that this looks worse than it is. I don't suppose they have taken anything, or damaged much—unless out of spite because they could not find what they were actually looking for."

Jean smiled at him serenely. She knew that the last phrase was for her especial ear. Having trusted Dugald with the parchment and Hamish's note, she would have bitten her tongue out rather than ask if they were safe. It pleased her in a way that she found odd to think that Dugald understood her so well.

"Let us see the extent of the damage," Dugald went on. "I don't expect it is really very much, as I say, but I don't feel inclined to let these miscreants get away with a trick of this kind."

"Hear! Hear!" said Punchy Haggart.

"What will you do, Dugald?" Jean asked anxiously.

"I don't know yet. We must consider a plan of some sort. It would be fatal to let the gang believe they can do what they like with us. We must get a bulge on them somehow, or we'll never get any peace. We haven't only got them to fight now. There are the Russians as well."

Dugald said a great deal less than was in his mind. He had already determined on a course of action.

After supper that night he and Punchy went down the glen. He told Jean that he was going merely on reconnoissance and that the length of his absence would depend very much on what there was to do. The shooting-lodge was stoutly built and well shuttered to withstand a siege. There might be another attempt by the gang, so there was to be admission for none who did not give the Hamish signal of whistling *Bha mi'n raoir an choille*. Iain was disappointed at being left out of the expedition, but he was much too good a scout to protest against orders.

When they reached the roadway Dugald told Punchy his real intention.

"We're going to Fountain Head, Punchy," he explained. "The whole of the gang isn't likely to be in that cottage all the night. There wouldn't be room. So we'll just give them a taste of what they've given us. If there aren't too many of them to tackle we'll raid them. My hope is that Seagar will be there, but I have a feeling that he won't."

“What’s the plan, then, Mr. Dugald?” asked Punchy.

“There’s none so far. We’ll have to plan according to the circumstances that come up. We’ll see how we get along at Fountain Head.”

As they walked quietly up the road toward Arisaig they saw the gleam of an acetylene bicycle-lamp among the trees some distance ahead of them. In case it might be one of the gang they dodged to cover by the roadside. But as they watched they saw the cycle turn into a bend which in actual direction was heading away from them, and against the illuminated patch thrown by the powerful lamp they were able to make out the silhouette of the rider.

“Ah!” said Dugald, “it is only the policeman. We needn’t delay because of him. We’ll give him ‘good night,’ and pass on.”

They were not allowed to do that, however. When the policeman saw them in the light of his lamp he dismounted.

“It’s Maister Torrance, isn’t it?” he said.

“Good evening, constable! You’re Mackellar, aren’t you?” Dugald returned.

“Yes, sir. I’m Mackellar. I was wanting to speak to you. It’s about that boy, young Macleavar,” the policeman said solemnly. “There’s no school inspector in the district just now, so it comes on me. That boy is too young not to be in school. He’s left Torr Cottage, I hear, and is living with you, sir.”

“I can assure you that Iain Macleavar is past the legal school age,” Dugald replied with equal solemnity.

“That’s a weight off my mind, Maister Torrance. Indeed it is. I’ve been bothering about the laddie ever since he came to the district. He looked that young and small, so he did. However, duty’s duty—and a body’s got to do it to the best o’ his ability. Iphm, aye!”

And after the manner of the policeman he rose on his toes and settled back on his heels, and stuck a thumb in his belt.

“The district’s kinda full for the time o’ the year,” he gossiped. “Curious the incursion of foreigners. A body’d like to know what they’re all up to. And that steamer lying in the loch down there, that’s curious, now.”

“Came round from Mallaig, didn’t it?”

“Aye, from Mallaig. I’m told that its papers are all in order, but I’m just off down to the loch-side for a look round all the same. A body never knows—”

“Quite a crowd at Fountain Head, I believe?” Dugald suggested.

“Iphm, aye! I noticed a big car standing outside as I came by. That’ll be the lot that’s stopping at Mallaig. A body’d like to know what it’s all about, but inquiry cannot be made as long’s they don’t act suspiciously. They’re a peaceable enough lot. Aye! Well! I’ll be stepping, Maister Torrance. I’m glad that boy’s over fourteen. I was afraid I’d have to take steps. Good night to you, sir—and to your friend.”

Dugald and Punchy bade him good night, and they went their several ways.

“I like the idea of Mackellar’s concern about Iain, and his placid acceptance of the gang,” chuckled Dugald. “There’s something comic about it. Wonder what he’d say if we told him about the burglary?”

“He’d be a bonny thorn in the gang’s side if we did,” grunted Punchy.

“Pity we can’t,” Dugald agreed; “for you’re right: he’d keep that crew well occupied. Listen, Punchy,” he went on on a new thought. “If the car is outside the cottage at Fountain Head, as Mackellar says, we may get in quite a lot of useful work. Could you nip back, do you think, to the glen-foot and get the motor-bike out?”

“Surely,” said Punchy.

“Well, do. I’ll go on to the cottage. You come up to within a hundred yards or so of the car—that tuck in the road below the cottage. I’ll be waiting for you there, probably; but if I’m not and you don’t see the tail-light of the car, just get on the bike again and come along the road to Arisaig—or Mallaig—till you reach me. Stick this in your pocket.”

“What’s this?”

“A knuckle-duster—”

“So I see now. Then—”

“I’ve got one too. If needs be we’ll use them. The time for mercy to these ruffians is past. If we’ve got to hit we’ll hit hard.”

“Good-oh, sir!” Punchy commended. “Right! I’m off!”

“A moment, Punchy. Shut off your engine on the hill beyond the bend I’m talking about. You can wheel down quietly for quite a long way. I’d rather the gang didn’t hear you too close.”

“Righto, Mr. Dugald. I’ll be back in a jiffy!”

He sped back in the darkness, and Dugald went on toward Fountain Head.

III

Some time later they met at the appointed spot. Dugald was waiting for Punchy by the roadside. They wheeled the cycle up closer to the gangsters' cottage and cached it. Then they took up position themselves where they could watch the cottage door.

"It may be a long wait, Punchy," Dugald explained. "They're all there—seven of them, including that woman. They're in close confab, in the cottage sitting-room. My hope is that soon Seagar and whoever is with him at Mallaig will set out. I've provided that he won't get very far—I hope just this side of Arisaig."

"How?"

"I've driven a stout pin a good way into one of the car tires—and I've stuck my knife into the spare. As soon as they start the car the pin will drive home to the tube. I'm hoping the tire isn't too hard—it didn't feel very hard—or else it may go off with a pop. What I'm after is a gradual deflation that'll pull them up a mile or two along the road. If that happens we'll have time to deal with the two halves of the gang separately."

"Uhuh!" Punchy said placidly. "What's the move, sir?"

"We let the car go on," Dugald explained. "But as soon as it has gone, with whoever goes with it—I'll guess at Seagar, Manuel, and Lola—we begin to entice the others out, one by one if possible, or even two by two. As they come out we—"

"Bash 'em?"

"We bash them. There's to be no mistake about it, Punchy. We've got to hit accurately and hard—one knock per man. Then we tie them up."

"What wi'?"

"These," said Dugald, producing several strands of tough cord, and letting Punchy finger them. "Then we go through their pockets systematically. We shall probably feel like absolute criminals—we shall be criminals in actual law—but perhaps we shall get over that."

"It'll no' bother me," Punchy muttered, "after the way they bashed you and ill-treated Miss Jean. All I say is—hurry up the fight!"

"Only one thing must stop us from action—and that is if Mackellar has not

returned before the car sets off for Mallaig."

"Aye, that would hinder us a bit. He'd be landing on the broken-doon car, and buzzin' off for help, I suppose. Weel, I jist hope oor luck's in, Mr. Dugald."

It was in, apparently, for a few minutes later the light on the constable's cycle flickered among the trees way back on the road, and presently came right up abreast of them. They kept well hidden, and they saw Mackellar dismount and have a good look in at the cottage window. The constable lingered for a moment or two, then mounted again and rode off.

"We must hope now that they don't come out immediately," Dugald whispered. "We don't want them to overtake the bobby."

Again their luck held. It held so well in this particular respect that it looked as if Mackellar would be back in Mallaig and tucked up in bed before any move was made from the cottage. The night was cold, and Dugald and Punchy took it in turn to have a sprint up and down the road to warm themselves. But at last their vigil was rewarded.

The door of the cottage opened and two men came out with the woman Lola to the car. Dugald's guess was right. The two men were Seagar and the chauffeur, Manuel. Manuel took the wheel, and Seagar and the woman got into the back seat. The self-starter buzzed and the engine began to fire. The watchers waited with bated breath for the engagement of the clutch and the start forward. Would there be a bang or hiss of the burst tire? Though he hardly thought so, Dugald yet strained in the expectation of the sound. He breathed a sigh of satisfaction when the car slid forward with no untoward noise.

They watched the lights of the car disappear into the distance, then crept across the road toward the cottage. Through the unshaded window they could see the remaining four of the gang—Vargas, Stowe, Caldas, and the man Dugald called Señor Cosa (M. Chose)—settling down again to the drinks that were on the table.

Dugald stole up the cottage garden and got under the window. From his pocket he took out a pin, a reel of thread, and a nail. He tied the pin to the thread-end, then ran a loop of the thread round the nail about six inches from the pin. He payed out some slack from the reel, then quietly stuck the pin into the putty of an astragal close to the side of the sash. The nail dangled against the pane.

"Crivvy dick!" Punchy breathed. "He's gaun tae play Tick-tack!"

That was precisely what Dugald was going to play, the small boy's game conceived for the annoyance (from a distance affording quick escape) of unpopular people such as school-masters, or the frightening of superstitious believers in that noise popularly known as the Death Tick. The process, of course, is to tug gently on the thread so that the nail ticks irritatingly on the window-pane.

Having fixed this simple apparatus Dugald joined Punchy behind a bush and began operations. They could watch the four men from their concealment.

The man Stowe was the first to take notice of the noise. He looked up irritably from the cards with which they all were now occupied, and said something to Señor Cosa. Cosa shook his head, but glanced toward the window. Dugald let the nail rest for a moment or two, then began the ticking once more. Suddenly Stowe threw down his cards and jumped to his feet. He came across to the window and peered out, pulling aside the lace curtain that hid the nail from general view. But by that time Dugald had jerked the thread and pulled it and the nail away from the window. Stowe examined the window all over, then went back to his seat. His companions seemed to talk to him pointedly.

Once again Dugald crept under the window and affixed a fresh pin and a new nail. Stowe got up once more in a greater state of exasperation than ever, and came over to the window to throw it up. By that time, of course, the nail was on the ground.

"It was on the window, I tell you," the watchers heard him fume to his fellows. "And there isn't a twig anywhere near the panes! Blast the thing, whatever it is!"

He brought the window down with a bang. Dugald let a minute or two go past, then he put up a fresh apparatus. This time when Stowe and Cosa came to the window he let the nail dangle. Stowe threw the window up, and grabbed at the thread.

"Haw! haw! partan-face!" Dugald squeaked. "Haw! haw! ba'heid!"

Punchy crammed a fist into his mouth with a choking gasp.

"Some damned boys!" Stowe foamed. "Come along, Barejo!" he said to the man Dugald called Cosa.

He banged down the window. Dugald had calculated that the man's irascibility would bring him out with a rush, and he was right. He and Punchy had just time to get to stations, with knuckle-dusters ready, on either side of the cottage door, when Stowe came tumbling out of it. Quick as a flash Dugald

had him about the neck, and had struck him with his armored fist on the back of the head. Barejo, peering out to follow this sudden sideways disappearance of Stowe, held his chin just in the right position to meet the blow Punchy swung up from the level of his knee. Barejo grunted and toppled forward senseless into Punchy's arms. Punchy dragged him into position by the side of the unconscious Stowe.

"Cords!" whispered Dugald, pressing a couple of strands into Punchy's hands. "Quick! Tie your man up before the others come!"

So far there had hardly been a sound in the encounter. Both men had gone down as if pole-axed. They were quickly turned on their faces, and their hands tied behind their backs. Then an equally secure fastening was put about their ankles.

"Luck, by George!" breathed Dugald into Punchy's ear. "The others haven't stirred yet. Look out, boy—I'm going to fetch them on the run!"

As he and Punchy took up their places by the door he let out a half-strangled moan:

"Ah-h-h-h!" he gasped. "Vargas! *A mi, amigo!*"

They heard the scuffle of chairs, and the door up the narrow passage of the cottage was torn open. Vargas came lumbering out, Caldas following him. Dugald swung a blow, but in the uncertain light had the ill-luck to miss. Punchy sensed Dugald's failure and brought his left slam into the Spaniard's stomach. Vargas doubled forward, his head coming into the side-glow from the rays that came through the window. Dugald recovered his chance and smote the man precisely where the man had smitten him three days before. Vargas went down like a log. The ill-luck of it was that the delay had warned Caldas. The pugilist drew back. Punchy, like some plucky terrier, sprang into the passage to tackle him, four stone of difference in weight notwithstanding.

"Punchy!" Dugald gasped, but it was too late. The little fighter already was engaged with his bulky opponent. Now, clever and determined a fighter as Punchy was, there was little chance for him against a scrapper like Caldas in such circumstances. Haggart's only chance against such a man would have been in sheer agility and quickness of movement. He had not room to make use of these qualities in the narrow confines of the cottage lobby. With a mild expletive that was half exasperation and half admiring affection Dugald left the unconscious Vargas without binding him, and dashed into the passage.

"Dodge aside, Punchy!" he cried. "Leave this skunk to me. Get out and bind Vargas!"

Punchy meant to obey, perhaps—but his dislike of the Spaniard led him into a final attempt to get in at least one punishing blow. It proved his undoing. Caldas smashed a left at Punchy which locked the little man's guard, then swung over a right that caught Punchy on the jaw. But that he bumped into Dugald the chances were that Punchy would have avoided the blow—but as it was he took it full, and went down.

A yell of rage was choked in Dugald's throat. He caught Punchy and let him down easily but quickly to the floor. Then out of the crouch he jumped at Caldas. Dugald was fighting mad. He attacked bitterly, savagely, hitting hard enough to kill. In dealing with Vargas he had dropped his knuckle-duster, or he certainly would have broken some of the Spaniard's bones. Blow upon blow he smashed in upon Caldas, beating clean through all defense. Caldas wilted before his fury, and staggered back along the passage, to fall sideways into the sitting-room. Dugald was after him like a flash. In the light of the room Caldas effected something of a recovery. His hand went to his hip-pocket and came out with a long curved thing of black horn. It clicked in his hand, and a sinister blade gleamed in the lamplight. The knife went to his thigh in readiness for that deadly, upward thrust of the Catalan.

Without a second's hesitation Dugald sprang. The knife came up like lightning, but once again Caldas experienced that marvelous side-step of Dugald's. His hand went up beyond Dugald's arm-pit to be locked uselessly, and his elbow was gripped and pulled inward with an excruciating wrench. Dugald's right leg coiled behind both of his, and his feet flew from under him. Next moment Dugald's foot had stamped the knife out of his fingers.

"You would, would you, you swine!" panted Torrance. "*That* for you, then!"

The heavy horn of the closed knife crashed on Caldas' head. He sagged back on the floor.

Dugald ripped the thin scarf from Caldas' throat, turned the man on his face, and tied his hands behind his back with the strip of cloth. He had dropped his strands of cord somewhere, so he knotted the laces of Caldas' shoes together. Then he darted out into the passage. Punchy had got to his feet and was leaning dizzily against the passage wall. Dugald grabbed him and half carried him into the open, where he propped him up against the garden wall.

"Don't move, old friend, till you get your wind properly," he said soothingly. "We've won, Punchy!"

"Good-oh, Mr. Dugald!" Punchy grinned feebly. "He was ower big for me in that nairra' passage!"

“Of course he was, you old chump—but you did very well.”

Stowe and Barejo were beginning to move feebly on the ground, but Vargas still lay inert. Dugald went over and examined him. He was relieved to see that the man was still alive, for it was borne in on him now that he had hit hard. He took Vargas’ cravat from his neck and tied him up with it as he had done Caldas.

Then he went through the pockets of all three men, systematically. He did not come upon what he was searching for—the parchment. He had hardly expected to. Punchy came over to help him.

“Are you fit, lad?” Dugald queried.

“Ah’m aw richt noo, sir,” Punchy assured him. “What’s next?”

“I haven’t found what I’m looking for, Punchy. I don’t expect it is in the cottage at all. At any rate, I’m going to risk that it isn’t here, but with the real ringleader, Seagar. We’ll hump these villains back into the cottage—we can’t leave them out here in the cold—and let them untie themselves as best they can. We’ve taught them a lesson, I think. Come along, Punchy! We’ve let ourselves in for the horrible charge of hamesucken. Let’s get these blighters indoors and go and have a spot of highway robbery!”

IV

The plan for highway robbery seemed to have failed. Dugald, with Punchy behind him a-pillion, drove the motor-cycle past Arisaig to Morar, a good three-quarters of the way to Mallaig. But they did not come upon the stranded motor-car that they expected.

"Bit of hard luck, Punchy!" Dugald philosophized. "Either the pin didn't work or they've gone on in spite of the flattened tire. A pity! I had worked myself into quite the right mood for dealing with Seagar. However, that is simply a task deferred. We'll settle with the chief villain to-morrow. Let's go back."

They turned the machine and ran back easily the way they had gone. As they came near to Fountain Head, Dugald shut off the power and let the cycle coast down the gentle slope to the cottage. The light was still burning in the sitting-room and all four members of the gang were back at the table, moodily nursing their damaged heads.

"That's all right, then," said Dugald. "We haven't killed any of them—not that it'd matter much, except for the consequences to us. The fools! They're sitting there swilling, making absolutely sure of aching heads in the morning!"

"Silly coofs!" Punchy agreed. "Funny hoo thae amatyoor fechters aye rin for sperits if they get a bit daud—wi' lashin's o' the best cure, fresh air, at hand at naethin' a bottle!"

Punchy had quite got over the knock he had taken. There was a smugness in his manner that made Dugald want to put an arm about him.

"Come along, Punchy," he chuckled. "We'll leave them to their stupidity."

They went on their way.

At the hut at the foot of Glen Beasdale, some twenty minutes later, they were stowing the cycle away, when Dugald was gripped by a new idea. He was flashing his torch about the pine-frond walls of the hut, and its beam happened to rest on a rough boat, very small, of wicker and canvas that was hung up. This was a sort of coracle that he sometimes used in going after wild-fowl.

"It's a calm night," he said half to himself. "I could easily do it."

"Do what, Mr. Dugald?" Punchy asked.

"Go out and have a look at that Russian steamship," Dugald replied. He

consulted his watch. “It isn’t ten yet. I think I’ll do it. Look, Punchy! For the sake of quickness—you don’t know the management of a coracle—I’d better tackle this alone. You hop up to the lodge and wait for me there. Don’t worry if I am a bit late—”

“Ye’re never gaun oot tae the steamer in that thing?” Punchy asked, aghast.

“I am. It’s as safe as houses. If I take the coble it will cause too much noise. Whereas this—well, I could get through a keyhole with it, almost. I’ll just carry it down to the shore and paddle out and see what I can see. You go on to the lodge and tell them simply that I’m scouting a bit alone.”

“I’d sooner wait for you on the shore—or come with you,” Punchy said, with an uneasy glance at the cockle-shell.

“There’s no need for you to freeze yourself on the shore,” Dugald replied. “And you’d only be a nuisance in the coracle. It needs practice merely to balance. No. Do as I say.”

“I’ll at least gi’e you a han’ wi’t tae the shore.”

“No need. It weighs the merest trifle. You go along up the glen. Say no more than you need do—no, say nothing—about our scrap with that four at the cottage. I’ll be with you all inside an hour and a half at the most.”

He took the little shell down from its pegs, with its paddles, and fastened it over his shoulders by the straps fixed in it for that purpose. He looked, Punchy thought, as disconsolately he watched Dugald through the rough doorway of the hut, like some gigantic beetle walking on its hind legs.

For a moment or two Punchy thought of following his friend to the loch-shore, but to obey Dugald had become second nature to him, and he moodily fastened the rough door of the hut. Then he took himself up the glen to the shooting-lodge.

Before many hours had elapsed Punchy was wishing with a sore heart that he had followed his instinct and disobeyed orders and had followed Dugald to the loch-side.

CHAPTER XII
THE ANXIOUS HOURS

HALF an hour past midnight, in the living-room of the shooting-lodge under Sithean Mor, Jean rose from her seat by the fireside, where she had been waiting with Punchy Haggart for Dugald's return.

"I can't bear it any longer, Punchy," she said wanly. "Something has happened to Dugald. I feel sure of it. That gang has got him."

Punchy shook his head.

"It isn't the gang, Miss Jean," he declared. "Aifter what Mr. Dugald an' me did tae them this nicht, they widnae be fit tae capture a fat poodle—let alane a fechter like the Maister."

"Why, what did you do to them?"

"Mr. Dugald said Ah wisnae tae say onything aboot it, but things seems tae be gettin' serious, Miss Jean. He wisnae hidin' it frae ye. I think it was only because ye hate fechtin' sae much—he'd raither 'a' telt ye himsel'. But—weel—here goes!"

Punchy's recital of the events of the early hours of the night did not lack vividness. He made little of his own share in the encounter with the gang, but magnified Dugald's. Dugald had told him of Caldas' attempt at knife-play, and Punchy described that as if he had been in the room, rather than picking himself up dazedly in the cottage lobby. And what with revulsion, wonder, fear, admiration, and excitement chasing each other in her mind and heart, Jean did not see any inconsistency in the little man's story. It thrilled her, yet it repelled her. The idea of Dugald—clean, good-natured, smiling, kindly Dugald, as she pictured him—knocking men senseless with his armored fist made her feel sick, even although she knew the men to be miscreants, and though she remembered her own treatment at the hands of the gang. Why, having sent for reënforcements, and having asked Don Pio to come and give his counsel—why had he deliberately gone into the enemy's camp and sought this fight?

Punchy supplied the answer.

“It was that chap Seagar he was aifter, Miss Jean,” he said, as if she had asked him aloud. “If you’d seen Mr. Dugald’s een when he saw what the gang had done tae your room—a’ your pretty things kicked aboot the floor—you’d ’a’ known he was jist rampagin’ mad. This, on top o’ a’ they’ve done tae ye, fair finished him, Miss Jean,” Punchy explained naïvely, “because Mr. Dugald’s terrible fond o’ you.”

Jean stared at him, and the color rose in her cheeks.

“Fond of me, Punchy?” she said with difficulty. “Don’t talk nonsense, please!”

“Nae nonsense aboot it!” the little man said stoutly, and demanded trenchantly: “What for wad he mix it wi’ thae scum if he wisnae fond o’ ye—him that simply detests fechtin’ for onything but fun? D’ye imagine he went aifter thae messans aff his ain bat? Naw, naw—that’s no’ Mr. Dugald! He jist saw that the cup was rinnin’ ower. They’d piled up their badness beyond a’ tholin’. An’ he saw the only wey tae finish the business was tae get that ither half o’ your family dockiment frae Seagar. That was the billy he was aifter—an’ the pity was that the plan failed. For all he spoke philosophic-like, he was terrible vexed aboot that. If the man went wrong, he went wrong oot o’ fondness—an’ that’s a fact!”

“Nonsense! You mustn’t say it, Punchy!”

Punchy humped his shoulders.

“Auch!” he said, grumbling. “The man’s fair daft aboot ye, Miss Jean. He jist made a kinda mistake, d’ye see? He mebbe thocht the tactics was tae finish off the gang before tacklin’ Seagar.”

“Listen, Punchy!” Jean said desperately. “You must forget that you ever said that about Mr. Dugald!”

“It’s the truth!” the little man said stubbornly.

“Whether it’s the truth or not—you must forget you ever said it to me!”

“How should I forget? What for should I forget?”

“Mr. Dugald might be very angry if he knew you had said that to me,” said Jean.

This altered the complexion of the matter entirely for Punchy. He looked almost scared.

“D’ye think he’d be terrible angry?” he asked apprehensively.

“Almost certain to be,” Jean declared.

“Crivvy! I didnae go for tae say it, Miss Jean. I was tryin’ tae explain, ye see—an’ it jist poppit oot. Please don’t tell him, Miss Jean!”

“I won’t tell him, Punchy. We’ll keep this strictly to ourselves,” she assured him. “But, Punchy—it makes it all the more—we must go and see if we can find what’s happened to him. I’m terribly worried about him.”

“So am I. I don’t think for a minute the gang’s got him—but I’m uneasy aboot him bein’ so long away.”

“Go and rouse Iain,” Jean said briskly. “He knows the country almost as well as I do, and he is very sharp. We may need his eyes—all the eyes we can muster. Wake him, Punchy—and both of you wrap up warmly.”

Not many minutes later the expedition of three set off down the glen. Jean left to Punchy all explanation of the situation to Iain, and indeed the most of it had been got through as the boy dressed. She led the way along the bridle-path in the pitchy darkness, silently engrossed in her own racing thoughts. They were of Dugald, and though concern about his disappearance bulked more largely, the idea put into her head by Punchy stuck out sharply.

To Punchy she had refused to credit the idea that Dugald was “fond” of her. The sudden blurting of his belief by Punchy had taken her aback, truly enough, but only for the merest instant. She had immediately recognized the truth of the little boxer’s assertion. Her denial of its truth had been mechanical, a sort of conventional gesture.

“Just touching wood!” Jean told herself.

It came to that. Whatever she might show to the world, or to Dugald, hereafter, in simple honesty with herself she had to admit that the idea warmed her. She had denied it in the same way that, as a tiny girl, she had falsely hoped aloud for bad weather on the morrow that was to be spent in picnicking with Hamish.

“Fathead!” she said to herself. “You’re jolly glad—and you ought to be! Dugald’s the finest man that ever looked at you. You’re glad—and you’re glad you’re glad, too!”

With this curious admission she set the pace through the dark at increased speed. She wanted to run, and but for the rough going by the burn that showed the way she would have done so. The thought that Dugald might be in danger, that he might have hurt himself, was more than she could bear. But she schooled herself to common sense. It would be no help to Dugald were she to trip over a rock or a root and put herself out of action.

They came to the concealed hut at the glen-foot.

“This is where you last saw Mr. Dugald, Punchy!” Jean asked.

“Aye, Miss Jean.”

“The chances are that he carried the coracle right down the road to the burn-foot, rather than carry it through the wood, which would have been awkward with the thing on his back,” Jean guessed. “We’ll work on that idea to begin with, anyhow. You take the left of the road, Iain, and keep your eyes well open for any sign of a struggle. I’ll take the right. Do you, Punchy, take the middle of the road. Don’t let any of us hesitate to consult the others if there’s the tiniest thing suspicious-looking. It will be a real saving of time to go slowly and carefully. You’ve both got your torches?”

In answer both her companions tested their flashlights, and the trio began the search in the manner arranged.

They worked down the road slowly and carefully until they came to where the Beasdale Burn tumbled into the loch, but without coming on anything to afford a clew. The coble lay beached where they had left it after the encounter in the loch with the Russians on the previous day, but of the little shell of wicker and canvas there was no sign. They sat on the side of the coble to confer.

Iain was all for taking the coble and boarding the Russian steamer. It would not take them many minutes, he said, to go back to the cache and get the oars. Punchy and he could go back to the glen-foot while Jean watched the loch from a safe hiding-place. He was supported in his suggestion by Punchy. Jean demurred.

“I’d like to try it,” she said, “but we haven’t the strength. If we happened to rouse the Russians we’d never get back. One or other of us, maybe all three of us, might be captured and held. And if Dugald is held by them we’d only be an embarrassment to him. Before we do anything rash we’d better be certain that he didn’t get back.”

“I could go aboard alone,” Iain insisted. “They’d never spot me, and you and Punchy could hold off while I spied round the ship. If the worst came to the worst and they saw me, I could nip over the side and swim for it.”

“Better let me,” said Punchy. “Ah’m nae great hand wi’ a boat, but Ah can swim pretty fine. Then if there was any fechtin’—”

“It was my idea, Punchy!” Iain protested.

“Sh-h-h! Quiet, both of you!” Jean ordered. “There’s going to be no

boarding of the steamer until we're in force. Listen! If Dugald didn't land here, there's always a chance that he came ashore beside Rudh Ard Ghamshgail. It would be quicker for him to land there and come up by his path through the wood. He could hide the coracle somewhere and go up through the wood in freedom. It would cut out a mile or more of paddling to do that. So what I say is this. Let's go back along the road and follow Dugald's path from the beginning. That will be quicker than scrambling along the shore over rocks and through bog in the dark."

"If Dugald landed at Rudh Ard Ghamshgail," said Iain, "he might have come up through the wood while we were searching the road."

For a moment the hope gladdened Jean, then she slipped back to anxiety.

"Dugald would have seen our flashlights," she pointed out.

"He might not. The road's terribly wobbly."

"He'd have seen them from the wood. And if he saw them he'd have been with us by now. Come along!" said Jean. "We're wasting time in arguing."

They climbed back to the road and retraced their footsteps to the point where Dugald's particular path through the woods left it. This point was the apex of a triangle formed by the road, Dugald's path, and the coast-line, which might be called its base.

As carefully as they had gone over the road they went over the wood path. But here again their search revealed nothing of moment. They came to the shore and hunted round all the likely landing-places. There was no sign of the coracle.

But a little from the shore, it seemed within a stone's throw, the little Russian steamer lay quiet, with only a riding-light to mark her presence. But for that it would have been difficult to pick up her bulk in the darkness.

"I could swim to it from here," Iain said regretfully.

"You'd freeze to death, Soorock," Jean told him. "But even if it were midsummer I wouldn't let you."

"Well, you're O.C.—and I promised Dugald to obey orders—"

"Don't make it harder for me than you need, Soorock dear," Jean pleaded. "Do you think I like being cautious—with Dugald perhaps tied up on that steamer? I've got to think for the best. If they could collar Dugald, what chance would we three have against them? We've got to be sensible."

"Sorry, Jean—"

“What if they were to up anchor and off wi’ the Maister?” Punchy put in.

The idea made Jean’s heart sink, but she gripped to common sense.

“They’re here for a purpose,” she said, “or they wouldn’t have tried to stop us dragging the loch. It isn’t likely that they’ll go before they’ve done what they’re here for. Let’s search back along the shore to Beasdale Burn-foot.”

“Shouldn’t one of us hunt farther in the other direction?” Iain suggested.

“We must keep together. Even if Dugald had wanted to go over to Drumdarroch he would have landed here, I imagine.”

“That’s right, Jean. The shore over by Drumdarroch is rotten.”

“Let’s go, then,” Jean ordered. “We’ll have to search in the dark. They’d see our torches from the ship. Do go carefully. Don’t lift a foot until you know the other’s solidly placed.”

Once again they set out on their quest for the coracle. They had worked some distance along the dangerous shore when Iain brought out another idea.

“I say, Jean,” he said. “If Dugald’s held on the steamer he might be able to hear us if we whistled. He might be able to whistle back.”

“Bless you, Soorock!” said Jean. “Shall I do it, or will you?”

“If it was just one whistle,” Iain conceded, “it would better be me. But you can whistle a tune clearer than I can, so you do it, Jean.”

Jean pursed up her lips and sent *Bha mi’n raoir an choille* over the dark water. They waited, their ears straining. But there was nothing to be heard in the night, save only the beat of the sea on the loch-shore, or the sough of the wind through the trees.

“Again, Jean!” urged Iain. “Louder, if you can, and your notes sort of separate.”

Once more Jean sent the melody out, and once more they listened in strained silence.

“Nae answer,” Punchy said mournfully. Iain gripped his arm.

“I’m not so sure,” he whispered. “It seemed to me there was a faint answer.”

“Don’t think so, dear,” Jean regretted. “Some sort of echo, perhaps.”

“Try again, all the same,” Iain insisted. “Keep your notes even more separate. Then listen as if to bust your ears!”

Jean tried again. And it seemed now only as if the sounds of waves and wind had grown louder.

"No use," said Iain. "The wind's blowing pretty well down the loch. It takes the whistle to the ship, but perhaps stops anything but a real screecher from coming back. Either Dugald can't whistle back properly or else he's not on the ship. If he isn't on the ship the coracle's on the shore. Let's go on hunting."

They toiled along the beach of rock and bog, but without result. They came at last to the mouth of the Beasdale Burn, having thus traversed the three sides of the triangle.

"I'm not satisfied," Jean said. "I feel we ought to search along the shore a good bit eastward. Dugald may have had some reason to avoid the burn-foot."

The road eastward of the Beasdale Burn hugged the loch-shore at some height above the water-level. Iain and Punchy prowled along the road, while Jean scrambled along the beach below. They had proceeded in this way for about a hundred yards when Jean heard her young brother give a low whistle. She clambered up to the roadside to meet him.

"What is it, Iain?"

"There's been a scuffle on the roadside," said the boy. "Come and look."

There was every evidence for Iain's belief. The turf by the roadside was trampled and gouged into throughout quite a big segment of a circle, and even the metal surface of the road itself was scratched and scarred by heel and toe marks for some distance.

"Look here, Jean!" Iain whispered. "Somebody's been dragged heels-down here! And there! Doesn't it look as if somebody'd been down there? Look how the little puddle is brushed out. And, gosh!—what's that stain?"

Punchy, down on his knees, flashed the torch into the stain.

"It's bluid!" said he with a gulp.

"Steady, Punchy!" said Jean, in spite of the fear that was creeping about her own heart. "It isn't to say that the blood is Mr. Dugald's."

"More likely somebody else's," Iain said stoutly.

"There's been aboot five o' the blackguairds set on my boss," Punchy lamented. "An' me no' there tae stand by him! Knives an' pistols! Whit's the use o' yin bonny pair o' jukes against a half-dizzen gulleys?"

"Ah, don't, Punchy—don't!" cried Jean.

She felt herself beginning to gulp and her eyes to smart. She wound her arm about a sapling and clung to it.

“What’s the matter with the pair of you?” came the voice of Soorock, brave, if a trifle tremulous, through the dark. “Think who you’re talking about! Dugald Torrance! He’s just smacked one of them on the nose and knocked the pig down. Dugald’s sure to have got a smack in somewhere!”

Jean steadied herself.

“If Dugald was in this scuffle,” she said, “it means he came ashore. The coracle’s somewhere about. Come on—down to the shore!”

They found the coracle a few minutes later. It was stuck up on its end under an overhanging rock above tide level. Its paddle was neatly disposed inside it. In the disposition of the little shell there was a total neatness that denied the slightest haste or alarm on Dugald’s part.

II

Jean had to face what was nearly mutiny on the part of her followers. Iain and Punchy almost fought with her for permission to storm the steamer. When she pointed out that, in spite of the lesson read the gang earlier in the night, it might have been they who had captured Dugald, the pair simply demanded the mopping-up of the cottage at Fountain Head as a preliminary to the boarding expedition.

Jean had to summon all her wit and strength of mind to argue with them. She met the scorn that Iain poured upon her timorousness with an appeal to his shrewdness, and Punchy's pleading with soothing arguments. She asked for the loyalty of both, and turned their objections to delayed action in a way that made these objections seem mere traitorousness, not only toward herself, but toward the very man they wanted to help. She got them up to the lodge on the suggestion that Dugald's landing might have been made while they were in the woods, and that their leader might be at home waiting for them, having avoided his would-be captors. Once she got them there, to find Dugald still absent, she met their suggestion that they should spend the night in watching the steamer and the cottage with a definite order to get to bed. The cottage and the steamer would both be sacked, if need be, when the Conde and his reënforcements arrived in the morning. If they were to be fit for these operations they needed rest. Finally, she did succeed in getting the pair to their beds. And went to her own. But not to sleep.

She herself was chafing at the delay she had to order. A myriad apprehensions for the safety of Dugald chased themselves through her brain. She had to tell herself over and over again that if the Russians had intended weighing anchor with Dugald aboard they would have done so immediately. She had to make herself believe that though they were unscrupulous enough to go to sea and dump a slaughtered Dugald overboard, they would spare him for the information that might be got out of him. Since they had not started immediate operations for the recovery of the galleon treasure it must seem that, like the Seagar gang, they were only half-informed. And the Seagar gang, she persuaded herself, would preserve Dugald for the same reason.

Jean lay awake until the tardy dawn of the Highlands diffused pale light in her room. She forced herself to keep in bed until she heard Mrs. Maclean and Màiri bustling about the kitchen, then she rose and bathed in icy cold water. Refreshed and glowing, she set her adherents a good example by eating a

hearty breakfast with a gusto that was anything but real. And as she so encouraged them to fortify themselves for the arduousness of the day, she set out her plans. These went only to the point of meeting the Conde and the two pugilists, Mickey Larne and Smiler Binns. After that, action would depend on the counsel given by Cousin Pio.

While Punchy kept an eye on the Fountain Head cottage, and Iain watched the steamer from some hidden and safe spot on shore, she herself would take the motor-cycle and go over to Lochailort, the station before Arisaig. There she would get the Conde and his companions out of the train. She would hire a car at Lochailort to bring them along to Glen Beasdale. The point of this would be to conceal the arrival of reënforcements from the gang, who might be at Arisaig when the train arrived there.

"You, Iain," she instructed her brother, "must take up a position somewhere that you can see the road—at any rate, you must be in such a position soon after eleven, so that you can hail the car and be picked up by us. Let's say that we are to look out for you at Beasdale Burn-foot. You'll be warned of the time by the passing of the train to Mallaig, and we should be along some time later.

"You, Punchy, must wait until you get word from me. You are not to leave your post unless something happens that you must report, when you should come back to the lodge here and tell me. Of course, if you see anything that looks like an attempt to remove Dugald from the cottage—should he be at the cottage—you must act on your own judgment. The only thing is, don't attempt anything that's beyond your strength. I'll leave for Lochailort just before eleven—say, quarter to—and after that, if you have to report, you must wait at the foot of the glen for my return with the Conde.

"Do—please do be careful," she pleaded with them generally. "Don't rush into danger or act foolhardily. There's nothing to be gained by trying to strike before we're ready. Now, bless you both! Keep well hidden, remember. Be off with you before anybody's likely to be stirring."

She saw them both well wrapped up for their vigil before she sent them away, then sat down with what patience she could muster to wait for the moment when she herself could be active.

III

Don Pio descended from the train at Lochailort with a springy step. The fifteen hours' journey had left him as fresh, apparently, as a night's repose in his own bed. And, thanks to his care of them, his two companions, Mickey Larne and Smiler Binns, were as brisk as himself. Like the healthy scrappers they were, the two pugilists turned out of the train spruce and well shaven. They knew what was due to a lady.

Don Pio wasted no time. As the car wove its way at the necessarily mild pace along the winding road he listened to Jean's outline of the situation attentively. And when she was done he patted her hand consolingly.

"We must act at once," he said. "The first thing to do is to settle whether our friend is in the hands of the Seagar faction or not. If not, then we must settle with these Russian strangers."

"But how do we go about it, Cousin Pio?"

"Very simply. We beard the ruffians in their—how do you say?—lair. I have grown tired of them. I do not think friend Dugald is with them, but we have the other score to finish. We go at once."

They picked up Iain at the appointed place, and the boy and the old man greeted each other in a way that showed they had taken each other to their hearts. Iain reported no great activity about the Russian steamer. The Russian enemy still seemed to be marking time for some reason or other.

Jean had a pony waiting at the foot of the glen to take the luggage of the new arrivals up to the lodge, but that was the only thing allowed to delay their progress. The luggage once bestowed, they went straight to Fountain Head.

A little below the cottage Punchy came out of the trees to report that the whole gang, with the exception of Caldas and Stowe, who had gone down to the shore, were inside. The car had brought Seagar, Manuel, and Lola about half an hour before.

"It is the man Seagar we want," said the Conde. "The others—they do not matter. Come! I shall take you, Ponchee—and you, Mickee—and friend Smiler."

"I say, Cousin Pio!" chirped Iain. "Me, too!"

The old man smiled, and put an arm about the youngster's shoulders in just

the brief embrace that Iain would care to tolerate.

"You too, my lion-pup!" he chuckled. "Cousin Jean—we leave you here with the car, not?"

"Better, I think," said Jean shakily. "There isn't much room in the cottage. I'd only hamper you—and I hate fighting!"

"Ah!" Don Pio said easily. "There will be little fighting. *Vamonos, mis amigos!* We proceed!"

He put Punchy Haggart in the post of honor at his right and Iain on his left. Then, with Smiler and Mickey bringing up the rear, he started the march up to the cottage. As the quintette came abreast of the gate of the cottage garden, Caldas and Stowe came pounding across the road from the top of the path to the loch-side.

Don Pio calmly halted his contingent, and waited until the two gangsters came to the gate.

"Ricardo Caldas, Mr. Stowe, I think?" said he mildly. "Pray precede us, I beg. We are glad to find your faction complete, for we have a word or two to say to you"—then with sudden emphasis—"about *el Banco de Cataluña, talvez*. Enter, *hombres*!"

The two stood goggling at him, Caldas suddenly very white of face, and the usually voluble Stowe for once quite tongue-tied.

Don Pio put out his cane and shepherded them into the gate.

"March!" he said sharply.

Dumbly the two men obeyed. Don Pio and his troop followed them solemnly up the path. At the cottage door the whole party broke into single file, and marched along the narrow lobby. The Conde shepherded the two gangsters into the sitting-room and stepped a little into it himself, so that his party could group itself about him. His four adherents could see now that his hand held a black revolver with a very long and slender barrel.

The whole gang was in the little room. By the fireplace, on the other side of the central table, stood the woman Lola, Manuel, Barejo, and Vargas, all rather nonplused by the meek entrance of Caldas and Stowe. They must have had timely warning through the window of the arrival of the Conde and his companions, but they made no move of resentment. The seventh member of the gang stood by the window. He was a slimly made man of middle height, thin of neck and face, gray complexioned, with very light-colored eyes set close to his thin nose, under which his mustache was an attenuated black

smear. Harley Seagar, the gang's real leader.

"What's the meaning of this?" he demanded, not very convincingly.

At the sound of his voice the other members of the gang showed signs of stirring. The long revolver came up a little in Don Pio's hand.

"Let nobody make the mistake of moving," said the old man. "The man that stirs I shoot at once in the hand—no more. José Vargas will tell you I am able. I myself tell you I am very willing. It is nothing to me. I shoot rats very often for practice."

"He could shoot a finger off if he wanted!" grunted Vargas.

"Or an eye out," said Don Pio. "And that is not to brag. It is the truth. You wonder, perhaps," he went on, "why Mr. Stowe and Ricardo Caldas go so meek? I tell you, then. I merely say the magic words—'*el Banco de Cataluña!*' "

Seagar, with some of the others, gave a perceptible cringe.

"And so—the charm works here also! Very good. We come to business. I ask you—where have you put the Master of Morar, Mr. Dugald Torrance?"

He cast a quick glance over the faces of the gang, and found nothing there but surprise at the question.

"That settles itself, then," said Don Pio. "It is evident that the question surprises you. We now come to the second thing. I require from whoever keeps it the piece of parchment stolen by José Vargas from my library at Altafulla!"

There was some muttering among the herded gangsters.

"What nonsense is this?" said Seagar. "What parchment?"

Don Pio's revolver circled a little.

"Let nobody move!" he said quietly. "Or I shall have to shoot some one as an example!"

In spite of the warning, Stowe shot his hand to his left arm-pit.

"Don't, you fool!" shouted Vargas.

As he shouted Don Pio's revolver barked thinly. Stowe howled, and bent double to stick his right hand between his knees in agony.

"I grow tired of you," said Don Pio. "Into the corner—all of you! Your faces to the wall!"

He herded them into the corner away from the window, waving Seagar to

remain where he was. The woman Lola hesitated.

"You also!" the old man ordered her.

"*Caballero!*" Lola protested.

Don Pio rapped out a sentence in Spanish that made her wilt. She cowered into the corner with the others.

"Ponchee—Smiler!" Don Pio said. "Search the man Seagar!"

"You won't dare!" Seagar cried. "It's robbery with violence!"

"There will be violence if you resist. As for robbery—*lo que es lo mio tomo yo*. I take what is my own! To him, my friends!"

Nothing loth, Punchy and Smiler went round the table, grinning as if glad of the chance of action. The show up to that moment had probably been too much of a one-man affair for their pugnacious taste. They took short measures with Seagar, whose feeble resistance availed him nothing. They calmly turned him about as if he had been a child and emptied the contents of his pockets on to the table. When they had gone over him thoroughly Punchy gave him a push into a chair by the window.

"Sit there, ye yella' messan!" he said, and turned to the Conde: "That's the lot, I think, sir."

"Good!" said Don Pio. He touched the eager Iain on the shoulder. "Run over these papers, my shrewd one, and see if you can come on anything of parchment."

The boy ran through the loose papers from Seagar's pocket, and turned out those that were in his wallet. He snapped through the lot with lightning fingers.

"No sign of a parchment, sir," he reported.

"Eh? No?" asked the old man.

"Oh—just a second!" Iain ejaculated.

He held up the wallet to his ear and teased it about in his fingers. Suddenly he gave a little grunt, whipped out his knife, and calmly slit the leather down by the binding seam. At that Seagar gave vent to some sort of half-choked oath. Iain nodded toward him.

"I thought so," he said, and stuck his fingers into the pocket disclosed between the layers of leather. "Got it, I think, sir!"

He brought out a rough little triangle of sheepskin covered with a close script in faded ink. He put it into the Conde's hand.

“Yes,” said the old man, with a quick glance at the trophy, and putting it into his pocket. “That is my property.”

He turned again to the gang.

“That,” he said, “finishes my affair with you; but I have a word for you regarding the Bank of Cataluña in Barcelona. You may turn round now, so that you will hear better. I have given myself the trouble to look at some pictures in Scotland Yard. They were of criminals wanted by the Spanish police. Mr. Stowe resembles very much one of them, and that man in the corner is another—Barejo, I think, is the name. From the confusion shown by Ricardo Caldas when I say ‘*Banco de Cataluña,*’ I think he too is implicated.

“It may be that the others are innocent regarding the robbery of this bank in Barcelona, but they are in a dangerous position. For are you not all together here? Have you not all been together both in England and Spain?”

“I know nothing about the Bank of Catalonia,” Seagar jerked out.

“No?” Don Pio showed mild surprise. “And yet you are mixed with these others. To work with them you have an office in Covent Garden in another name. So stupid to have it in the same building where you do your real—no, your legitimate—business! There is a man there named Gomez, who is supposed to pay the rent, but it is you that does this. It will be a pity for you if you were in Barcelona at the time of the robbery. But I fear you are a very unfortunate man as well as a very silly one.”

Seagar slumped in his chair. The other gangsters were looking at each other in consternation.

“Friend Mickee,” said the old man, “will you please to see if there is a key in the door?”

“There is, sir,” Mickey replied.

“Then put it in the outside of the lock. Retire, my friends, behind me. So!” He looked at the gang. “I go out now, but I turn the key on you. If when I go down the garden I see any one near the window, I shoot. *Comprenden?*”

And, having given his squad time to get out by the garden gate, he backed out himself from the room and turned the key. His glance toward the window as he strolled down the garden path was a mere formality. The long pistol was in his pocket.

As the Macleavar-Mendizábal contingent sorted themselves out in the car, there came a burst of confused sound from the cottage up the road.

“One of them has jumped out of the window, sir,” Iain told the Conde.

“It does not matter,” the old man said. “If the car I hear in the distance is what I take it to be they will all be captured in a few minutes. They cannot escape. Three detectives—two from London and one from Barcelona—came up in the train with us. They went to Mallaig to get the local police.”

“You called in the police, Cousin Pio?” Jean asked in surprise.

“Not over your affairs, my child,” the old man smiled. “I merely told the Scotland Yard authorities that some criminals wanted for a robbery at Barcelona were in this district. As far as your affair is concerned we have seen the last of the gang.”

Down the road beyond the cottage, from which the confused sounds still were issuing, came a large car. It contained two uniformed police, the stolid Mackellar for one, and three very square-shouldered men in civilian clothes. It pulled up outside the cottage, and one of the plain-clothes men raised his hat and bowed to the Conde, who was standing up.

“That will do for that,” the old man said, and sat down beside Jean. “Forward!”

The car moved down the road, and Don Pio turned to Jean.

“I have a gift for you, my child,” he said. And from his pocket he took the recovered half of the parchment of the Sons of the Book.

IV

The day fell to dusk and the dusk into darkness. Down by the side of Loch nan Uamh, where the Beasdale Burn tumbled its peaty waters into the brine, six people were launching a coble. The oars were wrapped about with thick cloths where they met the thole-pins, and these last were also bound about with rags. In the distance, over by Rudh Ard Ghamshgail, the Russian steamer's riding-light seemed to float in space like a low bright star. Its reflection was like a rod of gold in the water, but the only one, for though the night was still high banks of motionless cloud blotted the sky.

The coble took to the water with a faint grating on the rocks.

"You and Iain to the oars, Cousin Jean, as the most skilled among us," said the quiet voice of the Conde. "Bring the stern against the ship's side, so that we can easily get aboard. You others—Ponchee, Mickee and Smiler—you compr'end the orders?"

"Yes, sir!" whispered the three in chorus, but low as their voices were an eager tremor was manifest in them.

"I repeat, for being safe. When we approach the steamer there must be not a little whisper—unless for urgence," said Don Pio. "It is for Smiler and myself to lift Mickee and Ponchee till they can grip the rail of the ship. But first of all, for Iain, who is so ship-wise. When they arrive, it is for them to give me—the old man—their hands, and to help me up. Then we help, all four, perhaps, our good Smiler—*verdad?*"

"Gimme a grip, sir, and I'll pull meself up," grunted Smiler Binns.

"However it is—no noise!" the old man warned. "We take them by surprise."

"I'd give a great deal," said Jean, "to see the fisheries cruiser come round Eilean an Trì."

"We have done our best in that regard, my child," Don Pio said gently. "It is to be seen what effect have the telegrams sent for us by our good Iain. Now—how do you say, my rowers—make way?"

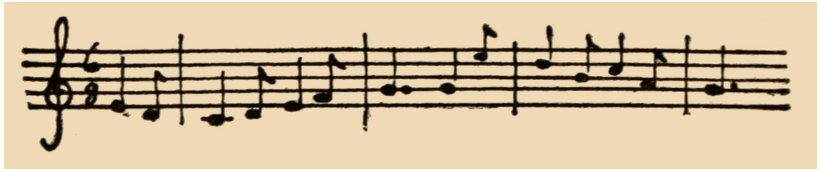
"*Give* way, Cousin Pio," Iain chuckled, "if you want to be nautical."

"Give way, then! Round close by the shore, till we come so near that Jean can give the signal."

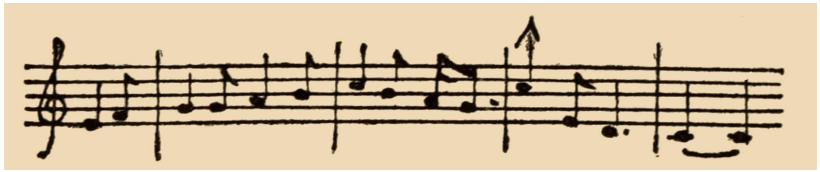
Jean and the boy pulled easily and quietly, keeping the coble close inshore so that its bulk would be lost in the shadow of the land. They pulled in silence for about a quarter of an hour, until they were close by the point Rudh Ard Ghamshgail.

“Stop!” came the old man’s whisper. “Now, Jean—your signal!”

Out over the water floated Jean’s whistle, clear and sweet, but only loud enough to carry faintly to the ship:



For a moment or two there was deep silence. Then, faint and unmistakable, but curiously doubled, there came back the continuation of the melody:



“It is answered!” Jean whispered.

“Funny sort of doubled way,” Iain joined in. “Sounds like two people whistling.”

“An echo, perhaps,” the Conde whispered. “But the point is, Dugald is on the steamer.”

“There were twa folk whistlin’,” Punchy Haggart grunted.

“How could there be two people whistling?” Iain whispered argumentatively.

“*Silencio!*” the Conde warned them.

Jean imagined those on the ship might easily have heard the thumping of her heart.

“Should I whistle again?” she asked.

“No, no! It might arouse suspicion. We lie quiet here for some good minutes so that suspicion may pass. Patience, my children! It is the cool head that wins!”

It seemed an age that the old man kept them waiting under the loom of Dugald’s eyrie. But at long last the word came, cool and contained.

“Give way, my children!”

The oars dipped in unison.

CHAPTER XIII
THE TREASURE OF THE LOCH

DUGALD TORRANCE, with the mooring-cord of the coracle in his hand, climbed easily and quietly aboard the Russian steamer. Methodically he hitched the cord about a stanchion of the rails and stood up to consider his next move.

The decks were deserted, and the only light to be seen was the riding-light slung from the goal-post mast. Beyond the small patch about the hatches that this faintly illumined there was darkness so profound that it was nigh impossible to make out the ship's small superstructure astern. And quiet held the ship completely, if the lapping of the small waves about the hull and their gurgling under the counter be left out. The impression was that the ship was deserted.

Dugald was about to make his way along the deck to prowl among the cabins in the poop when he noticed that the hatch-cover of one of the holds was thrown back and the planking removed. He went over to investigate.

The hold-ladder ran down from the opening. Dugald brought out his electric torch and, holding it well below the hatch-level, shot a ray into the darkness beneath. On the boarding that covered the lower hold, close to the foot of the steel ladder, lay a curious heap composed of coiled rope, metalwork, canvas, and armored tubing. Apart from this collection was a pair of bright metal globes with little grilled windows on their sides.

"Diving-outfits!" said Dugald to himself. "And up-to-date ones at that."

Here was additional proof, if any was needed after that day's encounter with the man of the glowing eyes, that the Russians knew of the treasure of the loch!

Dugald allowed himself a few moments for consideration of an ethical problem. Did the threat of force on the part of the Russian justify measures in retaliation? Dugald thought it did.

He put his foot over the hatch parapet and felt for the ladder, and before descending into the hold he dragged the tarpaulin back over the opening. To

carry out the purpose he had in his mind he might need light. One could never tell when some member of the Russian crew might come along the deck.

Dugald knew little about diving-suits, but he imagined that these were adaptable for air-supply, either pumped from the surface or released from a cylinder on the diver's back. Each of the suits had a contraption fixed to its shoulders, and from this a tube depended, apparently for joining to the helmet. Dugald removed the tube in each case and stuffed them in his pocket. Then he turned the taps of the cylinders full on. There was a loud hissing, sibilant enough, he imagined, to waken the whole neighborhood—let alone the ship's crew. Round the nozzle of the cylinder he was holding frost formed. Quickly he turned the taps back, so that the hissing of the escaping air became subdued—but sounds from the deck above seemed to show that he had given himself away.

There were rapid footsteps on the planking, and two voices exchanged exclamations. It seemed to him that the feet moved to the ship's side, and though he had tied the coracle's painter so that as little of it as possible showed at the foot of the stanchion, he feared the cockle-shell had been seen. The steps came nearer to the hatch. Dugald shut off both taps, let the diving-suits sink gently to the hold-flooring, and scuttled away from under the hatch opening. He was just in time, for the hatch-cover was dragged back, and the light from an oil lantern shone down into the hold. From the dark corner where he had ensconced himself Dugald heard two men argue briefly. Then the hatch-cover was pulled back over the opening, and he heard the rasp of the thick canvas as it was snugged down. The footsteps retreated from the hatch and died away as the men went aft. It seemed as if the coracle had escaped notice. On the other hand, it might have been seen, and the retreat of the sailors might be in the nature of a trap for him.

The consideration did not balk Dugald in his purpose. He waited some good few minutes, then went back to the diving-suits. He turned on the cylinder-taps once again, but to an aperture that reduced the escape of the compressed air to the faintest whisper. Time would do the work.

He did not wish to have the responsibility of drowning a diver. He could be certain that the absence of the junction tubes would warn those concerned that the suits had been tampered with, and probably lead to a thorough examination of the whole apparatus. He had no hesitation, therefore—though he loathed to destroy fine material—in hacking through the thick canvas and rubber of the armored tubing for surface supply of air. Having thus put the whole outfit beyond use for days to come, he arranged the pile of stuff much as it had been and went up the steel ladder.

At the top he shoved his head against the tarpaulin, expecting it to give quite easily. Somewhat to his consternation it would not move. He mounted a rung or two and pushed strongly with his shoulders against the cover. It refused to budge. The sailors had apparently fixed it down with the hatch-wedges.

Dugald considered for a second or two. If they had used the battens that usually hold down hatch-covers he was fixed in the hold for good. But he had not heard the rattle of battens, nor had he heard any noise to indicate that the wedges had been driven tight. He might cut through the tarpaulin with his knife, but he did not wish to do that. He wanted the Russians to be in ignorance of the damage done to the diving-outfit for as long as possible, and a hole in the hatch-cover would give everything away.

Dugald put his shoulders against the cover once again and pushed hard. It seemed to give a little. With the idea of shaking the wedges loose he began to shove and relax in rapid alternation. The canvas began to give. Then suddenly it gave altogether, and there was a loud clatter and a clang. The sailors had fixed the canvas down with some sort of crowbar through the hatch-cleats, and he had unshipped it violently. Dugald gave vent to one of his mild expletives, and heaved himself to the deck with all speed. He gripped the hatch-cover and tugged it into position. His groping fingers found the crowbar, and he rapidly fixed it over the canvas in the cleats, just as a door in the poop opened and a couple of men came along the deck with a lantern.

Dugald shot along on his hands and knees to the far end of the hatch, and there he crouched, watching the shadows cast by the lantern so that he might judge the position of the men. He heard them argue querulously as they stopped to examine the corner of the hatch where the crowbar was. Evidently they were puzzled. It seemed that they had pinned on the crowbar as having been the cause of the clatter.

The men grumbled to each other for a moment or two. Then they moved forward. Luckily they kept together, which gave Dugald a chance to slither round to the side of the hatch farthest from them. As they went forward, apparently to examine the anchor-winch, he crawled rapidly aft until he was abreast of the stanchion where his coracle was tied. There he rolled over to the ship’s side, slid through the rails, and hung for a moment by his hands over the water. His foot had found the mooring-rope as he went down, so that the coracle was pulled under him. For a second or so he fumbled gingerly with his feet till the cockle-shell came into such a position that he could balance in it, and on that instant he whipped the hitches off the stanchion.

It was a ticklish business. The slightest blunder would have been penalized

by an immediate sousing. But he accomplished it and found a firm seat. As the men came aft he paddled easily to cover under the stern. There he waited until all movement on the steamer seemed to have stopped, then he set out to paddle to Beasdale Burn-foot.

As he came round from the ship's stern and set out to paddle in direct line for his objective, he felt elated by the success of his exploit. Perhaps his elation made him careless. At any rate, he permitted himself to travel for some distance in and out of the reflection made by the ship's riding-light as it was seen by eyes from a boat coming from the head of the loch away beyond the mouth of the Beasdale Burn.

Dugald went a little beyond the burn-mouth. He remembered an overhanging rock along the shore where the coracle might be stowed more safely than at the burn-foot. He made his landing and fixed the little craft, then climbed to the road, whistling contentedly. Some twenty yards along the road men sprang upon him suddenly from cover by the loch-side. He fought strongly and in silence, and felt his fists crash home once or twice. He thanked his stars that he had dumped the tubes from the diving-outfit into the loch, for he knew that it was the Russians that encompassed him. His arms were seized, and his neck. Something heavy crashed on his head.

"That for you, English fool!" said a voice in his ear, the voice of the man with the lambent eyes.

"Fool," said Dugald, as he sagged to unconsciousness, "is right!"

II

Dugald came to himself with an overpowering smell of paint in his nostrils. He was in total darkness. His hands were tied behind his back, and his feet also were bound. He was lying on something painfully bumpy and rough. His head was a globe of pain.

“Socked twice in a week!” he grinned lopsidedly. “Only a solid box-wood head could stand it! So there’s something in being a fool!”

His hands under him felt coils of rope. He listened, and thought he heard the lapping of water. He sniffed the smell of paint. And he decided that he was in the paint-locker or lamp-room of the Russian ship.

“Wonder if I’ll get painter’s colic?” he mused.

He tried his bonds. They were tight about his wrists, but it seemed that between the two there was a bit of slack. In his more supple boyhood he had had a trick of passing his legs through his clasped hands and back again. Perhaps if he could work out a bit more slack he could do the trick in this instance. He tried it. No, there was just not slack enough—and beside he needed his feet free.

He rolled over and got to his knees, and struggled to his feet. It was useless to try to hop among the litter underfoot, but as he stood he swung his head about slowly, half bending. His face came in contact with a paint-pot on a shelf. He nosed it, trying its edge. The roughness of it came from accumulations of paint. It would not cut, so he abandoned the idea of pulling it to the floor.

“A varnish-bottle, now!” he said to himself.

If he could find a bottle—there might be some odd varnish in a bottle—it might be possible to drag it to the floor and break it, and so supply himself with a cutting edge. He wobbled his feet gingerly, went over the edge of a rope-coil, and went crashing down, bumping his head anew in the process.

“All right, then!” he muttered, through the intensified pain. “Must try something else, that’s all. Something less punishing.”

He rested for a time, then began to feel about with his feet. The space he had was terribly constricted, and there were drums of oil and paint all round him. He had been lucky, he told himself, to get a simple bump in falling. There were edges all round that might have cut his head open, though they were next

to useless for fraying his bonds. There was nothing for it except a patient endeavor to unpick the knots about his wrists.

For a long time—it seemed hours—he lay twisting his hands about behind him. His wrists ached abominably, and he fancied that they were almost raw. His fingers throbbed as if they had been red-hot in their joints.

All at once, as he lay in the dark, he stiffened. Somewhere close at hand some one whistled, and it seemed a mere disorder of his mind that made him identify the tune as that which he had learned from Jean—*Bha mi'n raoir an choille*. The thing seemed to come almost from the deck under him.

For a moment or two he lay tense. Then he pursed up his lips and whistled the tune—rather badly, because of his aching head. Immediately, still as if from the deck under him, the tune was repeated.

Dugald's heart sank. It could only be that Jean, having guessed that he had been captured by the Russians, had come out with Punchy and Iain to the steamer. They had come out in a madly useless attempt to rescue him.

The thought made him groan. He had hoped that they would guess where he was, but he had counted on them waiting until the arrival of Don Pio. There could be only one end to their mad expedition. They would all be captured, and the Conde would arrive to face an impossible situation, probably without the slightest information to act upon. What would there be to make the old man connect the disappearance with this Russian steamer? Dugald's spirit groaned within him.

Ages seemed to pass as he lay in agonized expectation of some sound that would tell of the capture of Jean and her companions. At the best, he expected to hear a sound of some one outside the locker, the sound of some attempt upon the door. The answering whistle had seemed to say that his whereabouts was known. Yet nothing came through all the minutes to show that anything was being attempted to release him. He began to grow puzzled. Then he grew thankful.

It meant, he told himself, that Jean had pulled out to the ship just to let him know she had guessed what had happened to him, to assure him that his rescue would be attempted. She meant, like the sensible girl she was, to await the coming of Don Pio with his wise counsel. But still, Dugald decided, he would make a test. He whistled the tune over.

Immediately, to his great bewilderment, the answer came, and again as if from the deck under him.

An idea came to him, and one so immense, so incredible, if justified, so

staggering, that his brain seemed to whirl in his aching skull.

"Heaven and earth—and must I couple—the other place?" he misquoted in a whisper.

Very gingerly, he brought himself round in the locker until his feet were against that side of it whence the whistle had seemed to come. He put his soles against the metal wall and started to play a rhythmic tattoo with them—the "iddy-iddy-iddy-iddy" of the preparative signal in Morse code.

A moment passed, then came the "umpty-iddy—umpty-iddy—umpty-iddy" of the "I understand."

Perhaps a couple of hours later Dugald smiled into the darkness of his prison and coiled himself up as comfortably as he could to snatch some sleep.

He grinned just as cheerfully when, in the morning, the Russian with the lambent eyes leaned over him. He kept on grinning in spite of the fate that the Russian promised him, which was that he was to be kept without food until he was ready to tell what he knew of the loch's secret.

"Chase yourself back to Moscow, you yellow mongrel!" Dugald said rudely.

The Russian kicked him in the ribs.

"When the time comes you will speak!" he growled. "You crow loudly now—but we will see how brave you are when you're faced with the cord and the hot iron. We will get it out of one or the other of you!"

"Oh, there's another, is there?" Dugald jeered. "I'll bet you a smack on the nose that you'll get as little out of him as you will out of me, unless he happens to be like yourself—a half-bred Mongol!"

Again the Russian kicked him.

"I'll have you flayed inch by inch!" he snarled. "You'll pray to have your throat cut and be thrown into the sea!"

He stepped out of the locker and banged the door to with a clang, then the bolt of the lock shot home.

Dugald was left in semi-darkness. The only light that came into the locker was what could percolate round the edges of the door and through the slits of a tiny wheel ventilator toward the top of it. But as the day brightened this light grew so that Dugald could make out the contents of the locker. It disappointed him that the carpenter's store did not contain a single bottle, and he searched in vain among the paint-pots for a cutting edge. He had tried several of their rims

against the cords round his wrists, but without making any impression on the strands, when he suddenly exclaimed to himself aloud:

“Fathead that I am!” he blamed himself. “And I’ve looked at it about twenty times!”

Down in a corner of the locker, on the floor, was a hurricane lamp!

Dugald let himself down into a sitting position, and with his bound feet he started pounding against the guard wires of the lamp. Two good kicks and the glass funnel was smashed. He twisted himself round gingerly, and felt about cautiously until his fingers came in contact with a decent-sized fragment of the glass. With this he set to work, at the expense of some blood-letting, on the rope about his wrist. It took a long time, but ultimately the rope parted.

He left the strands about his wrists, but eased them so that the blood began to flow through his hands. Then he slackened, but did not remove, the strands round his ankles. In the freedom thus permitted him he made a new examination of his prison.

First he worked on the ventilator in the door, forcing the radial blades round until the slits were fully uncovered. This gave him more light and a little more air. He stuck his face against the ventilator and allowed himself some minutes of breathing the freshness.

His next move was to gather the *débris* of the hurricane lamp and hide it behind one of the paint-drums. Then he hunted round the shelves of the locker, and had the luck to come upon a large-sized clasp-knife. Of its one stout blade only about half an inch was left, but he thought it might serve to operate upon the door-lock. He tried it, and found he could get the bolt moving out of the locking socket. The discovery contented him. When the time came he could be free by a minute’s labor. And the time was appointed. He sat down patiently to wait for it.

III

Day broadened and fell again to dusk. Twice the Russian leader came to jeer at him, and to elaborate on his threats of torture. Dugald lay on the locker floor with his freed hands behind him, keeping up the pretense of still being tied. Night came, and a smell of cooking could be sniffed through the little ventilator. It increased the hunger that ravaged him, but gave him a sense of great elation, for it showed that the time for action was close.

Somewhere in the distance a whistle rose, the first phrase of *Bha mi'n raoir an choille*. Without thinking he completed the melody, and as he did so there came the sound of some one doing the like on the steamer.

There was a tapping on the locker wall.

"Now for it!" Dugald said under his breath.

He stuck the half-inch of blade into the socket of the door-lock and forced back the bolt. His feet already were free. He stepped out of the locker.

He was in an alley-way of the deck-housing at the stern. The door leading to the deck was hooked back, so that he could see the night sky. At the far end of the alley-way a faint light came from an exceedingly dirty wall-lamp. It gave but poor illumination to the passage. The paint-locker that had been his prison was at the end of the alley-way next the deck, and a series of small cabins ran aft along it above the steamer's side. It was the cabin next to his locker that interested Dugald.

He slipped out to the deck and crouched under the companion-way that led over the paint-locker up to the bridge-housing. Several minutes he waited. Then a door on the inner side of the alley opened and a man came out with a steaming kid of soup or stew. Though Dugald tensed for action this was not his moment. The man came right down the passage, went by Dugald unseeing, and climbed the companion. In a minute or two he came down without the kid. Dugald let him pass.

Some minutes later the same man came out of the galley. This time he carried a small basin and what seemed to be a wedge of bread. He came down the alley to the cabin next the paint-locker and unlocked the door. He said something as he stepped into the cabin, and was answered by a deepish voice that had a laugh in it. Dugald crept down to the cabin door. The man who had carried the bowl came out. On the instant Dugald's arm was locked about his

throat. Next minute the Russian sailor was bundled back into the cabin with Dugald kneeling atop of him on the floor. Dugald, still pinning his victim, looked up into the eyes of a black-bearded man who lay stretched and bound to a settee to one side of the cabin. It was a remarkable face he looked at, with its beak of a nose and its indomitable gray eyes.

"Hamish Macleavar, I presume?" Dugald grinned.

"Dugald Torrance, I take it?" smiled the other. "Turn him over. He has a knife in a sheath on his hip."

Dugald bound and gagged the man, having taken some cords from the locker for just this purpose, and removed the sheath-knife. He slashed the ropes that held Hamish to the settee.

"All right?" he whispered.

"Fine. The starving, binding process didn't start until we came to Mallaig. But I'll just have a taste of the contents of the bowl before we begin operations. Better share it with me."

"Your need is greater than mine, as Sir Philip didn't say," Dugald grinned.

"Daren't take it all after such a fast," Hamish grunted from the lip of the bowl. "Make me uncomfortable."

Dugald took the bowl held out to him and was about to take a grateful swig, when there came the sound of hurrying feet from the upper deck above them, and some shouting.

Dugald threw the bowl into a corner, and with Hamish at his heels, sprang to the door over the bound sailor. They ran out on deck.

Good light coming from the bridge lit up the scene. The Russians had poured down from the bridge, and were advancing upon a group of five farther forward. Don Pio, the fine white hair of his bare head waving in the night wind, held a long, thin sword in his right hand, and his slim pistol in his left. Close to him was Iain, carrying a powerful electric torch. Punchy, Mickey Larne, and Smiler Binns were grouped about him, and all five were coming to meet the Russians.

Dugald and Hamish raced. As they did so Don Pio's revolver cracked, and the Russian leader reeled with a howl, his automatic clattering to the deck. Don Pio had shot him in the shoulder just as he was about to loose off.

Next moment the fight became general, and it was soon over. The attack from the rear by Hamish and Dugald bewildered the Russians from the outset.

They saw two men disappear from their ranks as if by magic, and turned to find a couple of fighting demons assailing them. Their two comrades lay on the deck inert, and two more went down. Their turning exposed them to the attack of three shrewd pairs of fists from the other side, and, what was worse, to the onset of a long blade that flickered in among them in a blinding light. Wherever one of them had drawn a knife, or made play with such weapon as he had hurriedly picked up, the long blade sought him and seared mercilessly through essential sinew. Fists hammered into their stomachs and crashed home to their jaws. Six of their number were already out of the battle, either groaning on the deck or clinging to the rail in painful effort to recover the breath smashed out of them, while their leader sat on the hatch of the after-hold nursing a useless arm and shoulder. And the blinding light danced about them like some demoniac will-o'-the-wisp.

It was too much for them. They broke and ran, scrambling past the two hefty men whose fists were flailing them from the rear. As they ran the tall old man of the searching blade stepped after them, the imp with the torch faithfully by his side. They scrambled and huddled into the alley-way, only to meet a new-aroused contingent of their own shipmates, who set about them indiscriminately with spanners, marlin-spikes, wedge-mallets. Dog ate dog with demoralizing effect.

Dugald, who had followed the Conde, put his shoulder against the alley-way door and crammed the last of the herd into the passage. He dropped the hook, and with his weight still against the door he turned to Don Pio and to the boy.

"To you, Iain, I introduce a brother, and to you, Don Pio, a kinsman—Hamish Macleavar!" he panted. "Take him with you to the boat while I stand by!"

With a little inarticulate gurgle Iain dived at his brother, and the old man grasped his kinsman by the hand.

Dugald held the door until he saw the party descend unmolested to the coble. Then he sprang away and raced to join them. As he dropped to the thwarts Jean left off hugging her returned brother to seize Dugald's hand and clasp it hard to her heart.

IV

Far into the night they sat round the fire in the lounge of the lodge. The odyssey of Hamish Macleavar took them to strange places, for his work was over and he spoke freely. Russia they saw through his eyes, Spain, and other European countries. They went with him to South Africa in pursuit of men who worked to incite the colored races to rebellion. For several years they were imprisoned with him in Asia, in Krasnoiarsk, and they escaped with him from that hovel. With him they traveled through places that were magically named—Bokhara, Khiva, Samarkand, Kabul—and came with him across the steppes to European Russia and to Scotland. With bated breath they hung on the quiet, half-humorous words of this gaunt, steel-thewed nomad.

"But the thing started here, in Scotland," said Hamish. "A parcel of Bolshevists were making for Glasgow. They hoped to put in a lot of propaganda on the Clyde among the workers. They were well furnished with money—somewhere round forty thousand in good negotiable script. Two of them were deported aliens. They couldn't have got in at a big port, so they meant to land at some deserted spot of the coast. I'm afraid I suggested Loch nan Uamh. You see, I was supposed to be rather scarlet myself. I couldn't stop them from coming to Scotland, but once I got them here I meant to have them nabbed.

"All right. We came from the Baltic round through the Minch. It began to blow as we came down outside Skye. Came down to Arisaig, and the steamer stood off. Seemed calmer. That's where we were cheated. Ran into the loch on a launch, myself and two other Reds, with the money in a stout steel box. There was a bit of the wind up on the part of my beauties about where we were to land. Result, we piled up on the rocks between An Glas Eilean and Eilean an Sgòrr, or else in the little islands to the north-east of An Sgòrr.

"I swam ashore and thought I'd lost my couple of poppies. But no. The crew of the launch, two men, were drowned—but the bad hats managed to get ashore. I picked them up next day in Arisaig and took them to Glasgow. There was a bit of bad luck for me there. I was spotted by a man who knew what I was, and got quite a gang after me. That's when I came to Edinburgh, Jean. The paper you've hugged for all these years referred to the Russian money, and not to the Macleavar doubloons.

"Oh!" said Jean, with a look at Dugald.

“It must be nice and comfy on the loch bottom,” said Hamish. “We’ll get it out by and by. It is in one of two places.”

“But how did the Seagar gang know of the paper you gave Jean?” asked Dugald.

“Ah! I can only guess at that. I had to pick up some information in Barcelona—and in Madrid. I met Seagar in Barcelona, and he kept hanging round me. I got a knife in the ribs during a brawl—served me right, perhaps, for being in such bad company. Seems I had a touch of pleurisy on me, and the knife couldn’t have been too clean. Anyhow, I got a fever, and went off my head. In delirium I must have blabbed about the paper. Seagar apparently thought I meant the Macleavar treasure. I can’t see any other way for it.”

“How did the Seagar operations begin so well in time with the Russian invasion?” Dugald asked again.

“Pure luck, I should think. Jean waited the seven years I’d stipulated—only so that she’d grow up before starting to work. Seagar must have watched her until she started operations, then called up his gang. He already had Don Pio’s half of the parchment. As for the Russians—well, I had been recognized in Russia by the same man that had spotted me in Glasgow—that fellow you shot in the shoulder, Don Pio. Name of Lubner. I was hunted. Thought I saw a way of getting to Britain. They were sure to haul me off in search of the lost money, since I was the only chap who really knew where it was. You see, the seven years were up, and I thought I’d better get back and help Jean. Practically let them catch me. It worked as I wanted it, but I had more difficulty than I expected in making the escape I had arranged. Fortunately, Torrance there butted in—and then Iain and the Conde, and these stout fellows carried on the good work.”

“What I can’t understand,” said Dugald, “is why Lubner should have waited—with all the diving-apparatus ready.”

“No divers,” said Hamish. “He was waiting for them to come from Glasgow. The torture that was to make me speak was postponed until their arrival.”

“Thank God the times coincided, then,” breathed Jean. “It would have been awful if Dugald hadn’t been here!”

The gray eyes of her brother twinkled.

“I’m afraid I’d have been an awful coward,” he said. “I’d have helped them all I could.”

Jean stared at him, but Dugald and Don Pio laughed.

“You were a topping swimmer when you were here some years ago, Macleavar,” said Dugald.

“And one can so easily slip over the side of a small boat,” said the Conde.

“Tcha!” said Jean. “I’m a chump. I might have seen what you meant.”

“I say,” Iain put in. “If we can get the Bolshie money and the jolly old Macleavar doubloons as well, we’ll be pretty oofish, won’t we, Hamish?”

“Ah!” said Hamish. “Now that we’ve got the two halves of the parchment let’s put them together, and see what old Peadar actually did say?”

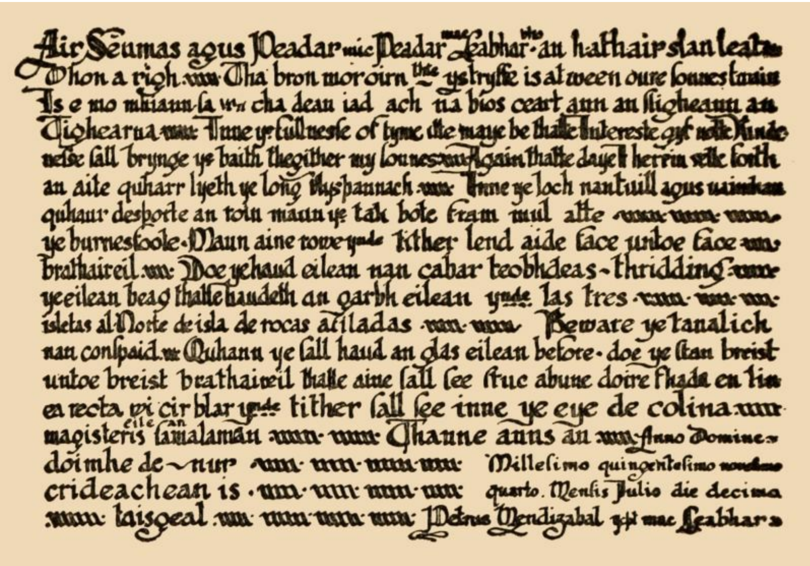
Jean looked to Dugald, who grinned.

“Punchy,” he said to that beaming henchman, “just step into the gym, will you, and deflate the punch-ball? At the bottom of the bag, where the cane joins it, you’ll find a little packet. Bring it here, like a good chap.”

“And this,” said Jean, “this is the man who thought a crevice in Prince Charlie’s cave a rotten hiding-place!”

Dugald still grinned.

Punchy came back with the oiled silk packet. They spread the two halves of the parchment on the table together. And this is what they saw:


Air Seumas agus Peadar mac Peadar mac Leabhar who an hathair slan leat
Dhon a righ Tha bron mor oirn the ystryffe is atween oure lounes twain
Is e mo mhiann-sa cha dean iad ach na bios ceart ann an slighean an
Tighearna Inne ye fullnesse of tyme ytte maye be thatte interestegyt kinde
nesse sall brynge ye baith thegither my lounes Again thatte daye herein sette forth
an aite quharr lyeth ye long Hyspannach Inne ye loch nan tuill agus
quhaur desporte an toin maun ye tak bote fram mul alte
ye burnesfoole Maun aine towe yonde kither lend aide face untoe face
brathaireil Doe ye haud eilean nan cabar teobhdeas thridding
ye eilean beag thatte haudeth an garbh eilean yonde las tres
isletas al Norte de isla de rocas afiladas Beware ye tanalich
nan conspaid Quhann ye sall haud an glas eilean before doe ye stan breist
untoe breist brathaireil thatte aine sall see stuc abune doire fhada en lin
ea recta vi cir blar yonde tither sall see inne ye eye de colina
magisteris eile an samalaman Thanne anns an Anno Domine
doimhe de nur Millesimo quingentesimo nonagesimo
crideachean is quarto. Mensis Julio die decima
taisgeal Petrus Mendizabal mac Leabhar

Hamish translated:

"TO JAMES AND PETER, THE SONS OF PETER, SON OF THE BOOK, FROM THEIR FATHER. Greeting.
Alas! Great sorrow is on us that strife is between our sons twain.
It is my wish . . . they do but walk upright in the ways of the Lord. In the fullness of time it may be that Interest if not Kindness shall bring you both together, my sons. Against that day I herein set forth
a direction where lies the Spanish ship. In the loch of the hollows and caves
where the seals disport must you take boat from the beach at
the burn-foot. One must row and the other lend aid face to face
brotherly. Do you hold the island of the antlers to the south threading
the little island that hugs Rough Island and the three islands to the north of the island of the pointed rocks. Beware you the shallows
of controversy. When you shall hold the gray island before —"

"You can't do that. Oh, he has used the Gaelic idiom meaning to the east," Hamish interposed, and went on:

"to the east, do you stand breast
to breast brotherly that one shall see the little hill above the long grove
in straight line with the white-spotted crest and the other shall see in the eye of
the Bailie's Hill the Samalaman Island. Then in the depths of your
hearts is
what you seek for."

Hamish looked up from his translating and glanced at the Conde with slightly raised eyebrows. The old man shrugged and nodded.

"In the corner is the date and subscription," said Hamish, and translated:

"In the Year of Our Lord, One thousand five hundred and

ninety-four, the month of July, the Tenth day.

"PETER MENDIZÁBAL, SO-CALLED SON OF THE BOOK

"It confirms a suspicion I formed when I found no record of such a plate ship in the Spanish archives," Hamish said.

"You mean," said Jean slowly, "that there's no treasure in the loch?"

"No Spanish treasure," Hamish replied, "nor any in money that the old man knew about. He simply hoped that his sons would come together in the loch and, standing breast to breast to look for an impossible bearing, would find the treasure of friendship. Wouldn't you agree with me, sir?" he asked the Conde.

The old man nodded gravely.

"But at long last," he said, "our ancestor's purpose is achieved, since there is friendship between the Sons of the Book. I feel sure it will be abiding."

Some minutes later Jean stole from the room. After some hesitation Dugald followed her, and found her in the rough garden that fronted the lodge. She did not turn as his footsteps sounded on the gravel behind her, but stood gazing at the beam of a searchlight that swept the sky above Druim Fiaclach.

"That will be the fisheries cruiser Don Pio wired for. The Russians will have to clear out," he said.

"Yes," said Jean quietly.

"Are you so sorry that the Macleavar treasure is—is mythical?"

"Sorry? Well—no, not altogether sorry," she replied slowly. "Haven't I great reason to be content—since Hamish has come back? Are you disappointed that all your labors in the past week—one wonderful week!—all the dangers you have faced and passed so splendidly have been for a myth?"

"The treasure of the loch is no myth to me," said Dugald. "It can be made a sweet and lovely reality, Jean. For me the treasure of the loch has been simply you."

She did not fence with him, but faced him straightly under the stars of the clearing sky.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

Book name and author have been added to the original book cover. The resulting cover is placed in the public domain.

[The end of *Galanty Gold* by Victor MacClure]